

**Tai Chi: A New and Ancient Reality
The Socio-Cultural Context of Older People who Practice Tai Chi
in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
June 2018

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To my parents Lu Guoen and Li Liqun, and my daughter Yan Lu
for their love and support

谨以此感谢我的父亲吕国恩、母亲李励群、及女儿吕彦的关爱和支持

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ABSTRACT

We reside in an aging global society. What people do as they age has been studied extensively in the leisure and aging literature. A variety of theories, such as the activity, continuity, disengagement, and innovation theories, have been developed to understand how older individuals engage in opportunities. “Leisure” is a Eurocentric term that does not exist within all cultural frameworks. The question arises: how do older people find meaning in opportunities in which they engage, such as Tai Chi?

This study examined the meaning of Tai Chi for older participants in Halifax, Canada, and Jinan, the People’s Republic of China. An ethnographic approach guided my research. Nineteen participants were recruited in each city. Data were collected through participant observation and individual in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews in Canada were carried out in English, whereas the ones in China were conducted in Mandarin or the Jinan dialect. Four main themes emerged from the collected data: 1) Health and wellbeing; 2) Socializing; 3) A sense of group identity; and 4) Cultural pride. The themes were interactive and reflected the complexities of cultural influence.

The findings of this study suggest that although Tai Chi does have different philosophical meanings for participants in the two cities, it serves a similar role with regard to socializing with “Tai Chi friends,” experiencing a sense of group identity, and seeking good health. The characteristics of the Tai Chi experience may provide insights into future research similar to Susan Shaw’s characteristics of “leisure.”

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

PRC	The People's Republic of China
HRM	Halifax Regional Municipality
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trail
CCSEP	The Canada-China Scholars Exchange Program
ECG	Electrocardiography
SDUA	Shandong University for the Aged
JNUA	Jinan University for the Aged

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Jerome Barkow and Dr. Jerome Singleton (my co-supervisor for most of this journey). I am extremely grateful for both of their academic guidance, understanding, kindness, and support throughout my study. I would not have accomplished this dissertation without their help. They were always available when I had questions and needed clarification or confirmation every step of the way in the process, whether I was at Dalhousie University or conducting my field research in China. I had the privilege to take courses directly from both of them. The expertise and inspiration that I gained from their lectures provided insights for my own research. Dr. Barkow not only provided timely advice, but also provided detailed comments for many of my chapter drafts. I enjoyed our numerous meetings in the library atrium. Dr. Singleton provided feedback by email and when I dropped by his office. He kept on track with the department throughout the years.

I wish to thank my Supervisory Committee members, both present – Dr. Marilyn Macdonald – and former – Drs. Robin Stadnyk, Barbara Downe-Wamboldt, and Harold McGee. I had the privilege of teaching in the same department with Dr. McGee years before I began this doctoral program. Our conversations encouraged me and helped to figure out my research direction. I was fortunate to have Dr. Downe-Wamboldt on my committee at the time she had just returned to Dalhousie from her sabbatical in China. She provided input from her own research experience and invited me to join her research forums. Although Dr. Stadnyk was on my committee for a short time, her general advice was appreciated. I was very excited to take Dr. Macdonald's qualitative research method course as the first required course for my PhD program. The contents of the course helped me in writing my research proposal. The support from both Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Interdisciplinary PhD Program is highly appreciated. My external examiner, Dr. Shane Pegg's questions and insights are highly appreciated.

I wish to thank Professor Gao Haiqing, the Jinan supervisor during my field research in China. In addition to Dr. Barkow and Dr. Singleton's continued advice and support through emailing and online chat while I was conducting field research in Jinan, Professor Gao provided advice and support on location, including a secure workspace, answering my questions and requests regardless of his busy schedule.

I would like to sincerely thank all of my research participants in Jinan, China and Halifax, Canada. Without their contribution, this study would not have been possible. My participants enthusiastically shared their Tai Chi experience and life stories. They appreciated the fact that I cared for them as older people. The rich information that they shared is the foundation for my analysis and encouragement to complete my dissertation.

Many of my friends deserve my sincere thanks, especially Dr. Sally Ross who helped to edit my dissertation as well as to act as a “sounding board” (in her own words) to help me shape my thoughts. The conversations over lunches were very supportive and helpful. Dr. Steven Burns also provided valuable help as a philosopher. Our coffee meetings were both productive and relaxing at different stages of the study. I owe deep gratitude to my Chinese friends Dr. Zhao Ziyang and Dr. Yao Yonghong. As academic researchers located in China with overseas study experience, they helped me to search for literature in China’s restricted database that I could not access from Canada. I sincerely appreciate the care and support from my dear friend Dr. Zheng Shi, who is like a sister to me. I wish to thank my long-term friends Myrna and Bruce Nauss for all their love and support and for being my “adopted family” over the years. I wish to thank Mary Ansell for her editing help and long-term friendship. I also wish to thank Dr. James Morrison for his continued support as a colleague in the department where I taught and as a friend who encouraged me to pursue this degree. Dr. Charles Quon’s kind support is highly appreciated. I wish to thank Brigitte Neumann for her support and friendship. I also appreciate the discussions and encouragement exchanged with fellow students, especially Liz Wilson and Jenny Baechler. I enjoyed our get-togethers and value their friendship.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their love and support. Pursuing this doctorate fulfilled a life-long dream. While it may not be traditional Chinese practice for parents to express it in words, my parents are happy with my achievements in life. I felt the greatest satisfaction when my father congratulated me: “我们家里终于出了一位正宗的博士学者了!” (“Finally, an authentic doctoral scholar in our family!”) The love and support from my daughter also contributed to my study significantly and positively. I am proud of her success in her own life and I am also proud to be her parent who never gives up. I am also grateful to the rest of my family members who supported my journey in their own ways.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Canada is a diverse society comprised of people from a variety of cultures and heritages. According to the 2016 census survey from Statistics Canada, immigrants made up 20.7 percent of Canada's population in 2011 and that number is predicted to rise to between 24.5 and 30 percent in 2036.¹ Culture and heritage influence the type of activities in which a person participates. Immigrants bring activities with them when they migrate to Canada. Tai Chi is an example of an activity that migrated to North America with immigrants from the People's Republic of China.

Aging has become a global issue that is of significant concern in both Canada and China (Shen et al., 2003; Novak and Campbell, 2006; Li, 2007; Chappell, 2003; Fung, 2013; Hugh, 2005; and Sun, 2013). In 2000, there were 600 million people aged 60 and older in the world. There will be 1.2 billion by 2025, and 2 billion by 2050 (Yang, 2007; WHO, March 16, 2008). Although Western culture values older people differently than Eastern cultures (Chappell, 2005), aging is of particular concern in both Canada (Institute of Aging, 2003; Novak and Campbell, 2006) and China (Song, 2005; Hugh, 2005; Peng, 2011; and Wang and Zhu, 2005). It was predicted that by 2016, 20 percent of Canadians would be over 65 years old (Health Canada, 2002), and by 2020, 16 percent of the Chinese population will be over 65 years old (Shanghai Research Center on Aging, 2008). Life expectancy is increasing in both Canada and China, meaning that people may have more leisure time during the latter part of their lives. The reality of aging populations presents a challenge to the availability of leisure activities for older persons.

What people do as they age has been studied extensively in the leisure and aging literature (Gibson and Singleton, 2012). A wide variety of theories have been developed to understand how as individuals age they engage in opportunities, theories that include Activity Theory (Havighurst, 1961), Disengagement Theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961), Continuity Theory (Atchely, 1971), and Innovation Theory of successful aging (Nimrod, 2007). The studies conducted used means of measuring involvement, including checklists of activities to experience sampling (Mannell and Zuzanek, 1988). These

¹ Retrieved September 26, 2017 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2017001-eng.htm>

theories have studied what the individuals engage in versus the meaning of the experience to the person. Shaw (1986, 1992) identified the characteristics of the terms: leisure of fun, enjoyment, relaxation, pleasure and freely chosen. But the term “leisure” is a Eurocentric androcentric term, which does not exist within all cultural frameworks (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, and Freysinger, 1996; Iwasaki, Nishino, Onda, and Bowling, 2007).

Individuals have an array of opportunities to engage in during their life course, within their cultural context. Individuals migrating from their own culture such as China may bring an opportunity such as Tai Chi with them. What is the meaning of engaging in this opportunity for the country of origin practitioner as opposed to the North American who engages in the same activity? Tai Chi was selected as an example of understanding the complexities of the experience for the older participants in the two cultures.

It is increasingly common in the West for Tai Chi to be used to complement traditional approaches to healthcare (Hall et al., 2017; Li et al., 2004; Li et al., 2005; Motivala et al., 2006) or to be seen as an alternative leisure activity (Martine, Powell, Peel, Zhu, and Allman, 2006). Tai Chi originated in China, where it has been practiced for centuries. In contrast, its history in Canada spans less than 50 years. Although older people practice Tai Chi in both Canada and China, there is insufficient literature in this area for cross-cultural knowledge and it is uncertain whether practitioners in the two cultures share the same understandings of Tai Chi (Fry, 2000). The intrinsic meaning of leisure may well be different in Canada and China (Lee, 1999; Chou et al., 2004). The existing studies have only looked at Tai Chi from a health perspective, and not at how Tai Chi may otherwise differ in China and Canada. It is the lack of cross-cultural study and research on Tai Chi, particularly with regard to aging populations, that this research endeavors to rectify.

This study examines the perception of older Tai Chi practitioners in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China of their Tai Chi experience. Existing literature largely focuses on Tai Chi’s health benefits for older adults (e.g., improving strength and balance, preventing falls, and reducing stress). Consequently, there is a knowledge gap in the socio-cultural context of older Tai Chi practitioners. Contemporary global research has not addressed how practitioners come to practice Tai Chi and to sustain their practice.

The perceptions of older Tai Chi practitioners can be a key to understanding engagement in Tai Chi, thereby improving quality of life and enhancing health.

My research contributes to the advancement of knowledge by providing a better understanding of what the practice of Tai Chi means to its older practitioners in the two cities. More broadly, the research findings shed light on how Tai Chi, as an adopted practice from China, differs in how it is currently practiced in its country of origin from how it is practiced in Canada.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study explores the question: *What are the meanings of the practice of Tai Chi for its older participants in Jinan, China and Halifax, Canada?*

Related sub-questions for investigation include:

- (1) Why does Tai Chi attract older participants?
- (2) Why has Tai Chi been chosen by older participants over similar activities such as yoga?
- (3) How has practicing Tai Chi impacted the lives of its older participants?
- (4) Why are more women than men involved in Tai Chi?
- (5) What are the major areas in which the two cultural groups experience Tai Chi differently and what are the areas in which there is a little difference?

1.3 MY EXPECTATIONS

Prior to my field research, based on my knowledge of local culture and my understanding of the findings of previous research, the following expectations were generated for this study:

- 1) Participants in both Jinan and Halifax would emphasize the health benefits that they received from Tai Chi;
- 2) Participants in both cities would have different opinions regarding the philosophical and/or spiritual significance of Tai Chi;
- 3) Participants in Halifax might not practice the same Tai Chi styles compared to Jinan participants; and

- 4) Tai Chi in Jinan would be available for and practiced routinely by elders in every income bracket or social class, but that in Halifax Tai Chi would probably only attract middle class and white individuals.

1.4 LOCATING SELF

It was a sunny fall day in Jinan, an east coast city in the People's Republic of China (PRC), shortly after the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977). I was in my early twenties practicing Tai Chi with a class of about forty undergraduate university students. We were taking a physical education course at a local university. The Tai Chi classes were held outdoors twice a week at a campus square surrounded by willow trees. Three decades later, I was again practicing Tai Chi with groups of people. However, this time I was practicing with groups of older people most of whom were retired. The groups were practicing indoor in classrooms or outdoor in public parks in two different cities on different continents. One of the cities was Jinan where I practiced Tai Chi thirty years previously, and the other was Halifax, on the east coast of Canada.

I am the researcher. The first time that I practiced Tai Chi was out of personal interest when I was working at a traditional Chinese medicine university in China. Now I am a doctoral candidate at Dalhousie University in Canada and I resumed practicing Tai Chi to conduct fieldwork for my research.

Life in China

Family

I was born in the 1950s in Jinan, Shandong province in the People's Republic of China. I lived in Jinan for the first thirty years of my life until I moved to Halifax, Canada.

I am the oldest of three children. My two sisters are still living in Jinan with their own families. Both of my parents were born in Shandong province, and moved to Jinan to work when the PRC was established in 1949. My father completed high school before 1949. My mother attended elementary school for a few years, but then had to stop because her family could no longer afford to pay for schooling. My parents have been living in Jinan for most of their lives, and retired after more than thirty-five years of full-

time employment. Both of my parents were government employees. My father worked in several divisions of the provincial government. My mother also worked at various jobs, and retired from a university as an administrator.

My maternal grandmother lived with us throughout my childhood. She moved in with my parents the year before I was born. When I was growing up, it was very common for three generations, including grandparents, to live together. My maternal grandmother was the only grandparent that we had since my maternal grandfather and my paternal grandparents had all passed away at a young age many years ago. As was the case in other families in the neighborhood, my grandmother took care of all three grandchildren, while my parents devoted their time to their jobs. My parents traveled to work by bicycle. My sisters and I attended public schools while my grandmother did most of the cooking and housework. We all walked to school every day and came home for lunch. I can remember that many times my grandmother would have supper ready but my sisters and I would sit by the roadside outside the gate of the compound where we lived, waiting for our parents to return from work so that we could all eat together. After supper, my parents put headlights on their bicycles and returned to their offices to work, while my grandmother put us to bed.

I grew up speaking the Jinan dialect at home with my family, and Mandarin Chinese at school. It was mandatory for all formal instruction in the school system to be carried out in Mandarin, the official Chinese language nationwide. The same official language was also widely used in the government, public services and businesses. At home, people normally spoke the dialect most familiar to their family. Although there were different dialects in our province, most of them were mutually intelligible. Because my grandmother had grown up in a county not far from Jinan, her original dialect was very similar to the Jinan dialect so it was natural that we all spoke the Jinan dialect at home. The Jinan dialect was in turn very similar to and mutually intelligible with the Mandarin dialect. In contrast, one of my school friends who was also a neighbor had parents and a paternal grandmother from Shanghai, so she spoke the Shanghai dialect at home. That dialect is dramatically different from the Mandarin that we spoke at school.

Our family always lived in employee housing provided by my father's employer. Each employee housing complex belonged to a division of the provincial government

where he worked. Such walled compounds ranged from a few to several dozen apartment buildings. Over the years, we moved several times within the city of Jinan due to changes in my father's place of work. Two of the moves occurred during the Cultural Revolution. Each time we moved, although we did not have a lot of possessions, we had to carry our belongings by ourselves, which was not easy when my sisters and I were young. I remember my parents talking about whether to keep all of the books. My mother wanted to discard some of the books in order to make moving easier, however my father always valued his books. My father briefly held a teaching position early in his career, and for a number of years he was an editor of an in-house journal at the division of the provincial government where he worked. Even today, my father still treasures his collection of books. My father told me that once he had asked his division director for an opportunity to study at Shandong University to advance his education. Unfortunately, the director told him that he was the most educated person in the division, so the director refused my father's request.

I started elementary school just before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. At that time, we lived in the largest housing complex belonging to the provincial government. It was a walled compound with a gate guarded by armed security officers, with a strict system for visitors to sign in and out, because the provincial governor's family and the families of other provincial government officials also lived there. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, most of our family's books and those of our neighbors, except for books by Mao Zedong, were burned in the middle of our courtyard. Subsequently, my father and most of the fathers of neighboring families were sent to the countryside to be re-educated by doing physical labor in the fields. The rest of my family had to move to a different location in the city, with rundown housing and no heat or security. With fewer books to carry, our bags were lighter during that move.

Education and employment

After elementary school, I went to junior and then senior high school. At that time, the government policy was that all students should attend the school closest to where they were living, without any entrance examination. I graduated from that high school toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, at a time when all of the universities in

China were still banned by the government. For this reason, most of the high school graduates in the city stayed at home and were unable to further their studies.

Fortunately, at that time my father returned to Jinan from the village where he had been working for over a year. The government division where he eventually returned to work had a modest library for the use of employees only. Although the books had not been burned, the library door was sealed with yellow tape. When I learned that a close friend and colleague of my father was in charge of guarding the door to the library, I begged to be allowed into the library to “clean” the room. For several months, I went to work with my father every day and carefully lifted the tape on the door, to hide in the library and read books for the day. It was a privilege to have had the opportunity to read that library’s collection of Chinese classical literature, as well as translated literature and other books from foreign countries.

I had always wanted to further my education beyond high school. When I started working at my first job in a provincial government department, all new employees received training in job-related skills for several months. During my free time after the day’s work, I studied for a traditional Chinese medicine diploma at a night school. The program was run by the province’s most highly regarded traditional Chinese medicine university. When the program started, several hundred students filled the large hall at the university’s teaching hospital where the classes were held. However, at the completion of the two-year program only about 20 students graduated. Although I received the diploma, I did not continue with a hospital internship for two reasons. Firstly, although it had been possible for me to maintain my full-time job and attend night classes at the same time, it would have been impossible to work full-time during the day and complete a hospital internship with rotating day and night shifts. Secondly, and more importantly, by then the ban on attending university had been lifted.

Universities in China reopened in 1977, when Deng Xiaoping regained political power in the central government in Beijing at the end of the Cultural Revolution. At that time, my employer discouraged employees from preparing for the national university entrance examination. Accordingly, due to a lack of time to prepare, several of the employees including me failed the exams that year. The following year, I changed my job to work at a university. My new employer encouraged young people to further their

education provided they study in the field chosen by the employer. That was why I eventually received a Bachelor of Science degree. As part of the agreement, I returned to work for the same employer after the completion of my degree.

Tai Chi experience

I first became aware of Tai Chi from reading one of the books that my father had in his collection, just before the Cultural Revolution when I was in elementary school. My first memory of Tai Chi practice was from watching films involving martial arts. After the Cultural Revolution, some Tai Chi practitioners began practicing in city squares and public parks in Jinan. I saw them on my way to work by bicycle in the morning or when walking in the local park with my family. Although this made me aware of Tai Chi, I was not familiar with the different styles or techniques.

I later learned that the Daoist Yin-Yang theory is shared by several Chinese practices including traditional medicine, meditation, and Chinese martial arts such as Tai Chi. The Yin-Yang theory is based on the belief of a naturally harmonious universe. “In Chinese philosophy, Yin-Yang describes how apparently opposite or contrary forces are actually complementary, connected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another.”² A Tai Chi Master, Waysun Liao, explained the relevance of Yin-Yang Theory and Tai Chi in his book entitled *Tai Chi Classics*, “everything in the universe is continuously contrasting and complementing itself..., everything is continuously revealing the negative and positive aspects of itself..., everything in the universe changes and therefore exists” (Liao, 1990, p. 54).

When I was studying traditional Chinese medicine at night school, the Yin-Yang theory was taught as the foundation of medical practice. It was in the early 1980s when I took my first Tai Chi course. It was a physical education course for undergraduate students, held at a university close to the traditional Chinese medicine university where I worked. Because my work research team leader understood the theoretical connection between Tai Chi and traditional Chinese medicine, I was permitted to take the beginning and intermediate Tai Chi courses during my working hours twice a week. I was also

²Retrieved September 1, 2015 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang

fortunate in obtaining the permission of the Tai Chi instructor, since it was uncommon to have a non-student taking a Tai Chi course with their own university students. The Tai Chi courses taught the Simplified 24 style,³ which was the most popular Tai Chi style in China and abroad because of its simplicity in comparison to the 108 moves of traditional Yang or Chen styles (Yang, 2005). Subsequently, I also studied Traditional Chen style Tai Chi from a colleague, who was a descendent of the Chen Tai Chi family. He had learned his family's Tai Chi style at a very young age. He practiced Chen style Tai Chi outside our department building during breaks. Several colleagues and I practiced with him together. Although I learned some moves and the differences between the Chen style and Simplified 24 style, I did not learn the entire 108 moves before I moved to Canada.

Several years after her retirement in the 1990s, my mother joined a Simplified 24 style Tai Chi group in a city park two blocks from my parents' home. A neighbor introduced my mother to the group. She and my mother walked together very early every morning to the park where their group practiced. The number of participants in her Tai Chi group ranged from six to ten. Tai Chi was very popular in Jinan at that time. Large or small Tai Chi groups practiced in public places early in the morning. The Tai Chi practitioners were mostly retirees. Over the years when I returned to visit my parents at various times, I went with my mother and practiced Tai Chi with her group. (Eventually, that Tai Chi group came to an end because the group leader's family relocated to the other side of the city, and some of the group members became ill or too frail to practice.).

Life in Canada

Family

More than twenty years ago, I moved to Canada with my four-year-old daughter to support my husband when he was studying at a university in Halifax. It was expected to be a temporary stay, and we planned to move back to China together after he had completed his degree. Everyday life was not very different from before, because the three of us had had our own apartment in Jinan. The climate was also similar to that of Jinan. It

³ Simplified 24 Tai Chi consists of 24 moves. In 1956, the Chinese Sports Committee gathered a number of Tai Chi experts, who compiled the typical moves from all Tai Chi styles and condensed them into the 24 moves.

was the unfamiliar social environment, the language barrier, the lack of family support, and the loss of professional identity that made the adjustment difficult for me.

My first impression of Halifax was the lack of people. The streets seemed very empty. The strong sense of privacy also made an impression on me. We lived in a house very close to a university campus. There was a large sign saying “Private” on the outside wall. A housemate told me that the sign was to prevent people from parking their cars in the driveway, because that space belonged to the landlord. However, to me the sign seemed to symbolize the relative isolation of my new environment. Although I had always done well in English classes in China, the classes focused on written English and I had never spoken the language. It took me a long time to start speaking English, and the inconvenience of not speaking the local language greatly affected my daily life. I remember my first unsuccessful attempt to buy a stamp at the post office. The breakthrough happened at the city library when I managed to borrow a book by myself. Eventual changes in my family situation greatly affected my health and wellbeing. Circumstances transpired such that I became a single parent in a new country.

While living in Canada, I have always maintained close contact with my family in China. When I moved to Canada in the late 1980s, communication technology was not as advanced as it is today. It took at least two weeks for an ordinary letter sent by airmail to reach my parents. I managed to mail a small parcel to my family once a year before the Chinese New Year. Every few years, whenever I could afford it, I took my daughter to visit my parents in China. During these visits, I did my best to care for my parents by cleaning their apartment and getting new everyday items for their home. Now it is easier to keep in touch. I phone my parents once a week to check on them. I also helped them to set up an email account and online chat to maintain frequent contact.

Education and employment

In Halifax, I took English courses offered by the immigration services, as well as various training courses, including one on self-employment and one on the Nova Scotia legal system. After living in Halifax for several years and becoming a single parent, I decided to continue my university studies and earned a Master’s in Education from a local university. The year after my daughter graduated from McGill University, I again

went back to school to pursue this doctoral degree. During the course of my study, she enrolled in law school at Dalhousie University.

Over the years in Halifax, I have engaged in paid and volunteer work. My professional employment has been primarily in the field of education. As of 2017, I have been teaching with the Asian Studies program at a local university for 21 years, teaching an Introduction to Chinese Culture course, as well as courses in Beginning and Intermediate Mandarin Chinese and in English as a Second Language. I have also taught courses at a community college, the city school board continuing education program, and a Chinese language school for Chinese children who lived with their biological parents and those who lived with their adopted parents. Additionally, I have given Chinese culture presentations to the general public during Asian Heritage Month in the city library and briefings for local government officials, CEOs, and professionals prior to their business trips to China.

Tai Chi experience

I took my first Tai Chi course in Halifax more than a decade ago at a local fitness facility, where I had previously been attending fitness classes. The instructor was originally from Hong Kong and had traveled extensively in Canada. There were ten participants in the class, most of whom were absolute beginners. The instructor started with the very basic elements of Tai Chi and intended to teach the Simplified 24 style. However, since so much time was spent on the basics, there was not enough time to complete the Simplified 24 style by the end of the set of six classes.

I also visited other Tai Chi groups in the city. Through my network of friends and acquaintances I was introduced to various Tai Chi groups. I visited groups that practiced the Simplified 24 style, the traditional 108 Yang style, and the Chen style. In response to students' interest in Chinese martial arts, I have also included aspects of Tai Chi in my courses on Chinese Culture.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Advancements in medicine and pharmaceuticals have greatly increased the average lifespan (Lichtenberg, 2005). However, living a long life and living a healthy life

can be two different realities, which do not always naturally coincide. Tai Chi has been deemed by the existing health and aging literature to be an age-appropriate physical exercise for elders. As North American health professionals become more accepting of alternative methods to supplement traditional Western bio-pharmacology, it is important to study not just Tai Chi's health-related benefits, but also the factors which attract and sustain its elder practitioners. The perception of elder Tai Chi participants is also a key factor for two reasons: to motivate more older adults to practice Tai Chi; and to equip healthcare providers with a practical and economical promotional tool for health and wellbeing of the general population.

In order to understand elders' experience of Tai Chi in China and Canada, we must first thoroughly investigate the history and context of Tai Chi in its culture of origin, as well as in its culture of adoption.

CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with background information on Jinan and Halifax, the two cities where the field research data were collected. It then provides an overview of the evolution of Tai Chi with an explanation of the different styles of moves and the types of background music used in China and in Canada. In order to better understand Tai Chi, this chapter also gives general theoretical information on the philosophy of Confucius and the Daoist concept of Yin-Yang. Finally, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Qigong are briefly presented for the relevance of the Yin-Yang theory they share with Tai Chi.

2.2 THE TWO CITIES

The Two Research Sites Halifax and Jinan



Figure 1: The Two Research Sites (Halifax and Jinan are marked with a star)

Jinan

Jinan is the capital of Shandong province in the eastern region of the People's Republic of China (see Figure 1). It is located about 500 kilometers south of Beijing, the national capital. Although Shandong is a coastal province on the Yellow Sea, Jinan is an inland city spread out over 8,177 square kilometers. At a latitude of 36.65°N, Jinan has

four well-defined seasons. The spring is dry. Summer is the season with the most rain of the year and usually very hot. Autumn is crisp and winter is cold but with little snow.

Jinan lies on the Yellow River,⁴ known historically as the “Mother River.” Shandong Province is located in the Yellow River Basin, often referred to as the “Cradle of Chinese Civilization” since it has been inhabited for over 4,000 years. Partly because of its proximity to the Yellow River, which used to connect to the Grand Canal,⁵ Jinan became a transportation hub, especially after the construction of railway lines and highways.

Jinan is situated about 100 km from Mount Tai⁶ (1,545 m), known as the most famous of the five so-called Sacred Mountains of China, with historical and spiritual connections to Daoism,⁷ one of the main philosophical pillars of Chinese society. Shandong province also has profound links to Confucianism,⁸ another philosophical pillar. Confucius’ hometown Qufu is located less than 200 km from Jinan. Confucius’ philosophy has been guiding Chinese people’s lives for thousands of years. The citizens of Jinan are particularly proud of living near Confucius’ home and of practicing his moral precepts.

The nickname of Jinan is the “City of Springs”⁹ because of its well-known 72 natural artesian springs of various sizes. Each of these springs has its individual characteristics. The most famous of these is the more than 2,000-year old Baotu Spring, which is located in the centre of the city and forms part of the 0.1 km² Baotu Spring Park. When the Qing Dynasty Emperor Qian Long (1711-1799) visited the Baotu Spring, he declared it “the best spring under heaven.” A tablet with his calligraphy of “Baotu Spring” hangs beside the “three jets of water”¹⁰ from the spring. The Baotu Spring Park,

⁴Yellow River (Huang He 黄河) is the second longest river in China after the Yangzi River (Chang Jiang 长江). It runs from Qinghai province in the Western region into the Yellow Sea in Shandong province.

⁵A 1,400 year-old canal connects north and south in China, in Chinese is “Da Yun He 大运河,” Retrieved August 7, 2017 from <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/05/chinas-grand-canal/johnson-text>

⁶Mount Tai (Tai Shan 泰山)

⁷“Daoism” is the Mandarin spelling while “Taoism” is the Cantonese spelling. Both names convert to the Chinese character 道. Retrieved August 7, 2017 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/daoism/>

⁸ Retrieved August 7, 2017 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/confuciu/>

⁹Quan Cheng 泉城. “quan” means “spring” and “cheng” means “city.”

¹⁰The “Three Jets of Water” form a triangle shape in the main spring of Baotu Spring Park. They are the most attractive scenery of the park.

the Daming Lake Park,¹¹ together with the Thousand-Buddha Mountain Park¹² are regarded as the “Three Greatest Attractions in Jinan.” Like most of the public parks in China, there are admission fees at their main gates as well as at some of the exhibition halls or historical displays inside the parks.

The total population of Jinan is seven million, of which four million live in the urban area. There was a 15 percent population increase from the fifth census in 2000 to the sixth census in 2010. According to the 2010 census, there were 623,500 people 65 years of age or older – in other words over nine percent of the population. The residents of Jinan include all of the 56 ethnic groups in China. The majority of Jinan residents are Han¹³ people (98%). The people who make up the other two percent belong to the remaining 55 minorities. The Hui¹⁴ ethnic group is the largest group by size, which constitutes 88 percent of the 55 minorities in Jinan.

Based on the 2010 census, Shandong province is the second most populated province in China and has the highest percentage of elders.¹⁵ Jinan is the second largest city in Shandong province. The port city of Qing Dao has a population of nine million, with six million in its urban core.

Jinan dialect is popularly spoken in the city, especially by the older generations. The tonal accent of the Jinan dialect is similar to that of Mandarin, the official language of China. Currently more people speak Mandarin in Jinan than before the 1980s because of the massive influx of migrant workers from elsewhere in China. Since their native dialects are often very different from Jinan dialect, Mandarin becomes the common language. As a general practice, the younger generations throughout China speak Mandarin. It should be noted that since 1949, when the People’s Republic of China was founded, Mandarin has been the mandatory language in schools and in the public service.

¹¹Daming Lake (Da Ming Hu 大明湖) is a public park in Jinan. It is only about one kilometer from Baotu Spring Park (Baotu Quan Gong Yuan 趵突泉公园).

¹²The Thousand-Buddha Mountain Park (Qian Fo Shan Gong Yuan 千佛山公园) is a public park with an altitude of 285 meters. The name derived from the great number of statues of the Buddha in the many Buddhist temples on the mountaintop and all over the mountain.

¹³“Han” 汉族 is the largest ethnic group among China’s 56 ethnic groups.

¹⁴“Hui” 回族 is one of the 55 minorities ethnic groups in China.

¹⁵China’s sixth census results. Retrieved July 31, 2017 from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

Jinan is the centre of higher education of Shandong province. There are 43 universities and colleges located in Jinan today. According to the 2017 official list of universities and colleges,¹⁶ there are a total of 141 universities and colleges in Shandong province.

Higher education in Jinan was established in September 1901 during the Qing Dynasty.¹⁷ By 1909, there were nine universities in Jinan. In 1958, there were 11 new universities established in Jinan, which increased the total number of universities to 15. Due to changes in government regulation, by 1965, prior to the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), the number of Jinan's total universities was reduced to eight. In 1985, however, there were 17 universities in Jinan. According to the university list published by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China on May 31, 2017,¹⁸ today there are 43 universities in Jinan.

Founded in 1901, Shandong University is one of the three universities in the province that is directly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education in Beijing, while the others are governed by the provincial Department of Education. With over 60,000 full-time students,¹⁹ Shandong University is one of the largest in China. The university's Medical College²⁰ was founded in 1864, which was a milestone of modern Chinese higher education. The original part of Shandong University was the second oldest university in China, after the University of Peking, now Beijing University.

During its 2,700-year existence, Jinan has played a major role in Chinese history. For example, the first Provincial Machinery Bureau was established in Jinan in 1895. Jinan today is the cultural, economic, finance, political, transportation, and science centre for the province. Heavy industry forms the core of its economy. Jinan is the birthplace of China's first domestically made "Yellow River" truck. Jinan's main industries manufacture machinery, textiles, chemicals, automobiles, and electronics. Jinan's "Little Duck" washing machines have gained a good reputation nationally and are sold overseas.

¹⁶Published by the Shandong Provincial Department of Education on June 15, 2017. Retrieved August 3, 2017 from <http://sd.people.com.cn/n2/2017/0616/c166192-30336197.html>

¹⁷Jinan Municipal Government. Retrieved July 31, 2017 from <http://lib.sdsqw.cn/bin/mse.exe?seachword=&K=b1&A=16&rec=39&run=13>

¹⁸ Ministry of Education. Retrieved July 31, 2017 from http://gaokao.eol.cn/shan_dong/dongtai/201706/t20170615_1528945.shtml

¹⁹ Retrieved August 6, 2017 from <http://www.sdu.edu.cn/2010/xxjj.html>

²⁰My Jinan field research advisor Professor Gao is a faculty member at this Medical College.

Bao Tu Quan beer, named after Baotu Spring, has also been popular locally and nationwide. A large number of residents are employed by the provincial and municipal governments as well as by the military base and higher education institutions. Jinan has made international connections with more than 20 “sister cities.”²¹ Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan in Canada, became one of these in 1987.

Quan Cheng Park and Ying Xiong Shan Park²² are the two significant parks for the Jinan part of this research because the majority of my Jinan participants practice in these parks. Quan Cheng Park and Ying Xiong Shan Park are the most attractive parks for older people in Jinan. Retirees and people of all ages use the parks for leisure activities and fitness exercises, including many Tai Chi groups practicing, especially in the early morning but also throughout the day. These two parks are situated in the central area of the city, both to the west of the Thousand-Buddha Mountain Park, accessible by a number of bus routes. Unlike most of the public parks in Jinan, admission to these two parks is free. This free access is particularly important for ordinary people who use the parks on a daily basis.

Quan Cheng Park is the largest city park in China. It is less than one kilometer from the Thousand-Buddha Mountain Park. Until 2006 Quan Cheng Park was called the Jinan Botanic Garden. In 1997 the municipal government decided to stop charging admission fees in order to make it more accessible to the general public. The park is gated with three entrances facing three of the four directions. 200,000 plants remain in Quan Cheng Park’s 46.7 hectares and provide a relaxing and spacious atmosphere for locals as well as visitors. Due to its no-cost entrance policy, natural environment, and convenient public transportation routes, Quan Cheng Park is one of the most popular places in the city for Tai Chi practitioners.

Ying Xiong Shan Park is a hill without a gate or formal entrance. It is about four kilometers to the west of the Thousand-Buddha Mountain Park. There are five bus routes between the two parks. The name “Ying Xiong Shan” translates as “Hero Hill.” This hill

²¹Cities in other countries made friendly connections with Jinan city for cultural exchanges. Having sister cities from abroad has been a common practice in China since the early 1980s.

²²Quan Chang Park (Quan Cheng Gong Yuan 泉城公园) and Ying Xiong Shan Park (Ying Xiong Shan Gong Yuan 英雄山公园) are both city-run public parks without admission fees. Quan Cheng Park is fenced with three gates while Ying Xiong Shan Park has neither fence nor gates.

sits on a 100-hectare mountain range. The Martyrs Cemetery on top of this hill serves as a base for ceremonies to remember the war heroes who died during the liberation of Jinan in 1948. The Wen Hua Guang Chang, literally “Cultural Market” at the bottom of this hill is one of the four²³ famous markets of its kind nationwide. The market is known for its variety of folklore merchandise including Tai Chi swords and Tai Chi fans, literature, and study aid books (for preparing for the national university entrance examinations); as well as its negotiable and affordable prices. One of the popular activities in the park area is to walk up and down the 100-metre altitude hill. It normally takes about an hour to walk from the bottom to the top on the rock steps. It is very common for many Tai Chi groups to conduct their daily practice at the bottom of the hill.

Halifax

Halifax is the capital of the province of Nova Scotia, which is situated in eastern Canada on the Atlantic coast. The distance from Halifax to Ottawa, the capital of Canada, is almost 1,000 kilometers. The municipality of Halifax covers 5,490 square kilometers, which is 67 percent of the size of Jinan. Halifax (latitude and longitude: 44.6488° N, 63.5752° W, elevation: 55m) is approximately eight degrees further north than Jinan (36.6512° N, 117.1201° E) and so Halifax is colder.

Although indigenous populations had inhabited the region for over 10,000 years, Halifax was founded in 1749 by the British as a counterweight to a large fort that the French had established further east. Situated close to a rich fishery, Halifax was chosen because of its large deep harbor and a steep hill that could be used for fortifications. Halifax has the largest ice-free harbor on the Atlantic Ocean, consequently it has long been famous for maritime commerce and naval activities. Halifax played an important role shipping supplies to Europe during wartime (1914-1945). Nowadays, Halifax port services connect to 150 countries.²⁴ Halifax port handles more than 1,500 vessels each year. Large containers from China transported by cargo ships are often seen on the dockyard along Point Pleasant Park²⁵ in the south-end of the city.

²³The other three markets are located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing.

²⁴ Retrieved August 3, 2017 from <http://www.portofhalifax.ca/>

²⁵The park was founded in 1866 as a military reserve.

The Historic Properties buildings near the waterfront formed a trading hub during the war of 1812. It now serves as a location for gift shops, restaurants and government offices. With its hexagonal-shaped fort, Citadel Hill is one of the main historic sites and tourist attractions in the city. The Halifax Public Gardens, established in 1867, are located on Spring Garden Road in the centre of the city. Their Victorian-style layout is particularly attractive. They are a favorite spot for locals to spend leisure time and celebrate important events such as Canada Day, weddings and school graduations with family and friends.

Pier 21, the Canadian Museum of Immigration, opened in 1999, is situated on the Halifax harbor front. From 1928 to 1971, it operated as an immigration depot and served as the point of entry for about one million immigrants to Canada. It also served as the departure point for nearly 500,000 soldiers during the Second World War – “Gateway to Canada” is another name for Pier 21.²⁶

According to the 2016 census conducted by Statistics Canada, people 65 years and older form 19.9 percent of the population of Nova Scotia, as opposed to 16.9 percent for the whole of Canada. The population of Halifax in 2017 was estimated at 453,964,²⁷ 11 percent of Jinan’s 4 million urban population. The 2016 Census profile of Halifax Population Age Groups²⁸ indicates that people 65 and older constitute 15.6 percent of the population. The percentage of people 65 and older has steadily increased: from the 1971 profile (8.3%) to 1976 (10.0%), 1981 (11.9%), and 1986 (13.5%). Within the age group of 65 and older, each of the three groups (65-74, 75-84, and 85 and older) increased continuously over the years from 1971 to 1986.

The Macdonald Bridge (1955) and the MacKay Bridge (1970) connecting Halifax and Dartmouth, have provided more residential area and boosted the city’s population growth. The city of Dartmouth joined the city of Halifax to become the Halifax Regional Municipality after amalgamation in 1996.

In terms of Halifax’s population growth, some newcomers to Halifax are employed by national corporations, the armed forces, research institutes, the federal

²⁶ Retrieved August 13, 2017 from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/pier-21/>

²⁷ Retrieved August 13, 2017 from <http://canadapopulation2017.com/population-of-halifax-2017.html>

²⁸ Retrieved December 18, 2017 from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=1209034&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&Data=Count&SearchText=Low&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All> 2016 Census Portfolio

government, or admitted as students at local universities. Some of these people only stay in Halifax until they complete their work term or graduate from a university. Halifax population growth depends on both natural growth and international immigrants, who come from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United States.

According to Statistics Canada,²⁹ the percentages of official languages spoken by the population in Nova Scotia are: English only, 89.5 percent; French only, 0.1 percent; English and French, 10.3 percent; neither English nor French, 0.2 percent. Among the 0.2 percent, the number of responses in 2011 was 2,845 Chinese speaking (other than Mandarin) and 940 Mandarin speaking.

Halifax is known as a university city. For the 2014-2015 academic year, Nova Scotia's total number of university students was 55,200 (45,732 full-time and 9,465 part-time).³⁰ Six of the ten universities in Nova Scotia are located in the Halifax Regional Municipality.³¹ The University of King's College, located in Halifax with an enrolment of 920, is the oldest university in the province. It was established in 1789 and like other Canadian universities it had strong religious ties. Dalhousie University, with 16,580 full-time students,³² is the largest in Halifax. It was established in 1818 and had connections with the Presbyterian Church, while Acadia University (Wolfville) was founded by Baptists, and Saint Mary's University (Halifax), Saint Francis Xavier University (Antigonish), and Mount Saint Vincent University (Halifax) were all affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church.³³ The secularization of these universities began in the 1960s and was completed by the 1970s.

Halifax is a major regional centre for the economy of Atlantic Canada and provides both private and public services. Halifax's economy is half of the provincial

²⁹Statistics Canada. 2012. Visual Census. 2011 Census. Ottawa. Released October 24, 2012. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/vc-rv/index.cfm?Lang=ENG&TOPIC_ID=4&GEOCODE=12 (accessed August 3, 2017).

³⁰ Retrieved August 3, 2017 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/educ71a-eng.htm>

³¹ Retrieved August 3, 2017 from http://www.canadian-universities.net/Universities/Nova_Scotia-Halifax.html

³² Retrieved August 7, 2017 from <https://www.univcan.ca/universities/facts-and-stats/enrolment-by-university/>

³³Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents. (2008). Memorandum Of Understanding Between The Province of Nova Scotia and The Nova Scotia Universities." Retrieved August 3, 2017 from https://novascotia.ca/lae/HigherEducation/documents/UnivFF_TechnicalReport.pdf

economy. By the 1950s Halifax had become a major railway and shipping centre.³⁴ The main sectors for the Halifax economy include International trade, health care, higher education, the food service industry, and both the federal and provincial government headquarters. A public-private partnership was launched in 2005³⁵ to promote economic growth in Halifax while keeping the heritage of the city. As a result of this project, important historical buildings on the waterfront, such as the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia were renovated.

There are two types of organizations in Halifax, which enable people to practice Tai Chi. One of these is part of a not-for-profit Tai Chi organization whose members practice Tai Chi in indoor locations in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Sometimes the organization rented a place such as a church hall, when they did not have enough space in their own buildings to run multiple Tai Chi classes. Community centres managed by the Recreation Department of the HRM constitute the other type of organization that provides Tai Chi classes. (These classes are just one of the many programs and activities offered on a regular basis in the centres run by the Department of Recreation.)

2.3 TAI CHI

2.3.1 What is Tai Chi?

This thesis follows the usual English-language practice of using “Tai Chi” rather than the Chinese term “Tai Ji Quan, or Taijiquan 太极拳” or “Supreme Ultimate Boxing.” The reference to boxing reflects the fact that the majority of its practitioners practice it barehanded. “Quan, 拳” means “fist.” However, “Tai Chi” is the most recognized and widely used phrase academically and worldwide outside China.³⁶

Tai Chi has been practiced, mainly by older people, in China for more than three centuries (China Sports, 1999; Lan, Lai, and Chen, 2002) and in North America since the 1970s (Adler and Roberts, 2006; Lu, 2007). In China, Tai Chi’s fundamental philosophy focuses on cultivating vitality and longevity as guided by the Daoist Yin-Yang Theory. In the West, Tai Chi has been adopted for its health benefits (Gallagher, 2003; Horowitz,

³⁴ Retrieved August 13, 2017 from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/halifax/>

³⁵ Retrieved October 26, 2017 from <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/071127cow3i.pdf>

³⁶ “Tai Chi” is also known as Tai Chi Chuan, Tai Ji, or Tai Ji Quan.

2009; Kuromoto, 2006; Lelard et al., 2010; Field, 2011; Logghe et al., 2009; Low et al., 2009; Ni et al., 2014; Tsang and Hui-Chan, 2006; Wu, 2008; and Yin and Dishman, 2014;) and also as a type of martial art (Callahan, 2009; McKenna, 2001). Tai Chi shares its philosophical foundation with other Asian practices such as traditional Chinese medicine, qigong, meditation, and yoga (Chan and Larson, 2016; Carter, Stratton, and Mallory, 2011; Sharma, Hankey, Nagilla, Meenakshy, and Nagendra, 2014; Wong, 1997).

Tai Chi is a holistic art in which the “physical, mental, and spiritual components are all integral to its practice” (Yang, 2005, p. 4). A Tai Chi master Liao Waysun (Liao, 1990) states that in order to understand the background of Tai Chi, three areas are very important: 1) Tai Chi’s philosophical background; 2) its original creation as a martial art; and 3) its development over the years. The original principle of Tai Chi means the ultimate state of a combination of human thoughts and behavior – in other words, the mind and body. The Daoist Yin-Yang theory, the foundation of Tai Chi philosophy, is about opposites: “Yin” is negative and “Yang” is positive. The ultimate goal of Tai Chi practice is to reach a balance between these two opposing forces. All aspects of traditional Chinese arts, including calligraphy, painting, literature, and cooking emphasize this Yin-Yang harmony.

2.3.2 Overview

There are various opinions in the literature regarding the length of Tai Chi’s existence. “Tai Chi is a way of life that has been practiced by the Chinese for thousands of years” (Liao, 1990, p.3). “Tai Chi is an ancient Chinese philosophy that dates back 5,000 years” (Nandoskar, 2009, p.2). However, Tai Chi as a martial art was developed by the Daoist monk Zhang Sanfeng³⁷ more than three hundred years ago in a temple on Wudang Mountain during the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties (China Sports, 1999; Liang, 1977; Yang, 2005, Zheng, 2004). Wudang Mountain is located about 900 km from Jinan. Wudang Tai Chi was created for defensive purposes as well as for improving the fitness and health of the monks in the temple. The

³⁷ Zhang San Feng is the phonetics in Mandarin Chinese. In Chinese characters is 张三丰 or Chang Sanfeng as the phonetics spelling in Cantonese (e.g., in Chen and Snyder, 1999).

first scientific research article on Tai Chi that reported experimental research results, published in English by a group of Chinese doctors in Shanghai in 1981, stated that Tai Chi had existed for a century (Gong et al., 1981).

Chen Jia Gou³⁸ is the birthplace of Chen style Tai Chi. The tradition of the Chen family was to only teach Tai Chi techniques to the male offspring of their immediate family. However, in the 1880s Yang Luchan (his family name was “Yang”) was allowed to learn Tai Chi from a man named Chen Changxing who was the 14th Tai Chi generational successor³⁹ of the Chen family. After seven years learning Tai Chi in the Chen family, Yang returned to his hometown in Hebei province. In the 1850s, Yang was hired as a martial arts instructor to teach the royal guard in Beijing. Due to the low fitness level of the guard, Yang made the Chen style Tai Chi moves softer and slower, gradually developing his own Yang style of Tai Chi. In Beijing, Wu Quanyou, one of Yang’s students, modified Yang style into his own Wu style. Wu was originally from Shanghai, so his son brought Wu style Tai Chi to Shanghai where the style is still popular today.

Tai Chi’s development has been affected by the ruling authorities over the centuries. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, each time Tai Chi has been supported it has been used to improve the fitness level of the nation. In more recent history, Tai Chi has been presented as a Chinese cultural icon, as at the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games.

In 1952, Mao Zedong wrote one of his famous dicta⁴⁰ to encourage ordinary people to participate in physical activities to improve their health (Chen, 2003; Lu, 2004). The activity choices that Mao mentioned included playing ball, doing gymnastics, running, swimming, and practicing Tai Chi. In 1956, China’s Sports Committee’s Sports Division gathered together Tai Chi masters and experts to compile the Simplified 24-move Tai Chi.⁴¹ It was part of a national health promotion campaign, along with several other physical activities (Li et al., 2003). It emphasized the fitness function of Tai Chi.

³⁸A village in Henan province.

³⁹Chen Changxing was the 14th male offspring learned the techniques of Chen Tai Chi that was passed on to him in the Chen family.

⁴⁰Fa zhan ti yu yun dong, zeng qiang ren min ti zhi 发展体育运动，增强人民体质. This quote was popularly painted on the walls of public places in China until the 1980s.

⁴¹Er shi si shi jian hua tai ji quan 24 式简化太极拳. This simplified Tai Chi consists of 24 moves. Each move involves one or various slow movements of the practitioner.

The birth of the Simplified 24 Tai Chi is considered a milestone in the evolution of Tai Chi.

Tai Chi was banned in China at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977) in accordance with Mao Zedong's dictum of "breaking the four old and building the four new."⁴² Tai Chi was seen as belonging to the "old." At that time, anything from the past, including books (except Mao's books), was considered "old" by the young students who actively participated in the Cultural Revolution.

In 1978, immediately after the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping, the Vice Chairman and Premier of the State Council at that time, told a group of Japanese officials that he received in Beijing, "Taijiquan is good."⁴³ This powerful signal lifted the ban on Tai Chi in China. In 1982, Beijing University became the first university to establish a Martial Art Society with a Tai Chi Branch.⁴⁴ Soon after, more than one hundred universities in China started their own Tai Chi societies. Later in the same year, the first national Tai Chi push-hand⁴⁵ competition was included as part of a martial art competition held in Beijing.

In 1983, the first Tai Chi group demonstration in China was performed by 5,000 Tai Chi practitioners in People's Square in Shanghai during the Fifth National Sports Games. This group performance returned Tai Chi to the attention of the general public.

In 1998, the State Sports Administration's Martial Arts Centre issued, for the first time, certificates to recognize the levels of credentials of Tai Chi masters and instructors in Tai Chi classes across the country.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tai Chi has been promoted at different times for different purposes. In 1956, for example, the central government regarded Tai Chi as an inexpensive way of boosting the nation's physical fitness and health. At that time, President Mao Zedong promoted Tai Chi and several other fitness activities (which included playing balls, jogging and swimming) to

⁴²Breaking the four old included old thought, old culture, old custom, and old habits. Jiu si xiang, jiu wenhua, jiu fengsu, jiu xiguan 旧思想、旧文化、旧风俗、旧习惯。

⁴³On November 16, 1978, at the request of the Japanese official, Deng Xiaoping wrote, "Tai Ji Quan hao 太极拳好" in calligraphy.

⁴⁴ Wushu Xue Hui Taijiquan Fen Hui 武术学会太极拳分会

⁴⁵Tai Chi Tui Shou 太极推手 is an advanced Tai Chi practice. It is practiced by two practitioners with the palms of both of their hands joined to the opponent during the practice.

encourage Chinese people to improve their health. Ordinary people were thus encouraged to learn and practice Tai Chi. In February 1956, the Wushu Branch, Sports Division of the National Sports Committee brought together Tai Chi experts of all styles nationwide and created the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set. Based on the original Yang style Tai Chi (which consists of 108 moves), this set includes the essence moves of all styles. The creation of the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set was a major innovation that popularized Tai Chi in China and made it possible for ordinary Chinese people to learn and practice. This set has been the most popular set for Tai Chi practitioners in many countries.

The socio-political promotion of Tai Chi, which began in the 1950s and continued for decades, provided an incentive for the Jinan participants. Since most of them worked in government jobs, they were very used to the idea of following the orders or recommendations of the central authorities. The more recent showcasing of Tai Chi during the Beijing Olympics Games obviously provided an added incentive and heightened their pride in Tai Chi as a Chinese cultural icon. In 2008, during the Olympics Games in Beijing, Tai Chi was promoted as a cultural icon. Not only did the opening ceremony⁴⁶ feature a Tai Chi performance, but the emblem of the Games was a pictogram of a Tai Chi practitioner moving in the shape of the Chinese character “京 Jīng” in Chinese calligraphy style, (Figure 2). “Jing” was used as an abbreviation for Beijing (北京) in this context.



Figure 2: The 2008 Beijing Olympics Games Emblem⁴⁷

August 8, 2009, was China’s very first National Fitness Day, in honor of the success of the August 8, 2008 Beijing Olympics Games. The 6-minute Tai Chi performance by 34,000 people from all walks of life in Beijing broke the Guinness World Record for the total number of people practicing Tai Chi together in one group at the

⁴⁶ For the entire opening ceremony, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8n-gMKtR77g>. For the logo, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:2008_Summer_Olympics_logo.svg

⁴⁷ Retrieved December 21, 2017 from http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-12/03/content_9286.htm

same time and same location. August 21, 2009, China's Museum of Taijiquan was opened in Tai Chi's birthplace, a village named Chen Jia Gou in Wen County of Henan Province,⁴⁸ to the west of Jinan.

Tai Chi (several styles) has been officially listed in the category of "Traditional Sports" by China's State Council (guo wu yuan, 国务院), as China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage on November 11, 2014.⁴⁹

Tai Chi has been a societal reality in Jinan and the rest of China for centuries. It is part of street scenery. Large or small groups of Tai Chi practitioners can be seen in public places such as city squares, public parks, or other open spaces in the morning or evening. The majority of those Tai Chi groups are comprised of retirees. Tai Chi was thus not strange to any of the Jinan participants.

2.3.3 Tai Chi styles

Tai Chi can be divided into two categories: 1) barehanded Tai Chi, which includes the Simplified 24, the Competition 42,⁵⁰ Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun⁵¹ and push-hands;⁵² and 2) Tai Chi with an item of equipment, the most popular types being Tai Chi sword and Tai Chi fan.⁵³ However, in each of these two categories of Tai Chi practice there are different pre-designed sets. For example, the most popular barehanded Tai Chi sets are the Simplified 24 with 24 moves and the traditional Yang style with 108 moves.

Each of the Tai Chi styles is comprised of a different series or set of moves. Each set consists of a number of different moves and each move involves specific slow and rhythmic movements. For example, the traditional Yang style includes 108 moves, as mentioned previously. The Chinese Sports Commission gathered Tai Chi experts to

⁴⁸Henan Sheng, Wen Xian, Chen Jia Gou Cun, 河南省温县陈家沟村

⁴⁹guo jia fei wu zhi wen hua yi cha, 国家非物质文化遗产 Retrieved August 30, 2016 from (China's State Council's official list published on November 11, 2014, Tai Chi was in the category of "Traditional Sports" number 293, VI-11): http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-12/03/content_9286.htm

⁵⁰Simplified 24 and Competition 42 sets were designed for Tai Chi practitioners of all styles. Neither set belongs to any traditional Tai Chi style.

⁵¹Chen, Yang, and Wu styles of Tai Chi each consists of various sets each of which has a specific number of moves. E.g., there is the 108-move traditional Chen style as well as shorter move styles.

⁵²"Push-hands" (tui shou, 推手) is an advanced form of Tai Chi. It literally means two practitioners with their hands palm-joined together with each other, while practicing Tai Chi. Practitioners must learn barehanded Tai Chi first before learning push-hands.

⁵³ The most popular Tai Chi is the barehanded in China and elsewhere. Some Tai Chi practitioners also practice Tai Chi sword or Tai Chi fan.

compile two sets by combining techniques from all the Tai Chi styles. The best known is the 24 Simplified Tai Chi set, which, as previously stated, was created in 1958 in order to promote Tai Chi as an economical tool for improving the wellbeing of the nation. The 24 Simplified Tai Chi set is the most popular set among practitioners in China and in many other countries. The Competition set was created in the 1980s and also used moves from all different Tai Chi styles. It provided a platform for practitioners from all Tai Chi styles to share and compete. Prior to this Competition set, practitioners were only able to compete within the same Tai Chi style because every Tai Chi style had their own special characteristics and there was no standard measurement for all styles.

There are also various sets for practitioners who practice with a Tai Chi sword or Tai Chi fan. Although several participants from both Jinan and Halifax mentioned that they had briefly tried Tai Chi with a sword or a fan or were interested in them, only barehanded Tai Chi was examined for this research project.

2.3.4 Tai Chi music

Jinan participants used the several pieces of standard Tai Chi music as the background music in all of their Tai Chi classes and informal groups. In contrast, Halifax participants (except for one informal group) did not use any background music in their class or group. When practicing Tai Chi at home, Jinan participants used the same Tai Chi music while Halifax participants either practiced Tai Chi silently or used music of their own choice.

One type of music used in China is commonly known as the “Tai Chi music,”⁵⁴ was composed for two specific Tai Chi sets, the Simplified Tai Chi and the Competition set. The background music (without lyrics) for the Simplified Tai Chi set was composed when the set was compiled in the 1950s. Since then, this piece of background music has become an integral part of the Simplified set. Practitioners all over China have been practicing the Simplified Tai Chi set with this music for years. Background music, also without lyrics, was also composed for the Competition set. The music for the Competition set is not as well known as the music for the Simplified set because the set

⁵⁴Taiji Yinyue 太极音乐

itself is not as popular as the Simplified set. Some practitioners sometimes also choose different Chinese traditional music when they practice the Competition set.

The other type of Tai Chi background music used in China is Chinese folk music with or without lyrics. It is comprised of a selection of popular folk songs or tunes that vary depending on the musical preferences of the practitioners and the Tai Chi set they practice. In other words, a group of practitioners would use one piece of folk music when they practice the Yang style Tai Chi and another piece when they practice the Chen style. Choices of background music may vary with each Tai Chi group as well.

2.3.5 Tai Chi's international development

Tai Chi made its first international appearance “as a symbol of a unified nation” at the Berlin Olympics in Germany in 1936 (Zheng, 2004). At this turning point, Tai Chi was transformed “from being a celebration of tradition into an expression of modernity” (Frank, 2006, p.167).

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976 and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977, China welcomed the “Open Door” policy⁵⁵ lead by Deng Xiaoping. This had a significant impact on Tai Chi practitioners both in China and in North America because it allowed Chinese nationals to leave China and settle overseas (e.g. North America) and in doing so they took with them the philosophies and practices of Tai Chi. In the same manner, there was more access by foreigners to Tai Chi masters residing in China, which allowed researchers and other westerners interested in Tai Chi to visit and learn more about this practice in its homeland. This period marked the beginning of Tai Chi's exposure to the Western world on a large scale. For example, American cultural anthropologist Adam Frank (Frank, 2006) went to China to study Tai Chi with a Tai Chi master in Shanghai in 1997.

In April 1984, for the first Tai Chi Competition organized in Wuhan (Hubei province), 70 Tai Chi practitioners from 18 countries, including Canada, were invited to participate. They competed with 100 Chinese Tai Chi practitioners. In September 1984, the national Tai Chi competition included 40 advanced Tai Chi players from 10 provinces. They competed in five Tai Chi styles including Chen, Yang, Wǔ (武), Wú

⁵⁵ Gai ge kai fang zheng ce, 改革开放政策

(吴), and Sun. In the same year, the National Sports Committee rewarded 1,000 excellent martial arts instructors nationwide. Many of those were Tai Chi instructors. In 1986, the Committee decided to have annual Tai Chi competitions including barehanded Tai Chi, Push-hand and Tai Chi sword. In 1988, 100 Japanese Tai Chi practitioners came to Beijing for the China-Japan Tai Chi competition. In 1990, the 11th Asian Sports Games was held in Beijing. Tai Chi and other forms of martial arts were included in the official competition. At the opening ceremony, 1,500 Tai Chi practitioners from China and Japan performed Tai Chi together. That was a milestone for the international reputation of Tai Chi.

In 1991, the first International Martial Art Competition was held in Beijing. Fifty participants from 40 countries competed with Tai Chi and other martial art forms. In 1994, the National Sports Committee promoted a National Fitness Program.⁵⁶ Tai Chi was the form of fitness training practiced by more people than any other in China. This program boosted the number of Tai Chi practitioners as well as their enthusiasm.

October 15, 1998, marked the 20th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's saying of "Taijiquan is good." It was also the 40th anniversary of the birth of the Chinese Wushu Association. Ten thousand Tai Chi practitioners together performed Tai Chi in Tian An Men Square to celebrate. In the early morning of January 1, 2000, Men Hui Feng, a very famous Tai Chi master, performed Tai Chi on top of Mount Tai. China Central Television broadcasted his performance live, through helicopter aerial shoot, to four billion people in 140 countries.⁵⁷ Later in May 2000, the Chinese Martial Art Association dedicated May of each year as "Tai Chi month." They organized the first large-scale free Tai Chi class at the China Olympics Sport Centre. More than 20 Tai Chi instructors from the association and Beijing Sports University taught 1,500 participants the Simplified Tai Chi. In July 2000, the Executive Committee of the International Martial Art Association also dedicated the month of May as the "World Tai Chi month."

More recently, during the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games, the logos for various sports were all designed based on an emblematic Tai Chi pose. Current views of how Tai Chi has evolved in China vary, although there is some concern by older Chinese Tai Chi

⁵⁶Quan min jian shen ji hua, 全民健身计划

⁵⁷Retrieved December 21, 2017 from http://www.sohu.com/a/166075602_164390

practitioners that younger Chinese nationals are no longer practicing Tai Chi. Some younger Chinese prefer yoga, possibly because they may consider it to be a trendier activity (Pilarzyk, 2008). In any case, Tai Chi is now strongly promoted and presented by the current Chinese government as being part of tradition and a cultural icon.

2.3.6 Tai Chi's transformation from China to Canada

The first Canadian Tai Chi organization⁵⁸ was established in 1970. The individual established it came from Hong Kong (This individual's name has been deliberately omitted in order to protect the identity of one of the participating Tai Chi groups in this research). He modified the moves of the traditional Yang style Tai Chi to give the set a focus on health-improvement. As a result, the early members of this Tai Chi organization joined primarily for health reasons. During my field research observation, many practitioners from various Tai Chi groups in Halifax emphasized specific moves in their Canadian Tai Chi set that helped particular aspects of their health. The Canadian Style Tai Chi set contains 108 moves, the same number as the traditional Yang style.

2.3.7 Tai Chi as "Moving Meditation"

Practitioners and researchers often refer to Tai Chi as "Moving Meditation" (e.g., Robins, Elswick, and McCain, 2012; Paterna, 2003; Khor, 1994) or "meditation in motion" (Posadzki and Jacques, 2009). In order to better understand the concept of Moving Meditation, it will be useful to discuss different schools of meditation including the newer term "mindfulness."

Buddhist meditation originated in India about 2,500 years ago (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Indian Buddhist meditation was brought by monks from India to China during the Tang dynasty (618-907AD) and then spread to other Asian countries before reaching the West. Chinese Buddhism assimilated the moral teachings of Daoism and together with Daoism and Confucianism Chinese Buddhism has greatly influenced Chinese daily life. Buddhists in China refer to their meditation practice as "Zuo Chan."⁵⁹ When Chinese

⁵⁸In order to protect the identity of this organization, "Canadian Style Tai Chi" is used in this dissertation.

⁵⁹Zuo Chan 坐禅 or Da Zuo 打坐 means to meditate in a sitting position. "Zuo" means sitting down and "Chan" means meditation.

Buddhism spread to Japan, the Japanese named it “Zen Buddhism.”⁶⁰ Japanese Zen Buddhism probably had a greater impact on Japanese culture than Chinese Buddhism has had in China, but the influence in China is nevertheless substantial. Japanese Zen meditation seemed to have had more impact on Western cultures than has Chinese Buddhism.

Chinese Buddhists and Zen Buddhists focus on the here and now. They perceive Buddhism as a practice, not a theory. In general, the practitioners sit still on a cushion while trying to clear all thoughts from their mind and hoping to be enlightened. Transcendental Meditation started in the United States as “Transcendental Deepbreathing Meditation” (Schwarzenegger, 2014). Its practitioners sit quietly with their eyes closed, also focusing on the present. They repeat a mantra to help their concentration and reduce stress.

The roots of mindfulness are in Buddhist philosophy and being mindful is a key element of several types of Buddhist meditation (Chiesa and Malinowski, 2011). Mindful meditation in the Chinese language is “Ming Xiang, 冥想,” which means “deep thoughts.” Despite the abstract definitions of mindfulness, some researchers have developed more current psychologically-oriented descriptions of mindfulness. Examples of such descriptions include “the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” and a “non-judgmental attitude, openness to current experience” (Brown and Ryan, 2003, p. 822). Jon Kabat-Zinn, the pioneer of mindfulness therapies (Harrington and Dunne, 2015), described mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4). According to the mindfulness expert, Goldstein (2013), mindfulness is a type of meditation. Moore and Malinowski (2009) found that the level of mindfulness significantly resulted better meditation results in their participants. Mindfulness meditation is intertwined with other types of meditations. All meditations focus on being present. Tai Chi thus appears to be a type of mindful meditation that involves physical movement.

Evidence shows that both Tai Chi and meditation in general contribute to the cultivation of health and wellbeing, building both physical strength and emotional

⁶⁰“Zen” is a Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word “Chan 禅.”

balance. The benefits of Tai Chi as reported in the literature are discussed in Chapter Three. The benefits that participants of this research have reported are presented in Chapters Five and Six. But it is worth noting here that a Chinese researcher (Liang, 2001) conducted a Randomized Controlled Trial comparing the cardiopulmonary function of long-term Tai Chi practitioners with non-Tai Chi practitioners of the same age group. The study concluded, “Tai Chi combined mindfulness, breathing technique, and body movements together (p. 64),” resulting in improvement in cardiopulmonary function and is thus a suitable activity for older people.

It is frequently mentioned in the Chinese Tai Chi literature that Tai Chi was heavily influenced by Laozi’s (the founder of Daoism) philosophy, especially the idea of “Tian Ren He Yi 天人合一.” This phrase literally translates as “the unity of Heaven and mankind.” It refers to the ideal notion of a Tai Chi practitioner who breathes into *Dan Tian*⁶¹ and moves in a circular motion to reach the ultimate mind-body harmony with nature. Another Chinese Tai Chi article (Gao, 2008) refers to Tai Chi as “a way to achieve *Dao*⁶² (p. 142). The highest level of *Dao* means “Tian Ren He Yi.”

Tai Chi and meditation (including mindfulness meditation) are both breathing-centric practices. The practice of breathing is shared, whether emphasized by the practitioners or not, by Indian Buddhist meditation, Chinese Buddhist meditation, Japanese Zen meditation, and Transcendental Meditation. All types of meditation practitioners focus their breathing on their abdominal area by putting their hands on the belly as they breath in and out. Although some Tai Chi practitioners may focus on their body movements as beginners, advanced Tai Chi practitioners focus on their Dan Tian during practice. Another shared feature of these practices, excluding Tai Chi, is the sitting position while breathing and meditating. This is probably why Tai Chi is popularly referred to as “*moving* meditation.” Practitioners of different meditations tend to emphasize their practical practice, rather than theoretical underpinning. Similarly, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, it seems that Tai Chi practitioners practice Tai Chi more for its practical application (the physical moves) than for philosophical aspects.

⁶¹Dan Tian 丹田 is located in the abdominal area, about two inches below the belly button. It is believed to be the centre of energy in traditional Chinese medicine.

⁶²“Dao 道” is the ultimate stage of Daoism.

Tai Chi, qigong, and yoga are seen as Asian mind-body practices by westerners (Kerr, 2002; Siddarth, Siddarth, and Lavretsky, 2014; Gallagher, 2003; Birdee et al., 2009; Pilarzyk, 2008). Tai Chi and qigong were created in China as two forms of Chinese martial arts. Yoga began in India. The commonality of the three practices consists of philosophical, physical, and spiritual aspects. That is, nurturing the mind to achieve calmness, training the body for health improvement, and reducing stress and anxiety. Furthermore, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) also shares the Yin-Yang theory as its foundation. (Becoming a TCM practitioner is not as accessible as the other three practices because it requires years of formal training in an education institute.) As discussed earlier in this chapter, Yin and Yang are a unity of opposites and each depends on the other. Yin and Yang represent a pair of things or the opposite aspects of the same unity. When the Yin-Yang balance is broken, unhealthy symptoms and/or illnesses occur in a human body (Taylor-Piliae and Haskell, 2007). Therefore, in China, the practitioners of TCM and the patients who believe in and seek treatment by a TCM practitioner are aware, to various degrees, of its fundamental theory of Yin-Yang.

2.4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.4.1 Confucianism and the Daoist theory of Yin-Yang

The most significant concept shared by Confucianism and Daoism is the harmonious relationship between nature and human beings. This important concept forms the theoretical foundation of Tai Chi. Confucian and Daoist philosophies are deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Confucius is a household name in China. For Chinese people, Daoism is the second most powerful cultural influence after Confucianism (Verellen, 2009; Alpers, 2008a and 2008b; Doctoroff, 2006).

The Daoist Yin-Yang Theory from the Chinese perspective and Identity Theory from both the North American and Chinese perspectives form the philosophical foundation of Tai Chi practice for its elder practitioners and provide contextual background for Tai Chi researchers in both cultures.

Confucius (551BCE-479BCE), one of the most famous Chinese philosophers, was born in Lu State (today's Qufu city, 200 km from Jinan) in the Spring and Autumn Dynasty. During the Han Dynasty (206BCE-220CE), with the adoption of Confucianism

as the official moral and political principle of the State, the Confucian tradition became so pervasive that the term “Scholar” became virtually synonymous with “Confucian,” and Confucianism (*Ru Jia*⁶³) became the common term. *The Analects of Confucius*⁶⁴ is a collection of Confucius’ teachings compiled by his students and which emphasizes Confucian values such as humanity, good manners, filial virtue, and consideration for others. One of Confucius’ most famous sayings is *what you do not want for yourself, do not do to others*.⁶⁵ Confucius strongly encouraged *Moderation* or the *Golden Mean* (*Zhong Yong* 中庸). It is what the Chinese believe is the ultimate ideal state that humans can achieve, either in health, politics, or any other component of an individual or society. This rule applies to many aspects of life and social practice, including Tai Chi. The ultimate goal of Tai Chi practice is to achieve the inner harmony of a human being in order to keep the *Golden Mean* within the Tai Chi practitioner.

Confucius’ philosophy can, some have argued, be considered the origin of Chinese culture (Yang, 2012). Confucius’ temples⁶⁶ at their peak during the Qing Dynasty numbered more than 1,500.⁶⁷ However, Confucianism is more about moral guidance for ordinary Chinese people to pass on from one generation to the next than it is about temples. The temples are for celebration purposes while Confucius’ thoughts have guided the moral lives of ordinary Chinese people throughout history. In addition to his philosophical and moral influence, Confucius is also the founder of Chinese popular education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has labeled Confucius one of the “Ten Cultural Celebrities.” Although there seems to be less influence of Buddhism on Tai Chi, other than the breathing techniques shared by Tai Chi and yoga (see Chapter Three), the *Golden Mean* of Confucianism and the Yin-Yang harmony of Daoism definitely compose the theoretical foundation of Tai Chi.

⁶³Ru Jia 儒家 translates as “Confucianism.”

⁶⁴Lun Yu 论语

⁶⁵Ji suo buy u, wu shi yu ren, 己所不欲，勿施于人

⁶⁶Kong Miao 孔庙, the first temple of this type was built in Confucius’ home as a private temple. After the Emperor of various Dynasties visited this temple, it became public and soon after, there are many other public Confucius’ temples were built in Mainland China.

⁶⁷ Retrieved August 13, 2017 from http://www.chinakongmiao.cn/templates/T_FocusTopics/index.aspx?nodeid=934&page=ContentPage&contentid=4997

Unlike Confucius, Laozi, the founder of Daoism, remains a mysterious figure to date. It is believed that Laozi was head of the imperial library of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (1046-256BCE) and that Confucius visited Laozi to get his advice on rites. Laozi's book titled *Dao De Jing* or *Tao Te Ching*,⁶⁸ is the most translated book worldwide after the Bible.

The fundamentals of Daoism put emphasis on establishing harmony with the “Dao 道” and Dao exists in everything. Dao means a “way” or a “path” or a “principle” in Chinese. Confucianism views Dao as an ethical and moral way to guide an ordinary person's behavior in Chinese society. Daoism focuses more strongly on a harmonious relationship between human and nature. The three themes of Daoism consist of the harmony in human-nature, human-society, and human-the human self (Gao, 2008). Yin-Yang Theory is the focal point of Daoism. Yin and Yang are opposites and represent the two extremes in nature. For example, Yin represents female and Yang represents male in human beings. Yin represents the front and Yang the back of a human body in Traditional Chinese Medicine.⁶⁹ Yin represents darkness and Yang represents brightness in nature. Beyond the notion of opposites, Yin and Yang are also intertwined. The Daoism symbol best represents this feature (Figure 3, p. 35). Yin-Yang Theory is widely accepted and practiced in Chinese culture. It is not just a theory. Yin-Yang harmony can be applicable to almost every aspect of ordinary people's lives in China. For example, the strong influence of Yin-Yang harmony in Tai Chi practice is demonstrated by: 1) the circular body movements to achieve balance; 2) the deep abdominal breathing into *Dan Tian* to regulated *qi* (internal energy); and 3) the harmonious mental state of the unity of Tai Chi practitioners with the universe.

The Yin-Yang theory focuses on the harmony of the human body as a whole (e.g., the back is Yin and the chest is Yang) as well as the balance between living things and nature (e.g., the moon is Yin and the sun is Yang). Within the Meridian System⁷⁰ that guides the practice of traditional Chinese medicine, *Dan Tian*⁷¹ is an important focal

⁶⁸Dao De Jing, 道德经, *Moral Classics*

⁶⁹ Zhong Yi 中医, Traditional Chinese Medicine

⁷⁰Jing Luo 经络, Traditional Chinese medicine teaches that qi (life energy) flows among the 14 channels of the Meridian System.

⁷¹ Dan Tian 丹田 is located about three finger widths below and two finger widths behind the umbilicus. It is believed to be the centre of energy.

point that is also referred to as “sea of qi” or “energy centre.” Deep breathing (inhale) into this focal point is a well-known exercise technique among practitioners of traditional Chinese meditation, qigong, and martial arts like Tai Chi. Developing this breathing technique is believed to be extremely important in order to achieve inner harmony in the various mind-body practices. Richerson and Rosendal (2007, p. 277) translate the Chinese deep breathing in Tai Chi into Western terms: “Tai Chi training is low impact during which diaphragmatic breathing is coordinated with graceful motions to achieve mind tranquility.”

Daoism is practiced in two different ways in China. There are approximately 30,000 Daoists who live full-time in 300 Daoist temples scattered throughout China⁷². For the vast majority of followers, however, Daoism is a spiritual concept that does not involve either membership or regular attendance at a Daoist temple. Followers may visit a temple frequently or infrequently to make a monetary contribution. It is important to note that one can believe in the Daoist Yin-Yang theory without being a Daoist.



Figure 3: The Daoist Yin-Yang symbol⁷³

The close connection between Daoism and Tai Chi is best presented by three dimensions: 1) Attitude toward nature. Daoism and Tai Chi both support the idea of dealing with strong forces in nature by gentle means. 2) Breathing technique. Both stress the importance of natural breathing as a way of guiding body movement. 3) Body movements. Both believe that the law of movement is expressed in a circular motion (Mou and Wu, 2007; Li, 2003). The essence of Tai Chi is Yin-Yang and Yin-Yang is the foundation of Meridian Theory⁷⁴ (Geng, Bi, and Wan, 2003), which guides the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Due to the impact of Daoism on Tai Chi, another name for Tai Chi (Wang, 2006a) is “Zhe Chuan”⁷⁵ or “Dance of Life” (Yu, 2003). Both terms reflect the value of Tai Chi

⁷² Retrieved October 16, 2016 from <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/religion/>

⁷³ The dark part represents Yin and light part is Yang. There is a little Yin inside Yang and vice versa

⁷⁴ A meridian is an internal path inside human-body through which the life-energy *qi* flows; there are 20 Meridians connecting about 400 acupuncture points throughout a human-body (Zhao, 2015).

⁷⁵ Zhe Quan 哲拳, “Zhe” means “philosophy” and “Quan” means “fist.”

for cultivating psychological and physiological health and longevity. Furthermore, some believe that Tai Chi is a “Chinese way of thinking” (Dan and Li, 2004, p. 43) reflecting the Chinese people’s worldview. For example, a belief shared by Yu (2003) is that the physical movements of Tai Chi represent Chinese culture collectively and Tai Chi is an understanding by ancient Chinese of the harmony between life and nature. Hence, Yin-Yang builds the theoretical foundation of Tai Chi practice.

Throughout Chinese history, what Tai Chi represents from the point of view of the Chinese government and what Tai Chi means to its older practitioners in China have not always coincided. The way Tai Chi is perceived by its older practitioners in China and in North America may also be somewhat different. The examination of the similarities and differences in perceptions of Tai Chi (see Chapter 6) is a major aspect of this research.

2.4.2 Identity theory

Identity Theory in North American social science contrasts sharply with Yin-Yang theory in that it is relatively recent and represents one school of thought and theory among others rather than being the philosophical underpinning of an ancient civilization. It is a lens with which to understand the relationship between the individual and society. Stryker and Burke (2000) developed two related strands of Identity Theory: a) social structures of identity, and b) internal processes of self-verification. These two strands are intertwined and provide contexts for each other. The social structures of identity influence self-verification, while the development of self-verification contributes to the social structures of identity. Individuals living in a given society are bound by many socio-cultural factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, class, and religion, within various layers of organizations, communities, and institutions. A particular individual’s identity can be “labeled” or perceived differently by others depending on their viewpoint. Moreover, an identity within a group can change at pivotal junctions in history for political reasons.

Frank (2006) applies Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000) in his ethnographic Tai Chi research to issues of how “authentically Chinese” Tai Chi is. During his preliminary Tai Chi research in the United States, Hong Kong, and extensive

fieldwork in Shanghai, Frank found that the theoretical framework of Identity Theory – Chineseness in this particular Chinese cultural setting and at that specific historical moment – was useful in understanding how Tai Chi has evolved from its original form as a martial art into a “Chinese identity.” Originally, Tai Chi provided its practitioners with a martial arts identity (Guo, 2000). However, Tai Chi has been seen as more than a martial art throughout the course of its historical development. When Tai Chi’s meaning changed so did the identity it conferred. At present, Tai Chi seems to be perceived by the majority of Chinese Tai Chi practitioners and their Western counterparts primarily as a physical exercise or a leisure activity for health improvement. But this does not mean that Tai Chi is unrelated to the identity of its practitioners.

Frank’s (2006) insights may shed some light on the connection between Identity Theory and Chinese practitioners’ perceptions of Tai Chi. Frank argues that Tai Chi “has become not only the single most popular exercise in China but also one of the most visible symbols of Chineseness that the Chinese Communist Party projects to the world” (Frank, 2006; p. 158). Tai Chi’s role in Chinese identity seems to be shared by Chinese elder Tai Chi practitioners and the current Chinese government. The elder Chinese Tai Chi practitioners Frank interviewed and the Chinese government both perceived Tai Chi as part of the Chinese tradition and a cultural icon. In fact, the elder Tai Chi teachers with whom Frank practiced Tai Chi in Shanghai were disappointed in the decreased public interest in Tai Chi among the younger generation in China. One of Frank’s Tai Chi teachers commented that Western Tai Chi students, such as Frank, who practiced with the Chinese Tai Chi masters, might become more skillful in Tai Chi practice than their few remaining young Chinese Tai Chi students. However, Frank’s work leads to several unanswered questions: Would the Chinese identity aspect of Tai Chi become overpowered by the popularity of its health benefits? Would Tai Chi’s Chinese identity be continued by the younger Chinese Tai Chi practitioners in China or by Western Tai Chi practitioners like Frank? A non-Chinese such as Frank obviously could not become an ethnic Chinese, but perhaps in his Chinese Tai Chi teachers’ eyes, he might carry more “Chineseness,” in a way, than some of their Chinese Tai Chi students.

2.5 CULTURAL BACKGROUND

A brief introduction to some relevant aspects of Chinese culture is included in this section in order to provide the cultural background for this study.

2.5.1 Chinese tea culture

In China, Tai Chi sessions (formal classes and free practice groups) typically include tea drinking. Tea culture is a significant aspect of Chinese tradition. Drinking tea is believed not only to be good for one's health but also important for cultivating one's inner calmness. Tea culture as a sub-culture has a traditional link to Chinese literature. There have been thousands of "tea" poems written in different dynasties in Chinese history. More than 100 tea books were written in ancient China. In the Tang Dynasty, Qu Yuan, one of the most famous Chinese poets, wrote the *Classic of Tea*, as the very first book on tea in the world. His book dealt with cultivating, brewing and drinking tea, and it influenced the development of Chinese tea culture significantly. Since then, the spirit of tea culture has impacted many domains of Chinese society such as calligraphy, painting, literature, religion, and traditional medicine.

Tea, to Chinese people, is one of the seven most important necessities of daily life.⁷⁶ China is the original home of tea plants. The five thousand years of tea history is almost as long as Chinese history (Ren et al., 2007). Originally, tea was part of traditional Chinese medicine. Tea trees are mainly grown in the southern area to the Chang Jiang River due to its mild climate and its fertile soil. The most popular Chinese teas include green, scented, Oolong, and pressed.

Cultural beliefs about the benefits of tea and the affordability of tea products have led to the popularity of tea drinking across China. It is very common for Chinese people to serve tea to their guests to show respect. Tea is a necessity at both formal and informal events such as business receptions, wedding banquets, school reunions or family get-togethers.

2.5.2 Chinese calligraphy

For the Jinan participants, the deep breathing component of Tai Chi was

⁷⁶Firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauces, vinegar, and tea (chai, mi, you, yan, jiang, cu, cha 柴米油盐酱醋茶)

comparable to calligraphy but with health and socializing benefits. Another relevant link of Tai Chi and calligraphy was that the common assumption of good calligraphy skill is socially considered as a quality of a respectful member of the society, at least with the Jinan participants' generation. For these reasons, a number of Jinan participants either took a calligraphy course or practiced it on their own at home.

Calligraphy is one of the most significant aspects of Chinese art going back thousands of years. In order to be an accomplished and socially respected scholar in the Chinese cultural context traditionally, one has to practice and perfect four skills (always in the following order whenever these skills are mentioned):⁷⁷ 1) a traditional musical instrument (e.g. Guqin or Guzheng),⁷⁸ 2) Chinese chess, 3) calligraphy, and 4) Chinese painting. The musical instrument is not as popular nowadays because it is expensive and difficult to learn. Chess requires a diligent partner and skills. Although Chinese painting uses the same writing brush, it takes considerable practice and talent to grasp the essentials of painting in the Chinese style. Calligraphy brushes are inexpensive, books on calligraphy styles are available and one can practice on scrap paper or an old newspaper.

Calligraphy tends to be the most popular activity among the four self-cultivating skills. It may be perceived as a way of self-improvement, a hobby, or a meditative type of exercise (to regulate internal energy). Many believe that calligraphy shares the same breathing technique as martial arts and meditation. It is popular among urban retirees, especially for educated individuals or people who wish to increase their education and boost self-esteem. It is a common assumption that calligraphy can be a way of expressing one's personality.

2.5.3 Filial piety⁷⁹

Respect for one's parents, elders and ancestors, otherwise known as *filial piety* is one of the basic tenants of Confucianism and is still commonly referred to in China today (Hu, Sze, Chen, and Fang, 2015). Taking care of aged parents has long been a moral

⁷⁷A musical instrument, Chinese chess, calligraphy, and Chinese painting (qin, qi, shu, hua, 琴棋书画)

⁷⁸Guqin 古琴 and Guzheng 古筝 are both string instruments. Gu literally means "ancient" so Guqin means "ancient stringed instrument", which is a plucked seven-string Chinese musical instrument. Guzheng is also called Zheng. It has 18 or more strings and movable bridges. The modern Guzheng usually has 21 strings and bridges.

⁷⁹Xiao shun 孝顺

obligation and the social norm in China. Children in China are taught to honor and obey the elders with a strong belief in family unity (Faure and Fang, 2008). Respect in this cultural context implies active responsibility for one's parents, not just passive admiration. Within each family unit, individuals are expected to undertake the caregiver role for their aged parents and grandparents (Zhang and Goza, 2006). The life satisfaction of elders in urban China, as reported in a study in Beijing (Zhang and Yu, 1998), was primarily determined not only by their perceived health and family financial situation, but also by their immediate family members' hands-on care for them. Recently, filial piety has been re-enforced legally by the authorities in China.⁸⁰ In terms of health care, children are still almost entirely responsible for their aged parents in China.

Caring for aging parents also exists in Canadian culture although it may not be emphasized to the same extent or enforced to the same degree of legal and moral authority as in China. There is, after all, an extensive literature regarding people in European and North American cultures who are referred to as the "sandwich generation" because they must take care of their own children and their aging parents at the same time (Buck, 2013; Chassin, Macy, Seo, Presson, and Sherman, 2010; Chappell and Funk, 2012). Evidently, things can be different in China and Canada and still be the same. Thus, despite the differences between Chinese and Canadian cultures, in both societies people take care of their aging parents. For many of this study's participants in Jinan, caring for aging parents was or had been an important factor affecting their participation in Tai Chi.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided background information likely to be useful in understanding the study. It began with an introduction to Jinan and Halifax and how the research participants live their lives in these two cities. The various aspects of Tai Chi, its varieties and history were summarized. The philosophies of Confucius and Daoist, together with western Identity Theory, summarized the theoretical perspectives to be used

⁸⁰ Retrieved March 1, 2017 from http://www.gov.cn/flfg/2012-12/28/content_2305570.htm The 30th Session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress revised the "Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly" in China on December 28, 2012. This law took place on July 1, 2013. It orders adult children, who do not live with their parents, to frequently go home to visit and care for their aged parents. Therefore, older people in China now have the right to take their grown children to court for lack of support.

in this thesis. Several relevant aspects of Chinese culture are included in order to provide background information to better understand Jinan participants. Additional perspectives on Tai Chi and its effects will be presented in the next Chapter's review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the results of the review of literature relevant to this study. The search engines used to identify the relevant literature include: Academic Search Premier, Project Muse, Science Direct, Google Scholar, and cnki⁸¹ as well as specific databases including CINAHL, PubMed, Embase, SportDiscus, and WorldCat. Both Chinese and English language books and peer-reviewed journals were utilized. A number of cited references of the literature reviewed were also hand searched.

The search criteria included but were not limited to Tai Chi studies conducted in Canada, the United States, and China. In order to reflect the age group of the participants in this study (55 years and older), the literature search also concentrated on studies involving participants in that age range.

The style of Tai Chi studied in the reviewed literature was not considered pertinent, since this dissertation examines the socio-cultural context of the elder Tai Chi participants regardless of the style of Tai Chi they practiced.

In the case of journal articles and books written in Chinese, I have searched by using the available search systems through Dalhousie University libraries and obtained assistance from personal contacts in higher educational institutes in China. Furthermore, I conducted a first-hand Chinese Tai Chi literature search when I had direct access to the cnki online network during my field research in China. I read the text in Chinese and translated my citations into English. I also translated and summarized their themes⁸² and relevant sections in English for the convenience of my supervisory committee members and for the consistency of the language component of my study.

3.2 THE FIRST TWO PUBLISHED TAI CHI STUDIES

Koh, an anesthetist at a hospital in Australia, published the very first Tai Chi article in the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine* in 1981 (Koh, 1981). Koh briefly

⁸¹Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure 中国知网 – an online database, with restricted access, consists of academic journals in mainland China.

⁸²The terms “themes” and “categories” often overlap. “Categories are sometimes referred to as themes” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 159). In this dissertation the term “theme” will be used.

describes the history and philosophy of Tai Chi in China and includes the standard drawings of 22 Tai Chi moves.⁸³ Koh states that the Chinese believe that exercise in general is important for health and longevity and that, of all the martial arts forms, Tai Chi is the most popular mind-body relaxation exercise in China (p. 15). The author also points out that there are different styles of Tai Chi and that the most popular appears to be the Yang Tai Chi with 108 moves. Koh also states that these moves are designed to balance the internal *qi* (vital energy). “Recently Westerners have become interested in Tai Chi because of the health benefits it seems to bestow on those participating,” he writes (p. 16). Koh believes that Tai Chi trains the mind to concentrate on “Tan Tien”⁸⁴ in order to strengthen *qi* to achieve better health. However, he also points out that Tai Chi’s health benefits “have not been proven scientifically but many practitioners of Tai Chi are well and fit after years of practice” (p. 17).

The first study attempting to scientifically prove certain aspects of Tai Chi’s health benefits was also published in 1981, in China. A group of seven healthcare professionals in the Coronary Care Unit of a hospital in Shanghai published an article in English in the *Chinese Medical Journal* (Gong et al., 1981). In this study, the researchers examined changed heart rate and electrocardiograms of 54 male and 46 female Tai Chi practitioners ranging in age from 46 to 89 years old. The participants were retired workers, intellectuals, and government employees. The length of Tai Chi experience among those participants ranged from one year to 30 years. All the participants practiced the Simplified 24 Tai Chi daily in a park in Shanghai. Prior to the study and at its completion, each participant’s heart condition was examined, blood pressure measured, and a resting electrocardiogram recorded. Each practice session was 20 minutes long. During the session, participants’ heart condition and blood pressure were monitored every two minutes.

This study found that the participants’ heart rate during Tai Chi practice increased from an average rate of 74 to 104 per minute, thus showing that Tai Chi exercise intensity is much lighter than some other physical exercises during which the heart rate can go up to 140 per minute. The pre- and post-Tai Chi exercise blood pressure results showed that

⁸³The most popular and standard drawings of Tai Chi moves (see China Sports, 1984).

⁸⁴ A variant spelling of “Dan Tian 丹田” (see footnote on p. 31)

there was no change in blood pressure at the completion of Tai Chi practice. Therefore, they concluded that Tai Chi was moderate compared to other forms of physical activity.

3.3 THE BENEFITS OF TAI CHI

Since the early work of 1981, the health-related benefits of Tai Chi have been well documented (Huston and McFarlane, 2016; Hall et al., 2017; Shanman and Hempel, 2016; and Luramoto, 2006). These health benefits include preventing falls in older adults, improving osteoarthritis, reducing symptoms of Parkinson's disease,⁸⁵ reducing pain, building balance confidence, increasing muscle strength, controlling hypertension, reducing stress and depression, enhancing cognitive functioning, and improving quality of life. Solloway and colleagues (2016) conducted a systematic review of 107 reviews of Tai Chi studies. By reviewing all those reviews, they found Tai Chi's positive outcomes for many health-related conditions that coincide with Huston and McFarlane's (2016) findings. For example, a Canadian Tai Chi study analyzed the effects of Tai Chi on four chronic conditions including cancer, osteoarthritis, heart failure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Chen, Hunt, Campbell, Peill, and Reid, 2015). They found that Tai Chi improved the symptoms in the research participants with all four chronic conditions.

In his book *Taijiquan – the Art of Nurturing, the Science of Power*, Yang⁸⁶ (2005) examines all aspects of Tai Chi, including its benefits. As a well-established Tai Chi master who moved to the United States from mainland China and who is also a Western-trained professor of kinesiology, Yang believes that the three essential practices of Tai Chi are: 1) martial art; 2) meditation; and 3) push-hands. He further explains these three significant stages of Tai Chi practice. The primary stage views Tai Chi as a form of martial art and the participants' training involves learning the physical moves of Tai Chi. The second stage involves meditation, which contributes to the therapeutic benefits of health and wellbeing. Push-hands, according to Yang, the highest stage of the Tai Chi practice, is the spiritual aspect of Tai Chi, which requires the practitioners' understanding

⁸⁵“Parkinson's Disease is a degenerative neurological disorder.” (Ni, Mooney, and Signorile, 2016, p. 126).

⁸⁶Yang Yang moved to the United States from China as a graduate student and a Tai Chi master. He obtained his doctoral degree in Kinesiology specializing in Tai Chi, and now teaches at a university in the United States.

of Chinese philosophy regarding the Yin-Yang harmony. Evidence in the Tai Chi literature echoes these three stages of Tai Chi practice, especially on the aspects of Tai Chi's physical moves and its meditative effect. The vast majority of Tai Chi practitioners in China and elsewhere in the world certainly started their Tai Chi practice by learning the Tai Chi moves, regardless of whether they regarded Tai Chi as a martial art, a supplement for illness treatment, or a fitness or leisure activity. The majority of practitioners studied have already or just started to feel the therapeutic effects of Tai Chi. Only a small percentage of Tai Chi practitioners have reached the highest stage of Tai Chi practice which Yang describes. As we will see, the results of this literature review are consistent with Yang's insights.

3.3.1 Physiological health

Fear of falling is a common concern among older people. Falls affect approximately thirty percent of community-dwelling⁸⁷ elders in developed countries (Hoffman, Hays, Wallace, Shapiro, and Ettner, 2017). These older adults fall at least once each year. The immediate result of falls in the elders can be bone fractures, and repeated falling usually demonstrates frailty. Falls are one of the major leading causes for many health problems, especially among the elders. It is not surprising, therefore, that numerous studies recommend using Tai Chi as a preventative intervention to reinforce strength and balance in the older population so as to avoid the severe and costly consequences of falls (e.g., Harling and Simpson, 2008; Gonsalves, 2011; Ni et al., 2014; Nick et al., 2016; Hoffman et al., 2017; Wayne et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2013; Qiu and Cui, 2008; Shen, 2007; and Li et al., 2005). Tai Chi research conducted by Taylor-Piliae (2014) and her colleagues also discovered that their Tai Chi intervention for post-stroke patients (N=145, age ≥ 50) was more effective in reducing falls in comparison to their control groups (which included a "Strength Improvement" group and a "Usual Care" group). The most widely reported health benefit of Tai Chi for older participants is fall prevention (e.g., Yang et al., 2015; Gallagher, 2003; Frick et al., 2010; Logghe et al., 2009; Lui, Qin, and Chan, 2008; Faber, Bosscher, Paw, and van Wieringen, 2006; Gatts and Woolacott, 2007; Xie, Yan, and Chen, 2005; Archer, 2004; Gong, Zhang, Wang, and

⁸⁷Those who live in the community on their own rather than in specialized facilities.

Wang, 2003; and Au-Yeung et al., 2009). An American study (Li, 2008) developed a community-based fall prevention program using Tai Chi to improve the balance of the elders. Another study (Li, Fisher, Harmer, and Shirai, 2003) also designed an easy eight-move Tai Chi form to suit the needs of older people. Fear of falling has been greatly reduced by practicing Tai Chi according to a number of Tai Chi studies (e.g., Sattin, 2005; Zhang, Ishikawa-Takata, Yamazaki, Morita, and Ohta, 2006). In a pilot study, Richerson and Rosendale (2007) investigated Tai Chi's effect on healthy older participants and on older participants with diabetes. In their study, 18 elder participants aged at least 73 years old and living in a retirement community were recruited. The research participants' plantar sensory ability⁸⁸ (p. 276) was clinically tested at the starting point and at the end of their 6-month study. All participants were asked for their demographics information and their fall history. Potential participants who had fallen five times in the previous year were excluded from the study. The potential participants also took functional tests and balance tests and were asked questions about diabetes. All participants took Yang style Tai Chi training once a week for an hour for a total of 26 weeks. At the end of the study all participants took the same tests as they had in the beginning. The authors found that Tai Chi improved balance for both healthy older participants and the older participants with diabetes. Furthermore, they emphasized that Tai Chi is the most cost-effective strategy for fall prevention in community-dwelling older adults.

Tai Chi's effects on improving the symptoms of osteoporosis and balance are well documented in the literature. Maciaszek, Osinski, Szeklicki, and Stemplewski (2007) conducted a randomized controlled trial to study the effect of Tai Chi on balance with male participants suffering from osteoporosis. The 49 participants of this study, aged from 60 to 82 years old, had osteopenia or osteoporosis. Twenty-five participants were randomly assigned to the Tai Chi group and 24 the control group. The 18-week Tai Chi classes were 45 minute long, twice a week. This study found that the participants in the Tai Chi group experienced significant body balance increase while there was no change in the control group. A randomized controlled trial studied the effects of Tai Chi on older people with knee osteoarthritis and the study found that the participants in the Tai Chi

⁸⁸In plain language, "plantar sensory ability" means how one feels on the bottom of one's feet.

group experienced decreased pain in their knees while the participants in the control group had no change in their physical function (Brismee et al., 2007). A group of researchers in China (Wang, Yu, Chen, Lu, and Yu, 2015) compared the effects of a simplified Tai Chi resistance training program and a traditional Tai Chi resistance training program in postmenopausal women; the researchers concluded that both of their Tai Chi programs are effective for slowing down bone loss and improving osteoporosis conditions for menopausal women. The authors believe that the program with the Simplified Tai Chi may be the more beneficial because it is shorter and easier to learn and requires less time and less space to practice at home.

Parkinson's disease is extensively studied in the Tai Chi literature. Hackney and Earhart (2008) conducted a pilot study to examine Tai Chi's effect on balance, gait, and mobility of Parkinson's disease patients. Thirteen participants, aged at least 40 years old, were recruited from an American university's Movement Disorder Centre and a local community event organized by the American Parkinson Disease Association. Hackney, the first author, randomly assigned all participants. Eighteen participants were in the Tai Chi group and 17 in the control group. The participants in the Tai Chi group took one-hour Yang style Tai Chi classes twice a week and completed 20 classes within 13 weeks of their intervention. Participants in the control group received no interventions. All participants were clinically assessed and videotaped both prior to and after the completion of their intervention. At the post-testing, Tai Chi group participants answered a questionnaire with a one to five scale to rate whether they had enjoyed the Tai Chi practice and how/if they felt any improvement of their physical wellbeing from their Tai Chi practice. The data of this study only included a total of 26 participants (13 from Tai Chi group and 13 from control) due to dropouts for various reasons. Participants in the Tai Chi group showed greater improvement than the control group, except for two test measurements. In forward walking and one leg stance, both Tai Chi and control groups showed no improvement at the post testing. In addition to the quantitative results, participants in the Tai Chi group reported that they enjoyed their Tai Chi practice and felt that their physical wellbeing and mood had improved.

Zhou, Yin, Gao, and Yang (2015) conducted a comprehensive systematic review of research conducted in China in order to evaluate the effect of Tai Chi on Parkinson's

disease. The authors claim that this is the first systematic review “with a pooled estimate of Tai Chi for Parkinson’s disease” (p. 4). They searched six electronic databases (in both English and Chinese) up to June 2014. In addition, they also searched Chinese Dissertation Full-Text Database and ProQuest Dissertations. The authors found a total of 118 publications. Eventually they identified nine eligible studies with Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) methodology that met their search criteria. Of the nine studies, six were published in English and three in Chinese. These studies investigated the effects of Tai Chi on Parkinson’s disease patients’ functional ability, balance, gait, and quality of life. Two studies included follow-ups to evaluate the effect of Tai Chi, one following up at three months and the other at six months. Both studies found decreased falls among those patients in the Tai Chi group compared with the control group. Zhou and colleagues found statistically significant evidence for Tai Chi improving motor function and balance for the Parkinson’s disease patients, though the other studies they reviewed did not provide sufficient evidence for Tai Chi improving gait and quality of life because the research did not include follow-ups. In Zhou and colleagues’ opinion, the identified Tai Chi benefits on motor function and balance can be related to Tai Chi’s features of improving coordination, stepping strategy, flexibility, and cognitive function.

Nursing researchers Kwok, Chow, and Lai (2016) in Hong Kong surveyed research on the effects of mind-body exercises on the wellbeing of Parkinson’s disease patients. The ten studies that they reviewed (from four English-language databases) were all randomized controlled trials. The mind-body exercises in those ten studies involved Tai Chi, yoga, and dance. The sample size of those studies ranged from 13 to 80. The mean age of the studies’ participants ranged from 60.8 to 74.9 years old, with 64.1 percent male participants. The intervention session in all reviewed studies lasted for 60 minutes. The frequency of the intervention ranged from once a week to three times per week. Kwok and colleagues analyzed the data by creating three subgroups based on interventions’ frequency of once per week, twice per week, and three times per week. They found no significant difference among the subgroups. However, the authors’ review concludes that Tai Chi, as a mind-body exercise, had significant benefits for the motor systems and for functional ability for patients with mild to moderate Parkinson’s disease.

The pain relief effect of Tai Chi is another one of the documented Tai Chi benefits in the literature. Kong and colleagues (2016) reviewed 18 randomized controlled trials to evaluate Tai Chi's effect on chronic pain conditions. The authors conclude that Tai Chi improved chronic pain for patients with some common diseases such as osteoarthritis, lower back pain, osteoporosis, and fibromyalgia. They also conclude that it may require at least six weeks of Tai Chi intervention to reduce chronic pain. Kong and colleagues also state that longer Tai Chi intervention may result better management of the patients' pain conditions.

A pilot study conducted by a group of researchers (Tsai et. al., 2017) as a nursing research project at an American university explored Tai Chi's effect on pain, emotion, cognition, and physical function in individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder and chronic musculoskeletal pain symptoms. This study was conducted in two phases in order to gather information for the authors' future larger-scale clinical study. Most participants in this study were male with an average age of 55. According to Tsai and colleagues, Phase One was to test the feasibility of a Tai Chi intervention on those patients with pain and Phase Two was to test the perceptions of the participants in the Tai Chi intervention. Eleven participants completed Phase One and nine of them continued to complete Phase Two. In Phase One the participants first took a 60-minute trial Sun style Tai Chi, and then answered a questionnaire. In Phase Two, participants took the same style Tai Chi for a total of 36 one-hour Tai Chi classes, two classes per week, during the 12 weeks of the intervention. The outcomes of the participants were tested clinically prior to Phase One and at the conclusion of Phase Two. The researchers of this study categorized pain in three categories, "worst pain, average pain, and current pain" (p. 7). The participants perceived great improvement at their "current pain" in comparison to the other two types of pain. Therefore, the researchers state that Tai Chi can be accepted by and used as a holistic treatment to reduce pain and improve physical function.

Hypertension is another health condition that can receive benefit from practicing Tai Chi, according to the literature. A recent systematic review conducted at a Chinese university by researchers of traditional Chinese medicine and of nursing reviewed the effect of Tai Chi on patients with hypertension (Lian et al., 2017). The authors searched for studies using RCT methodology from four English databases and three Chinese

databases and found 20 RCTs that matched their inclusion criteria. Of the 20 studies, there were a total of 1641 participants, with ages ranging from 30 to 97 years old. The duration of the Tai Chi interventions were from six weeks to one year. All studies included both males and females with hypertension. The Tai Chi styles used in those studies varied with the majority applying the Simplified 24 Tai Chi. Lian and colleagues found that all the reviewed studies reported Tai Chi's effect on hypertension, but based on the different control groups those studies can be divided into: Tai Chi versus no treatment; Tai Chi versus antihypertension medication; Tai Chi versus health education, and Tai Chi versus walking. The result of this systematic review shows that Tai Chi can lower blood pressure and Tai Chi is a safe therapy compared to antihypertension drugs for hypertension patients.

A recent American study (Du, Roberts, and Xu, 2016) examined whether practicing Tai Chi along with music can maximize Tai Chi's effect on preventing falls. Their study used a convenience sample of 18 female participants (9 white and 9 black, age ranged 50-84 years old) recruited in a community seniors' centre. Participants were randomly assigned to two groups – "Tai Chi in silence" or "Tai Chi with music." After the 15-week intervention, the data were analyzed. A major finding was that participants' balance increased in both groups, but the Tai Chi with music group had a significantly higher score. The authors conclude that practicing Tai Chi with music may increase balance in white and black middle-aged and older women, and maximize the effects of Tai Chi on reducing the risk of falling. The authors suggested choosing culturally appropriate music or ethnic group-preferred music to encourage the practice of Tai Chi.

Some Tai Chi studies compared the effects of Tai Chi practice with other traditional exercises. A Hong Kong study compared the effects of Tai Chi with jogging (Xu, Li, and Hong, 2005). This study included 21 older long-term Tai Chi practitioners, 18 older joggers, and 22 sedentary elders as the control group. The results showed the differences between the three groups of participants. The clinically measured muscle strength of the knee joints of the participants in the Tai Chi and jogging groups was stronger than the control group. The results suggest that Tai Chi may have the same effect as jogging in terms of strengthening lower body muscles. (Tai Chi's deep breathing and its slow and graceful moves as a mind-body exercise are also recognized by this study.)

Another Tai Chi study also took place in Hong Kong and compared the effects of Tai Chi practice on older people with the effects of swimming, with a sedentary control group (Xu, Hong, Li, and Chan, 2004). The results showed that the older Tai Chi participants demonstrated greater strength in the ankle and knee joints than in joints of the sedentary group. More importantly, the Tai Chi participants' strength measurement was greater than that of the swimmers. Similarly, Xu, Hong, and Li (2008) investigated the effect of Tai Chi on muscle strength of the lower extremities in older participants. In their comparison, muscular strength was stronger in the participants of the Tai Chi group than among the participants in the jogging and sedentary groups.

3.3.2 Psychological health

Kerr, Agrawal, and Nayak (2016) conducted the first neuroscience research to examine Tai Chi's effect on sensorimotor processing and motor function, particularly on integrated body awareness. This study included 31 elder participants aged at least 61 years old. Fifteen Tai Chi practitioners were recruited from a Tai Chi studio and 16 participants, for the control group, were recruited from the same local community. Based on their scientific measurements, Kerr, Agrawal, and Nayak found Tai Chi to have positive effects on participants' sensorimotor and movement functions. Interestingly, they found that the improvement of Tai Chi participants with less Tai Chi experience had a shaper trajectory while the more experienced Tai Chi participants had a more steady increase of those functions (p. 11).

A geriatric psychiatry study (Chou et al., 2004) conducted in Hong Kong examined Tai Chi's effect on older Chinese patients with depression. In this randomized clinical trial, the participants were recruited from a local community's psycho-geriatric outpatient clinic. The 14 participants' mean age was 72.6 years old. Seven of the participants were randomly selected in the Tai Chi training group and the other seven formed the control group. All participants were clinically tested at the baseline and the conclusion of this three-month intervention. The participants in the Tai Chi group took three 45-minute Tai Chi training classes per week with an 18-move Yang style Tai Chi. Each training session started with a 10-minute warm-up, then a 25-minute Tai Chi practice, and ended with a 10-minute cool down. Chou and colleagues claim that their

randomization was successful because there were no significant differences between the two groups in the participants' demographic or health related variables at the beginning of this study. The findings of this study include Tai Chi's positive effect in reducing depressive symptoms of the participants. Tai Chi's impact is equally clear in reducing all four categories of depressive symptoms including somatic, psychological, interpersonal relations, and symptoms associated with wellbeing. However, Chou and colleagues noted their study's small sample size. They suggest future studies to compare Tai Chi's impact on a group versus an individual practitioner.

Wang and colleagues (2014) conducted a systematic review of studies of Tai Chi's effect on depression, anxiety, and psychological wellbeing. They reviewed 37 RCT studies and five quasi-experimental trails published by May 2013. After a careful selecting process, 42 of 615 studies were chosen to ensure methodological, clinical, and statistical quality. Of the 42, there were 15 studies from the Chinese databases and 27 from English-language databases. Wang and colleagues' review indicates very positive effects of Tai Chi on depression, anxiety, and psychological wellbeing. However, they also point out several limitations of the reviewed studies. One of the limitations is the lack of details of Tai Chi such as the duration of the Tai Chi intervention, the intensity, style, and the Tai Chi instructor. Wang and colleagues believe that these details may affect the reported health benefits. Another limitation is about design priority. Only three RCT studies examined participants with clinical depression as their primary goal. In most of their reviewed studies, examining the psychological effect of Tai Chi was the secondary goal of the study. Those studies did not recruit participants with severe depressive symptoms. Therefore, Wang and colleagues suggest that the methodological limitations should be rectified in future studies with a psychological focus.

Tai Chi's effect on anxiety has been reported in the literature. American researchers Sharma and Haider (2014) conducted a literature review to analyze the effectiveness of Tai Chi as a treatment for anxiety. Their review inclusion criteria included scientific articles published in English from 1989 to 2013, using quantitative methodology to study Tai Chi's effect on anxiety. The study design had to include a comparison group, and the study reported a scientific measurement scale for anxiety. The authors searched more than 100 scientific articles in three databases and found 17 studies

met their set criteria. Sharma and Haider conclude that Tai Chi can be used as a complementary approach to prevent, treat, and manage anxiety. The authors also emphasize that all the healthcare professionals working to prevent and manage anxiety must teach their patients Tai Chi for reducing anxiety (p. 152). Other than reviews, there are also scientific studies examining the effectiveness of Tai Chi on anxiety. For example, an American study (Lavretsky et al., 2011) conducted the first randomized controlled clinical trial to compare the effect of Tai Chi versus health education on older adults with major depression and anxiety. The 112 participants in this study, aged at least 60 years old, had major depression. All participants were given escitalopram (an antidepressant) once a day for four weeks. Seventy-three participants who responded to escitalopram continued to receive it on a daily basis and were randomized into a Tai Chi group and a health education group. There were 36 participants in the Tai Chi group and 37 in the health education group. Each group met two hours per week. At the completion of the study, 33 in the Tai Chi group and 35 in the health education group had finished the intervention. All participants were tested for depression, anxiety, health-related quality of life at baseline and at the 14-week follow-up. Lavretsky and colleagues found in this study that the participants in the Tai Chi group had less anxiety as compared to the health education group.

Quality of life is another area examined in the Tai Chi literature. American researchers Greenspan, Wolf, Kelley, and O'Grady (2007) examined the perceived Tai Chi benefits of transitional frail older women for their quality of life. The authors' definition of "transitional frail" meant that the overall health condition of these older adults was lower than the criterion for vigorous but higher than that for frail. Their 269 female participants were at least 70 years old and were recruited from 20 independent senior living facilities. 137 participants were randomly assigned to a Tai Chi group while 132 participants were assigned to the wellness education group. All participants were interviewed and clinically tested based on this research's inclusion criteria prior to the 48-week RCT intervention. The Tai Chi group met twice a week. The duration of Tai Chi class progressed throughout the intervention. It started at 60-minute per class and gradually extended to 90-minute at the end of the 48-week study. The 137 Tai Chi participants were divided into two groups for Tai Chi instruction. Two instructors taught

the identical six Tai Chi moves from the Simplified Tai Chi set. Each Tai Chi session started with warm-up and ended with cool-down periods. Participants could sit to rest during the session depending on her physiological condition. Therefore, the intensity of this Tai Chi intervention could vary for each participant. The wellness education group met once a week. The instructions for each session consisted of fall prevention, balance exercise, nutrition information, medication management, health related legal information, and issues related to mental health. At both the baseline and the one-year follow-up interviews of this study, participants self-rated their health using five scales with excellent as the highest and poor as the lowest to reflect their perception. At the baseline, the majority of participants self-rated their health as very good. The authors believe that older adults tend to rate their health in comparison with their peers and often view their physiological changes as the process of aging. This study found that the Tai Chi participants perceived Tai Chi benefits for their physical health condition, especially in walking ability and self-care. The authors point out that these abilities are important contributors toward independent lifestyles.

3.3.3 An age-appropriate activity for the elders

Tai Chi's group structure is an extremely important factor for its elder practitioners. Numerous studies show the positive effects of Tai Chi, especially for elders (e.g., Li, Harmer, Fisher, and Mcauley, 2004; Wang, Xu, and Li, 2017; Lauche, Langhorst, Dobos, and Cramer, 2013; Robins, Elswick, and McCain, 2012; Hawkes, 2012; Ren, 2006; Liu, 2006; Liu and Ma, 2003; and Taggart, 2001). Although a single practitioner can practice Tai Chi alone, it is usually a group activity and research has therefore focused on groups (e.g., Wise, 2016; Ghandali et al., 2016; and Yeh, Chan, Wayne, and Conboy, 2016). Evidence shows that Tai Chi is appropriate for elders for the following reasons: (1) Most Tai Chi sets (except the competition style Tai Chi sets) tend to be of low intensity and to require minimum flexibility. (2) Practitioners can choose the level of difficulty when they learn and practice. For example, practitioners decide how low they squat during the practice. They can practice the entire set or practice several moves within a particular set. In this regard, it appears to be common in the literature that modified Tai Chi sets with fewer moves are used, especially by practitioners and

researchers outside of China. For example, Audette and colleagues (2006) in the United States conducted a study to compare the effects of Tai Chi versus brisk walking in older women. Although they used a modified 10-move Yang style Tai Chi form, their study results show that the short Tai Chi was effective in improving the health of their older participants. Their short Tai Chi form was significantly better than the results of brisk walking as well. Furthermore, Tai Chi as an activity does not cost much. Practitioners do not have to buy any equipment. In most cases, they do need to pay for courses. They may buy uniforms and shoes or just wear ordinary loose clothing and flat shoes.

3.3.4 A mind-body activity

Tai Chi is often referred to as a “mind-body therapy” or “mind-body technique” by Western researchers (e.g., Tao et al., 2016; Bower and Irwin, 2015; Bannuru, Abariga, and Wang, 2012; Kemper et al., 2011; Brismee et al., 2010; Wahbeh, Elsas, Oken, 2008; Posadzki and Jacques, 2009; and Cheng, 2007), or as a “mind-body exercise” by researchers in China (e.g., Wei, Dong, Yang, Luo, and Zuo, 2014; and Xu, Li, and Hong, 2005). Most Tai Chi moves (e.g., the Yang style Tai Chi) require the practitioners to move their upper and lower extremities gently and slowly in a circular motion. Tai Chi’s diaphragmatic breathing technique helps its practitioners regulate their breathing rhythm and further cultivates tranquility of mind (Richerson and Rosendale, 2007). Both the deep breathing technique and the low impact moves make Tai Chi especially suitable for older people and individuals whose health conditions prevent them from participating in strenuous physical exercises (Wong et al., 2001).

In their original research on the neuroscience of aging, Tao and colleagues (2016) studied Tai Chi’s effects on improving memory function in 62 healthy adults 50 to 70 years old. This study included three groups: a Tai Chi group, a Baduanjin⁸⁹ group, and a control group. The randomly selected 21 participants in the Tai Chi group practiced the Simplified 24 Tai Chi for five days per week for a total of 12 weeks, which is considered a longitudinal study by the authors. Unlike most Tai Chi studies where the intervention group only practiced a type of Tai Chi, this study’s Tai Chi group’s practice included a 10-minute warm-up and reviewing of Tai Chi principles, 30 minutes of Tai Chi, 10

⁸⁹Baduanjin 八段锦 is a breathing exercise that is considered as a type of qigong in China.

minutes breathing exercises, and a 10-minute relaxation period. Memory functions of all participants were clinically tested at the beginning and the end of the study and the results statistically analyzed. This study reports that there was no significant difference in their neuroscience tests between the Tai Chi group and the Baduanjin group. The researchers believe that Tai Chi and Baduanjin are both mind-body activities (see Wang et al., 2016). They conclude that the longitudinal and intensive Tai Chi experiment resulted in a significant increase in memory performance.

A study conducted by healthcare practitioners at an American university reports that half of American adults use alternative medicine, mind-body therapy including Tai Chi being the most commonly used form (Wahbeh, Elsas, and Oken, 2008). These three authors conducted a review of mind-body interventions including clinical trials and research reports. Their goal was to provide an overview of mind-body interventions to serve as a practical application in neurology for physicians. The authors grouped research by type of mind-body intervention such as meditation, relaxation, breathing techniques, yoga, Tai Chi, and qigong. They then sought links between type of mind-body intervention and effectiveness for conditions that included pain syndrome, back and neck pain, headache, fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis, stroke, and aging. The authors conclude that mind-body therapy is most effective for the treatment of migraine headache.

3.3.5 Meditation and mindfulness

As was discussed in Chapter 2, Tai Chi has been referred to as a “moving meditation.” As noted above, according to Yang’s (2005) theory, the meditation effect is the second stage of the Tai Chi learning process. Chan and Larson (2016) conducted a systematic review of different types of meditation and their effects on people with chronic illness. The authors’ view of the effect of meditation is that it serves to train the practitioner to be more mindful and more aware of and focused on their internal and external surroundings.

Mindfulness therapeutic programs have developed rapidly in the West in the past 20 years, especially in clinical practice (Harrington and Dunne, 2015; Luu and Hall, 2017). Participants in the first study of a short (4 days) meditation training demonstrated benefits in cognitive tasks (Zeidan et al., 2010).

The cultivation of health and wellbeing includes both building physical strength and reinforcing emotional balance. Evidence shows that Tai Chi and meditation both contribute to these two aspects of wellbeing. McCown (2004) reported various cognitive and perceptual benefits of meditation, including meditation for chronic pain, sleeping disorders, and cancer. A Chinese researcher (Liang, 2001) conducted a Randomized Controlled Trial comparing the cardiopulmonary function of long-term Tai Chi practitioners with non-Tai Chi practitioners of the same age group. The study showed that “Tai Chi combined mindfulness, breathing technique, and body movements together (p. 64),” resulting in improvement in cardiopulmonary function and thus suitable activity for older people.

3.3.6 Tai Chi, Qigong, and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Qigong is a general term to describe various Chinese systems of physical and mental health training and the essence of martial arts, including Tai Chi. Tai Chi, and Chinese martial arts in general, are breath-training exercises, that is, the cultivation of the practitioners’ *qi*. The “*qi* 气” in Tai Chi breathing is the same concept and the same Chinese word as the “*qi* 气” in qigong (气功). Various forms of qigong have been practiced by people in China and other Asian countries for thousands of years (Chen, 2003; Rogers, Larkey, and Keller, 2009; and Rogers, Keller, and Larkey, 2009).

Qigong is a breathing exercise focusing on manipulating and regulating the internal energy. A human body with well-balanced *qi* within him/herself provides the vital base for health and wellbeing. The *qi* flows through an internal system called *Meridians* (introduced in p. 34, section 2.4.1 Confucianism and the Daoist theory of Yin-Yang). This network is made of 12 regular and eight extraordinary Meridians. The Meridian system of a healthy person flows smoothly. However, if there is any blockage of *qi* or irregular activity in this network, illness may appear immediately or in the near future. Meridians are the tunnels for the vital energy *qi*, guiding human life. It may appear to observers that Tai Chi practice is just the movement of arms and legs. However, the most important aspect of Tai Chi, according to the Chinese belief, is the exercise of *qi* by practicing breathing techniques. Such breathing techniques are a

common practice in Tai Chi and Qigong, (as well as in yoga). The goal of the breathing training is to achieve a harmony both within a person and with nature.

Nancy Chen's (2003) ethnographic work describes how widely qigong was practiced as a healing method in China in the 1980s. As a China-born American medical anthropologist, Chen conducted her ethnographic work in three cities in China during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Her research was conducted in two settings. During the day, her identity was a "foreign researcher" in urban psychiatric hospitals, but in the very early morning she observed and interviewed qigong practitioners from all walks of life in the city parks. Her roles in the two settings seemed to work well for gathering rich data regarding the links between the qigong practitioners in the parks and the psychiatric patients (who were former qigong practitioners) in the hospitals. According to Chen, qigong was at its peak in 1989. It was perceived by its devoted practitioners in China, including by some biomedical professionals, as having healing power in two ways: 1) Qigong masters perform healing by using their own *qi* on parts of the patients' body to overpower the illness (Du, 2003; Li, 2003); and 2) Qigong practitioners learn how to manipulate their own vital energy to treat their own illness internally. The so called "qigong fever" happened after the Cultural Revolution during the decade of 1979-1989. During that time, many qigong masters claimed that they had healing power and many practitioners claimed they were the living proof of self-healing from all types of illnesses.

3.4 TAI CHI AND THE YOGA RESEARCH LITERATURE

As was previously discussed, Tai Chi and yoga share the same theoretical goal – to achieve internal harmony for the practitioner.

Yoga studies are reviewed for the following reasons: 1) Tai Chi and yoga are both from Asian cultures, 2) the Chinese and Indian philosophies that underpin the two activities are very similar; 3) Tai Chi and yoga are both mind-body exercises; 4) Yoga is gaining popularity in Canada and in mainland China; 5) Tai Chi and yoga were both brought to Canada from Asia and have been modified (in various ways) during the transition; and 6) perspectives from the study of yoga practitioners may broaden my viewpoint and contribute to a deeper understanding of Tai Chi studies, including my own.

Tai Chi studies published in English and Chinese almost always involve elder participants. However, most yoga research is conducted with younger participants. The yoga studies reviewed were selected primarily on the basis of their research methods. Therefore, participants' ages in some of the reviewed yoga studies may be younger than the participants in the Tai Chi studies previously discussed.

Although the physical moves and body poses are different between Tai Chi and yoga, the breathing technique for both practices is to cultivate *qi* in order to achieve the ultimate internal harmony of the practitioner within him- or herself and with nature. Tai Chi and yoga have both gained popularity in North America since the 1970s (Brown and Leledaki, 2010; Pilarzyk, 2008; Demeter, 2006; and Hakim et al., 2010). They are commonly referred to as mind-body therapies, especially in the West. For example, Kennedy and Resnick (2015) describe yoga and Tai Chi as mindful activities that can affect both physical and mental health. A group of Canadian scientists (Villemure, Ceko, Cotton, and Bushnell, 2015) studied yoga's effect on the human brain and found it tended to protect the brain against age-related decline.

“Yoga is a set of physical and mental practices which originated in India between 200 BC and AD 200” according to Askegaard and Eckhardt (2012, p. 47). It is believed that yoga cannot only balance a practitioner's body muscles but also the individual's mind (Desikachar, 1999). Like Tai Chi, there are various styles of yoga in India (Gandhi, 2009). Hatha yoga is the style that has been the major focus of yoga research both in China (Zhou, Zhang, and Cao, 2008) and in North America and elsewhere (Park, Braun, and Siegel, 2015; Pilarzyk, 2008). One study summarizes the three essential elements of Hatha yoga: body postures, breathing technique, and meditation (Riley, 2004). Iyengar yoga has become increasingly popular in America (Kolasinski et al., 2005). Lea (2009) explored the different meanings of practicing Iyengar yoga as a physical intervention or as a means to improve oneself for a better quality of life. She states that modern Indian yoga [of all styles] has developed into two types, one type focuses on the meditation techniques and the other on posture (p. 75).

It seems that the yoga studies conducted in India also used Western standard RCT research methods. Compared to how the control group was carried out in Tai Chi studies conducted in North America and in China, yoga studies' control group design differed.

Participants in a control group of a yoga study in India received yoga counselling or lectures on yoga philosophy. However, lectures in Tai Chi philosophy were not used in control groups of Tai Chi studies, except some instructors of a Tai Chi class in Jinan spoke briefly about Tai Chi philosophy during class or when explaining the harmony or balance of certain Tai Chi moves. This was done in some of the Tai Chi courses that I participated in and observed in Jinan.

A group of Indian researchers conducted a RCT yoga study in India (Tekur, Nagarathna, Chametcha, Hankey, and Nagendra, 2012). Their seven-day study included 80 patients with lower back pain in a residential, holistic health centre. They found that yoga was more effective in reducing pain, anxiety and depression in those patients than physiotherapy and exercise. Participants in their intervention group (the group that was given yoga training) received specific poses from Asanas and Pranayamos,⁹⁰ meditation, yogic counselling, and lectures on yoga philosophy. The control group included physical therapy, and matching counselling and educational sessions.

Both yoga and Tai Chi have evolved in their respective homelands, and their North American practitioners do not necessarily share the perceptions of their Asian counterparts. For example, yoga is a Buddhist “way of life” according to Indian researcher Ramaratnam (2001, p. 3). A group of Indian yoga researchers also state that the original meaning of yoga was to connect body and mind (Sutar, Yadav, and Desai, 2016). This is similar to the emphasis of Chinese researchers on Tai Chi’s Daoist philosophical underpinning. However, such cultural concepts are not emphasized in North American studies that tend to focus only on the health benefits of yoga and Tai Chi.

Yoga in North America differs from the way yoga is practiced in India. In North America, yoga has been repackaged to fit the local cultural context. As American yoga instructor Pilarzyk (2008) points out, “... in a society which prides itself on openness and tolerance, a despiritualized fitness yoga – one less clearly rooted and having fewer spiritually gifted teachers as guides – more easily gains popularity with the mainstream” (p. 227). In terms of the characteristics of yoga practitioners in the United States, “yoga use is greatest among women and those with higher socioeconomic status and appears

⁹⁰ Asanas and Pranayamos are two types of yoga in Indian yoga terminology.

favorably related to psychosocial factors such as coping and mindfulness” (Park, Braun, and Siegel, 2015; p. 460). American researcher Field (2016b) conducted a yoga research review and highlighted yoga’s therapeutic effects. Some studies selected yoga poses to suit their design (Carson et al., 2010) or used only certain yoga techniques in their study (Visweswaraiah and Telles, 2004). Ni, Mooney, and Signorile (2016) in the United States designed a special power yoga program to explore the effect of yoga on gaining muscle strength and improving quality of life in patients with Parkinson’s disease.

There are some single-group pre- and post-test yoga studies in the literature. One study was conducted by a group of American researchers (DiBenedetto et al., 2005) and aimed to examine the effects of yoga on older adults as they aged. Nineteen healthy elders between 62 and 83 with no previous yoga experience participated in this 8-week Iyengar Hatha yoga program. Two 90-minute yoga classes were held per week and participants practiced yoga for 20 minutes at home on the days that they did not have a class. The study results suggest that the yoga program may improve strength and flexibility for the older participants and that it is a cost-effective activity for ameliorating the aging process.

One study (Ni et al., 2014) compared the effects of three different exercises (Tai Chi, yoga, and standard balance training). The 48 healthy participants were 60 years or older, with a history of at least one fall. The intervention lasted for 12 weeks. Sixteen participants were randomly assigned to each of the Tai Chi, yoga, and balance groups. Each training class was 90 minutes long, twice a week. A certified Tai Chi master chose 18 moves from the Chen Style Tai Chi. The yoga class was taught by two certified yoga instructors, who taught selected poses from Vinyasa yoga. The balance group performed standard Western exercises to strengthen muscles. This study found that Tai Chi and yoga are equally effective as standard balance training for improving stability in older participants. Morris’ (2008) yoga study also had three groups: yoga, balance training, and an awareness class. In this study, the 18 older female participants with a mean age of 76 attended biweekly one-hour classes for eight weeks. The statistical results of this study indicate that yoga training was not more effective than balance training or the control group. However, the results did show that yoga and balance training were equally effective in reducing the risk of falling in the elder participants. Unfortunately, Morris did

not include a Tai Chi experimental group but it seems likely that if she had her findings would have been similar to those of Ni et al. (2014).

Like Tai Chi studies in North America, yoga studies in China focus on a clinical goal. These goals can include yoga's effects on schizophrenic inpatients (Xie et al., 2011), on insomnia (Zhang et al., 2009), on posture training in lumbar disc herniation (Li et al., 2010), on postpartum depression (Zhao, 2009), and on pregnancy and maternal health issues (Jiang et al., 2010; and Chen et al., 2009). With respect to an understanding of yoga's theoretical foundation, the Chinese researchers view yoga as an interdisciplinary science situated between sport and psychology (Yang et al., 2009). Similarly, a group of researchers at Harvard Medical School conducted a review of mind-body exercises, using nurses with chronic low back pain as their participants (Budhrani-Shani, Berry, Arcari, Langevin, and Wayne, 2016). They found that while there were studies focused on either yoga or Tai Chi as interventions for nurses with low back pain, none of that evaluated the combined impact of both yoga and Tai Chi. Field (2016a) reviewed studies on the effects of massage therapy, yoga and Tai Chi on elders' osteoarthritis-related knee pain (Field, 2016a). Field states that the three therapies all reduced the elder participants' knee pain; yoga and Tai Chi were as effective as massage therapy but with less cost. Field comments that it was difficult to compare Tai Chi because of its variable protocols. It may help to appreciate Field's perspective by looking at a review done by a group of Chinese researchers in Shanghai (Pan et al., 2015). They aimed to create clinical guidelines for alternative treatments for Parkinson's disease. The exercises and activities that Pan and colleagues (2015) investigated included yoga, Tai Chi, and other alternatives such as common Western medicine, surgery, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), acupuncture and Tui Na.⁹¹ This review seemed to be more focused on TCM and it concludes that the health conditions of each patient with Parkinson's disease is very different, so that it was difficult to design a standard model to manage all those patients' symptoms with all the treatment options.

As with Tai Chi studies, a qualitative approach is not popularly used in yoga research. A Canadian study (Tul, Y. 2008) examined the lived experience of yoga participants who were patients at the pain centre of a university hospital in Canada. A

⁹¹ Tui na, 推拿 is a Chinese-style massage.

phenomenological approach was used in this study. One male and six female participants took part in the eight-week Hatha yoga program. Hatha yoga was chosen because of its effect on pain (p. 25). Tul, the researcher, who was also a yoga instructor, designed this 5-12 pose yoga program with a hired certified yoga instructor. The yoga was modified to fit the capability of the research participants. Each weekly yoga session included four segments: a question and answer period, a breathing exercise, yoga, and relaxation (p. 38). Tul carried out participant observation and in-depth interviews with open-ended questions with the seven participants. Themes derived from her data include: increased self-awareness from practicing yoga; a transformed relationship with pain; acceptance of life challenges as pain patients; ensuring yoga practice time and space; and positive experience of sharing support with yoga group members. Tul's study emphasizes yoga's effectiveness in helping patients with chronic pain.

A recent Canadian yoga study used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore and compare the potential differences between middle-aged and older yoga practitioners (Wertman, Wister, and Mitchell, 2016). Their mixed methodology included a convenience sample of 452 yoga participants completing an online questionnaire and then 20 participants derived from the pool for face-to-face interviews. As the authors noted, their sample was not "purely random" (p. 194). However, the yoga forms that their participants practiced included asanas, pranayama, meditation, and savasana.⁹² It is worthwhile noting that this study not only used the traditional ways to recruit participants, but also took advantage of social media. Their various recruiting methods included posters at community centres and yoga studios, word-of-mouth, website advertisement, or an opportunity to click on a link on a friend's Facebook wall. Comparatively, none of the Tai Chi studies examined in the literature, including my study, used any form of social media.

In summary, Tai Chi and Yoga are Asian spiritual-physical practices. The positive effects of yoga and Tai Chi, particularly their health benefits, have been appreciated by practitioners in many countries. The similarities and differences that yoga and Tai Chi share are reflected in aspects of their origin, theory, practice, and transformation (see Table 1).

⁹²Asanas, pranayama, and savasana are Indian terminologies for different types of yoga.

Table 1: A brief comparison of Tai Chi and Yoga

Aspects	Tai Chi	Yoga
Origin	China	India
Original viewpoint or image	A martial art form to cultivate qi	An activity to connect body and mind
Theory	Yin-Yang harmony	Self-realization, Holistic realization
Breathing technique – abdominal deep breathing	Cultivating <i>qi</i> to achieve internal harmony (Yin-Yang balance)	Cultivating <i>qi</i> to achieve internal harmony (Yin-Yang balance)
Style – identified in the literature	Chen, Yang, Wu 武, and Wu 吳, Canadian Style Tai Chi, other modified styles	Hatha, Iyengar, Vinyasa, Power yoga, Kundalini, other modified styles
Transformation	From China to North America	From India to North America; From India to China
Certification of instructor	China: existing standard procedure Canada: only within a Tai Chi organization	India: depends on each yoga school Canada: depends on yoga organizations
North American perspectives – identified in the literature (listed in order of importance)	Health promotion activity; supplement to Western medicine; martial art; health improvement therapy; age appropriate activity; fitness exercise; Chinese identity	Fitness exercise; Meditation; weight loss tool; holistic lifestyle; ancient spiritual practice; healing power; pop culture industry;
Chinese perspectives – identified in the literature (listed in order of importance)	longevity exercise; slow and age appropriate exercise; <i>qi</i> cultivation; socializing for elders practitioners; daily routine activity for seniors; health improvement and maintenance; fitness exercise; Martial Art; Chinese identity	Ancient spiritual practice; fashionable for the younger generations; cultivating health and well-being; meditation; stretching exercise; rehabilitation; supplement therapy; Buddhist way of life

It is worth noting that not all yoga studies produce positive results. A recent study (Smith, Mross, and Christopher, 2017) was intended to develop a Hatha yoga program to

improve strength and balance of elders to prevent falls. This pilot study took place at a community hospital of a rural town in the United States. Fifteen female and five male participants, aged 62 to 89, were recruited by using the convenience-sampling method. It is worth noting that five of those participants had practiced Tai Chi prior to this yoga intervention. There were eight weekly yoga classes throughout the intervention. Each class was 50 to 60 minutes long. For the days when there was no yoga class, participants were asked to practice three yoga poses for ten minutes at home for three days a week. The researchers indicate that this yoga intervention involved a minimum 11.5 hours, which they believe, was not long enough to see the results of yoga on their participants (p. 125). At the post-testing stage, many participants felt that their ability to do “tree pose”⁹³ was much improved, but they were surprised to see their low score for single-leg balance. To explain this situation, the researchers question how those participants carried out their home yoga practice.

3.5 TAI CHI STUDIES USING QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES

The Tai Chi studies using qualitative methodologies are more relevant to my ethnographic methodological approach than those using an experimental research design. However, the latter dominate the literature. Qualitative research methods identified in Tai Chi studies include: 1) ethnographic analyses (Frank, 2006; Docker, 2006); 2) semi-structured in-depth interviews (Yang et al., 2011); 3) case studies (McGinnis, 2008); and 4) focus groups (Yau and Packer, 2002).

3.5.1 Ethnographic analyses

The most relevant ethnographic Tai Chi studies identified are Frank (2006), Docker (2006), and Yang and colleagues (2011). They have in common the fact that they examine the meanings of Tai Chi from the perspectives of their participants and explore the effects of Tai Chi beyond its well-studied health benefits.

⁹³“Tree pose” is a yoga pose in which the practitioner stands on one leg, the foot of the other leg touching either the thigh or calf of the standing leg. Both arms are straight up or in front of the chest (what part of the leg that the foot touches and the arm position depend on the flexibility of the individual).

Frank (2006), an American cultural anthropologist, conducted the first Western anthropological study of Taijiquan.⁹⁴ He studied Chinese history, customs, and Mandarin⁹⁵ prior to beginning his Tai Chi field research in Shanghai. During his long-term fieldwork in Shanghai, Frank (2006) learned the Wu (吴) style Tai Chi and push-hands (see Chapter 2, p. 23) from three Tai Chi masters at the *Jianquan Taijiquan Association*, founded in 1953 and named after Wu Jianquan, a martial artist and their Tai Chi master. They practiced the Wu style Tai Chi in Shanghai's People's Park on a daily basis. Except for Frank (2006) and a few other foreigners, most of the members of the association were Shanghai locals. The other foreigners were there to learn Tai Chi as a martial art form.

Frank (2006) conducted participant observation throughout his Tai Chi practice with the members of the Tai Chi association. He interviewed his research participants and observed the participants' daily activities as well as those of other Tai Chi practitioners in the same association. In order to learn more about Chinese culture and Tai Chi's cultural identity, Frank (2006) also attended the monthly meetings of the association where he heard stories about Tai Chi and learned the history of Daoism and its association with Tai Chi, especially the Daoist key concept of *qi*. Frank (2006) traveled to visit Chenjiagou in Henan province, where the Chen style Tai Chi originated. Frank also participated in a Tai Chi tournament in Henan.

Frank's (2006) Tai Chi study focuses on Tai Chi's representation of "Chinese identity," which is different from the mainstream studies of the health benefits of Tai Chi focused on by the vast majority of Tai Chi researchers. Another distinctive feature of Frank's (2006) study is that he provided a broad picture of the Chinese government's policies and intentions regarding Tai Chi throughout a historical timeline. Prior to his research, this political aspect was almost never touched upon by Tai Chi researchers either in North America or China. Frank reports that Tai Chi was regulated and promoted by the Chinese government in the 1950s, had a downfall during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s before being re-validated as "an essential feature of Chinese identity" in contemporary China (p. 183). His extensive fieldwork enabled Frank to gain the trust of

⁹⁴Frank uses the authentic Chinese spelling "Taijiquan" throughout his doctoral dissertation and his book. In order to keep the consistency of my dissertation, I use "Tai Chi."

⁹⁵Mandarin is the official spoken language of the People's Republic of China.

his participants and to gain insightful information about their beliefs and perceptions. His Western anthropological training, his ability to communicate in the Chinese language, and his Tai Chi fieldwork in Shanghai provided opportunity and means for Frank to learn a great deal about Tai Chi skills, its history and representation in the Chinese culture. Frank's extensive ethnographic study enabled him to conclude that Chinese Tai Chi practitioners, including his research participants in Shanghai, perceived Tai Chi as a part of their Chinese identity, which is relevant to the goal of the current Chinese government to promote Tai Chi as a Chinese cultural icon.

Docker (2006) conducted a preliminary study to explore the experience of older Tai Chi participants regarding the factors that influenced them to attend local Tai Chi clubs. This exploratory study in the north of England is outside the geographic boundaries of my research, but it is included because of the relevance of its goals and methodology.⁹⁶ Docker used an ethnographic approach to determine why her participants began and stayed with Tai Chi. She was interested in exploring the non-physiological benefits of Tai Chi from the older participants' own perspective. The participants were encouraged to tell their own stories and describe their whole experience during the interviews. Docker observed one group session from each of the three local Tai Chi clubs. Through participant and non-participant observations, seven participants from three Tai Chi clubs, ranging in age from 52 to 71 (one male, six females) were recruited. She then conducted a single interview with one open-ended question with each of the seven participants, "I [the researcher] am interested in all you can tell me about how the practice of Tai Chi affects your life. Please tell me all about this from your own perspective" (p. 113). The duration of her interviews was between 45 minutes to two hours. She audiotaped each of the interviews.

The three themes derived from Docker's research data are: 1) the seven participants started Tai Chi to improve their physical and emotional health; 2) the participants enjoyed the social experience with each of their Tai Chi groups; and 3) participants also felt that learning all aspects of Tai Chi stimulated their concentration and improved their memory. Docker's findings include: 1) Tai Chi's physical and mental

⁹⁶China, Canada, and United States were the intended boundaries for the search of literature due to the cross-cultural comparative nature of this research. However, Tai Chi studies from elsewhere are included based on their high relevance.

benefits seem to be the same as described in the existing literature; 2) enjoying socializing in a Tai Chi group was important to her participants; 3) the spiritual or mystical nature of Tai Chi were mentioned by her participants; and 4) the Chinese philosophical aspect of Tai Chi attracted her participants. It seems that her findings include participants' perception of Tai Chi's health benefits and beyond. However, her study sample was only seven people. The socio-cultural background of the seven participants was not mentioned. For example, she indicated that several of the seven participants were retired but others were still working, without providing more details. She only made one visit to each of the Tai Chi clubs and she did not conduct any follow-up interviews to confirm or clarify any potential questions from her collected data.

3.5.2 Semi-structured individual interview

Following Docker's Tai Chi study, a group of American researchers (Yang et al., 2011) carried out a qualitative Tai Chi study (as a continuation of their quantitative study) at a university in the United States. At the completion of their six-month Tai Chi and Qigong quantitative study, the researchers selected seven female and one male participant (all retired; ranging in age from 67 to 85 years old; all started Tai Chi because of physical health problems). The researchers chose the eight individuals from a group of participants who had just finished participating in the researchers' quantitative Tai Chi study and who had expressed their willingness to continue Tai Chi on their own. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the eight participants with the aim of exploring how their participants felt about the effects of Tai Chi and their motivation for continuing to practice Tai Chi.

Although some studies explore the psychological benefits of Tai Chi, the methods of such studies tend to be quantitative. Yang and colleagues recognized that the literature has reported a continued interest in practicing Tai Chi from participants in most previous Tai Chi studies. However, Yang and his colleagues believe that participants' intention to continue Tai Chi, after each individual Tai Chi intervention has ended, is important but the reasons for continuing to practice Tai Chi have not been addressed. Yang and his colleagues intended to investigate the subjective experience of Tai Chi participants in order to learn how to encourage older Americans to practice Tai Chi and to carry it over

into everyday life (p. 2). Therefore, they believed that the individual interview method would be an important tool to achieve their research goal. It is worth noting that, in their study, Yang and colleagues cited Docker's (2006) findings from her interviews of the seven older participants.

In the six-month quantitative study, there were three one-hour Tai Chi classes per week. Yang taught the classes with assistance from his three long-term Tai Chi students. The class instruction started with qigong breathing practice of both sitting and standing meditation. The practice was gradually increased until the 13th week, when participants started learning seven Tai Chi moves taken from the 48-move Chen style Tai Chi.⁹⁷ The reason for selecting the moves was to make it easy for the participants to remember and because the moves were suitable for any participant of any age and physical ability. Beyond the physical moves of Tai Chi, the training also included information regarding how to integrate mind and spirit into the physical practice. During the Tai Chi class, traditional Chinese music was played to help participants cultivate tranquility (p. 2).

Two of Yang's long-term Tai Chi students (both of whom assisted in teaching the class and one of them is also a physiotherapist) each conducted four interviews. Each of the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded in the interviewees' homes. Based on their pilot study in 2000, Yang and his colleagues used a five-category model to analyze interview data: "physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual benefits of Tai Chi participation" (p. 3). In order to ensure no biases from Yang and the two interviewers, who are all experienced Tai Chi practitioners, they asked a qualitative researcher who is a non-Tai Chi practitioner to evaluate their data and coding results. Then the research group created a "Layers Model" (p. 3) to capture the multidimensional meanings that they learned from their previous research data. The model includes: *Simple Benefits* as Layer One (physical or mental effects of Tai Chi); *Complex Benefits* as Layer Two (interviewees start to feel the improved mind-body connection); *Immersion* as Layer Three (interviewees sense their positive attitude and self-confidence); *Complex Integration* as Layer Four (interviewees feel mind-body-spirit connection).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ The names of the chosen seven Tai Chi moves were listed in this study's report.

⁹⁸ A Layers Diagram is included in Yang and colleagues' research report to demonstrate their described layers and various combinations.

It was presumably unusual for Yang and colleagues to have asked their interviewees to read their analyzed data results because the standard practice is for the researchers themselves to interpret their data. It seems that the Layer Model worked well for their study because the interviewees agreed that the analyzed research results were accurate. Yang et al. are aware of the limitations of their study: the tiny sample (only seven completed the research, one passed away after his/her interview) and the fact that the better educated interviewees seemed to be better able to articulate their perceptions of more complex feelings regarding Tai Chi. The researchers also state that their Layer Model may not work for all Tai Chi studies. They consider that the advanced ages of their interviewees may reflect a reality that Tai Chi may be more suitable for an aging population because the older participants appreciate more multidimensional benefits from Tai Chi (see page 70) as a result of their accumulated experience. However, it is unclear that so small a sample size merited such a complex theoretical structure.

3.5.3 Case study

If Yang's sample size was quite small, that of McGinnis (2008) tests the limit for research: she conducted a qualitative case study with a single 70-year old woman at a community centre in the United States. (The analysis is summarized here because it is relevant to the ethnographic approach used in my own project.)⁹⁹ McGinnis's participant was a retired school teacher who lived alone in her own house. After a fall at home, she wanted to improve her balance and reduce her fear of falling in order to gain more confidence carrying out her daily activities. When she heard from her friends about Tai Chi's benefits for older people, she joined a community centre where various workshops were offered focusing on health and wellness. Preventing falls was one of the topics among those workshops. A physiotherapist conducted the standard measurements of this participant's health-related functional abilities and suggested Tai Chi "as an adjunct" (p. 140) to her program of care because the therapist thought Tai Chi would help her balance. Consequently, this participant attended a small-sized (8-12 participants) introductory Tai Chi class taught by a physiotherapist at the community centre. The class met twice a week for one hour for a total of eight weeks. The class members learned a "simpler 8-

⁹⁹ See Gustafsson (2017) for a discussion of single case studies vs. multiple case studies.

form easy Tai Chi for older adults” (p. 149). After the Tai Chi program, the participant was tested by the physiotherapist again. All her health-related functions improved except for her blood pressure, which remained the same (in the normal range). The participant found the outcome of her Tai Chi class promising so she searched for local Tai Chi groups but did not find any in her home area; she therefore bought a Tai Chi videotape in order to practice at home.

McGinnis viewed Tai Chi as a mind-body intervention and considered her case study to be an examination of “the use of Tai Chi as an adjunct to wellness and fall prevention for a community-dwelling older adult” (p. 140). McGinnis concluded that the participant’s improved balance and increased confidence that she would not fall were the most promising benefits from her Tai Chi experience. McGinnis recommends the following for older people who do Tai Chi: 1) the high stance (knees only bent a little) is the most appropriate for elders because “it places less stress on the joints and muscles of the lower extremities” (p. 148); and 2) some modified versions of short Tai Chi forms (e.g., the Tai Chi form with eight moves that this participant learned) reduce the complexity of long form Tai Chi (e.g., the long form Yang style with 108 moves). She also points out that there is no organization where Tai Chi instructors get certified in the United States.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, despite her study having had a sample of only one, McGinnis provides some general guidelines for older people looking for a Tai Chi group.

3.5.4 Focus group

Yau and Packer (2002) used the focus group method to conduct a qualitative study of 18 older Tai Chi practitioners (ranging from 51 to 85 years of age) in Hong Kong. They used Activity Theory (Havighurst and Tobin, 1961) to explore the meanings, values, and benefits of Tai Chi for their participants. They examined the perceptions of their participants regarding the relationship between their Tai Chi practice and their sense of quality of life. Purposive sampling¹⁰¹ was used to recruit research informants and the research participants. A focus group guide was developed prior to the research based on Tai Chi literature and their key informants. Additional questions were developed as the

¹⁰⁰As of 2008.

¹⁰¹ Also known as selective or subjective sampling. Researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing participants.

research progressed. They divided their participants into four focus groups. The number of participants in each group ranged from three to six. One of the groups consisted of three participants with visible physical disabilities (p. 168). The members of the latter group had the least Tai Chi experience. Each focus group meeting lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted by a trained research assistant. Their findings include: 1) the elder participants chose Tai Chi because of its gentle and soft movements, mainly for its low intensity; 2) the participants liked the physical, psychological, social aspects of Tai Chi; and 3) the physical and mental health effects improved their quality of life and they reported positive lifestyle changes once they had integrated Tai Chi into their daily routine. The authors believe that Tai Chi had multiple benefits for the practitioners beyond the physical. In particular, their participants, who practiced Tai Chi in the park every day in Hong Kong, felt that Tai Chi was a “good fit” (p. 170) for them. It was different from other physical exercises because Tai Chi was not complicated to learn, with no cost and did not require equipment. Therefore, the authors recommend Tai Chi as a strategy to promote successful aging. Unfortunately, background information for their participants (such as gender) is not provided. More importantly, the authors used a North American conception of quality of life to study a sample of elders residing in Hong Kong, who were strongly influenced by the Chinese cultural values and beliefs.

3.6 SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON TAI CHI

Practitioners’ perspectives of Tai Chi are necessarily influenced by the cultures in which they participate. Westerners, including Western researchers, tend to view Tai Chi as a therapeutic intervention or a leisure activity, but the concept of leisure itself is Western and new to Chinese culture, while Tai Chi itself is ancient in Chinese society but relatively new for Westerners. However, Tai Chi’s impact on health seems to be recognized by its practitioners and researchers across cultures. At the individual level, practitioners may start their Tai Chi practice with their own perceptions, which may gradually evolve as they gain more experience with Tai Chi. Learning the practitioners’ perspectives may help researchers to better understand Tai Chi and to develop strategies to promote Tai Chi amongst elder populations.

3.6.1 Tai Chi – a leisure activity versus “a good fit in life”

Leisure as a concept has been criticized for being Androcentric and Eurocentric (Shaw, 2007). Iwasaki, Nishino, Onda, and Bowling (2007) argue that the North American term “leisure” does not exist within Eastern cultures. Lee (1999) specifically argues that the concept of leisure does not exist in Chinese culture. She interviewed a group of older Chinese immigrant women residing in Nova Scotia for their perspective of the meaning of leisure. Lee’s study participants identified several phrases in the Chinese language to approximate the meanings of “leisure.” These phrases may loosely and collectively help explain what “leisure” means in the Chinese context, but none of them is an exact translation of the term “leisure.” One of the phrases Lee learned was *xiu xian* 休闲 (loose translation as “free time”), which does not accurately translate “leisure” as the term’s meaning is used in North America. A Canadian study (Walker and Wang, 2009) examines the meaning of “leisure” for Chinese-Canadians and points out the “passive nature of Chinese people’s leisure (e.g., rest and relaxation).” According to their study, perceived freedom seems to be the main perspective of Chinese-Canadians toward leisure activity (e.g., watching television). It is not apparent whether certain ideas can be translated from one language to another due to the complexity of the cultural context in which the phrase was created and used. However, the concept of “leisure” in the Chinese context (e.g., free time to relax or to watch television) is shaped by the social construction of the experience. This experience, within Chinese culture, may vary due to differences in geography (e.g., rural or urban) or age (e.g., older or younger). Construction within Western or Eastern ideological frameworks provides the foundation for understanding cultural concepts. Despite original Western and Eastern cultural differences, the Chinese family-focused collectiveness is gradually being influenced by policy changes such as the One-Child Policy,¹⁰² as well as by globalization of media and consumption of North American experiences such as American fast food chains (e.g., MacDonald’s). In spite of these social changes, Tai Chi is still not considered a leisure activity from the Chinese perspective. Based on the reviewed literature, few leisure studies programs exist as

¹⁰²One-child policy, as a population planning policy in mainland China was first introduced in 1979, with a number of exceptions (e.g., excluding the 55 ethnic minorities). In 2015 the policy changed to allow some parents to have two children if one of the parents was the only child in his/her own family. On January 1, 2016, the one-child policy ended and all couples can now have two children.

academic fields in China, and where they do they are associated with the study of tourism and the hospitality industry. A government official from China's National Tourism department states their view of the concept of leisure: "China has become an affluent society where the demand for leisure is increasing rapidly. Even though the social environment to meet this demand is rapidly improving, leisure as a social phenomenon and a concept is still new to us" (Wei, 2005, p. 2). Recently, there seems to be an increasing interest in the leisure economy in China, in a commercial way such as travelling abroad during national holidays.

Tai Chi is considered a leisure activity for older adults in North America (Chiang et al., 2009). Zwick and colleagues (2000) demonstrate Tai Chi's low-cost, low or moderate intensity (heart rate is elevated to 55%) and convenience for older adults. Some researchers find that Tai Chi is a suitable exercise/activity and suggest that Tai Chi should be implemented in leisure programs for the fast-growing older population in North America (Birdee et al., 2009; Li et al., 2001; Martine et al., 2006; Wu, Zhao, Zhou, and Wei, 2002; Gallagher, 2003). The outcomes of a leisure activity in North American culture are typically measured by the physical, emotional, and social wellbeing of the participants (Lee, 1999). Numerous health-related Tai Chi studies present Tai Chi's health benefits, generally measured by the physical outcome of the participation. However, the social benefit of Tai Chi participation is rarely the focus of North American Tai Chi studies. In contrast, the Chinese Tai Chi literature largely does demonstrate the social aspect of Tai Chi benefits (e.g., Wang, 2008; Jiang, 2008; Guo, 2006; Wu, 2005; Yau and Packer, 2002; and Zheng et al., 2015) and explores the meaning, associated values and benefits of Tai Chi as perceived by its older participants in Hong Kong. Among their findings, there are two important aspects that the majority Tai Chi studies fail to mention. Firstly, their participants perceive Tai Chi as providing social support – the morning group Tai Chi practice becomes the focus of their daily life routine. Secondly, their participants see Tai Chi as "a good fit" in older people's lives. Yau and Packer argue that Tai Chi as "a good fit" is the Chinese equivalence of the North American concept of "Quality of Life." They also find that the social benefits of Tai Chi perceived by their participants go beyond the North American concept of "Tai Chi as a leisure activity."

3.6.2 Tai Chi as a health promotion tool

As was explained in Chapter 1, my own research does not focus on Tai Chi and health but on the meaning of Tai Chi for older people and its place in their lives, and how these may or may not differ between research participants in Jinan and in Halifax. As was stated previously, however, most Tai Chi research has been health-oriented. Tai Chi practice has been well integrated into clinical trials and nursing interventions, especially in North America. The theoretical foundation of Tai Chi studies conducted by nursing researchers in North America and China consists of both quantitative (e.g., randomized controlled trials) and qualitative (e.g., ethnography and case study) approaches. The most significant finding of Tai Chi research in nursing and healthcare studies is that practicing Tai Chi improves older adults' health and wellbeing.

The biomedical benefits of Tai Chi practice have been well documented. For example, Rogers (2009), an American nursing researcher, and her colleagues studied nursing interventions using Tai Chi and qigong. They found that physical activity is a significant contributing factor to successful aging. Tai Chi is age-appropriate and low cost (Kerr, Agrawal, and Nayak, 2016; Taylor-Piliae, 2003; Taylor-Piliae, 2005), which makes it an excellent promotion tool for physical activity in older adults. Another American nursing researcher, Kerr and colleagues (2008), designed a Tai Chi intervention to compare Tai Chi effects in younger versus older practitioners and found that the effect of Tai Chi is greater in older research participants and Tai Chi may slow age-related decline. Docker (2006), a nursing researcher from England, conducted a preliminary Tai Chi study examining the perceptions of older Tai Chi participants. Her most significant findings were related to the "social group feature" of Tai Chi practice perceived by her elder participants. This "group feature" coincides with the findings of the two Chinese researchers Yau and Packer (2002) – Tai Chi's "group effects." It appears that those Tai Chi participants from three different cultures share the same insights about their Tai Chi practice, that is, that it creates a valued social group.

Chinese researchers have found that Tai Chi has many health benefits for older people. The Daoist Yin-Yang Theory is not as well recognized in North America as it is in China, especially compared to the health improvement and martial arts aspects of Tai Chi. This nature-human harmony perspective is the philosophical and spiritual core of

Chinese culture (Gao, 2008). The harmony guides Tai Chi in theory and in practice. Most Chinese health research, including nursing research, emphasizes this harmony aspect.

Health and wellbeing-related outcomes of Tai Chi research are shared by both leisure studies in the North American context and nursing studies in both the North American and Chinese contexts. Such outcomes are also recognized by health-related studies in other disciplines in China, which often take a descriptive approach to their Tai Chi research. Tai Chi literature in nursing studies is the most frequently found among reviewed Tai Chi studies, particularly among those published in the English language. There is also some overlap in methodological approaches applied by nursing studies and leisure studies. The physiological and psychological health outcomes of elder Tai Chi practitioners are investigated by researchers from both North America and China. Conversely, the social harmony aspect of Tai Chi benefits only appears to be identified in health-related Tai Chi studies in China. Tai Chi's benefits in health and wellbeing are highly recognized across the health-related disciplines of leisure studies and nursing studies.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The majority of Tai Chi studies focus on Tai Chi's effects on health. The reviewed literature largely reports the benefits of Tai Chi on various health-related illnesses and conditions. These range from preventing falls and lessening joint pain in older people to reducing stress and symptoms of anxiety. Beyond its physiological impact, Tai Chi's meditative effect, often referred to as a mind-body therapy in Western studies, is also highly emphasized in the literature. Although meditation has been practiced for hundreds of years in China and other Eastern cultures, Westerners have only recently started practicing mindfulness meditation (Rae, 2015).

The Chinese perspective considers that Tai Chi is guided by the Daoist Yin-Yang theory and it cultivates internal energy and strengthens the practitioners' overall health in an effort to achieve the ultimate harmony. The Western Tai Chi studies view Tai Chi as a mind-body therapy to improve the practitioners' quality of life. Regardless of the different perspectives identified (either a practice to cultivate energy or a mind-body therapy), Tai Chi shares its deep breathing technique and the philosophy of harmony with

several practices such as qigong, mindfulness meditation, and yoga. Therefore, the insights gained from these practices provide a context for this study.

The role and the meaning of Tai Chi as perceived by its practitioners in the North American and Chinese cultures are also examined. There have been a number of recent studies comparing data regarding Chinese and Canadian research participants. Several such studies are also reviewed in order to include the most current research methodologies and results.

Although quantitative methodologies dominate the reviewed Tai Chi literature, Tai Chi research using qualitative methodologies are particularly relevant to this study. The qualitative Tai Chi studies being examined in this chapter (ethnography, case studies, and focus groups) provide insights for the ethnographic approach of my study. How the ethnographic approach guided this study is discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes my research design and explains the data collecting procedure. An ethnographic approach was chosen for this cross-cultural study. The study sample is presented in two sections: Jinan, China and Halifax, Canada. The fieldwork preparation process explained in this chapter consists of the research methods including the interview guide, research introduction letter, the informed consent, and the researcher as instrument. The data-collecting process includes gaining entry to the two research fields, participant and non-participant observations, participant recruitment, note-taking, individual interviews, and interview data transcription and translation (of the Jinan data).

Three ethnical/technical issues are also discussed in this chapter. They are: 1) an adjustment of the lower end of the research participants' age range, 2) variation in gaining participants' consent in the two cities respectively, and 3) the lack of permission for audio-recording interviews (in Jinan only).

4.2 THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Ethnographic methodology was developed in order to study cultural groups (Bernard, 2011; Patton, 2002). Ethnography describes and interprets a group sharing the same culture. In the early twentieth century, anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead adapted the natural sciences research model to develop an ethnographic research approach (Creswell, 2007). It is a fieldwork approach in which the researcher immerses herself in the lives of the people being studied, in an effort to understand how they live their lives (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011).

Ethnographic methodology has become an important qualitative approach not just in anthropology but also in the health-related disciplines of leisure studies and nursing studies. As was described in Chapter 3, the Tai Chi research literature includes ethnographic studies from the fields of cultural anthropology (Frank, 2006), leisure studies (Yau and Packer, 2002), and nursing studies (Docker, 2006).

The data-collecting process in ethnographic research involves a researcher situated in the field, building rapport with the research sample through participant and/or non-participant observations, identifying and recruiting key informants, conducting in-

depth individual interviews with open-ended questions, keeping fieldwork notes and journals, and re-visiting research groups to confirm learned information or clarify new themes uncovered through coding and analysis process. Collecting information through multiple sources is a general practice. The size of the study sample in an ethnographic study can be small or large depending on the design of a project but usually is small.

The ethnographic approach was chosen for my research for the following reasons:

- (1) My qualifications and ethnographic approach were a very good fit. I am a Jinan native but Halifax has been my home for more than 20 years. I am familiar with both cultures and fluent in the three contact languages (English, Mandarin, and the Jinan dialect). My knowledge of and experience with Tai Chi contribute to the foundation of doing this research in the two cities. I am personally familiar with many older people in the two cities.
- (2) Tai Chi's transformation as a societal phenomenon – Tai Chi originated in China and has been practiced for hundreds of years in China. Despite its evolution and various political impacts on it over the years, Tai Chi remains a popular activity in China, particularly by older people. Since a Buddhist monk brought Tai Chi to Canada from China in 1970, Tai Chi has been adapted by Canadians. It is apparently gaining popularity among the elders in Canada.
- (3) Aging – Aging is a social phenomenon that seriously affects the quality of life of older people in both China and Canada (and presumably everywhere else).
- (4) Tai Chi's elder practitioners – Tai Chi's practitioners may be of any age. However, evidence shows that Tai Chi is especially popular among older people in Jinan and Halifax.
- (5) Relevance and compatibility – Jinan is the capital of Shandong Province located on the east coast, which is the second most populated province in China.¹⁰³ Halifax is the capital of the province Nova Scotia and is also a coastal city. Nova Scotia has the highest percentage of elders in Canada. The 2016 census results show that 19.9 percent of Nova Scotians were 65 years or older.

¹⁰³ Retrieved March 9, 2017 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/279013/population-in-china-by-region/>

- (6) A knowledge gap – Existing literature shows that Tai Chi’s health benefits have been extensively studied in China and North America while the perception of its practitioners toward their own Tai Chi experience has rarely been investigated. My research’s niche of examining the meanings of Tai Chi to its elder practitioners contributes to closing this knowledge gap.
- (7) The theoretical differences – Chinese Tai Chi research and North American Tai Chi research appear to have different underpinning foundations. The Chinese Tai Chi research emphasizes the Daoist Yin-Yang Theory and promotes Tai Chi’s Chinese identity while the North American counterpart seems to emphasize Tai Chi as a therapeutic supplement.
- (8) My accumulated contacts with Tai Chi groups in both cities – Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program, I had visited several Tai Chi groups in public parks in Jinan and I am familiar with the logistics of the groups’ practice. Once I began my doctoral studies, I conducted online research on current Tai Chi organizations and groups in Jinan and Halifax. I subsequently developed contacts in Jinan with a view to gaining entry to Tai Chi groups, benefiting from the assistance of Professor Gao Haiqing,¹⁰⁴ who acted as my local “supervisor” at Shandong University throughout my Jinan fieldwork. In Halifax, once I had received formal ethics approval for my research, I visited several Tai Chi groups to make initial contact with Tai Chi group leader, instructor, and members of those Tai Chi groups. Most members in those groups were more than 55 years old. Several of them expressed readiness to serve as key informants and to assist in the recruitment process for my eventual field research.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

The ethnographic fieldwork phase of the research involved five consecutive months in Jinan and four months in Halifax. It is important to emphasize that this research treats the two cultural research sites equally in all aspects. Jinan was studied first

¹⁰⁴ When I was doing my field research in Jinan in 2012, Professor Gao Haiqing gave me permission to refer to him by name in this dissertation.

because of the terms of my research grant from the Canada-China Scholars Exchange Program (CCSEP). Prior to my fieldwork trip to China, approximately 12-16 participants at each cultural site were anticipated. I also hoped to recruit more or less equal numbers of female and male participants from each cultural site. However, the existing Tai Chi literature indicates that the majority of elder practitioners are female. In the final analysis, the gender ratio of successful recruitment was very close to equal numbers: 11 female versus 8 male participants in Jinan and 10 female versus 9 male in Halifax. This number of participants proved to be adequate for collecting meaningful data, judging from the qualitative literature. For example, Crouch and Mckenzie (2006) argue, “interview-based studies involving a small number of respondents are becoming more common in social science” (p. 484). They considered a small sample was to be “less than 20” (p. 492). In Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey’s (2011) discussion regarding how many participants to recruit in a qualitative study, they state that the reason for a small number of participants in a qualitative study was “because the depth of information and the variation in experiences are of interest” (p. 88). Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey conclude that a small sample size is adequate for reaching data saturation, because the purpose of recruiting participants is to “seek variation and context of experiences rather than a large number of participants with those experiences” (p. 88).

Tai Chi practice is usually a group activity. This study therefore includes observation of the groups to which the consenting individuals who are the actual focus of observation belong. The observation of the Tai Chi groups started at the beginning of the participant recruitment process. Before beginning observation of any group, I requested permission to do so from the appropriate administrator or the Tai Chi instructor (if it was an organized Tai Chi course), or from the informal leader who led the practice (if it was an informal group). I first explained the purpose of my observation by providing a copy of my Research Introductory Letter (Appendix A), and then I asked the instructor or leader for their permission to observe the group practice. Upon obtaining that permission, I asked the instructor or leader to ask, in turn, for the permission of all members in their group for me to observe. Whenever necessary, I asked each group member individually for permission. As I observed and interacted with the group, its members had a chance to

get to know me and gain trust. It is in this context that I identified potential study informants and participants whom I asked to consent to being interviewed.

4.3.1 The cross-cultural feature of this research

Research participants in Jinan and Halifax were recruited to gain understanding of: 1) what motivated the elders to begin Tai Chi; 2) what motivated them to continue to practice Tai Chi; and 3) whether or not practicing Tai Chi with a group affected their decision to begin and continue with Tai Chi.

4.3.1.1 The cross-cultural nature of the samples

Participants could be female or male at least 55 years old, members of a Tai Chi group, and able to maintain regular Tai Chi practice. The length of time they had been practicing Tai Chi was not a considering factor. Nor was their educational background or whether they were retired or still in the workforce.

As a precaution, at the beginning of each fieldwork interaction, I reviewed the purpose of the task and reminded the participant(s) of the voluntary nature of their participation and of their right to withdraw. (One potential Jinan participant was very interested in my research and participated regularly in a Tai Chi group during my observation stage. Prior to the interview date set by the participant, I learned from another member of her Tai Chi group that she had left Jinan to travel to another country due to an unexpected family situation. Obviously, this potential participant quit the Tai Chi group and was necessarily excluded from this research.)

4.3.1.2 Social and cultural consideration

The participants of this study consisted of older people. My participant observation experience with them taught me that they are not the most dominant or powerful members of today's society either in Jinan or Halifax. My respect for the elders in both countries and my understanding of both cultures built the foundation of participant selection. I highly respected the research participants. My cross-cultural living experience and credentials helped the participants feel at ease with me and trust me. The Tai Chi techniques that I had learned and practiced enabled me to be regarded almost as

an insider of their Tai Chi group by my research participants. Although my Tai Chi skills may not be excellent, the important point is that they contributed to establishing a rapport with the participants.

4.3.2 Study Sample

Participants at both research sites came from two types of settings, fee-based Tai Chi courses and free informal Tai Chi groups. The Tai Chi styles that were practiced in the two types of settings included the Simplified 24 Tai Chi, the traditional 108 Yang Style, the traditional Chen style, and Wu style. A few participants also practiced Tai Chi sword and Tai Chi fan.¹⁰⁵ The length of time the participants had been practicing Tai Chi varied from several months to 42 years. Participants in both cities came from various backgrounds ranging from factory workers to healthcare professionals. The level of formal education of participants ranged from elementary school to post-secondary education. Participants in Jinan generally had a lower level of formal schooling than those in Halifax. The majority of participants in both research sites were retirees. At the time of my field research in 2012, several of them were in their last year of work before retirement.

Due to the different characteristics of each fieldwork site, the study sample will be discussed in two sections, below.

Jinan

4.3.2.1 The host university for my research grant

Shandong University (Shan Dong Da Xue, 山东大学) was the host university for my research grant awarded by CCSEP. It was required by CCSEP to have a faculty member from the host university as an advisor throughout fieldwork, so I chose Professor Gao Haiqing, a faculty member at the university's Medical College. Professor Gao agreed to be my Jinan advisor during our long-distance telephone conversations before I went to Jinan.

¹⁰⁵ This study focuses on the participants' experience with barehanded Tai Chi forms. Their experience with Tai Chi sword and Tai Chi fan was not investigated unless a participant spontaneously discussed her/his experience with these two forms.

Shandong University is one of the top universities in China and the most prestigious university in Jinan. It was established in 1901 as the second national university in China (the first being the Imperial University of Peking, now Beijing University). Shandong University is a key comprehensive university under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education of the Chinese central government. All ordinary universities are under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. Among Shandong University's eight campuses, I chose to stay in the Medical College campus for two reasons. As a Jinan native, I am very familiar with the city's geography. Over the past 15 years, I have paid particular attention to the distribution of the Tai Chi population. Some neighbors and friends of my family in Jinan were Tai Chi practitioners who belonged to Tai Chi groups in nearby public locations. I learned from my preliminary research prior to my research trip to Jinan in 2012 that there are various Tai Chi groups and classes in the vicinity of the Medical College, saving me some day-to-day travel time as well as keeping me connected with Professor Gao during my fieldwork.

On my first day at Jinan, I met with Professor Gao to discuss my research plans and logistics. He assigned me a computer work station in the computer laboratory of their 24-hour Network Medical Centre. The computer lab was used for researchers to conduct long-distance consultation with their collaborators throughout the province. At my request, Professor Gao introduced me to several of his research team members. Although their research was in geriatrics, it was helpful to learn about their data collecting procedures regarding consent and other practical situations that they had experienced in their research projects. Professor Gao suggested that I meet with some of their on-going research participants to explore the possibility of recruiting them for my research. I spent an entire day at the Electrocardiography (ECG) Room of their teaching hospital and met some of their participants who came to get their scheduled ECG test. Although those participants fit in my designed research age range, they were critically ill patients who were not capable of practicing or interested in Tai Chi. However, I learned from one of the research team members that there was a Tai Chi practice group every morning at 6am at the basketball court in the back corner of the Medical College campus where I stayed for the duration of my Jinan research. I asked that research team member to introduce me to her colleague who was a regular member of that campus Tai Chi group. The group met

every morning from 6-7:30am. After their practice, I could travel to other Tai Chi classes or groups outside the university. The campus group became one of my regular groups throughout my Jinan fieldwork. As a result, I was able to gradually recruit four participants from that group.

Shandong University's main campus was located on the opposite side of the city from the Medical College campus. I spent all of my time focusing on my fieldwork and only made a few essential trips to the main campus (e.g., to register when I arrived and to sign off when I completed my fieldwork). Additionally, I took a trip to the main campus to observe a full-day Provincial Tai Chi tournament that happened to be held at the university's main gymnasium there.

During the entire Jinan fieldwork from March to July, 2012, I stayed in the dormitory building on the Medical College campus. It was a 24/7-guarded building designated for international students and foreign visiting scholars. I was the only CCESP scholar at the host university for that academic year. I spent the day collecting data from off-campus Tai Chi classes or groups, and worked on my collected data (transcribing, translating, and analyzing) at night at Professor Gao's computer lab. The dormitory building was a U-shaped, three-story, old building with 18 small sized single bedrooms on each floor. Male and female residents were separately situated on each leg of the U. The building had only one front entry at the first floor. There were set visiting hours during daytime and visitors were required to sign in and out at the front desk of the building. There were four shower rooms located at the four corners on each floor for all residents to share. There were also four washrooms, two for each gender, located at the four corners of each floor. There were also two kitchenettes located at each side of the U on each floor. A few residents took advantage of the kitchenette to cook their own meals. Most residents either purchased take-out food from local restaurants regularly or dined out. I was one of the very few residents actually eating (mostly breakfast and dinner) at the college's dining hall, which was just next door to the dormitory building. The single room had a window facing outside, a single bed, a small desk, a chair, and a bookshelf. The air-conditioning machine on the wall inside each room was very important, especially with daily temperature higher than 38 degrees Celsius throughout most days of my stay.

Professor Gao led a well-established, state-of-the-art, research centre. The centre was strictly protected by a security guard at all times and was in operation 24/7. The research team members worked day and night shifts. The computer laboratory was managed by an engineer and an assistant. During the day, the researchers and physicians at the college's teaching hospital used the computer lab but it was very rarely used after working hours. It is located within walking distance to my dormitory. From the first day that Professor Gao assigned me a workstation in the lab, I quickly became acquainted with the research team members and security guards. Both the quiet space at night and the convenient location worked perfectly for my schedule.

4.3.2.2 Shandong University for the Aged

Shandong University for the Aged (SDUA)¹⁰⁶ was established in 1983. It was the first of its kind in China. It is a continuing education institution initially established for urban retirees of government offices and of retirees from the general public. It is subsidized by the state. By 2009, there were 40,161 similar elders' universities or schools across mainland China, according to the Statistics Bulletin issued by China's National Committee on Aging¹⁰⁷ on July 13, 2010. In Jinan, there is Shandong University for the Aged (SDUA) and Jinan University for the Aged (JNUA). Due to my preliminary communication and connections, I started with SDUA. Later in the fieldwork, I also observed and participated in two Tai Chi groups whose members were current or previous students of JNUA. I also visited JNUA during their Spring Semester Tai Chi performance period.

SDUA is located at the western part of Jinan. It was about one hour bus and walking from my dormitory. Throughout my five-month fieldwork, I visited the SDUA Tai Chi classes regularly and also conducted some interviews there either before or after a Tai Chi class, whenever it was convenient for my participants. For example, my very first Jinan interview took place at a Tai Chi classroom in SDUA. My first Jinan

¹⁰⁶ Shandong Lao Nian Da Xue 山东老年大学 (www.sdlnx.com) was established in June 1983. To date, there have been more than 37,000 graduates. Currently there are 18,000 registered students taking 770 courses under 60 majors such as calligraphy, painting, music, dance, computer, English, photography, and Tai Chi.

¹⁰⁷ Zhong Guo Lao Ling Wei 中国老龄委

participant Mr. An¹⁰⁸ lived in his company's housing in a Jinan suburb. He had to take three buses to get to SDUA from his home. In order to be on time for his Tai Chi class, he would arrive at the classroom one and a half hours early. I normally arrived in class early to chat with class members prior to the beginning of each class. I noticed that he was already sitting in the classroom all by himself when I arrived. He was very glad to offer that period of time for our interview. In fact, he had so much to tell me that those one and a half hours were not enough. So we resumed the interview after class on the same day, upon his request.

The physical conditions of SDUA were not perfect. The two old buildings with a small courtyard between them faced a gate opening on a narrow street in the middle of a busy commercial district. The five-storey building was comprised of standard classrooms and administrative offices. The other building had only two levels, without dividers on each floor, which were used for the practice portion of certain courses, such as dance or Tai Chi. March and April of 2012 was the coldest Spring season in the past 60 years in Jinan. Ironically, the Summer of 2012 also broke the highest temperature record in Jinan with many 40 Celsius degree days. Although the Tai Chi classes were held indoors, the school buildings were not well equipped for the weather. There was only one small air-conditioner (of the type that generates hot air in winter and cold air in summer) in each classroom. The little heat generated by the unit was not sufficient for the room size. It was so cold that some students kept their overcoats on during Tai Chi class in the Spring. When the weather suddenly changed, the same machine could not cool down the classroom either. It was so hot that the T-shirts of most students, including me, were soaked well before the class was over. Everyone brought a water bottle. As a routine, a student filled the two hot-water thermoses with boiling water from a large boiler located on each floor, before the beginning of each class. Before each class, everyone would fill up their water container with hot water and put them on the windowsill to cool down. The break time was naturally used for drinking warm water and chatting.

Initially, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was introduced to the Dean of the College of Sports and Health at SDUA. She and her colleagues were very excited to hear of my interest in their Tai Chi classes. The Dean introduced me to two of the Tai Chi

¹⁰⁸ The names of all 38 participants in this dissertation have been changed in order to protect their identity.

classes, the two substitute instructors of those classes, and the two Class Leaders.¹⁰⁹ The Dean’s introduction enabled them to comprehend why I was there and they were all enthusiastic and welcoming. One of the two Tai Chi classes was a fourth year course and the other was a second year course. SDUA’s Tai Chi courses consist of various levels and the different Tai Chi styles (bare-handed Taijiquan,¹¹⁰ Tai Chi sword, Tai Chi fan, and Wu Dang¹¹¹) as shown in Table 2. According to the Student Handbook distributed by the Class Leader of the fourth-year course on April 10, 2012, Tai Chi courses’ enrolments are as following (see Table 3).

Table 2: Shandong University for the Aged – Tai Chi courses offered annually

Year	Spring Semester (March – July)	Fall Semester (September – January)
1 st	Taijiquan (bare-hand Tai Chi) 24 Form	Tai Chi Sword 32 Form
2 nd	Taijiquan 42 Form	Tai Chi Sword 48 Form
3 rd	Taijiquan 48 Form	Wu Dang
4 th	Taijiquan 42 Form Advanced	Tai Chi Tuishou (push-hands)

Table 3: Shandong University for the Aged – Tai Chi courses offered in March 2012

Level	Tai Chi Form	Sections per level	Enrolment per class				
			Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5
1 st year	24 Form	5	28**	28	28	24	24
2 nd year	42 Form	4	26	30*	24	24	
3 rd year	48 Form	2	26	30			
4 th year	42Form (Advanced)	3	26**	26	26*		

* Tai Chi courses that I observed and participated in all of their classes at SDUA

** Tai Chi courses that some classes of which I visited at SDUA

¹⁰⁹ The organizational structure of China’s schooling system features a Class Leader (Ban Zhang 班长), who is a student in the class and is normally appointed by the school administrators. He or she acts as an intermediary for the school administration, e.g., distributing school notices and newsletters to students or handing out Tai Chi uniforms to and collecting money from class members for organized Tai Chi tournaments. A Class Leader also assists the instructor, e.g., leads Tai Chi practice by standing at the front row or the corner while students are lined up in rows to practice new Tai Chi moves, or by leading a review practice of a Tai Chi set. A Class Leader is also responsible for bringing the Tai Chi music and the tape recorder to each class.

¹¹⁰ As stated in Chapter 2, Taijiquan is the term used in Jinan and China that refers to “Tai Chi.”

¹¹¹ Wu Dang 武当, originated in Wu Dang Mountain in Hubei Province, is a type of Chinese martial arts.

Classes were scheduled from Monday through Friday at SDUA. Each class was one hour and forty minutes long with one 15-minute break during class. The 4th year advanced Tai Chi class was on Tuesday afternoon from 1:30 to 3:10pm. The 2nd year Tai Chi class was on Friday morning from 10:20am to 12pm. I participated in all the classes of those two courses throughout my Jinan fieldwork. It took little time to refresh my own previous Tai Chi skills and I was able to catch up quickly. The fact that I was able to act as a student in class by practicing the same Tai Chi moves literally in the middle of the Tai Chi classes made my presence seem more natural. It assisted the process of gaining entry and building trust with the class members.

The tuition for two semesters at SDUA was 300 Yuan¹¹²(approximately \$50 Can) per year (as of March 12, 2012). Every course offered at SDUA cost the same amount. According to my conversation with the participants, this amount seemed to be affordable for most students (those for whom it was not affordable obviously were not there.). All instructors were paid on a per course basis. Whether the instructor was retired or still employed elsewhere, teaching at SDUA would not be their main source of income. It is rather as a supplement to their income. From 1983 to 2012, Mr. Kang taught all Tai Chi courses at SDUA. Due to a sudden illness, he took a short sick leave for few weeks just before my arrival. Mr. Kang was a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctor before his retirement. He was also a long-term Tai Chi practitioner and a certified Tai Chi instructor. When I arrived in Jinan in March 2012, the Dean introduced me to the two substitute instructors¹¹³ - Ms. Xie for the 2nd year class and Mr. Chang for the 4th year advanced class. Mr. Kang returned to teach part-time (a limited number of Tai Chi courses including my two courses) on my second week into the fieldwork, so that I had only a very brief period of interaction with the two substitute instructors. Although the interaction was brief, Ms. Xie strongly encouraged me to join the first year Tai Chi course that she continued teaching after Mr. Kang's return. Based on Ms. Xie's perception of me as a "new student" who went there to learn how to do Tai Chi, she believed that I should start properly with the 24 Tai Chi Form. In her opinion, the two Tai Chi classes that the Dean had introduced me to, where the students were learning 42 Tai

¹¹² One Canadian dollar approximately equalled six Chinese Renminbi 人民币 Yuan 元 in 2012.

¹¹³ These two instructors' names have been altered in order to protect their privacy.

Chi Form, were not the best choice for me (from her technical point of view and unfamiliar of my research project). Under her strong encouragement, I unofficially dropped by at Ms. Xie's first-year class twice to meet her 28 students, who were absolute beginners. By that time, I had already discovered and started visiting some outdoor Tai Chi practice groups in Jinan. Due to the scheduling conflict with all of my regular Tai Chi classes and groups each day, I discontinued attending her class.

4.3.2.3 Jinan Study Sample

Research participants were recruited from the two types of groups: a) Tai Chi courses with tuition fees and compulsory registration and b) informal Tai Chi practice groups free of charge and without registration, as shown in Table 4. I researched for Jinan Tai Chi population distributions, reputable Tai Chi organizations and locations, and made some connections through contacts prior to my Jinan research trip. As soon as I arrived in Jinan, I started visiting SDUA, where the most reputable (according to the locals) paid Tai Chi courses were offered. Simultaneously I visited Quan Cheng Park,¹¹⁴ a popular location where many free Tai Chi groups meet on different days of the week and at various times (e.g., early morning, midmorning, or afternoon). Gradually, I also visited Tai Chi groups at Ying Xiong Shan Park, and other locations.

In the category of paid Tai Chi classes, I spent most of my time with SDUA's 2nd-year and 4th-year Tai Chi courses. There were four Tai Chi courses offered at SDUA during my Jinan research months (see Table 3) and the Tai Chi courses were taught mainly by Mr. Kang. I began my participant observation with the two randomly selected Tai Chi courses (one lower level and one upper level course). The Dean's random selection was justifiable to meet my research design. I carried through with the two courses because of the stability of Mr. Kang as the instructor for both courses and of the continuity of class members in both courses as well as the rapport that I gradually built with members of the two courses.

Practicing Tai Chi regularly with an outdoor group is another path for many older Tai Chi practitioners in Jinan. In fact, Tai Chi groups are more popular than Tai Chi courses because they are free of charge and easy to join or to abandon. These free Tai Chi

¹¹⁴ As noted in Chapter 2: Background of Jinan.

groups normally do not have a set curriculum, so that made joining a group less intimidating for most elders. In terms of location and time, a group usually has its own spot at a public park or some other public place where the members agreed to meet at the same time on the same day every week. The order regarding each group's shared time at the same location seemed to be a non-verbal understanding between groups. For example, one of the regular groups that I followed met from 8am to 10am on Sundays. Another Tai Chi group met at the same spot at 10:30am. Sometimes I stayed after 10am next to the group practice spot in the park to write down my observation notes on my notebook so I saw the other group gathering after my group left. The attendance of each group practice varied depending on the weather, the health condition, and the level of commitment of the members. Members of my observed Tai Chi groups would miss group practice for reasons such as looking after grandchildren or their own ill parents, or in order to take a day-trip with a commercial tour.

The flexible and friendly group feature allowed any interested person to join a group at any time. However, the common practice was that individuals normally joined a Tai Chi group because they knew at least one person in the group. Some Tai Chi groups had a certified Tai Chi instructor leading group practice while other groups were led by a highly experienced practitioner. Several public parks, with free admission at the main gate,¹¹⁵ were well-attended spots for Tai Chi groups, such as Quan Cheng Park and Ying Xiong Shan Park. These parks were about a 30-minute walk in opposite directions from my dormitory.

Large industrial corporations, government departments, and universities usually have their own employee housing. There were Tai Chi groups that met in the yard of these gated collective living quarters in the early morning or evening. At the Medical College campus where I stayed, there were two Tai Chi groups that met at their school basketball court in the early morning and two other groups that practiced there in the evening. There were also Tai Chi groups all over the city that met wherever there was sufficient space and enough interested people. It is common for each group to have a devoted core of long-term members.

¹¹⁵ Visitors must pay for a ticket for one entry or buy a monthly pass to enter most public parks in China at the time of my field research.

The common factor shared by all informal groups was that they were free and open to anyone. However, there were differences in group dynamics. A group located in the living quarters of an institution or company normally consisted of co-workers, such as the Medical College campus group where the members were all current or former employees, plus a few of their family members such as spouses. A group located on a street corner or a backyard normally consisted of neighbors who all live in the same street block. The groups in a public park attracted people from all over the city. Those people normally travelled to the park by public transportation. Many of them would take the bus to work prior to retiring, since having a personal car was extremely unusual for the generation of my Jinan participants. Most of them joined a certain group in a park for their own reasons, such as the reputation of the Tai Chi instructor or because of friends who already belonged to the group. Due to the timeframe of my Jinan fieldwork, it was not practical for me to visit regularly all the Tai Chi groups I had met. Therefore, I focused on the three groups that practiced in Quan Cheng Park, one group that practiced in Ying Xiong Shan Park, the Medical College Campus group, and the Cha Lu Street group. Additionally, I would drop by to visit other Tai Chi groups. Table 4 shows the 15 classes and groups with more than a total of 200 Tai Chi practitioners that I visited on a regular basis.

Table 4: Jinan research fieldwork – classes and groups that I visited

Tai Chi Classes (Tuition fees & registration required)	Tai Chi Groups (Free of charge & free to join)
Organization A SDUA Tai Chi 4 th year course, section 3 Tuesday, 1:30-3:10pm 26 registered students	Group A Medical College campus group (1) Daily, 6-7:30am 12-25 people
Organization A SDUA Tai Chi 2 nd year course, section 2 Friday, 10:20am-12pm 30 registered students	Group B Cha Lu Street group (most members from SDUA) Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 8-10am 3-7 people
Organization A SDUA Tai Chi 4 th year course, section 1 Wednesday, 1:30-3:10pm 26 registered students	Group C Quan Cheng Park group (1) (by students of JNUA) Sunday, 7:30-9:30am 25-40 people
Organization A SDUA Tai Chi 1 st year course, section 1 Monday, 8:15-10am 28 registered students	Group D Quan Cheng Park group (2) (by students of JNUA) Sunday, 8-10am 8-15 people
Organization B JNUA Tai Chi 1 st and 2 nd years' courses Tuesday, 8-10am 60 registered students	Group E Quan Cheng Park group (3) (community members) Monday, 7:30-9:30am 3-8 people
	Group F Quan Cheng Park group (4) (by students of SDUA) Wednesday, 9-10:30am 3-6 people
	Group G Zhong Shan Park group (most members from SDUA) Tuesday & Friday, 9-10am 12-15 people
	Group H Ying Xiong Shan Park group (Community members and two students of SDUA) Saturday, 7-8:30am 8-12 people
	Group I Shandong University main campus group (faculty, graduate students, and community members) Daily, 6-7:30am 30+ people
	Group J Medical College campus group (2) Daily, 6-7am 2-3 people

4.3.2.4 Jinan Recruitment

Recruitment was carried out first by using a convenience sampling method to locate Tai Chi classes or groups, and then the snowball technique was applied to recruit participants. Although the research sample can be divided into paid Tai Chi courses and

informal Tai Chi groups, there were some overlaps. For instance, some Tai Chi practitioners were taking a Tai Chi course and also belonged to a Tai Chi group for their after-school Tai Chi practice. That meant I interacted with the same person both in the Tai Chi classroom as well as at his or her informal Tai Chi practice group in a public place.

Mr. Kang helped to set up some Tai Chi practice groups during SDUA's summer vacation to help students remember what they had learned during the term. Some of these Tai Chi groups continued and became year-round after-school Tai Chi groups. Some people, who were students from SDUA, later joined these informal groups. I learned through my participant observation at SDUA about this overlap and quickly started visiting some groups by following some members of the Tai Chi courses to her/his after-school groups. Recruiting research participants became relatively easy once I had gained the trust of the class or group members and established an understanding with key informants.

Ethnographic approach and other qualitative methods were not well-known or regularly practiced in China, at the time of my field research. Mainstream research projects used quantitative questionnaires. Several of my participants assumed that I was going to use a questionnaire and asked me how long my questionnaire might be. They had no objection to my observing and personal interviewing after I had carefully gone over my research introductory letter and the consent form with them.

First, I identified key informants from the Tai Chi courses at SDUA (Ms. Bai, Mr. Cai, and Ms. Ning) and JNUA (Mr. Ou and Mr. Peng). More participants from Tai Chi groups (Ms. Geng, Ms. Jia, and Ms. Qi) were also identified at the beginning of the data collecting process. As mentioned earlier, some of the key informants belonged both to a Tai Chi course and an informal practice group (e.g., Ms. Ning). All of the key informants became my research participants and they helped to recruit more participants. There was not much difference between the recruitment method I followed for a paid Tai Chi class and for a Tai Chi practice group. Most of my participants were devoted Tai Chi practitioners. Some were long-term practitioners and some were relatively new to Tai Chi. The minor difference in recruitment between a class and a group would be that in the former there was an instructor and a Class Leader who could often assist my recruitment

by providing the students' background. In such cases, I always showed my respect for their help, but did not always follow their suggestions.

The 19 participants successfully recruited in Jinan represented almost equally paid class and informal group settings (11 from classes and 9 from groups). It is important to note that the 11 participants who were recruited from classes all had their individual after-school Tai Chi practice groups. Most of them belonged to a group with classmates who were also in their Tai Chi courses. My data collecting took place during the spring and summer, the best times for outdoor Tai Chi groups. Jinan participants' age ranged from 55 to 88 years old at the time of my fieldwork. With 11 women and 8 men, the gender ratio was almost even. The length of their Tai Chi practice ranged from one year to 56 years. The detailed descriptions regarding each of the Jinan participants can be found in Chapter 5.

Halifax

4.3.2.5 The Tai Chi Society¹¹⁶

The Tai Chi Society has its own style created by a Daoist monk who came to Canada from China in 1970. The society's Atlantic office is located in Halifax. There are more than 40 locations offering Tai Chi classes in the Atlantic region. The society's mandate states that their Tai Chi style is specifically designed for cultivating health. The creator had more than 50 years of training in meditation, qigong, and Tai Chi. He synthesized the wisdom that he had learned from those Chinese practices when he created this Canadian Style Tai Chi¹¹⁷ in 1970.

The Tai Chi Society offers two levels of Tai Chi courses, the Beginners' Tai Chi course and the Continuing Tai Chi course. Both types of courses require fees. Any interested individual can pay \$110 for a four-month Beginner course, which offers students complete instruction of the 108-move Canadian style Tai Chi. After the completion of the beginners' course, if an individual wants to continue with the Tai Chi society, he or she will pay either \$30 a month or \$300 a year (as of October 5, 2017).

¹¹⁶ In order to protect the identity of this particular Tai Chi society, the society's name is omitted.

¹¹⁷ The term "Canadian Style Tai Chi" used in this dissertation refers to the Tai Chi style that is practiced only with this Tai Chi society.

This amount is considered as a membership for the society. Members can participate in any continuing classes that the society offers. The Continuing Tai Chi class is given all year round, while the Beginner Courses are offered periodically at different locations.

Each Beginner or Continuing class is two hours long. During the first hour in a Continuing class, the members practice one full set of the 108 moves with an instructor facing the group at the front of the classroom and two advanced Tai Chi practitioners standing at each of the corners in the front row. Sometimes the “corner” is an instructor who teaches a different class. After the first hour, there is a 15 to 20-minute tea break. During the tea break, members sit in a circle drinking tea, while the instructor makes their society’s announcements. As soon as the announcements are finished, members chat and socialize with each other. After the break, some difficult moves of the Tai Chi set are practiced or the instructor shares his or her newly learned Tai Chi skills from workshops, or corrects individual member’s mistakes. Usually one member volunteers to make the tea before break and clean up after the break or after the end of the class. Based on my observation, it seemed to be always the same individuals who would volunteer for making the tea when others were practicing Tai Chi and for cleaning up when the majority of the members rush out of the door at the end of each class.

The yearly membership fee allows members to practice Tai Chi at any location of the Tai Chi Society. It is convenient for members to maintain their regular Tai Chi practice while travelling for business or pleasure. Although members do have the freedom of practicing with any class, most members tend to go regularly to the same class, where they have made friends or where they like the particular instructor. The location of a class seemed not to be a concern for most members since they travel to class by car. Although the majority of members have their own vehicles, there are one or two members in each class I visited who travel to class by bus. For them, a convenient location and the travel time by bus were concerns.

Other than the courses, the society often offers paid one-day workshops locally and one-week summer retreats at their national headquarters in Canada. The instructors are all volunteers. They must be experienced Tai Chi practitioners before qualifying either for a Beginner course instructor or a Continuing course instructor, approved by their society’s selection committee.

Table 5: Tai Chi classes that I observed at the Tai Chi Society in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)

Halifax	Dartmouth
Continuing class Tuesday, 10am-12pm 20 to 30 people	Continuing class Wednesday, 9:30am-11:30am 25 to 30 people
Continuing class Thursday, 5:30pm-7:30pm 20 to 30 people	Beginner class Wednesday, 9:30am-11:30am 8 people

Note: A Beginner course has a fixed number of students. A Continuing course consists of the regular members and an unpredictable number of visitors who are members of the Tai Chi society.

4.3.2.6 Halifax Study Sample

Research participants were recruited from paid Tai Chi Classes and informal Tai Chi groups in the Halifax area. These are the same two categories as in Jinan, the difference being that practicing Tai Chi in an informal group outdoors is not as popular in Halifax as in Jinan. Therefore, in Halifax I spent more time than I had in Jinan with members of Tai Chi classes rather than informal Tai Chi groups. Table 6 shows the total of nine classes and groups with more than 160 Tai Chi practitioners that I visited on a regular basis.

Table 6: Halifax research fieldwork –classes and groups that I visited

Tai Chi Classes (Tuition fees & registration required)	Tai Chi Groups (Free of charge & free to join)
Organization C The Tai Chi Society, Halifax Continuing class Tuesday, 10am-12pm 25-35 students	Group K The outdoor Tai Chi group at a park Sunday, 9am-10:30am 2-14 people
Organization C The Tai Chi Society, Halifax Continuing class Thursday, 5:30pm-7:30pm 25-35 people	Group L The indoor Tai Chi group in the basement of a building Friday, 10am-11am 3-8 people
Organization D The Tai Chi Society, Dartmouth Continuing class Wednesday, 9:30am-11:30am 30-40 people	
Organization D The Tai Chi Society, Dartmouth Beginner class Wednesday, 9:30-11:30am 6-10 people	
Organization E Tai Chi course in a sports centre, Dartmouth Monday, 6pm-7pm 4-6 people	
Organization F Tai Chi course in a Community Centre, Dartmouth Sunday, 1:30am-2:30pm 6-9 people	

4.3.2.7 Halifax Recruitment

The Halifax recruitment followed the same methods as in Jinan and began as soon as I returned from Jinan fieldwork in the fall of 2012. Prior to my Jinan field research, I had visited some Tai Chi organizations in Halifax to become familiar with the local Tai Chi population. All 19 Halifax participants were recruited from Tai Chi classes and Tai Chi groups. Unlike the Tai Chi classes in Jinan, the Continuing Tai Chi classes in Halifax did not have a set number of registered students in each class. The Beginner courses were an exception. So there was no class registration list, other than an attendance sheet for the

society's statistics. However, there were members who almost always attended the same class. Unlike Tai Chi classes in Jinan, there was no "Class Leader" in Halifax. But there seemed always to be a few regular attendees who volunteered to carry out duties in class, such as making the tea or moving the chairs after break or cleaning the floor after class.

Halifax participants' detailed background descriptions are presented in Chapter 5. Participants ranged in age from 57 to 84 years old at the time of my fieldwork. With 10 women and 9 men, the gender ratio was almost even. The length of their Tai Chi practice varied from a few months to 30 years.

4.3.3 Research instrument

Research instrument for this study included a Research Introductory Letter (Appendix A), the Informed Consent including the written form (Appendix B) and oral consent script (Appendix C), an Interview Guide (Appendix D), and myself as a dedicated researcher (see page 78, my qualifications).

Prior to going to China, I translated all relevant documents (Interview Guide, Research Introductory Letter, Informed Consent, and Oral Consent Script) into the Chinese language.¹¹⁸

4.3.3.1 Research introductory letter

The research Introductory Letter and the Informed Consent Form along with the Oral Consent Script were carefully and rigorously developed prior to my research fieldwork. As soon as I arrived at Jinan, I consulted several researchers at Shandong University and compared the format of my research documents with the local researchers' documents to ensure that I was in accordance with local research practice in Jinan.

The research introductory letter provided all relevant information, including the purpose of my study, the study design, the inclusion/exclusion of study participants and what they would be asked to do, procedures to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity to the fullest extent possible, potential benefits and risks, and feedback

¹¹⁸ Unlike regional or local dialect differences, the written form of the Chinese language uses the standard script called *simplified Chinese characters* nationwide (see my translated Appendices).

opportunity. The potential research participants were told that the hard copy of the letter was for their information and it was their decision to either keep it or destroy it. They were then given sufficient time to review the information in the letter with me or at their own convenience. Once they had had a chance to review the letter, I met each of them at a location of their choice to discuss potential questions or concerns regarding this study, such as its purpose, procedure, their time involvement in the project, and the voluntary nature of their role as a participant and their right to withdraw at any point. When the participant was ready and willing, she/he was asked to sign the Informed Consent Form. The oral consent script was for participants who chose not to sign the consent form. All the participants in Halifax signed the form. All the Jinan participants chose the oral consent option.

4.3.3.2 Informed consent

The informed consent procedure protects the rights of the participants as well as providing a guideline throughout the research. The process of getting consent from participants was carried out with the same procedure in both Jinan and Halifax. Everyone who expressed interest in participating in the study and who fit the study inclusion/exclusion criteria was provided with the Research Introductory Letter with an Informed Consent Form attached. The informed consent form asked each participant to consent to aspects of their participation, such as being audio recorded during an individual interview, the use of direct quotations without revealing personal identification, taking photographs of individual participant's Tai Chi practice whenever necessary, and the possibility of asking follow-up questions.

All signed written consent forms and verbal consent scripts were kept in a sealed envelope, separate from all other fieldwork documents. This precaution procedure is written on the bottom of the consent form and I also informed each participant verbally. At my Jinan research site, the sealed envelopes containing the oral consent forms were kept in a locked location at the host university throughout the entire duration of my fieldwork in Jinan. When I travelled from Jinan back to Halifax, I carried these sealed envelopes in my carry-on bag to ensure maximum security. The sealed consent forms

were brought back to Dalhousie University and kept at a secured storage site with the rest of the research materials.

4.3.3.3 Interview guide

Anthropologist Russell Bernard (2011) indicates, “An interview guide is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order... The interviewer maintains discretion to follow leads, but the interview guide sets forth clear instructions” (p. 205). The development of my interview guide (see Appendix D) began from the literature review. The reviewed works of Tai Chi studies, such as the first Western anthropological Tai Chi study conducted by anthropologist Adam Frank (2006), contributed to the foundation of the preliminary draft of the interview guide.

My interview guide was pilot-tested and revised several times prior to field research, as a result of extensive consultation and feedback from my informal discussions with elder Tai Chi practitioners in Jinan and Halifax (who were not included in the eventual research). Feedback from my actual research participants during the early stages of my data collecting confirmed some concepts of my interview guide and inspired additional interview questions.

The goal of the interview guide was to encourage and enable my research participants to freely share their perceptions of their Tai Chi experience with me in their own words. The guide also served as a checklist for me throughout my fieldwork observations and semi-structured interviews. Examples of questions on the interview guide include where, when, how, and why each research participant started their Tai Chi practice; whether or not some aspects such as Tai Chi styles, the setting or organization of practice groups or group locations had contributed to their decision to join and remain with the same Tai Chi group; what expectations they brought with them and if such expectations had changed at the time of their interviews with me. The interview guide was revised several times prior to my fieldwork. The version of it that I took to my two fieldwork sites was greatly strengthened.

4.3.4 Data collection procedure and cultural differences

In most cases, going over the documents' contents with me in person was the choice of Jinan participants. As was previously mentioned, most existing Tai Chi research in China is of the quantitative survey-type and examined the health effects of Tai Chi (e.g., Wang and Wang, 2004). As expected, my Jinan participants were not familiar with ethnographic research method procedures and some potential participants asked me to explain the interview procedure and the analysis methods. Given Chinese culture and the historic period the Jinan participants had lived through, it was not a surprise that they preferred the oral consent method (see discussion in Chapter 7). As for the rationale and purpose of my research, the participants' reaction in both Jinan and Halifax was "it's about time someone studies about us and our Tai Chi practice (specifically expressed by participants Mr. Kang, Ms. Shen, Andy, and May)!"

The participants in the two cultures perceived the concept of "personal privacy" differently. None of the Jinan participants were reluctant to provide me with personal information including their telephone numbers. (In fact, I phoned most of them after I returned to Halifax to wish them happy Chinese New Year in 2013.) Some of them even voluntarily told me how much their pension income was. The Halifax participants kept such personal information private, in accordance with standard North American practice. I only contacted several Halifax participants with follow-up questions by their own choice, either by telephone or emailing.

Individual interviews with open-ended questions were conducted smoothly. However, the interview recording methods and logistics were quite different in the two cities. Halifax participants accepted my audio-recording of interviews as normal practice. I always explained to all of my participants that my audio-recording and note-taking during the interview was to best capture their own voices for analysis. I always asked for permission to record and take notes during the recruiting and also at the starting point of each interview. I brought two small digital audio recorders and my fieldwork notebook to every interview. During my participant and non-participant observations, I always brought a small pocket-size notebook to record anything I learned at anytime in the field. During the interviews, I wrote down key phrases, non-verbal cues, and body languages. In contrast, audio-recording was impossible in Jinan. Jinan participants refused to accept

any machine taping method. Therefore, note-taking by hand was the norm for interviews in Jinan.

I took observation notes during the Tai Chi class break and before and after group practice. A few Jinan participants reacted nervously and hesitated when I wrote in my small notebook while she/he was talking. In order to provide participants a relatively relaxed atmosphere, I sometimes just listened to them without taking notes by hand. Then I would try to find a way to put my mental notes into my notebook as soon as possible. I also took advantage of my regular interaction with participants, attending every class of the two Tai Chi courses at SDUA and the Cha Lu Street Tai Chi group three times a week. The high frequency of my appearance and participation not only helped to build trust, but also provided greater opportunity to hear their thoughts and stories. They shared their perceptions of their own Tai Chi practice freely during our Tai Chi practice. Some of my Jinan participants would walk with me to the bus stop after each Tai Chi practice and continue talking to me. Sometimes the Jinan participants and their group members wanted to walk with me out of the public park (if the conversation was not relevant) and if I could I would either stay in the park or take the bus back to my dormitory in order to write my thoughts in my notebook as soon as possible. As for the Halifax participants, no one objected to my on-site note-taking. Almost all of them drove home immediately after Tai Chi practice. Consequently, my interaction with them was primarily before each scheduled Tai Chi practice and during the break.

In terms of the interview process, there were cultural differences regarding the participants' choice of locations and sittings. Jinan participants preferred to be interviewed on-site in their Tai Chi classroom after class or at the parks where they did their regular group practice. Only one Jinan participant preferred to be interviewed in his home, located close to the park of his Tai Chi group. That interview was completed in one sitting with two brief interruptions, one by one of his neighbors' dropping in for a short time and the other from an unexpected relative paying a short visit. Another Jinan participant invited me to her workplace to be interviewed. It actually took three visits to complete her interview at her office because she was in charge of the company and each time the interview was interrupted frequently. As for the Halifax interviews, almost all participants preferred to be interviewed at their Tai Chi practice location or a nearby

public place such as a coffee shop. The interviews lasted one or two hours prior to their Tai Chi class/group times so that the participant and I would finish the interview and then join the Tai Chi practice right after. Exceptionally, two Halifax participants invited me to their respective homes for each of their interviews. Two Halifax participants chose to be interviewed at a community centre's cafeteria on separate days. Two other participants were interviewed separately at a local coffee shop, which was their favorite and regularly visited place. Those six participants' interviews were each completed in one sitting.

The Halifax participants' interviews lasted one hour or two hours depending on how much each participant had to say. Jinan participants almost all requested several days/times to complete one interview due to their personal schedules. One Jinan participant needed five sittings on different dates to complete her interview, because she could only spend a short time with me at each meeting. During both Jinan and Halifax data collecting periods, I attempted to complete the interview transcript immediately after each interview or each sitting of interviewing the same person. I spent almost all of my nights in the computer lab transcribing the transcripts and also translating the Jinan transcripts into English. As for the Halifax fieldwork, I stayed at home converting audio-recorded data into text as quickly as possible after each interview.

Confirmation or clarification of participants' perceptions was necessary whether an interview was completed in one sitting or multiple sittings. It was important to check back with participants after an interview for details or questions that arose during the transcribing process. This type of checking was handled differently in the two cultural sites. The Jinan interviews were generally done in multiple sittings, so checking was done incrementally. Confirmations or more questions after each meeting of the same participant's interview could be conveniently done during the next meeting of the interview with the same participant. At both cultural sites, my frequent participation at their Tai Chi practice locations provided me ample opportunity for follow-up questions and confirmations. Other than face-to-face follow-ups, telephone conversations seemed to be effective with the Halifax participants. Several of them also communicated with me by email. In contrast, emailing was not popular with the Jinan participants. This seemed to be a generational characteristic regarding lack of familiarity with the Internet usage among the Jinan participants' cohorts in China. On the other hand, telephone

communication was very popular with the Jinan participants' cohorts. In fact, every member of a given Tai Chi class or group carried a made-in-China mobile phone in 2012. This was typical of individuals of the Jinan participants' generation at that time.

During both of my fieldwork periods, I kept daily logs and fieldwork journals. I also used sticky notes as reminders to myself. Those sticky notes were all over the walls in the Jinan dormitory room and my Halifax study space. The sticky notes served as temporary reminders of logistics and of what transpired and what insights I gained at each stage of fieldwork, or at times even each day. My daily logs were both written by hand on notebooks and typed and saved electronically. Both verbal and non-verbal data during the interviews and observation sessions were recorded in field notes. What I had learned through observation and participation made another important contribution to data collection.

4.4 DATA PROCESSING

Data processing for analysis began during data collection. I would review possible themes through direct quotes as well as the implications of what the participants had said. Meeting with Professor Gao periodically to discuss my research progress while I was in Jinan helped to confirm my understanding of the generational characteristics of the Jinan participants. The frequent communication with my co-supervisors (while I was in Jinan and after I returned to Halifax) helped to develop insights for data analysis.

I translated several Jinan interview transcripts into English during the Jinan fieldwork. I transcribed all 19 Jinan interviews from both Mandarin and the Jinan dialect into text (simplified Chinese characters), and then translated the transcripts into English for the convenience of my supervisory committee as well as to maintain unity of language. For the Halifax data, there was no translation involved because all participants spoke English. I completed several full transcripts and some summary transcripts of interviews. I listened to all interview audio records numerous times and selected direct quotes that were meaningful answers to specific research questions. The data were analyzed manually to assist immersing myself in the data. Further analysis utilizing open coding and axial coding yielded a total of 16 recurring themes.

The Jinan and Halifax data were processed separately. After the completion of the preliminary data analysis, I made comparisons focusing on the cultural similarities and differences between the two sites' participants. (See Chapter 6 for the similarities and differences of the two cultural groups.) Detailed data analysis is presented in Chapter 7.

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN CHANGES IN THE FIELD

My research ethics application had been approved by Dalhousie Ethics Review Committee prior to data collection, with subsequent changes requiring further approval. One such issue, which appeared at the beginning of my Jinan fieldwork, was the age range. The vast majority of current Tai Chi practitioners in Jinan are few years younger than the 60 years old age limit of my original proposal.¹¹⁹ This is because female Tai Chi practitioners greatly outnumber male practitioners in Jinan. Due to government policies, the mandatory retirement age for most women is 55 (with a few exceptions, e.g., a female full professor's retirement age extends to 60, while a female factory worker has to retire at the age of 50). Consequently, it is extremely common for many devoted female Tai Chi practitioners to be in their late 50s (see detailed discussions in Chapters 5 and 7). So it was necessary to lower the age range to 55 years old or older. I immediately applied to the Dalhousie Ethics Board for a modification of my research population's age range from "60 years old and above" to "55 years old and above," which was granted. The new age range was used for recruiting participants in Jinan and subsequently in Halifax. In the end, Jinan participants ranged in age from 55 to 88 years old, whereas Halifax participants were between 57 and 84.

Signing the informed consent form was not culturally appropriate for the Jinan participants (as was mentioned in 4.3.3.2). However, oral consent was obtained without any difficulty in Jinan. Most people over 55 in China have lived through major political upheavals. Many from all walks of life experienced harsh times and extreme difficulties, the memories of which could be triggered by the request to sign a document. To minimize the discomfort level of the Jinan participants, I asked them to provide oral consent on a Consent Script containing the same information as the written consent form.

¹¹⁹It was not uncommon for Jinan Tai Chi practitioners to retire from work in their fifties. See details regarding retirement ages in Jinan in Section 5.2.6 Employment (p.116).

Requesting the interviews to be audio-recorded posed a problem in Jinan. Audio-recording was a cultural taboo among Jinan participants. Audio-recording would appear to have the same implications for them as signing the consent form. It was acceptable for all Jinan participants for me to take notes by hand in most cases.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study used an ethnographic approach to collect data. This chapter has provided the details of fieldwork preparation, the data collection process, and of data processing.

In order to have a better understanding of the perceptions of the research participants, Chapter 5 provides a background description for all 38 participants.

CHAPTER 5 BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AT THE TWO RESEARCH SITES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the detailed background information on the 38 research participants from the two cultural sites. It consists of four sections – a general description of the Jinan participants as a cultural group, a general description of the Halifax participants as a cultural group, individual descriptions of each of the 19 Jinan participants, and individual descriptions of each of the 19 Halifax participants. In order to follow the same sequence as my field research (Jinan before Halifax), descriptions of the Jinan participants are presented first.

The descriptions serve as the foundation for analysis and discussion. The similarities and differences between the research participants in the two cultural groups are discussed in Chapter 6 and further analyzed in Chapter 7.

5.2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ALL JINAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This field research took place in Jinan, the People's Republic of China, from March to July in 2012. The locations of all 15 Tai Chi groups (five formal, ten informal) were randomly selected in the general vicinity of the university that hosted my research grant. The 19 research participants were recruited from a pool of over 200 Tai Chi practitioners.

5.2.1 Jinan Participants' Age range

This research focuses on older people, so the research design set the participants' minimum age at 55 with no restriction for the maximum age. The Jinan research participants were born between 1924 and 1957 and ranged from 55 to 88 years old. The average age was thus 66 years. Table 7 shows the number of male and female participants in three different age groups: 55 to 60, 61 to 70, and 71 to 88. Gender representation was considered in the recruiting process with the goal of having approximately equal numbers of women and men.¹²⁰ The final sample had 8 men and 11 women.

¹²⁰For a discussion of selection of participants, see page 79, Chapter 4 – Methodology.

Table 7: Jinan Participants' Age range

Age range (years)	55-60		61-70		71-88	
Participants: In order of the youngest to the oldest	8 (1M, 7F)		5 (3M, 2F)		6 (4M, 2F)	
	Mr. Peng (59)	Ms. Wang (55) Ms. Feng (59) Ms. Geng (59) Ms. Han (59) Ms. Li (59) Ms. Ning (59) Ms. Jia (60)	Mr. An (61) Mr. Meng (62) Mr. Cai (66)	Ms. Bai (61) Ms. Tang (62)	Mr. Kang (74) Mr. Ou (74) Mr. Deng (75) Mr. Liu (81)	Ms. Qi (72) Ms. Shen (88)

Taken as a whole, the lives of these participants cover the period from 1924 to 2012, a period that saw major political and social upheavals and transformations in the People's Republic of China. Although participants focused on Tai Chi-related experiences during the interviews and conversations, they all experienced turbulent times in the history of their country. The two participants in their eighties were born before the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). In 1937, Mr. Liu was six years old and Ms. Shen was 13 years old, so both would have memories of wartime. Seven participants were born before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. All of the participants lived through the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), whether as children (e.g. Mr. Cai was three years old in 1949), as adolescents (e.g. Mr. Kang was 11 years old), or as young adults (the oldest participant, Ms. Shen, was 25 years old). All 19 Jinan participants would have lived through the extreme hardships of the Great Leap Forward famine (1959-1961). Regardless of whether their families lived in the city or in the countryside, they all suffered personally during those three years of extreme food shortages. Their lives were also impacted in various ways by the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), most notably with regard to their education. Those who were teenagers during that decade would have been attending public school. After completing high school, several of them were sent to the countryside as a result of the government policy to have young urban "intellectuals" "re-educated" by peasants. Mr. Meng, for instance, went to a village after high school, then was hired by a factory in Jinan, and then was sent to a college. Ms. Jia was also sent to a village and later hired by a factory in Jinan where she worked until retirement. In 1978, the major socio-economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping also affected the lives of these participants, especially with regard to housing.

5.2.2 Family

All of the Jinan participants were currently or previously married and all had children. At the time of the field research in 2012, one was divorced and three were widowed. One participant had four children, one participant had three children, six participants had two children and 11 participants had one child. Most of the participants with only one child were younger than 70 years old, in other words born after 1942. The average number of children of all 19 Jinan participants was less than two (1.6).

The family planning policy, known as the One-Child policy, was introduced in 1979. In general, families who did not fall into exempted categories (such as the 55 ethnic minorities) were restricted to one child. However, there were different regional policies in place across the country. The Jinan participants who were born in the 1950s and who only had one child may have been affected by this policy. However, having only one child may also have been the result of personal choice influenced by economic or other factors. For example, Mr. Liu, born in 1931, only had one child. The children of some of the participants would also have been affected by the One-Child policy and, in some cases, by recent changes in the policy (also see note on page 72).¹²¹

Eleven of the participants had at least one grandchild. Seven participants had no grandchildren. One participant, who apparently had at least two children, chose not to talk about her family. The participant with the greatest number of grandchildren had three. Most participants had one grandchild. Among the seven participants with no grandchildren, six had only one child and the other had two children. All of these children were unmarried. It is a long-standing social expectation in China for grandparents to take care of their newborn grandchildren, irrespective of the circumstances of the baby's parents. Traditionally, all grandparents in China look after their grandchildren when they are born. It is not surprising that the participants with a

¹²¹In November 2013 (after the conclusion of my fieldwork), following the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, the central government announced its decision to relax the one-child policy. Under the new policy, families are permitted to have two children provided that at least one parent is an only child. Various regional modifications were subsequently introduced. For example, the Beijing municipal government passed a policy on February 21, 2014, stating that the mothers of families who qualified for a second child must be older than 28 and their first child must be older than four. On October 29, 2015, the People's Congress announced the two-children modification, as a part of China's 11th Five-Year strategic plan, to reduce the impact of aging in China. Since January 1, 2016, all couples can have two children.

grandchild or grandchildren spoke of their commitments as grandparents. Raising a child is very expensive in China today, and the grandparents' help enables parents to save on childcare costs. Maternity leave with reduced pay is usually only about 90 days, 15 of which must be taken prior to the birth of the baby. Given the highly competitive workplace, most new mothers cannot take more than the allotted time, otherwise they might not be able to return to the same job position. Paternity leave is only three days, taken when the baby is born.

5.2.3 Housing

Eleven participants live with their spouse only. Three participants live alone. Three participants live with their spouse and their grown child or children. Ms. Bai (61 years old) is divorced and lives with her daughter and son who are working and unmarried. Ms. Shen, the 88-year-old widow, has four children and lives with her oldest daughter and the daughter's husband because her children did not want her to live alone.

Nowadays in China there are a variety of housing possibilities, but all the Jinan participants live in homes that they own, except for one who is renting. The 18 Jinan participants who live in their own homes are in one of two different types of housing. Ten participants live in an apartment they paid for and which was originally provided by the workplace where they are currently employed or where they retired from. The other seven participants live in a condominium unit that they bought because their workplace did not provide employee housing. Another participant lives in an apartment that he inherited from his parents. The only participant who was renting was waiting to buy a unit from a condominium building under construction. For the generation of the Jinan participants, "employee housing" constitutes the most important part of employee benefits. When they received their monthly salary (urban employees are paid monthly), a small amount was deducted for the "rent" of their apartment. Some smaller factories or other workplaces did not provide employee housing, which was considered to be a definite disadvantage since, until fairly recently, buildings with rental units did not exist. People without employee housing had to find their own place to live. After the socio-economic reforms introduced in the late 1970s at the national level, the housing situation became much more complex. Some workplaces sold their apartments to their current

employees and their retirees. In these cases, the individual paid his or her employer a modest sum, based on years of employment, in order to buy the apartment where he or she had been living for many years. This was a much cheaper arrangement than purchasing a condominium unit from a developer or a real estate agency. In more recent years, some retirees have been able to move into larger and newer units in condominium buildings, thanks to the financial help of their grown children and their lifetime savings.¹²²

5.2.4 Language

The Jinan dialect and Mandarin differ slightly in vocabulary, intonation, and tonic stress. Mandarin, the official language promoted since 1949, is actually based on a number of dialects from northern China (e.g. north of the Yangzi River) that are mutually comprehensible. Jinan is north of the Yangzi River and about 500 kilometers south of Beijing. Compared to the dialects spoken in the southern provinces, the Jinan dialect is relatively close to Mandarin. A Jinan dialect speaker can communicate with a Mandarin speaker from any part of China without difficulty, whereas the same Jinan native would have to speak in Mandarin with a Cantonese-speaking individual. One example of the speech pattern difference between the Jinan dialect and Mandarin is the phrase for “chatting.” It is “la gua” (拉呱) in the Jinan dialect and “liao tian” (聊天) in Mandarin. The spread of Mandarin has greatly diluted the differences among the many regional or local dialects, especially for educated people and the younger generations. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Mandarin has been the mandatory language of instruction throughout China for all students at every level. Depending on the region and family circumstances, some children may speak their local dialect at home, especially with their grandparents. Others speak pure Mandarin, possibly with a slight local accent.

Interviews and informal conversations during my regular observations with the participants were carried out primarily in the Jinan dialect. Ten participants were born in Jinan and speak in the Jinan dialect. Seven participants were born elsewhere in the

¹²² The majority of the research participants avoided China’s current major real estate boom because they already had housing prior to its start.

province and speak in the Jinan dialect with a slight accent. Two participants were born in other provinces. One of them speaks in the Jinan dialect and the other speaks Mandarin.

5.2.5 Education

The level of formal education of the Jinan participants varies considerably (see Table 8). One participant completed Grade Three, another completed junior high (middle school), and eight completed high school. One participant received a secondary school certificate (higher than high school, but lower than university). One participant received a “college equivalency” through self-study. Five participants were so-called “Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Students,” the standard term that refers to people who received a college degree during the Cultural Revolution. Three participants who were born before 1942 graduated from university before the Cultural Revolution.

The major difference between a university student who graduated before or after the Cultural Revolution and a “Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Student” is that the latter went to college on the recommendation of the authorities or an employer without having to write an entrance examination. In addition, the post-secondary curriculum during the Cultural Revolution was heavily politicized in every discipline. In the individual background descriptions, the term “college degree” is used for the five participants who received their post-secondary education as “Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Students.”

Table 8: Jinan participants’ education level

Category	High school or lower		Other		College	University
Participants	9		1 secondary school:	1 college equivalent:	5 Worker, Peasant, & Soldier Students:	3
	Junior high or lower: Mr. An, Ms. Han	High school: Ms. Bai, Mr. Deng, Ms. Jia, Ms. Li, Mr. Peng, Ms. Tang, Ms. Wang	Mr. Kang	Mr. Ou	Mr. Cai, Ms. Feng, Ms. Geng, Mr. Meng, Ms. Ming	Mr. Liu, Ms. Qi, Ms. Shen

The public school system in China consists of elementary school, junior high school, high school, technical school, college and university (see Appendix E). This system has been in effect since 1949 and still existed as of 2018. The Chinese government enforces nine years of free mandatory education (six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school). Technical schools vary in the length and breadth of their programs. Some are designed for junior high graduates, whereas others only accept high school graduates. The duration of the program is either one or two years. Technical schools and universities constitute two separate paths in China. Graduates from technical schools become trained blue-collar workers, whereas university graduates can obtain teaching positions, government jobs or administrative positions in private or public companies.

The curriculum of universities requires four years to complete a bachelor's degree while some colleges only require three. It normally takes two years to get a Masters' degree and four or more years to obtain a doctorate. Chinese colleges and universities are part of a very hierarchical system and are administered by municipal, provincial or national authorities. They are ranked according to various criteria. Until 2012, the nationwide university entrance examination was held for three days (June 7 to June 9). Since 2013 the examination period has been reduced to two days (June 7 and June 8) with fewer subjects that the students had to write. The student's score determines the university that he or she is permitted to attend. The ranking of a university can directly affect the future prospects of its graduates. The top six universities in China are located in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Nanjing.

Some of the research participants take their Tai Chi courses at one or other of the two Jinan continuing education institutes for retirees (*Organization A* and *Organization B*). In both cases, the names of the institutes include the phrase *Da Xue* (大学), which means "university." The administrative procedures of the institutes for retirees are similar to those of a post-secondary institution for younger people. The elders attending these educational institutes pay a nominal fee for the courses of their choice. They go to regular classes and receive instruction from an instructor in a classroom setting. There are fall, winter, and spring semesters. The two elders' institutes offer a variety of courses including Tai Chi, singing, musical instruments, dancing, calligraphy, and photography.

Several of the Jinan research participants take Tai Chi and other courses such as singing (Ms. Ning), a musical instrument (Mr. Liu), and calligraphy (Ms. Jia). Although the elders' institutes neither grant degrees nor require entrance examinations, the phrase *Da Xue* in their names adds a prestige that seems to have attracted many urban retirees. Several research participants, especially individuals like Ms. Bai and Mr. Cai who have less formal schooling, felt that taking a Tai Chi course at the institute was like "going to a university" to get more education.

5.2.6 Employment

Only three of the Jinan participants had not retired (in 2012). They were all 59 years old and were due to retire when they reached their mandatory retirement age of 60. At the time of the field research, one of the retired participants had a part-time job that she had obtained after retiring. Two other participants sometimes volunteered for their Tai Chi group events. As was common for people of their generation, the majority of the participants were assigned a job that they kept until they reached the mandatory retirement age for their professional category. Prior to their retirement most participants had worked for 30 some years and mostly at one job.

In a country where the collective way of living is highly valued and emphasized, volunteering is not a new phenomenon. All of the research participants were very familiar with the idea of helping out. Several of the participants help the members of their Tai Chi group and volunteer their time and energy for the events organized for their group. However, signing up officially and having the title of volunteer is a recent phenomenon. For instance, Ms. Li is one of the two official volunteers who represent her Tai Chi class. (The admission's office of the Institute requires two official volunteers from each class.)

The career categories of the Jinan participants (see Table 9) include six factory workers; one retail salesperson whose previous job was a factory worker, five government office workers three of whom were administrators and the other holders of technical positions; four healthcare workers; and three educators who taught either in the public school system or at the university level.

Table 9: Jinan participants' career distribution

Career Category	Factory Worker	Sales-person	Government office		Health care		Educator	
			Adminis-trator	Technical worker	Profe-ssional	Worker	School Teacher	University Professor
Participants	6 (3M, 3F)	1 (F)	3 (M)	2 (1M, 1F)	2 (1M, 1F)	2 (2F)	2 (F)	1 (F)

As noted earlier, the common pattern of employment for the Jinan participants was to work at a single job that had been assigned to them. The main entry points to employment were: after graduation from an educational institution, being hired directly by a factory, or completing military service with officer rank.

Chinese universities are public and are under the jurisdiction of the federal, provincial or municipal governments. Before the socio-economic reforms of the 1970s, whichever level of government was responsible for the administration of the institution determined the jobs of the graduates. For example, the host university for my research grant was governed federally, therefore its graduates were assigned jobs within the federal quota. However, since the socio-economic reforms, current graduates are responsible for finding their own employment.

Military retirees without an officer rank could return to their home village or to the factory where they had worked before enlisting. Retired officers would be assigned a job appropriate to their rank in a city, regardless of where they originally joined the military. During the Cultural Revolution, most urban high school graduates were sent to a village, where they worked a number of years before returning to the city to work in a factory. Some of them were later recommended to go to a college as a “Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Student.”

Several participants had a short-term job before they started their long-term job. For example, the four participants who went to college during the Cultural Revolution worked for a short time in a village and then in a factory, prior to being recommended to attend a college. After completing their college degree, they were assigned a new job in the city where they stayed until retiring. Several individuals had periods of absence from their long-term jobs. For example, two participants worked at a factory, enlisted in the military, completed their service, and then returned to the factory. Two other participants joined the military from a village or from a university before they started a career. When

they completed their military services, they were assigned jobs by the government based on their military work experience, and then worked until retirement. There were three participants who had more than one job throughout their working life. One worked at temporary jobs during the Cultural Revolution before getting a long-term position, one changed to a second job but did not disclose why, and another participant changed to a less physically demanding job when he was close to the mandatory retirement age.

The retirement rules in China are complex. The retirement age is based on the individual's career category and, in some cases, gender. The current rules have been in effect since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Despite discussions during the People's Congress in March 2015 regarding possible modifications to the retirement policies, there have been no changes. The policies that apply to the Jinan participants include the following mandatory retirement ages: 55 for male factory workers and 50 for female factory workers; 60 for male government office workers and 55 for female government office workers; for healthcare workers the retirement ages depend on their professional classification and rank. Most male and female medical doctors retire at the age 60, while all nurses retire at the age of 50. School teachers and university professors of both genders retire at age 60.

5.2.7 Tai Chi experience

The majority of the Jinan participants (13 of 19) had practiced Tai Chi for less than ten years (see Table 10). Two participants had only been practicing Tai Chi for one year. The two participants with the longest Tai Chi experience had been practicing for 42 and 56 years respectively.

The same type of Tai Chi music is used in all formal Tai Chi courses and informal Tai Chi groups among the Jinan research population. It is also used in all other Tai Chi groups in Jinan and the rest of mainland China and some overseas Tai Chi groups. It is common for Tai Chi practitioners, including the participants of this research, to play the music even when they practice on their own.

Table 10: Jinan participants' lengths of Tai Chi experience

Years	10 years and less			11-20	21-30	42	56
	1-3	4-5	6-10				
Participants	7 (2M, 5F) Mr. Cai Ms. Feng Ms. Geng Ms. Han Ms. Jia Ms. Li Mr. Meng	4 (1M, 3F) Mr. An Ms. Bai Ms. Ning Ms. Qi	2 (M) Mr. Liu Mr. Ou	2 (1M, 1F) Mr. Deng Ms. Tang	2 (1M, 1F) Mr. Peng Ms. Wang	1 (F) Ms. Shen	1 (M) Mr. Kang

The Jinan research participants belong to a total of five formal Tai Chi courses and ten informal practice groups. Three participants only attend formal Tai Chi courses and six participants only practice with informal groups. The other ten attend both.

I have included a description of the participants' clothing simply to present a snapshot of their appearance. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that all the participants experienced the period in China when everyone had to wear the same outfit (often referred to as the "Mao tunic suit"). There was no correlation between the participants' choice of clothing and their socio-economic status. Since there is no mandatory dress code for either the formal or informal groups, the participants are free to wear Tai Chi uniforms or their everyday clothes. For several participants who, like Ms. Li, have a low income, it would be expensive to buy a Tai Chi uniform (which usually costs over 100 Yuan or more than \$20 Canadian dollars). Some participants, like Mr. Ou, whose income is higher, preferred to wear the clothing that he used to wear going to work in his office. In contrast, some participants with lower income did choose to wear Tai Chi uniforms (e.g. Ms. Bai). Other participants viewed the Tai Chi uniform as a way of showing their dedication and commitment (e.g. Ms. Wang) or to feel more professional (e.g. Ms. Tang). However, when a Tai Chi group performs for the end-of-term celebration or participates in a Tai Chi tournament, all group members wear the same color Tai Chi uniform. The most popular color for both genders is white. The Chinese Tai Chi uniform consists of full-length pants and a long-sleeve shirt with seven Chinese traditional buttons. As depicted in Hollywood martial art films, the uniforms are loose-fitting and are made of a soft material. Tai Chi shoes seem to be much more popular and affordable than Tai Chi

uniforms. The cheapest pair costs about 10 Yuan (\$2 Canadian dollars). Tai Chi shoes are usually white, flat soled, with the Daoist symbol on the outside edge of each shoe.

At the beginning of their Tai Chi experience, seven Jinan participants joined to improve their health, three in order to further their education, four saw Tai Chi as a way to spend time after retirement, and five joined for a combination of health and other reasons. At the time of the field research, 13 participants reported that their health had improved through Tai Chi practice. Two participants' health problems remained the same after Tai Chi. Four participants had no health problems from the beginning.

The majority of Jinan participants started Tai Chi with the popular Simplified 24 set. Two long-term participants, Mr. Peng and Ms. Wang both started with a form of martial arts called "Long Fist" when they were six and eleven years old, respectively. Although they continued practicing Long Fist, they only began practicing Tai Chi when they were in their thirties, partly as a result of injuries and partly because of their age.

Although my research focused on the elders, it is important to note that many children today start learning martial arts at a young age. Tai Chi in China is traditionally considered a type of martial art, and it is common for young trainees' programs to include Tai Chi along with other martial arts. The basic moves of all bare-hand martial arts, such as the kick and squat, are somewhat similar. Most martial artists are usually familiar with at least some Tai Chi moves and poses. The growing number of national and international Tai Chi competitions held in China and elsewhere has encouraged more young martial artists to practice Tai Chi. However, there seem to be differences with regard to the location and organization of younger and older Tai Chi practitioners. Young martial artists tend to practice Tai Chi with their peers as part of their professional training at an indoor facility, whereas older Tai Chi practitioners join groups in outdoor public spaces.

There were three Tai Chi instructors among the 19 Jinan participants. Two of them were also Tai Chi group leaders. There were four other participants who were Tai Chi group leaders but not instructors. An instructor teaches techniques and new sets in a classroom setting (usually indoors), whereas a group leader helps an informal group to review a set learned in class or to practice difficult moves. Participants pay a fee for all their Tai Chi classes but most informal groups are free of charge. The leader of *Group F* (who is not a participant in this research) charges a fee that is lower than the formal Tai

Chi courses at the two elders' institutes. The leader of *Group H*, Ms. Wang did charge for her teaching when she taught her own Tai Chi classes in a city park near her home and sometimes she would get contracts to teach for an organization. However, she did not charge the members in *Group H* because it was her practice group. Although anyone can join *Group H*, the members were mostly her former students. Two of the instructors (Mr. Kang and Mr. Peng) taught Tai Chi courses at the two elders' institutes. When they were not teaching a formal class, Mr. Peng and Ms. Wang were also group leaders for their students (who practiced in city parks). Mr. Kang would also visit groups at different parks where his Tai Chi students practiced, but he did not lead any group. In addition to the three instructors, the three group leaders (Ms. Bai, Mr. Cai, and Ms. Ning) led their own groups at different parks. Mr. Cai's group consisted entirely of members of his Tai Chi class. Ms. Bai and Ms. Ning's groups included their Tai Chi classmates and others.

5.2.8 Limitations

In order to protect the identities of Jinan participants, certain sensitive details are not included in the individual background descriptions of Jinan participants. For example, if a participant had a specific medical condition (e.g. Mr. Kang) that could reveal the identity of the individual, the name of the condition was not included in the background description. Sometimes there is missing information as a result of a participant's preference to not mention a certain aspect of his or her life. For example, Ms. Tang preferred not to talk about her children. Some participants preferred not to talk about a certain period of their lives. For example, Mr. Kang did not wish to talk about his job situation during the Cultural Revolution. In all cases, the wishes of the participants were respected.

5.3 INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS OF ALL 19 JINAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The individual background descriptions of all 19 Jinan research participants are presented in the sequence of the length of their Tai Chi practice, from the shortest (Ms. Li practiced for one-year) to the longest (Mr. Kang practiced for 56 years).

1) Ms. Li

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Li was 59 years old.¹²³ She was taking a Tai Chi course (level two, section two) at *Organization A*, a continuing education institute for elders. She was also a member of *Group E*, an informal Tai Chi group, where she practiced with several of her Tai Chi classmates from *Organization A*. She had been practicing Tai Chi for one year.

General impression

Ms. Li is of medium height and average weight for a Northern Chinese woman of her generation. She often smiles. She talks to all the members of her Tai Chi class and her informal group during the break time. She stands in the middle of the group during class. She never wears a Tai Chi uniform or Tai Chi shoes, which she probably cannot afford. She wears a short-sleeved shirt buttoned up to her neck, full-length pants and plain flat shoes. Ms. Li is a pleasant person who always participates in her Tai Chi group activities such as the class lunch organized to welcome back a Tai Chi instructor from sick leave. She is one of the two official volunteers¹²⁴, who volunteer on behalf of her Tai Chi class in the beginning of the semester to give the new students directions on campus. Based on the way she talks and her behavior, she has not had much education. She speaks in the Jinan dialect.

Family

Ms. Li and her husband live in an apartment of their own since their respective workplaces did not have employee housing. They are both retired. One of their two children is single, has a full-time job and lives with them. The other one is married and lives elsewhere in the province. Ms. Li was born in a nearby county and has lived all her adult life in Jinan. Her siblings are retired and living with their own families in Jinan. During the past ten years, Ms. Li and her siblings took turns caring for their elder and ill parents until they died.

¹²³ The present tense in all of the following descriptions of the Jinan participants refers to the time of interview.

¹²⁴The administration office of *Organization A* requires two official volunteers per course.

Health

Before Ms. Li started Tai Chi, she says her blood pressure was slightly high although she never took medication for it. She took up Tai Chi in the hopes of “reducing [her] blood pressure.” She says that thanks to her Tai Chi practice, her blood pressure became normal, her dizziness went away, she became stronger and felt more cheerful after chatting with Tai Chi friends in [her] groups.”

When she had a factory job, Ms. Li felt that her 50-minute bike rides twice a day to and from work was enough exercise for the day. Later, when she changed to a retail job, her work location was closer to home. Six mornings a week on her way to work (she had Sunday off), she rode her bike to a nearby mountain and then took 30 minutes to walk up and down the stone steps leading to the top of the mountain.

Education and employment

After completing high school, Ms. Li was assigned a job in a factory where she worked for a number of years. Then she worked in a retail business. She says neither job was very physically challenging. She retired at the age of 50, the mandatory retirement age for her professional category.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Li started her beginners’ Tai Chi course at *Organization A* after her parents passed away. At the time of the interview, she had taken three semesters of Tai Chi during which she had learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set, the 42 Competition Tai Chi set, and the 32 Tai Chi Sword.

Ms. Li believes that “It is better to learn Tai Chi in a class than by oneself because of the professionally trained Tai Chi teacher.” She chose to take her Tai Chi courses at *Organization A* because of its convenient location. As she explains, “It is only a 40-minute bus ride without changing buses from my home to the Tai Chi class.” She attends her Tai Chi class once a week. Each class is 100 minutes long with a 15-minute break. She also practices with her informal Tai Chi group in a park once a week for an hour. The members of her informal Tai Chi group are also her Tai Chi classmates at the Institute. During their group practice, they review and repeat what they have learned in class.

“Practicing Tai Chi has become a habit for me,” Ms. Li says, “Sometimes I practice Tai Chi at home on my own, but not every day. Whenever I do, I practice for 30 minutes. Sometimes I watch the Tai Chi demonstration on the computer while practicing at home.”

Ms. Li says, “Before Tai Chi, I was a quick-tempered person. After the first half year of my Tai Chi practice, my daughter said that my temper had become softer!” She says, “My Tai Chi classmates are very close to each other. Sometimes if a classmate misses a class, we are concerned about her. When she comes to class again, we ask how she has been.¹²⁵” However, “The interaction with Tai Chi group members is very important. But it is secondary. Doing Tai Chi for my health is the most important [thing] for me.”

In addition to her Tai Chi course, Ms. Li is also taking a singing course at *Organization A*. She likes both courses because “singing exercises my lungs and makes me happy and Tai Chi is fitness exercise for the whole body.” At the time of the interview, she thought she might take a computer course at the same institute next year. When asked her opinion about why there are more women Tai Chi practitioners than men, Ms. Li feels there are “more women practicing Tai Chi because women retire ten years earlier than men. Women retire at 50 and men retire at 60. And men often get another job after retirement if their health is okay.” As indicated in the General Description of Jinan Participants, retirement ages vary depending on the category of work. Ms. Li does not appear to be aware of those differences.

2) Mr. Meng

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. Meng was 62 years old. He was taking a formal Tai Chi course (level two, section two) at *Organization A*. He was also participating in an informal Tai Chi group.¹²⁶ Like Ms. Li, he had been practicing Tai Chi for one year.

¹²⁵In Chinese culture, it is considered a sign of genuine affection when asking someone why she/he missed an activity. It is not considered rude or an invasion of privacy.

¹²⁶ Mr. Meng’s informal group met at a location that was a considerable distance from the area of the research sampling, so it was not observed.

General impression

Mr. Meng is the tallest member in his Tai Chi class. He is slightly overweight for a northern Chinese man of his generation. He is cheerful and enthusiastic. He is friendly with all of his Tai Chi classmates and often tells jokes during the break. He never misses a class and usually arrives early. He asks the instructor questions whenever appropriate during class and usually practices the newly learned Tai Chi moves during the break. Given his height, he always stands in the back row. He comes to class wearing ordinary clothes and shoes, never a Tai Chi uniform. He drives his own car from his apartment to his Tai Chi class and his informal Tai Chi group. In fact, he is one of the very few individuals who drive¹²⁷ to *Organization A*. Unlike the majority of his cohort, Mr. Meng drove his own car to work prior to retiring. The way he talks and his manners indicate that he is an educated individual. He speaks mainly in the Jinan dialect with traces of Mandarin and the dialect from his hometown elsewhere in the same province.

Family

Mr. Meng and his wife live in an apartment building belonging to the government department where he used to work. He and his wife are both retired. Their only child has a full-time job and lives with them. Neither his wife nor their child is interested in Tai Chi although they support Mr. Meng's Tai Chi practice.

Health

Mr. Meng says that he has had some health problems and has been taking medication. As he explains, "I was too busy at work before retiring. I had all kinds of problems from overworking. I'm retired now. I don't have any work-related stress or responsibilities anymore."

Mr. Meng says, he "has reduced the medication as a result of [his] Tai Chi practice" and also says, "When I first started the beginners' course, my legs were so stiff that I couldn't squat. Now I can lift my legs very high!"

¹²⁷ On *Organization A*'s campus, there is an area which can store about 100 bicycles and a small space next to it to hold only a handful of personal cars.

Education and employment

After graduating from high school during the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Meng was sent to a village. After working there for two years, he came back to Jinan to work in a factory for another two years before attending a college on his employer's recommendation. Consequently, Mr. Meng completed his college degree as a "Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Student." He was then assigned an administrative job in a department of the provincial government where he worked for 30 years. He retired at his mandatory retirement age of 60.

Tai Chi experience

When Mr. Meng was a college student more than 30 years ago, the college offered a Tai Chi extracurricular course late in the afternoon. He took the Tai Chi course then but "only attended very few classes and didn't learn much."

Mr. Meng went to *Organization A* to register for a beginners' Tai Chi course in January 2011, less than a week after he had officially retired at the end of December 2010. Once a week, Mr. Meng attends the same Tai Chi class as Ms. Li. Mr. Meng also practices Tai Chi with an informal group at a city square far away from his home. Since he drives his own car, "the location is not a problem." The members of the informal group are all his personal friends whom he has known for many years. None of them goes to the Tai Chi class he attends. In addition, Mr. Meng practices Tai Chi at home on his own for at least a half of an hour every morning. He says, "I practice Tai Chi every morning in the yard of the employee housing. I don't care what other people think about it."

Mr. Meng says, "Tai Chi represents Chinese culture. I didn't have time to learn it systematically before. Tai Chi brings me happiness and health. I have had that feeling from the very beginning." He is happy to share that "Tai Chi improved my mood, regulated my internal energy, and improved my overall wellbeing. As a result, the dosage of my medication has been reduced." Mr. Meng concludes by saying, "My hopes from practicing Tai Chi can't be measured in numbers. I'm glad that my initial goal for Tai Chi has been accomplished. I intend to spend the next three years taking all the Tai Chi

courses offered by my Tai Chi class instructor. And I am determined to continue practicing Tai Chi for the rest of my life!”

Mr. Meng says that his “classmates came to learn Tai Chi searching for happiness and health. There is no concern about competing or gaining profit among us. We are learning and practicing Tai Chi together in a relaxed environment. In Chinese culture, doing things collectively is always considered better. Practicing Tai Chi together gives us a chance to share our learning experience. It’s even more important for group members to share our feelings. An individual alone is lonely, unhappy, and has nowhere to express feelings. The communication and interaction among our Tai Chi classmates are different from that of family members, friends and former colleagues. The language and the manners are all different.”

Regarding the social reality that more women practice Tai Chi than men, Mr. Meng comments, “When I started, I was surprised to see more women than men practicing Tai Chi. Maybe men just have too much pride?”

Mr. Meng also shares his opinion that “Tai Chi is getting more popular nowadays. Most Tai Chi practitioners are older people. Tai Chi is for health. It’s better to start Tai Chi at a younger age.”

In addition to Tai Chi, Mr. Meng is also taking an English language course at *Organization A*. He says that he took an English course when he was a college student but that was too long ago and he has forgotten everything. About ten years after college, he took an English language night course. But he quit after attending only two classes because “there was a heavy workload at my office and not enough staff.” At that time, he “usually finished a day’s work at 10pm.” Mr. Meng also likes calligraphy and photography, but says, “Taking Tai Chi for health is the most important [of these activities] for me.” Mr. Meng says that he likes physical activities including running, walking, swimming and walking up the mountains. Prior to retiring, the most exercise he did was swimming twice a week and walking up and down the steps of the Hero Hill once a week.

3) Mr. Cai

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. Cai was 66 years old. He was taking a Tai Chi course (level two, section two) at *Organization A*. He was also the leader of *Group E* in a city park. He had been practicing Tai Chi for two years.

General impression

Mr. Cai is slightly above average height and a little overweight for a northern Chinese man. Mr. Cai's good posture is likely due to his military training when he was young. He is always eager and ready to help members of his Tai Chi class and his Tai Chi group. For example, he brought a Tai Chi book to check the breakdown of the Tai Chi poses during class break. Several classmates liked the book but it was inconvenient for them to travel to the bookstore, so he went there by bike after class to pick up copies for them. He also went to a market and bought some Tai Chi swords for some of his classmates who were not able to get to the market. At *Organization A*, it is a common practice for the class leaders to bring the background music CD to every Tai Chi class. As a class member, Mr. Cai always brings his CD for class. On his own initiative, he organizes events for his fellow Tai Chi classmates, such as a class lunch. In the eyes of his classmates, he is more likable than the class leader, who was appointed by the school administration. Mr. Cai travels by bicycle to both his Tai Chi class and his Tai Chi group. Like the two other male Tai Chi classmates, he wears his black Tai Chi pants, an ordinary T-shirt and Tai Chi shoes to class. He wears his every-day clothes and Tai Chi shoes to all his informal group practices in the park. His temperament and choice of vocabulary indicate his post-secondary educational background. Although he was born in a county near Jinan, he has worked and lived most of his life in Jinan. He speaks in the Jinan dialect with a slight accent from his hometown.

Family

Mr. Cai and his wife are both officially retired from their respective full-time jobs. They live in their own apartment, which was left to Mr. Cai by his late parents. His parents moved to Jinan for work when Mr. Cai was a toddler. Mr. Cai and his wife have one child, who has a full-time job and lives with them. Their home is only a 10-minute

bike ride from *Organization A* where Mr. Cai has been taking Tai Chi courses. Their apartment is located in one of the most convenient city districts where there are all sorts of facilities within walking distance, including supermarkets, schools and hospitals. In fact, there is a farmers' market located on the corner of the same block. Mr. Cai buys fresh vegetables for his family when he bikes by the market on his way home after his Tai Chi class or group practice. Although there was employee housing at the factory he retired from, it was located outside of the city and the apartments were small.

Mr. Cai says his wife does contract work since "her health will allow her to work for few more years after her mandatory retirement." It is relatively common for young healthy retirees to find a short-term job while receiving their pension.

Health

Mr. Cai says he had a bad back. Prior to Tai Chi, he had difficulty walking. His back would start bothering him after walking for about ten minutes. He thinks he probably injured his back during his military service. He believes at that time he was young and the consequences of the injury only showed up later in life. Over the years, Mr. Cai tried various traditional treatments for his back problems without success. For example, once he consulted a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine who specialized in back pain. Mr. Cai traveled some distance by train to the doctor's office. When he came home, he filled out the prescription for Chinese herbal medicine.¹²⁸ After taking the herbal medicine for a month, his back had still not improved. On another occasion, he bought some medicated patches from another specialized practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine. He put those patches all over his back, but they were of no help either.

Mr. Cai's initial goal for taking Tai Chi was to help his back and leg pains. At the time of the interview, he was excited to share that "My leg pains are gone! I have no problem standing for the entire Tai Chi class time and walking briskly. My spirits are higher and my mood is better!"

¹²⁸ The proper way to prepare for traditional Chinese herbal medicine is to boil the prescribed dry herbs in a clay pot according to specific instruction by the doctor. The patient drinks the liquid part of the medicine on a daily basis, normally once in the morning with empty stomach and once in the evening before bedtime.

Education and employment

Mr. Cai attended primary and secondary school in Jinan. After high school, he joined the military and served for six years in a different province. Upon his retirement from the military, he was eligible to be assigned a job at a factory in Jinan. The factory belongs to one of the major industrial enterprises in the province and employs about 40,000 workers distributed in a number of sites. In a large enterprise of this kind, it is not unusual to have numerous educational upgrading and promotional opportunities. Mr. Cai's employer sent him to a college for work-related training. After the completion of his college degree during the Cultural Revolution, he returned to the same factory and was promoted to a new position with more responsibilities and higher wages. He worked at the same factory for more than 30 years until he reached his mandatory retirement age of 55.

The position in the factory that Mr. Cai held longest was the executive head of scheduling, which involved a high degree of physical activity. He oversaw all the divisions of the factory. Therefore, he was on his feet all day for six days a week. He traveled to work from home by bicycle for many years. It was only in the last few years of his employment that he took the factory shuttle bus because the factory had been relocated outside of the city.

Tai Chi experience

Mr. Cai took his first Tai Chi class at *Organization A* two years ago. Prior to that he had attempted twice to register for a Tai Chi course but all the classes were full. He decided to wait because *Organization A* "is a university (Da Xue), so it must have the academic teaching system to teach Tai Chi properly." He feels that "the Tai Chi masters who teach in the parks might add something to the standard Tai Chi techniques. I don't want to learn Tai Chi in the wrong way."

During the past two years, Mr. Cai has taken the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set, the 42 Tai Chi set, and Tai Chi Sword. He admires his Tai Chi class instructor at the institute and thinks he "is the best Tai Chi teacher in the city." He believes that his instructor teaches the class based on the curriculum that has been compiled by the State Sports General Administration Committee in China.

Mr. Cai has been learning Tai Chi through all the sources available to him. In addition to his weekly Tai Chi class at *Organization A*, he is also the leader of *Group E* with several members of his Tai Chi class. They practice together once a week for one or two hours in a city park. Mr. Cai stands at the front of the group and the group members follow his moves. They repeat the Tai Chi moves that they have recently learned from their formal class. The group members chose this park because it is on a convenient route for several buses. The park is also one of the most popular locations for many Tai Chi groups in Jinan. All members of his group travel by bus, except Mr. Cai who prefers to bicycle even though the park is quite far from his home. He always arrives at the park before everyone else. He also practices Tai Chi by himself at home for 20 minutes every day. He bought Tai Chi books from the city's largest bookstore to study the break down descriptions of Tai Chi moves. Whenever he forgets a move he learned in class, he watches online video demonstrations by Li Deyin.¹²⁹ He says, "The best way to learn Tai Chi is getting face to face instruction from an instructor in class. Self-study Tai Chi from scratch is not for me. Maybe some smart people can do it."

As noted earlier, Mr. Cai started Tai Chi in the hope of reducing his back symptoms. He was satisfied with the results of his Tai Chi experience at the time of this interview. He initially also hoped to "make new friends" in his Tai Chi class. He now "enjoys the friendly chat with Tai Chi classmates." He feels that his "mood has improved from Tai Chi." He often volunteers for his Tai Chi class whenever he sees a need. The challenge that Mr. Cai feels now is, "I feel I am old. My arms and legs are not flexible, so I can't do some hard Tai Chi moves precisely."

Mr. Cai says, "Tai Chi is our national quintessence."¹³⁰ Our ancestors from hundreds of years ago created the Tai Chi sets for the improvement and maintenance of our health. Tai Chi is our ancestors' great contribution to the world." He also says, "Tai Chi has become a part of my daily routine. When I can't sleep during my noon nap, I think about Tai Chi moves. Sometimes I just get up and turn on the computer to look at these moves. Sometimes, I look at the Tai Chi books that I bought." He once attended a

¹²⁹ Li Deyin 李德印 is an internationally well-known Tai Chi Master and the Chinese Tai Chi Head Coach.

¹³⁰ Guo Cui 国粹

public lecture about health. He really liked what the speaker said “the best types of physical activities are walking and Tai Chi.”

Mr. Cai has always liked sports. He played basketball in high school as well as in the army. Because of his physically high active job, his former co-workers gave him the nickname “Flying Legs.” Most of his working years he traveled by bicycle. After retirement he continued using his bicycle because he enjoys his “cycling freedom.” He is not interested in dance or yoga. But he likes singing and listening to songs.

Mr. Cai says, “Tai Chi is my best hobby. I trust Tai Chi can improve my health, reduce the risk of getting sick, and [help me to] live longer.” In his opinion “if only retirees had time and had started learning Tai Chi before they retired, they would just continue practicing it after retirement.” He also believes that Tai Chi is good for retirees because older people do not have as many choices for exercise as younger people. “Young people may join other activities instead of Tai Chi, such as basketball, football, running, martial arts, and Diabolo.¹³¹ None of these is suitable for older people.” When asked about his opinion regarding the differences between Tai Chi and other forms of martial arts, he says, “Other forms of martial arts are forceful, whereas Tai Chi looks soft but it actually has strong internal power.”

4) Ms. Han

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Han was 59 years old. She was a member of two informal Tai Chi groups, *Group A* and a Tai Chi Fan group that was not included in the research observations. She had been practicing Tai Chi for a total of two years with four groups at different times.

General impression

Ms. Han is short and of medium weight for a Northern Chinese woman of her generation. She appears energetic. She smiles a lot, but she looks serious when practicing Tai Chi with her groups. She is one of the few individuals who ask a lot of questions whenever it is appropriate during group practice. During group break time she always

¹³¹Diablo (Kong Zhu 空竹) is a juggling game that uses an hourglass-shaped object and two sticks tied together with a long string.

seems to practice on her own and discuss moves with a group member or the group leader. She is friendly with her Tai Chi group members and other people. She always wears a T-shirt, Tai Chi paints, and Tai Chi shoes to her group practice.

Ms. Han is an enthusiastic and experienced worker with some formal schooling. She was born in a county near Jinan and has spent her adult life in Jinan. She speaks the Jinan dialect with no trace of another accent.

Family

Ms. Han lives with her husband in one of the newest three apartment buildings for employees of the hospital where she worked for many years before retiring. Their apartment is on the ground floor with a small yard behind the building. Ms. Han and her husband are able to grow some flowers and vegetables in their yard. Their only child is married and lives with his own family in the suburbs of the city. Ms. Han's in-laws insisted on taking care of their young grandchild because, as she explains, "they thought my health was not good and that taking care of the grandchild would be too much work for me to handle."

Health

Ms. Han says, "I have bad shoulder pains and some heart problems." Over the years her heart problems "have resulted in [her] being admitted to the hospital for long-term stays in the ward and short visits to the emergency department." She also says, "one year I had to take a sick leave for six months. Another year I almost had to have open-heart surgery."

Ms. Han gratefully says, "After six months of practicing Tai Chi I noticed a great improvement in my health." She also states, "I gained strength and a better mood. My morning Tai Chi practice enabled me to feel energetic and comfortable for the rest of the day!" At the time of the interview, Ms. Han stopped taking all of her medication, except one traditional Chinese medicine capsule as an aid for her heart.

Education and employment

Upon completing junior high school, Ms. Han started working in a hospital as a healthcare worker. After several years, she took some professional training, which enabled her to be promoted. She worked in the same hospital in various departments for over 30 years. During that time, most of her positions involved shift work. She retired four years ago at the age of 55, the mandatory retirement age for her professional category. Since retirement, Ms. Han has been volunteering twice a week at the information desk at the hospital where she used to work. This involves directing outpatients to various departments in the building. As noted previously, it is very unusual in China for a retiree to have an official volunteer position.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Han says, “Two years ago I started learning Tai Chi from two older men in my neighborhood.” She and four of her friends went for a walk one summer evening. They saw two older men practicing Tai Chi on the side of the road. Ms. Han was the only one among her friends who was interested in learning Tai Chi from them. She learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set from those two men over a period of several months. Because they only practiced in the evenings whereas Ms. Han “wanted to practice in the morning,” she decided to join another informal morning Tai Chi group. During the transition period from the first group to the second, there was an overlap, which meant that she “was practicing Tai Chi both morning and evening.” After a year, Ms. Han and her husband moved to their current apartment, which is far away from her old neighborhood. She then switched to *Group A* as it is only about a ten-minute walk from her new home. *Group A* meets for an hour and a half every morning with various bare-hand Tai Chi sets and one set of Tai Chi Sword. This group follows the same sequence of Tai Chi sets every day. After the break, they often go over and over various components of difficult Tai Chi moves. For an hour in the evenings Ms. Han practices Tai Chi Fan with a different Tai Chi group. Both of her current Tai Chi groups meet at the same, convenient location for Ms. Han.

Ms. Han states that she has learned a total of ten sets of Tai Chi, including bare-hand Tai Chi sets, Tai Chi Fan, and Tai Chi Sword. In the beginning of her Tai Chi

experience she says she learned slowly: “It took a half a month to learn and memorize a single Tai Chi move.” After she learned the Simplified 24 set, she “really wanted to learn more.” The four Tai Chi groups that Ms. Han has participated in have varied in size. The largest included more than 100 people. Her current morning and evening groups each consists of about twenty people.

Ms. Han says, “Tai Chi has become a part of my daily life. It would make me uncomfortable if I went without practicing for a day. Amongst bare-hand Tai Chi, Tai Chi Fan, and Tai Chi Sword, I like the sword because it is the most elegant.” She is so committed to her Tai Chi learning, that her husband told her that she “moves her arms and legs at night when she’s sleeping as if she were practicing Tai Chi!” She believes that “the slow Tai Chi training involves internal energy. It is not training just for appearance. Practicing Tai Chi requires a steady mind.”

Ms. Han says, “I wanted to do some exercise to heal my illnesses” and “through Tai Chi practice, my physical health and mood have both improved. I don’t need to take the medication that I took before. I don’t need to take care of my grandchild. Normally my husband cooks for the two of us. I can cook when I feel like it. I can jump while doing Tai Chi sword. My former employer asked me to join a group dance to represent the hospital, but dancing made me feel dizzy and increased my heart rate!”

Ms. Han believes that “it is better to learn Tai Chi in a group. You progress too slowly when you try to do it on your own. The positive group atmosphere makes a difference. The slow learners can get help from the fast learners. It is important to have an instructor, but self-practice is the key. Learning together in a group increases your confidence. However, when communicating with group members you have to watch what you say. For example, once I offended a group member when I told her that she had moved her leg in the wrong direction.”

Ms. Han believes “there is no other activity that can replace Tai Chi.” She says, “I have many leisure activities. I like planting flowers, growing vegetables, and taking care of my pet fish. All of my activities have to produce a result. I enjoy watching my Clivia flowers, eating the chives, and watching my fish. Of all the things I like to do, I love Tai Chi the most. The most important aspect of Tai Chi is diligence. I have learned ten sets of Tai Chi. As a result, my health problems are all healed, which means I have reached my

original goal of doing Tai Chi... I don't feel I'm old. At our recent school reunion, my classmates thought that I looked very young. I think they look really old in comparison to me!"

5) Ms. Jia

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Jia was 60 years old. She was taking a Tai Chi course (level two, section two) at *Organization A*. She is also a member of *Group F*. She had been practicing Tai Chi with these two groups for several months. She had started learning Tai Chi twice before but had abandoned. She had been practicing Tai Chi for a total of two years.

General impression

Ms. Jia is very thin and taller than most women of her generation in Jinan. Although she is quiet and speaks in a soft voice, she is not afraid to ask questions related to Tai Chi technique during her group practice whenever it is appropriate. She smiles a lot and is friendly with the members of her Tai Chi groups. She always wears her Tai Chi uniform and Tai Chi shoes to her Tai Chi group practice. She travels by bus to both her groups. Judging by the way she talks and her behavior, she is a Jinan native with some formal schooling. She speaks in pure Jinan dialect.

Family

Ms. Jia and her husband live in an apartment in one of the buildings that belong to the factory where she used to work. Her husband is also retired. Ms. Jia says that her husband stays home most of the time while she is out practicing Tai Chi in the morning with her two groups. He normally gets the ingredients ready in the kitchen, so that when Ms. Jia arrives home after Tai Chi she cooks their lunch because she "is a better cook." They have one daughter, who is married and lives with her own family in a different province. Ms. Jia and her siblings were all born in Jinan. They are all married and retired and still living in Jinan. Ms. Jia's parents came to work in Jinan in the 1950s. Her mother passed away many years ago. Her father lived to the age of about 90 (exceptionally old for a Chinese man of his generation). Ms. Jia and her two sisters seem to have a very

close relationship. Every Tuesday her sisters wait for her in the park where *Group F* meets. As soon as she finishes her Tai Chi practice, the three of them will either sit to chat or go shopping together.

Health

Ms. Jia says that she has had high blood pressure for many years but has not taken medication for it before or after Tai Chi. As she explains, “every time I asked the doctors in the hospitals, they told me that I don’t need to take any medication.” Ms. Jia says that she also has had neck pains for a long time. She says that she does not like to go to the hospital because “the Western-style doctors refused to explain what was wrong with me” and she “prefers the traditional Chinese doctors, but there are too many people in the traditional medical hospital and you have to wait for too long.”

Education and employment

Ms. Jia graduated from junior high school during the Cultural Revolution. Like the majority of her peers, she worked in a village for five years. Then she was hired by a factory and moved back to Jinan. She had an administrative position in an office in the factory and worked for 25 years before retiring. Despite the mandatory retirement age of 50 for her professional category, she voluntarily retired two years early “due to [her] personal circumstances.”

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Jia’s initial encounter with Tai Chi was more than ten years ago at the factory. An outside Tai Chi instructor came to the factory to teach the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set during work hours. At that time the factory was not busy so Ms. Jia and many of her colleagues learned parts of the Tai Chi set from that instructor. When the authorities at her factory decided to enforce regulations, the outside instructor was banned from the factory during work hours. As a result, the Tai Chi group disbanded. Ms. Jia did not continue practicing on her own.

The second time that Ms. Jia learned Tai Chi was the year she retired. She says that she took the bus to visit her father almost every morning when she first retired. On

her morning bus route, she saw a Tai Chi group practicing at a city square. She recognized two of her former coworkers in the group. There was a Tai Chi master leading the group practice from 7am to 9am every morning free of charge. Ms. Jia joined the group and learned five sets of Tai Chi in about two years. As she explains, “I had to quit Tai Chi when my father became very ill and needed intensive care. My sisters and I took turns caring for him for ten years until he died.”

After her father passed away, Ms. Jia discovered that her previous Tai Chi group was no longer at the city square. She then tried twice to register for a Tai Chi course at *Organization A* but the courses were full. Normally at a city’s continuing education institute for elders, “individuals are supposed to start with the beginners’ level Tai Chi course.” When Ms. Jia explained her previous Tai Chi experience, the Tai Chi instructor allowed her to take the second level course. Because her formal Tai Chi course only had one 100-minute class per week, she also joined *Group F* in a park. All the other members are from the local community and none of them are in Ms. Jia’s class at *Organization A*. The group “practiced for at least one hour every morning” and she “learned the 42 set, the Wu and the Chen Tai Chi sets.” Ms. Jia “likes the Chen style Tai Chi better than the Wu style.”

Ms. Jia says her “Tai Chi group leader in the park teaches the group members new Tai Chi sets, so she charges the members a small sum.” Apparently the leader said that she “only wanted the fees as an incentive to make the members attend the group practice regularly when learning a new set of Tai Chi.” The leader charged about one half of what Ms. Jia paid for her formal Tai Chi course at *Organization A*, as she says, “it was good that the group leader charged me because I felt at ease learning a new Tai Chi set after I had paid her.”

Ms. Jia says, “Tai Chi has become a part of my daily life. I intend to practice it for the rest of my life!” She and her siblings each have only one child. When they were taking care of their elder and ill father, Ms. Jia thought, “We all only have one child. When we get older, there will be nobody to take care of us. For that reason, we need to exercise to avoid getting sick.” She explains that her daughter and son-in-law’s combined income is higher than that of her husband and herself. Ms. Jia says, “When they have a

child, they can hire a nanny. They won't need our money because they make plenty themselves.”

In addition to her Tai Chi course, Ms. Jia has been taking a calligraphy course at *Organization A*. She believes that “calligraphy is about practicing writing characters and poetry and to learn the Chinese culture. The breathing technique is the same for Tai Chi and calligraphy. It is to exercise internal energy. When I practice Tai Chi, I don't think about anything else. I feel I am addicted to Tai Chi.” On a daily basis, she practices Tai Chi in the morning with either her class or her group and practices calligraphy in the afternoon at home. Sometimes she also practices Tai Chi in the evening outside her apartment building. She says she also likes Chinese painting and Erhu¹³² but “hasn't found time to learn them yet.”

6) Ms. Feng

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Feng was 59 years old. She was one of the three Jinan research participants who were not retired yet. She had been an irregular member of *Group A* for three years.

General impression

Ms. Feng gets along well with her Tai Chi group members, most of whom are also her colleagues from the hospital where she works, including Ms. Han. She always has a smile on her round face and often jokes with the other members. She is of average height and slightly overweight for a typical Jinan woman of her age. She does not appear to be energetic. At the time of the interview, she had less than a year before her mandatory retirement. She “cannot wait to retire!” She does not always attend her Tai Chi group's practice, so she is one of the very few irregular participants of *Group A*. When she does go to her Tai Chi group, she wears ordinary clothes, such as a short-sleeved shirt, a pair of soft summer pants, and plain flat shoes. Ms. Feng's manners and way of speaking indicate that she is educated. She speaks in the Jinan dialect with a slight Mandarin accent.

¹³² Erhu, 二胡 is a two-stringed traditional Chinese musical instrument.

Family

Ms. Feng lives with her husband in an apartment that belongs to the hospital where she works. Both of them are close to retirement. In urban China most married couples live in the husband's employee housing because employers allot apartments according to the job title and seniority. As a general rule, the husband has a higher ranking than his wife. However, Ms. Feng's employee housing is closer to her workplace and the apartment is more spacious than the one her husband's employer offered. It only takes her ten minutes to walk to work. There are all sorts of convenience stores, supermarkets and schools in the vicinity. Their only child is married and lives with her own family in the same city. Ms. Feng was born in Jinan. Her parents were born in the province and came to Jinan for work in the early 1950s. They have both passed away. Her siblings are married and most of them are retired and all live in Jinan.

Health

Ms. Feng says she has had arthritis in her knees for a number of years. She currently takes both prescribed and over-the-counter pain medication for the pain. She says that her "knee pain started prior to [her] Tai Chi experience," and she believes that "it is an age-related degenerative disease." She says that Tai Chi has not affected the pain, "so far there is no change in my strength, stamina and energy as a result of practicing Tai Chi" and "the reason for that is because I don't practice it consistently."

Education and employment

Like Mr. Meng, Ms. Feng graduated from a college as a "Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Student" during the Cultural Revolution. After high school she was sent to a village. After several years, she came back to Jinan to work in a factory. Then her employer recommended that she go to college. She started working at her current job when she graduated.

At the time of the interview, Ms. Feng had been working as a healthcare worker for a hospital for more than 20 years. The hospital is one of the teaching hospitals of a medical school. She has a regular day-time shift and works full-time six days a week.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Feng first learned Tai Chi about 20 years ago at the same hospital. She says, “I was young and had no health problems back then. My goal was strictly fitness, not for treating any illness or anything else.” She and a group of about ten colleagues gathered together to learn Tai Chi from an invited Tai Chi instructor from outside the hospital. They learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set in several months. It was not mandatory for work to learn and practice Tai Chi even though the sessions took place during their working hours. She only practiced Tai Chi with the group of colleagues at her workplace when they were not busy. She says that her family members did not even know about her first Tai Chi experience.

Subsequently, Ms. Feng joined *Group A*. The group meets seven days a week for an hour and a half starting at 6am. In the first half they practice the 24 set and the original Wu Tai Chi set. For the remainder of the time they practice Tai Chi sword. The majority of the group members are employees or retirees of the hospital. Most of them live in employee housing within walking distance of their group location. For example, it only takes Ms. Feng a few minutes to walk from her apartment to where *Group A* meets. Ms. Feng and several others leave the group immediately at 7am in order to get to their jobs on time. Ms. Feng says that she has been with this group “on and off over the years.” Each time, in the past, she continued practicing with the group for several weeks. As she explains, “I am lazy. For example, I almost never go walk in the park in the morning as many people do. It is too difficult for me to get up and meet the group at 6am! That was why I can’t go to the Tai Chi group regularly. I can only go when I get up early enough and my legs are not too painful.”

Ms. Feng says, “Tai Chi is not my first choice for fitness exercises or other activities. If I had a choice, I would rather swim because swimming reduces my knee pain. I love swimming. I swam often as a child. Not long ago, I went swimming at an indoor pool twice a week. That fitness club was very expensive. I was able to go because my daughter bought me a temporary pass for the pool as a gift.”

In Ms. Feng’s opinion, “Tai Chi is a type of fitness. It is harmless and it is good for people” but “you can’t practice Tai Chi on your own because Tai Chi is a group

activity.” Regardless of the fact that the members of her Tai Chi group are all elders, she thinks, “Tai Chi is good for people of any age.”

Ms. Feng likes to travel. During her vacations, she has taken trips with her friends in tour groups of various sizes to many places in China as well as several foreign countries. She also likes to dance. When she was in her forties, she did ballroom dancing for ten years. At that time, she “got up at 6am to dance for 30 minutes before going to work.” She only stopped ballroom dancing when she developed leg pain. Like many urban Chinese women of her age, she recently joined an informal free-style dance group that is also located at the same basketball court as her Tai Chi group. However, the dance group meets in the evening at 7:30pm. The members of her dance group are all hospital employees who are close to retirement age. Ms. Feng feels that “it is easier to learn free-style dance than Tai Chi” and “most importantly, the evening suits me much better than the 6am Tai Chi group time.” She also likes watching television programs, especially series on family life stories.

7) Ms. Geng

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Geng was 59 years old. She had been a member of her current informal Tai Chi group (*Group A*) for a year and a half. She had been practicing Tai Chi for three years.

General impression

Ms. Geng appears to lack energy. Her voice is low and she talks and walks slowly. She is short and thin for a northern Chinese woman of her age group. Sometimes she has to sit down during her Tai Chi group practice to gather her strength. She never wears Tai Chi uniforms. When she goes to her Tai Chi group practice, she wears her casual summer clothes and a pair of plain flat shoes. She is friendly with her Tai Chi group members as well as her colleagues. Ms. Geng’s elegant manners indicate that she is an educated individual with social status. She speaks in the Jinan dialect with a slight Mandarin accent.

Family

Ms. Geng and her husband live in an apartment building belonging to the hospital where she works. Several of her current Tai Chi group members including the group leader and his wife live in the same apartment building because they are also hospital employees or retirees. Ms. Geng and her husband are still working, but both are close to their mandatory retirement age. Their only child is married and lives with her own family not far from their apartment. Ms. Geng was born in Jinan. Her parents came to Jinan for work in the early 1950s and they have both passed away. Her siblings are married and most of them are retired. They all live in Jinan.

Health

Ms. Geng says that she has been having health problems that have been getting worse. When she first started learning Tai Chi, she developed pain in her knees and the pain lasted for about a month. She thinks that it was because her legs were positioned incorrectly for the various Tai Chi moves.

Education and employment

Like Ms. Feng, Ms. Geng went through high school and college during the Cultural Revolution. She worked for two years in a village after high school and then worked in a factory in Jinan for a few months. She then went to a college recommended by her factory authority. When she graduated from the college as a “Worker, Peasant, and Soldier Student,” she was assigned a job at a hospital. Ms. Geng has been employed at the same hospital for more than 30 years. At the time of the interview, she had less than a year before retiring. In her professional category as healthcare professional, for which the mandatory retirement age for both genders is 60. Unlike all her full-time colleagues, she is working on reduced hours due to her health problems. She hopes that her health condition will allow her to keep working part-time until she retires.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Geng says that she started Tai Chi in the hopes of improving her health. She also believes that “practicing Tai Chi cannot replace [her] medication or heal [her]

illnesses, but it can reduce the symptoms and improve [her] spirits and mood.” As a result of her Tai Chi practice, Ms. Geng feels that her “spirits are much higher and that her immune system has become stronger against the common cold.” She says that she enjoys the “beauty of Tai Chi moves with the background music” and feels that “that could have something to do with [her] dancing experience in [her] younger years.”

Ms. Geng joined her first informal Tai Chi group three years ago. The group met every evening at 7pm on the main campus of the medical school, a ten-minute walk from her home. It was one of the many informal Tai Chi groups on the large campus. A self-taught Tai Chi practitioner taught them the Simplified 24 set. Ms. Geng says, “the group members were very friendly. Chatting with them was enjoyable and relaxing.” At that time, she was not well and moved around slowly in daily life. Her energy level was very low and she did not have enough strength to go through the one-hour group practice. As is still the case, she often has to sit down on the side about half way through and watch her current group finish the practice. She practiced Tai Chi with her previous group for a year and a half until it broke up. Most members of that group moved away to look after their newborn grandchildren either in other parts of China or overseas.

Ms. Geng joined *Group A* immediately after her first Tai Chi group disbanded. The leader of *Group A* is the husband of one of Ms. Geng’s colleagues. He took some formal Tai Chi training many years ago and he is very skillful. The group practices for an hour and a half every day starting at 6am. Most members of the group are retirees so they stay till the end of their daily practice. Several others like Ms. Feng along with Ms. Geng leave at 7am in order to get to work. Each morning they start their group practice with the Simplified 24 set, then the original Wu set and Tai Chi Sword. Other than leading the group practice at the front, the group leader also demonstrates certain moves when members ask questions. Some members of this group also get together in the evening at the same location, without their group leader, to practice on their own. Ms. Geng usually attends both the morning practice and the evening practice. She says, “Practicing with the Tai Chi group for an hour in the morning and another hour in the evening should be enough exercise for me.” For that reason, she says she “does not practice Tai Chi [by herself] at home.” Compared to walking, she feels fine “after practicing Tai Chi for an hour” but “very tired after walking for an hour.”

Ms. Geng says, “Recently I feel that Tai Chi is a must-do for me. It has become a part of my daily life. There is no other activity that can replace Tai Chi.” She also says, “Practicing Tai Chi reduced my health problems and improved my immune system. As a supplement method, Tai Chi can strengthen the immune system but it cannot replace the medications I take.”

Ms. Geng indicates that she has “always loved sports.” She was much healthier when she was younger. She loves dancing and took different types of dance lessons and danced regularly for many years when she was young. Prior to taking up Tai Chi, Ms. Geng swam regularly for many years in an indoor swimming pool until the pool building was demolished. Then she joined her first Tai Chi group to continue her fitness exercise.

Ms. Geng believes that the fact that “more women than men practice Tai Chi is not because of Chinese culture, it is because of the laziness of men. But men do Tai Chi better than women and that is why most group leaders are men.” She also believes that “young people do not practice Tai Chi is because they have too much stress from their jobs and too little time.” In fact, there is only one man in her current Tai Chi group and he is the leader. The same was true for her previous group.

8) Mr. An

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. An was 61 years old. He was taking a Tai Chi course (level four, section Three) at *Organization A*. He had been practicing Tai Chi for five years.

General impression

Mr. An is of medium height and average weight for a Chinese man born in northern China. Chinese people in the Northern provinces tend to be taller and have bigger bone structure than those from the South. He appears fit, energetic and young for his age. He is quite reserved and quiet, but is very friendly when someone initiates a conversation with him. He has to take three different buses from his home to get to his Tai Chi class. Because of the bus schedule, he is always the first to arrive at the Tai Chi classroom. He usually wears his black Tai Chi pants, an ordinary T-shirt and a pair of Tai Chi shoes, so that he does not have to change clothes. In fact, none of the three male

members change their clothes for the class. They either wear their Tai Chi uniform or their street clothes. During the 100-minute Tai Chi class, the 26 members randomly form three rows. As a general rule, Mr. An and his two male classmates always stand in the back row. During the 15-minute break, Mr. An often practices the newly learned Tai Chi moves by himself, while the others chat in several small groups. The way Mr. An talks shows that he has not had much formal schooling. Like the majority of his classmates, he speaks in the Jinan dialect.

Family

Mr. An and his wife live in an apartment. Their building is one of the 30 buildings in a compound that belongs to the factory he retired from. The compound is located in the suburbs of the city where there are very few retail shops or supermarkets. Most of the current residents of the compound are older people because many of the factory's younger employees and their families, who used to live in the compound, have moved into the city for the convenience of everyday living. There is no problem with transportation for those younger employees since the factory provides free shuttle bus services for employees' daily commute between home and workplace.

Mr. An and his wife are both retired. Their only son is married and lives with his own family in the centre of the city. Mr. An's mother lives by herself in the city. While he was working, Mr. An traveled by bicycle. It was only a 10-minute bicycle ride from home to work. After retiring, he started using the city bus system. Sometimes he takes the bus to visit his mother. According to Mr. An, his wife does the cooking and most of the housework. He helps out sometimes. Before the couple retired, whoever returned home first would cook the evening meal. Mr. An's wife retired from a factory before he did, so "she became a housewife after retiring. She thought she should do more cooking at home." When asked whether his wife supported his Tai Chi practice, Mr. An said, "My wife is good tempered. She normally does not get upset. She has supported my Tai Chi practice throughout the past five years."

Health

Mr. An considered himself “physically weak” at the time of his retirement and before taking up Tai Chi. As he explains, “My energy was low before retirement. My blood pressure was unstable and I had sleeping problems. I thought my health was affected by my shift work with irregular hours.” Mr. An was convinced that “the irregular work schedule had disturbed [my] sleeping patterns.” He took various types of medication and felt that “all of the pills I took had no effect on [my] health.”

According to Mr. An, in the fourth year of his Tai Chi practice his sleep quality improved noticeably. His appetite was better and his blood pressure became normal. He said his memory also improved, which helped him to memorize the Tai Chi moves he learned from his Tai Chi class instructor. He stopped taking medication. He feels “more energetic with higher spirits.” His “relationship with other people is better” because of “the good feeling after [my] morning Tai Chi practice and the better quality of [my] sleep.” His neighbors tell him he looks younger than his age.

Education and employment

Mr. An started working in a factory as a teenager to earn income to help his family. Consequently, he only had primary education. During his employment years, Mr. An had on-the-job training so he could operate certain machinery in the factory. As a result of his training, he was promoted to a position with more responsibilities and a higher salary.

Mr. An worked for the same factory for more than 30 years. The factory had several thousand employees. After three years at the factory, he joined the army and was stationed in a different province. As explained in the General Description of Jinan Participants, factory employees who volunteered to serve in the military were eligible to return to their original factory after completing their military service. After his four year military service, Mr. An went back to the factory to continue his employment. He retired at his mandatory retirement age of 55.

Tai Chi experience

Two years after he retired, Mr. An decided to try a Tai Chi class because “all the pills weren’t helping.” Mr. An took his first Tai Chi class at *Organization B*, a continuing education institute for elders, during the second year after his retirement. He learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set in his first Tai Chi course. One year later, Mr. An switched to a different Tai Chi class at *Organization A* because “the quality of the teaching is good and the Tai Chi instructor is very famous.” During the last four years at *Organization A*, Mr. An has taken several Tai Chi courses, including the Simplified 24, the 48, the 42, the Advanced 42, and Tai Chi Sword.

Mr. An “initially wanted to learn Tai Chi properly and now has achieved this goal.” In his own words, “Tai Chi has become a must-do for me. I automatically practice it every day. Tai Chi means benefits and happiness for me. I am addicted to it. If I did not practice for a day, I would feel like I had lost something. There is no substitute for Tai Chi for me because Tai Chi suits me best!”

At the time of the interview, Mr. An practiced Tai Chi by himself for one to two hours every morning in addition to his once weekly Tai Chi class. Sometimes Mr. An watches Tai Chi demonstrations on the Internet at home. He is the only Tai Chi practitioner in his neighborhood. As he states, “I am the only one who practices Tai Chi in our factory employee living quarters. When I practice Tai Chi in the yard, my neighbors or former colleagues sometimes ask me what I am doing and they think I am crazy. But I don’t care what they say.” When he first started practicing Tai Chi in the yard, Mr. An encouraged several of his neighbors to join him. “But they quit only after a few days of practice. They would rather sit around and chat with each other!”

Mr. An has been practicing calligraphy for more than ten years. He has practiced various calligraphy styles such as Cao, Xing, Li, Kai and Zhuan.¹³³ He described how important both Tai Chi and calligraphy are to him, “Tai Chi and calligraphy are equally important to me because they represent life and health. I did not have much education when I was young. Calligraphy and reading are ways of my learning. Hand written characters represent one’s identity.” Mr. An’s years of practice and the varieties of the

¹³³ Cao 草, Xing 行, Li 隶, Kai 楷 and Zhuan 篆 are the basic Chinese calligraphy styles. Each has its unique shapes of brush strokes. E.g. “Tai Chi” in Kai style “太极拳” or in Zhuan style “齋 齋 齋”

calligraphy styles he practices demonstrate his pride and dedication, especially as a man with little formal schooling.

Mr. An's description of his daily routine gives an indication of his dedication and self-discipline: "I get up in the morning. The first thing I do is to practice Tai Chi for about an hour to two hours. After breakfast I practice calligraphy. How long I practice calligraphy depends on how I feel for each day."

Mr. An has always liked sports. "When I was a teenager, I ran both long and short distances and swam in the Yellow River.¹³⁴ After I started working I had no time to do that." When asked whether he had ever thought of taking up yoga, he said he feels yoga is "for younger people and mainly for women." In his opinion, "young people believe that Tai Chi is for older people because it is too slow. Young people like vigorous exercises. But the young martial artists are willing to practice Tai Chi."

9) Ms. Bai

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Bai was 61 years old. She was taking a Tai Chi course (level four, section three) at *Organization A*. She was also participating in two informal Tai Chi groups (*Group G* and *Group H*) at two different parks. She had been practicing Tai Chi for five years.

General impression

Ms. Bai is cheerful and friendly. She is outspoken and naturally initiates conversations with the members of all her Tai Chi groups during the break and before and after their group practices. She is very thin and one of the shortest individuals in all three of her Tai Chi groups. She appears fit and energetic. Her hair is always twisted up in a bun. Several years ago, Ms. Bai lived in a different district that was closer to her Tai Chi groups. At that time she rode her bicycle. However, her current apartment is too far away from any of her groups so she travels by bus. Most of the time, Ms. Bai arrives at her Tai Chi classroom wearing her white or pink Tai Chi uniform. Otherwise, she uses

¹³⁴ It passes by Jinan city.

the curtained corner¹³⁵ to change into her Tai Chi uniform. She also wears her Tai Chi uniform to her two informal groups. She always wears her Tai Chi shoes to group practices. Her choice of words reveals the fact that she has not had much education. As a Jinan native, she speaks in the Jinan dialect.

Family

Ms. Bai and her two grown children live in a small apartment. The factory she worked for did not have employee housing. She has been divorced for many years and has had a hard life as a single parent with a low income. Both of her children work full-time and they are not home during the day. They make their own breakfast because Ms. Bai goes out practicing Tai Chi before they get up. However, she always cooks the evening meal for the three of them. Her 80-year-old mother has health problems and lives alone. Ms. Bai's three siblings are all married living with their own families. They share responsibility of their mother's care. They decided not to hire a caretaker because "it is too costly" and "we are all retired anyway."

In terms of life priorities, Ms. Bai feels that "Chinese women should put their family first and Tai Chi second." She says that before she started doing Tai Chi, she spent a lot of time doing all the housework. She continues to do as much housework as possible while practicing Tai Chi. She says, "My children supported my Tai Chi practice and were happy to see my spirits improve," but she thinks they would not appreciate her spending too much time practicing Tai Chi and that she would "feel guilty."

Health

Prior to taking up Tai Chi, Ms. Bai considered herself "unhealthy" despite the fact that she did not need to take any medication. She "was very thin, very weak and timid, and did not have enough energy to talk to people." Her balance "was not good as a child and it is still not good." She "frequently felt anxious and depressed." She was "convinced that everyone was doing better than [her] in every aspect of life."

¹³⁵ Ms. Bai's classroom is the only one with a curtained corner for changing. The room is also used for dance classes. All students from other Tai Chi classes have to change in one of the washrooms located on each floor.

Ms. Bai says she developed pains in her knees and feet when she first started taking a Tai Chi course. She is not the only one who experienced leg pain when starting Tai Chi. A long-term Tai Chi instructor said that the cause of leg pain is usually attributed to the fact that beginners do not position their knee joints correctly. Her leg pain prevented her from squatting in class and made it hard to walk up a flight of stairs. When she returned to her Tai Chi class after the summer break, her leg pain had disappeared. She thought that was because of the rest she had during the summer.

Ms. Bai says that she has strengthened her leg muscles because numerous Tai Chi poses involve standing on one leg. She now feels comfortable walking briskly. Her arms used to be “skinny” and now she is proud to show me her arm “full of muscles.” She feels that her higher spirit and better mood often enable her to think positively. She experiences “more than ever satisfaction in daily life!”

Education and employment

Upon the completion of junior high school, Ms. Bai was assigned a job in a factory in Jinan. The factory only had a few hundred employees. Like the majority of Jinan research participants and their contemporaries, this job was the only job that Ms. Bai had until retirement. For the most part, her daily work at the factory was very physically demanding manual labor. She had a very early morning shift for many years. After working more than 30 years she eventually retired at her mandatory age of 50. She says her wages were low and her retirement pension is still low even though the government has increased it several times since she retired. Even including the wages of her two adult children, she concludes that her family income is “on the edge of poverty.”

Ms. Bai always felt that she “did not have enough formal education.” During her first few years at the factory while her children were young, she secretly prepared for the exams of several self-study Chinese literature courses offered by the city’s continuing education program. She values this program highly because she believes “it is internationally recognized.” She studied in secret because both her “employer and family were not supportive.” She was busy working at her full-time job and looking after her young children. Consequently, she failed the exams and, as she says, “that was the end of my schooling.”

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Bai took her first Tai Chi course at *Organization A*. Her sister had taken it and highly recommended both the course and the instructor. Thus far, Ms. Bai has taken the Simplified 24, the 42, the 48, the Wu Style, and Tai Chi Sword. She considers a course the best way to learn Tai Chi because “instructors teach Tai Chi from the basics and classmates can help each other.” She prefers to stand in the front row of her Tai Chi class so she can see the instructor easily. Sometimes she asks the instructor to correct her during class break, when she feels uncertain about a newly learned Tai Chi move. She often discusses Tai Chi moves with classmates or group members whenever there is an opportunity. She says she sometimes telephones a classmate from home to ask about a Tai Chi move she has forgotten. She appreciates the help from classmates, but believes “students in the same class are at different skill levels due to their ability in understanding, realization, and acceptance.”

Ms. Bai had a breakthrough in her learning when she started leading *Group G* in a park. She says, “the experience of leading others greatly strengthened my own skills.” Sometimes she visits other informal Tai Chi groups at different parks because some of her Tai Chi classmates are in those groups.

Ms. Bai also learns Tai Chi through other sources, such as watching video demonstrations and participating in Tai Chi competitions. During the first year, she was not involved in any informal Tai Chi groups. She says it was hard for her to remember the Tai Chi moves learned in class. Starting from the second year, she has been practicing with informal Tai Chi groups in addition to her Tai Chi courses. She joined *Group H*, an informal group in a city park, only one member of which is a Tai Chi classmate. Most of the members in *Group G* that she leads are her Tai Chi classmates. In recent years, after she had access to a computer at home, she has found it helpful to watch Tai Chi demonstration. However, she still believes that classroom instruction is the most effective. “The classroom instructor can deconstruct each move from all angles, whereas a video demonstrator only shows one side.” During my field research, Ms. Bai invited me to watch her group competing at a municipal Tai Chi tournament. The competing group consisted of two of her Tai Chi classmates and about ten community members.

Ms. Bai says, “Tai Chi has become part of my daily life.” She practices Tai Chi from one to two hours seven days a week. It has become natural for her to get up early to practice Tai Chi. She was “just simply interested in Tai Chi” when she first started but obviously has become much more interested as her Tai Chi skills have progressed. She says she grew into it because “Tai Chi is the essence of the thousand year old Chinese culture. Tai Chi requires repeated digestion.”

Ms. Bai is convinced that her Tai Chi experience has changed her dramatically. Her former co-workers have told her that she “is glowing and has become a different person.” Her Tai Chi classmates also commented, “she takes Tai Chi seriously because she is able to express herself in her Tai Chi practice.” She believes that “respecting myself means respecting others.”

Ms. Bai says she keeps a strong interest in Tai Chi for four reasons: 1) Tai Chi is a “Chinese treasure;” 2) Tai Chi is good for your health; 3) There is so much to learn in Tai Chi that learning can last a life time; and 4) Tai Chi benefits oneself and others. She strongly believes that “there is absolutely no substitute for Tai Chi” and “in contrast to yoga, you can start Tai Chi without spending a lot of money on clothes and equipment. Look at the Tai Chi practitioners in Germany and Japan. Tai Chi is a treasure that our Chinese ancestors left to us. Now those foreigners practice Tai Chi so well!” She believes that children in China should start learning Tai Chi at a young age to empower them to carry on the Chinese heritage.

Ms. Bai’s hobbies include reading books on any subject and watching television. She once took a yoga course at *Organization A*, but the class required equipment that was too expensive and the quiet practice location was very inconvenient for her. She also took a musical instrument course to learn Zheng¹³⁶ at the same institute but discovered it was too hard to learn. When she was young and in school, she did not like sports and disliked physical education class. What she liked then was to listen to other people talking. In her opinion, “housework and sports activities are two different concepts. Housework is part of daily life and it is tiring, whereas sports activity is about body and mind stretching and relaxing.”

¹³⁶ See footnote on page 39.

10) Mr. Liu

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. Liu was 81 years old. He was taking a Tai Chi course (level four, section three) at *Organization A* as well as participating in *Group B*. He had been practicing Tai Chi for five years.

General impression

Mr. Liu is of average weight but taller than most southern-born Chinese men of his generation. He walks with a straight back slowly but confidently. Normally he does not talk much. When someone else from either his class or his group starts a conversation, he participates willingly. He is friendly and polite. He never wears a Tai Chi uniform or Tai Chi shoes. He goes to his class or group wearing a men's dress shirt, full-length dress pants, and a pair of flat shoes, just as if he were going to work in an office. (Generally male office workers in Jinan continue wearing their business clothes after retiring.) In his Tai Chi class, Mr. Liu stands in the back row with the other male classmates including Mr. An. In his informal Tai Chi group, he stands next to the group leader because it is a small group and all members stand alongside each other in one row. As the oldest in *Group B*, he moves slower and sometimes modifies a Tai Chi move to make it easier. He always travels by bus carrying a cloth bag and his water bottle. His manners and the way he talks show that he is well educated. He speaks mainly in the Jinan dialect with traces of Mandarin and the dialect from his hometown. Since he has been living in Jinan for 60 years, the local dialect has become his everyday language.

Family

Mr. Liu lives by himself in an apartment building that belongs to his former workplace. His wife passed away many years ago. His only child is married and working in a different province. He is one of only two Jinan research participants who were born in southern China. He moved to Jinan for work a long time ago. None of his other relatives lives in Jinan.

Health

Mr. Liu says he “has always been healthy.” He has not taken any medication either before or after starting Tai Chi.

Education and employment

Mr. Liu is of an age that he was able to complete post-secondary education well before the Cultural Revolution. After graduating, he was assigned a technical job in the military for five years. He then worked for a department of the provincial government for 30 years. His technical job in the department was sedentary. He took the employee shuttle bus from home to work every day. He retired when he was 60 years old, the mandatory retirement age for both genders of his professional category.

Tai Chi experience

Mr. Liu started learning Tai Chi 40 years ago. As he explains, “when I first learned Tai Chi, I was young and didn’t have any health problems. I took it as a hobby.” His friend introduced him to an informal Tai Chi group near where he and his family used to live. The group was made up of twenty young people. They learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set. When Mr. Liu’s family moved to a different district of the city, he stopped going to that Tai Chi group. Since he was busy working, he did not continue practicing Tai Chi.

Mr. Liu started taking a Tai Chi course at *Organization A* five years ago when he heard about it from a former colleague. At the same time, he joined *Group B*. Most of the group members are his Tai Chi classmates. Mr. Liu says, “This time learning Tai Chi is for my health.” And he feels, “it is better to learn Tai Chi in a class rather than on the computer. When the instructor on the computer turns around during a move, you can’t see the front of his body.” Although it is a ten-minute walk between the two groups, the Tai Chi class and the informal group are close together but quite far from Mr. Liu’s home. As Mr. Liu says, “it is convenient for me to go to my class and my group since it is only one bus ride. I don’t need to change buses.”

Mr. Liu says, “practicing Tai Chi has become a must-do for me. I would be uncomfortable if I didn’t practice it. If my legs hurt when I get up in the morning, I may

skip a day's practice. But that is very rare. Tai Chi is suitable for older people. I feel I have become stronger thanks to Tai Chi." In Mr. Liu's opinion, "young people think Tai Chi is too slow. But the slow moves are good for older people."

After he gets up at 6am, Mr. Liu watches the morning news on television, has breakfast and reads the newspapers. He subscribes to several newspapers and picks them up every morning at the gate of his living compound. He then practices Tai Chi for one and a half hours on his own at home. His daily routine includes five Tai Chi sets: the traditional Yang Style, the Wu Style, the 48, the 42, and the Simplified 24.

Mr. Liu says, "I feel good in my Tai Chi class. We only have one class per week. Classmates are always very happy to see each other again. It is quite a different feeling from when you see former colleagues. When I went back to my workplace, I didn't know any of the young people who are working there now. As for my neighbors, we only exchange simple greetings when we pass by each other in our apartment building."

Mr. Liu says, he "loves Tai Chi the most." He took a singing course at *Organization A*, but "found it boring." He says, "Although I have other hobbies, there is no time to take them up now. I like musical instruments. I taught myself the accordion. I also like piano and the electronic keyboard."

Regarding the fact that there are more women Tai Chi practitioners than men, Mr. Liu comments, "It is the same for all the courses at *Organization A*. Besides, men are too lazy to get up so early in the morning!" In fact, at *Organization A* the calligraphy course is the only one where male students dominate.

11) Ms. Ning

At the time of the interview in 2012, Ms. Ning was 59 years old. She was a member of a formal Tai Chi class (level four, section three) at *Organization A* and the leader of an informal Tai Chi group (*Group B*). She had been practicing Tai Chi for five years.

General impression

Ms. Ning is of medium height and average weight for a woman in northern China. She appears young and energetic for her age. She walks gracefully and is the most

fashionably dressed individual in her class. Like many of her female classmates, when she arrives at her Tai Chi classroom she goes to the curtained corner to put on her Tai Chi uniform. At the end of her class, she changes back into her street clothes before walking home. Ms. Ning is enthusiastic and friendly. She chats with all the members of her class, organizes class events, passes on notices from the administration office, and always brings her Tai Chi music to class. Her personal characteristics perhaps explain why the administration office of *Organization A* appointed her head of the class. Her caring nature carries on outside class. For example, she often reminds Mr. Liu to slow down in *Group B* because of his advanced age. She always brings drinking water for the members of *Group B*, hot water in a thermos on cold days and cold water¹³⁷ in a jug on hot days. One can tell from the way she speaks that she is educated. As a Jinan native, she speaks in pure Jinan dialect.

Family

Ms. Ning retired at 55, but her husband is still working at one of the major national banks in China. Their only child is working in a different city in China. Ms. Ning's father is dead but her mother still lives in her own apartment. Ms. Ning's mother retired from a government job with a pension that includes health coverage. However, she is bedridden and has a 24-hour caretaker. Ms. Ning is the eldest of three children. Both her siblings are married, living with their own families and working in Jinan. They share the cost of their mother's caretaker, because hiring her was a family decision and Ms. Ning's mother's health insurance does not cover a full-time caretaker.

Ms. Ning's childhood living situation was unusual. When she was born, her mother was too busy working to care of her. She therefore made a private arrangement, paying a family living nearby to take care her daughter. That family consisted of a married couple without children of their own. According to Ms. Ning, each month, when her mother visited the family to bring the payment, she "only pointed out what they did wrong" before picking up her daughter. Ms. Ning did not return to her parents' home until the age of 13.

¹³⁷ It is neither safe nor a custom to drink tap water in Jinan and in China. Tap water has to be boiled and then cooled down at room temperature in summer. Summer in Jinan can easily get to the high 30s degrees Celsius (e.g., It was 38 degrees for almost a month during my field research in 2012.).

Ms. Ning's two siblings had a different upbringing. When Ms. Ning's sister was born, she was sent by her parents to the provincial government kindergarten, which provided daily care and weekly or monthly boarding. Her sister was a monthly boarder, which meant that her family brought her home only once a month. The kindergarten accepted children from about two-months old to the age of seven. Of the three siblings, only Ms. Ning's brother grew up in their parents' home. When he was born, an older relative they called "grandma" stayed at her parents' home to take care of the baby boy. Ms. Ning says, "When my mother became older, she regretted the decision to send me away. In order to make up for it, she insisted on bringing up my daughter personally. As a result, my daughter is closer to my mother than to us." Nevertheless, Ms. Ning and her husband have maintained a close relationship with their adult daughter. They communicate regularly by telephone and through the Internet. They also travel to visit her. Their daughter always comes home for holidays.

According to Ms. Ning, life seems to be harmonious between her and her husband. She is proud to show her apartment located in one of the ten buildings in a fenced compound owned by the bank her husband works for. Their apartment is fashionable, with modern furniture and interior design. It is only a few-minute walk from *Organization A* as well as from her husband's office. Every day, he buys the groceries from a farmers' market on the corner of their block on his way home.

Health

Before taking up Tai Chi, Ms. Ning says she suffered from various illnesses. She adds, "My spirit is higher after practicing Tai Chi. After the first six months of practicing Tai Chi, my insomnia was less severe. After one and a half years, my blood pressure, my heart condition and my neck pain have improved as well."

Education and employment

Ms. Ning's schooling was similar to that of most urban people born in the 1950s in China. Throughout her school years, she was always appointed head of the class and served as a liaison between students and teachers. Ms. Ning graduated from high school in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution. She then went to work at a village on the

outskirts of Jinan. After working in that village for more than a year, Ms. Ning was recommended for a college in Jinan. At the completion of her college degree as a “Worker, Peasant, and Solider Student,” she was assigned a teaching job in a vocational school in Jinan. When she developed a health problem, she changed to a job in the school library. Eventually she retired from the Continuing Education Department of the same school at her mandatory retirement age.

Ms. Ning says, “I did not like sports before retiring.” Throughout her career, she worked mainly at jobs that did not require physical labor.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Ning became interested in Tai Chi when she saw groups of older Tai Chi practitioners on her morning commute to work. Immediately after retiring, she started taking a beginners’ Tai Chi course at *Organization A*. As she explains, “I had four reasons for taking Tai Chi courses: 1) to improve my fitness level, 2) to carry on Tai Chi as part of China’s cultural heritage, 3) to take advantage of Tai Chi courses offered at *Organization A*, and 4) to follow in the footsteps of retirees from the school where I had worked. My fellow retirees are all here taking various courses.” Ms. Ning also adds that her “former colleagues take courses to improve their fitness level and to learn things they have always been interested in but never had time for before retiring.”

At the time of the interview, Ms. Ning says, “I have fulfilled 80% of my initial expectations from Tai Chi. Tai Chi now is a very important part of my daily life. It has become my favorite hobby, over my other hobbies including doing housework, chatting with others, and reading books.” Ms. Ning says she is determined to make Tai Chi a life-long commitment. “There is no reason for me to stop practicing Tai Chi. It is all about time management. For example, I will make time to practice Tai Chi while happily babysitting for my daughter, when the time comes.” Ms. Ning is also taking a singing course at *Organization A*. She feels that “singing requires talent, whereas progressing in Tai Chi is a result of personal interest and hard work.”

Over the past five years, Ms. Ning has taken seven Tai Chi courses at *Organization A*, including Simplified 24, the 42 Competition, the 48, and several Tai Chi Sword courses. The 26 classmates in her current Tai Chi course at *Organization A* are all

retired elders from various walks of life. She has always been the appointed head of the class of all her Tai Chi courses.

Ms. Ning practices Tai Chi four times a week for a total of approximately 12 hours, once in her Tai Chi class and three times with *Group B*. She often arrives at her group meeting spot early in order to practice on her own. Originally Group B consisted of 20 individuals who were from her Tai Chi class, but at the time of my research fieldwork there were only between three and five people.

Ms. Ning enjoys practicing Tai Chi with a group as well as by herself. “I like the group’s positive atmosphere and the formal instruction provided by the experienced and respected Tai Chi instructors. However, I can focus better when I practice by myself,” she said. Ms. Ning appreciates the opportunity to lead *Group B* because “teaching others is a valuable learning process that contributes to my own growth. I have to make sure I have solid Tai Chi skills and a thorough understanding of Tai Chi moves. My Tai Chi techniques improve through correcting others.” She enjoys chatting with members of both her formal and informal Tai Chi groups.

Ms. Ning believes that Tai Chi and needlework are both suitable pursuits for women. She feels that the slow movements of Tai Chi and the flexibility it involves are very positive. On the other hand, she thinks that the sitting position for doing needlework or looking at a computer screen could have a negative impact on one’s neck. She thought about taking calligraphy or Chinese painting courses at *Organization A*, but was not sure of the effect it would have on her neck. As noted earlier, her neck pains have been lessened through Tai Chi but she is still trying to protect her neck.

12) Ms. Qi

At the time of the interview, Ms. Qi was 72 years old. She was taking a Tai Chi course (level four, section three) at *Organization A* as well as participating in an informal Tai Chi group (*Group D*) in a city park. She had been practicing Tai Chi for five years.

General impression

Ms. Qi is of average height for a northern Chinese woman of her age group. Although she is of average weight compared to women of her cohort in the general public

in Jinan, she looks overweight among her Tai Chi group members since most Tai Chi practitioners of both genders are fit or slim. She walks slowly and carefully. She attends her Tai Chi class and group wearing a short-sleeved shirt, a pair of loose pants and Tai Chi shoes. Her home is not close to *Organization A* or the park, but she can take one bus to either place without having to transfer. Normally she has a serious look on her face, except that she smiles when she is talking to someone she likes. She is polite and her voice is soft. She only talks to a few members in her Tai Chi class. The majority of her current Tai Chi classmates have taken a number of Tai Chi courses together. This is her first time taking a course at *Organization A*. She took all of her previous Tai Chi courses at *Organization B*. When Ms. Qi goes to her Tai Chi group in the park, she makes a point of only speaking to the six members she met at her previous Tai Chi courses at *Organization B*. Judging by her manners and her speech, Ms. Qi appears to be an educated person. She has been living in Jinan for most of her life so she speaks fluently in the Jinan dialect.

Family

Ms. Qi was born in a city not far from Jinan where all her five siblings live. Ms. Qi and her husband are both retired. Their two children are married and living with their own families in Jinan. Each of the children has one child. Since Ms. Qi and her husband's workplaces did not have employee housing, they bought an apartment and later bought another one for their son. At the time of my fieldwork, her husband was living with their son and daughter-in-law and looking after the grandchild. Ms. Qi's parents passed away many years ago.

When her first grandchild was born, Ms. Qi quit her substitute teaching job and happily became the full-time caretaker of the baby until he was ready to go to school. Ms. Qi says, "Looking after grandchildren is our Chinese tradition. Although it is not an obligation, being grandparents, we are happy and willing to care for our grandchildren so that our children can focus more on their jobs."

Ms. Qi says, "I devoted the first half of my life to my children, my family and my job, not for myself. After my grandson started school a few years ago, I was able to move back into my own apartment." Ms. Qi says that she enjoys her independence. "My

children have their own families and their own jobs. They don't need my money and I don't need theirs. I have a retirement pension that enables me to buy what I want! I'm content. I'm very independent. I follow my own daily routine. I listen to the morning news on the radio every day. I also subscribe to two magazines on health for the elders."

Health

Six years ago, Ms. Qi had surgery on her back. She says, "Prior to my surgery, I could only walk five minutes at a time before my legs got very numb and painful. I decided to have the surgery because the surgeon told me it could improve the quality of my life." Six months after her surgery, Ms. Qi decided to take a Tai Chi course to help with her recovery. She says, "I think Tai Chi is good for older people because it is not intensive." Two years after her Tai Chi practice, Ms. Qi says that she could feel the gained strength in her legs.

Education and employment

Ms. Qi completed a university degree before the Cultural Revolution. She is proud that "of [her] five siblings I'm the only university graduate." After graduating in 1961, Ms. Qi was assigned a job as a high school teacher in Jinan. She taught at the same school for 35 years. For all of those years, she was also a homeroom teacher. At the time of retiring, she earned the highest pay in her category based on her seniority. Ms. Qi is also proud that she has the highest income and pension of all her siblings. After retiring, Ms. Qi taught at a private school as a substitute teacher for two years, but quit when her first grandchild was born.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Qi took a beginners' Tai Chi course at *Organization B* five years ago. She says, "I took Tai Chi in hopes of becoming independent again after my surgery." She is happy to share that "I have reached my initial goal for Tai Chi! Now I am interested in Tai Chi. I want to do it better." Ms. Qi took several levels of Tai Chi courses at *Organization B* for three years. When she completed all the Tai Chi courses that institute offers, she went to *Organization A* to take an advanced Tai Chi course. Over the five

years, Ms. Qi has learned the Simplified 24, the 42, and the 48 Tai Chi sets. Not only has Ms. Qi learned all the three sets of Tai Chi, but she has also taken each course twice taught by two different instructors at *Organization B*. Like some of her classmates, her reason for taking the same Tai Chi courses twice was that she missed some classes while she stayed with her daughter who had just given birth.¹³⁸

Ms. Qi practices Tai Chi twice a week. She attends her Tai Chi class on Tuesday and her Tai Chi group on Friday. She says, “I feel comfortable after the Tai Chi group practice. Tai Chi is good for older people and for those with less strength because it is just the appropriate amount of intensity.” She also feels that “It’s better to learn Tai Chi from a teacher because the teacher can explain and show the Tai Chi moves in class. I sometimes watch the demonstration by Li Deyin on a computer to review what I have learned in class.”

Ms. Qi says, “Practicing Tai Chi is the most important part of my daily life now. I intend to keep my health and avoid getting sick. By doing that, I won’t be a burden on my children and they won’t have to take time off from work to accompany me to see a doctor at the hospital.¹³⁹ After my grandson started going to school, I was able to manage my own life. I take a trip once a year. Our tour group goes to a different country each year. I enjoy traveling and want to travel more before I get too old.” Ms. Qi says, “I loved sports when I was young. I was a member of the school gymnastics team when I was a student in both high school and university.”

Regarding her Tai Chi experience, Ms. Qi says, “The drawback of my Tai Chi practice is that my knees hurt and also I have to be careful with my back. I don’t feel younger because of practicing Tai Chi. But I feel happy interacting with my Tai Chi friends. I met those friends through the Tai Chi courses at *Organization B*. The friendship with them is different from that with my former colleagues from my high school and the private school. The relationship with my Tai Chi friends doesn’t involve any employment-related conflict.”

¹³⁸ It is a custom across China for a new mother to stay indoors and to get as much rest as possible during the first month after giving birth. Traditionally it was her mother or mother-in-law who cared for her. The tradition still exists although some urban families hire a full-time helper for that month.

¹³⁹ Family doctors did not exist in Jinan in 2012, although it is just starting in several cities in China. It is a custom for a family member, usually an adult child, to take time off from work in order to accompany their elder parent(s) to see a doctor in a hospital.

Ms. Qi believes that “Tai Chi practitioners have a different temperament than non-practitioners. It’s better to start practicing Tai Chi at a younger age. But Tai Chi is an activity suitable for middle aged and older people. Young people don’t have the patience or the time. They are too busy with their jobs and raising their children.” Ms. Qi comments on the age range of Tai Chi practitioners, “In China, people think about Tai Chi as an older people’s activity. If you watch television, it is always older people who are practicing Tai Chi. Therefore, the public image is that it’s only old men and old women who practice Tai Chi.”

Regarding the gender imbalance of Tai Chi practitioners, Ms. Qi says, “I don’t know why there are more women practicing Tai Chi than men. I guess men are lazy in their 60s or 70s whereas women of the same age are willing to do physical exercises. Besides, Chinese men have so many other choices for leisure activities such as running, swimming, walking up the mountains, singing Beijing Opera, and taking care of their pet birds. Although swimming is good for joints, I think the dirty swimming pools are not good for women.”

13) Mr. Ou

At the time of the interview, Mr. Ou was 74 years old. He was a member of an informal Tai Chi group (*Group D*) at a city park. He had been practicing Tai Chi for eight years.

General impression

Mr. Ou is taller than average for a northern Chinese man of his age. He is youthful, fit, and full of energy. He walks energetically with a straight back, perhaps as a result of his many years of military training. He talks slowly with a soft voice. Like Mr. Liu, he never wears Tai Chi uniforms. He goes to his group with the clothing that he used to wear to go to work at his office. He can definitely afford Tai Chi uniforms with his higher than average pension because of the position that he retired from, but it would appear that he is thrifty and prefers to make use of what he has. He is polite and friendly to everyone in his Tai Chi group. During his group practice, he always stands in the front row to follow the group leader more easily. He lives within walking distance of the park

where his group meets. He is proud of his spacious apartment. He was born elsewhere in the province. Mr. Ou's way of speaking and the content of his conversation reflect his ample work experience in comparison to the majority of research participants. He speaks in the Jinan dialect with a little trace of his hometown accent.

Family

Mr. Ou lives by himself in an apartment building of the municipal government department where he used to work. His wife is no longer living. Their two children are married and live with their own families in Jinan. They are busy working and their homes are relatively distant from Mr. Ou's home.¹⁴⁰ However, they always make sure to come to visit Mr. Ou during the holidays and on some weekends. (It is a tradition for grown children with their own families to visit their parents during holidays such as the Chinese New Year.) While serving in the military, Mr. Ou was stationed in Jinan and has remained there all his adult life. His relatives live in his hometown and sometimes visit him. For example, during the interview at Mr. Ou's apartment, one of his nieces, who was in Jinan for a conference, dropped by and brought him some fresh fruits.¹⁴¹

Health

Mr. Ou states that, "I have always been very healthy. So many years of military experience have set up a very firm foundation for my health. Walking up and down the steps made by rocks or bricks or raw surface on the side of the mountains and going for walks on streets have been my daily routine for many year.

Education and employment

Mr. Ou joined the army from his hometown at the age of 16 after completing junior high school. During his career, he took a number of adult education courses. Eventually he passed all of the exams and obtained the equivalent of a college diploma.

¹⁴⁰ Jinan is 8,227 square kilometers in comparison with the municipality of Halifax, which is 5,490 square kilometers.

¹⁴¹ It is common for family members and relatives to come for a visit without notice.

Mr. Ou says, “I didn’t have enough education. I always wanted a chance to study and to improve myself. I like the Tai Chi course the most among other courses that I have taken, such as photography, calligraphy, or health Information.”

After serving in the military for 30 years, Mr. Ou was re-assigned to an office job with the Jinan municipal government. His administrative position with the city government was similar to the last position he held in the military. After more than ten years working for the city, he retired at the age of 61. At the request of his employer, he worked for an extra year after his mandatory retirement age.

Tai Chi experience

Mr. Ou says, “Immediately after retiring I took my first Tai Chi course at *Organization A*, which was very close to my home.” Along with Tai Chi, he also took a course on health and wellness for the elders. Unlike most Tai Chi classmates, Mr. Ou did not practice after class. “It was hard for me to remember the Tai Chi moves because I did not have time to practice after class.” As he explains, “My wife didn’t understand why I wanted to take courses after retiring. She thought I should be doing housework since I’m a retiree. In addition, during the year I retired our first grandchild was born. So I helped with housework and baby-sitting until the child was old enough to go to school.” When *Organization A* moved to a new location far from his home, Mr. Ou heard about the reputation of a Tai Chi instructor at *Organization B*, so he went there and took Tai Chi and other courses for six years.

Mr. Ou currently practices Tai Chi for two hours once a week with his group. His group practices the Simplified 24, the traditional Yang style and the 42 set. Sometimes, they also practice a little Tai Chi sword after the break. The members of his group, including the group leader, are his former classmates from the Tai Chi courses that he took at *Organization B*.

Mr. Ou believes, “It is best to combine learning Tai Chi in a group and practicing it by oneself. Learning with other people in a group, we can help one another. If I practice by myself now, I can’t remember all the Tai Chi moves. But if you really want to do Tai Chi well, you have to practice on your own. You have to spend time concentrating on your own.” Mr. Ou says, “Going to my Tai Chi group is good for interacting with people.

Group members can become good friends. Not long ago, I invited six friends from my Tai Chi group to my apartment. We cooked in my kitchen and had a nice lunch together. They liked my apartment and we all had a good time.”

Mr. Ou says, “As a general rule, I must go out to exercise every morning. I spend 30 minutes walking on the streets and another 30 minutes walking up a mountain¹⁴² near my home. When the weather is good, I spend one hour going up and down the mountain and I also walk 30 minutes. The back slope of the mountain is beautiful. It is harder to climb because it is steep and there are no steps there, but the air is so fresh and there is hardly anybody there!”

Other than his Tai Chi practice, “Every day I read several newspapers and journals such as the Current Affairs and Economic Weekly that I subscribe to. I also have other interests such as photography, calligraphy, and dancing. But I like Tai Chi the most. Although going up the mountains and walking have become second nature, Tai Chi is different. I can practice Tai Chi anywhere at any time. For example, if I have trouble sleeping and get up with a headache, I will go to the park next to my home and practice deep breathing and Tai Chi. My headache will be gone in 15 minutes and I will feel normal again.”

Regarding the fact that there are more women than men Tai Chi practitioners, Mr. Ou comments, “Women like social activities. They like to get together. The women living in my building often get in a group and chat in the yard. As for men, the more educated men just have too much pride. The higher their social status, the harder it is for them to participate in activities with ordinary people. Therefore, they prefer to be on their own instead of joining a group. For example, if you look at a group of retirees who walk up the mountains in the morning, most of them are retired from companies, fewer from government offices. Chinese culture does not divide exercises based on gender. What types of exercises either men or women do is up to their personal interests.”

¹⁴² It is a popular morning exercise spot for ordinary people of any age. This mountain with an altitude of 285 meters is located in the southern part of Jinan.

14) Mr. Deng

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. Deng was 75 years old. He was a member of an informal Tai Chi group (*Group F*) in a city park. He had been practicing Tai Chi for 15 years.

General impression

Mr. Deng appears very fit and energetic and much younger than his age. He walks smoothly like a martial artist with a straight back and good posture. The flexibility of his legs enables him to do Tai Chi moves properly, especially the ones that the majority of older practitioners find very difficult. He is of average height and weight for a Chinese man born in the north. He and his wife always wear colorful Tai Chi uniforms and Tai Chi shoes. He is a man of very few words. He always practices Tai Chi with his wife, who is the leader of the group. Generally she does the talking for both of them. Based on the vocabulary that he uses and his manners, it is obvious that he has had some formal schooling. The Jinan dialect is his everyday language although he speaks it with a slight accent from the area of the province where he was born.

Family

Mr. Deng and his wife are both retired. When they are living in their own apartment in Jinan, they have a very Tai Chi focused daily routine. They go to the park to practice Tai Chi for three hours seven mornings a week. Then they go home and cook lunch together. After lunch and their nap, they practice Tai Chi again or study certain moves by watching Tai Chi demonstration videos or reading Tai Chi books at home. In the evening, Mr. Deng goes for a one-hour walk after their evening meal and before watching television.

Mr. Deng and his wife's three children are all married and living with their own families elsewhere in the province. He is very proud of the types of job and the important positions that they have. During the summer he and his wife always go to visit one of their children who lives in a coastal city. They stay there to get away from the summer heat in Jinan. During their stay, they help out by looking after their young grandchild.

Health

Mr. Deng has had high blood pressure for many years, as he explains, “It must have something to do with my family because everyone in my family has high blood pressure.” Although he does not feel any symptoms, he has always taken medication for it and has continued even after taking up Tai Chi.

Mr. Deng started physical exercise prior to retiring. As he says, “when I was 40 years old, I started walking up the mountains and doing leg stretches¹⁴³ every morning before going to work. I was too busy with my job and didn’t have time to learn Tai Chi, but walking up the mountains and stretching my legs didn’t require taking courses. My exercises were not for treating any illness. They were only for keeping me fit.”

Mr. Deng prioritizes the important aspects of his life in the following way: “Health first, children and family are second, all other things including employment are in third place.” He feels, “My health is perfect now. I have a good appetite. I sleep well. My legs are very flexible. I can stretch my legs down to 180 degrees.” As he spoke to me during the interview, he propped his leg up to a full vertical split on a nearby tree.

Education and employment

Mr. Deng completed high school prior to entering the workforce. He had a job with one of the city’s major transportation companies for more than 30 years. During his career, he had both technical and administrative positions. One of those jobs involved traveling on the train and each of those shifts took several days. During the years he worked in an office before retiring, he was sitting behind a desk all day. He retired from the company at his mandatory retirement age of 60.

Tai Chi experience

Mr. Deng started practicing Tai Chi when he retired. Over the past 15 years, he has practiced almost every style of Tai Chi. As noted earlier, he started Tai Chi “without much thought, just to do it as a fitness exercise.” He says, “At the beginning, my Tai Chi skills progressed very quickly” and “that was because of my many years of strength and

¹⁴³ It is a very popular and economical leisure activity for people of all ages in Jinan and elsewhere in urban China to walk up the mountains in the suburbs and doing a vertical leg-stretching exercise against the trees in the early morning before starting their day.

flexibility training.” The first Tai Chi course that Mr. Deng took was at a martial arts club when he and his wife were visiting their son’s family in another city. First, a Tai Chi master at the club taught Mr. Deng and his wife three lessons. And then the master’s assistant carried on with more mostly practice sessions in the club. They “learned all four styles of Tai Chi, including Yang, Chen, Wu, and Sun.”

Mr. Deng always practices Tai Chi with his wife. They arrive very early in the morning and practice together before their group members join them at the park. They also practice at home in the afternoon. “Normally we practice the Chen and Yang style Tai Chi. I like the Chen style the most because of its powerful moves and elegant poses,” Mr. Deng says. The 56 Chen Competition set is his favorite. He also likes other Tai Chi sets such as the 42 Yang or the 45 Wu. He once learned and practiced Chen Style Tai Chi Fan for a short period many years ago. He says he has forgotten it now. Even when he and his wife were looking after a newborn grandchild at their son’s home, they “got up at 4am and went out to practice Tai Chi at 5am. When [they] came back to the house at 7am the baby was just waking up.”

Mr. Deng says “I am addicted to Tai Chi. I started practicing for my health. I am still practicing for my health today” and “Tai Chi is my best hobby.” His other leisure activities include reading a local newspaper, watching television and going for walks. He says he follows the Chinese proverb “Eat smart and keep walking.” He thinks, “Swimming could be a substitute for Tai Chi because floating on the water protects your joints.” But, as he explains, it is not as convenient as Tai Chi. For example, “We swim in the ocean when visiting our son in the summer time but it is too cold to swim outside in the winter. Indoor pools and gym memberships are too expensive for common people. Practicing Tai Chi doesn’t require equipment. All you need is a small space.”

Mr. Deng is of the opinion that “women like fitness exercises such as Tai Chi more than men and that is why women live longer.” He also thinks that “men dislike exercise and they would rather be sitting around chatting, smoking and drinking.”

15) Ms. Tang

At the time of the interview, Ms. Tang was 62 years old. She was taking a Tai Chi course (level four, section three) at *Organization A* as well as participating in two

informal groups. One of them (*Group I*) practices in the courtyard of her apartment building and the other¹⁴⁴ practices in a city park. She had been practicing Tai Chi off and on for about 20 years.

General impression

Ms. Tang is the tallest woman in her Tai Chi class. She does not appear muscular but she is very energetic. She is usually calm and reserved in class, except when speaking with her close friends like Ms. Ning. She is very friendly with the instructor, who was a friend of her late father. Both men belonged to a small circle of distinguished Tai Chi practitioners in Jinan. Ms. Tang's classmates were well aware of this fact so were not upset that he sometimes showed her a difficult Tai Chi move not taught in class. She often misses class due to a conflict with her part-time job. When she does attend, she makes sure to change into her pink Tai Chi uniform as soon as she arrives, because "wearing a Tai Chi uniform helps my concentration during class." Ms. Tang's down-to-earth gestures and vocabulary reflect her working class background. As a Jinan native, she speaks pure Jinan dialect.

Family

Ms. Tang and her husband are both retired. They live in an apartment building since neither of their workplaces provided employee housing. Their children are all married and have moved away from the city. Ms. Tang's parents are no longer living. Her siblings are married and living in Jinan.

Health

Prior to her Tai Chi experience, Ms. Tang says that her blood pressure was low and that she often felt dizzy when she stood up. "My blood pressure is normal now, my health is good and my spirits are higher." Ms. Tang is proud of her youthful appearance: "Look at me. I'm over 60. But I don't look my age!"

¹⁴⁴ This group was a long distance away from the host university and there was schedule conflict with one of my regular groups, so it was not observed.

Education and employment

Ms. Tang started working at a local factory immediately after graduating from high school. After 30 years working there six days a week, she retired from the factory at her mandatory retirement age of 50. Subsequently, she found a part-time job at a store. At the time of the field research, she was working several hours a week. Ms. Tang explains, “I wanted to learn something new from a different type of job and it is like a pastime after retirement.” She used to walk to work because the factory was not far away. Now she bikes to the store where she works.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Tang’s first exposure to Tai Chi was as a child at home. “I was influenced by my father. I remember watching him practice and wondering why he moved so slowly. In my early forties, my father showed me a few basic moves so he could have a partner to practice push-hands¹⁴⁵ with at home. Once I started practicing regularly, I realized that slow can be good for you, too.”

Ms. Tang says, “I took up Tai Chi in my forties for my health and wellness, but I was too busy with my job and it was hard to get up so early in the morning. So my Tai Chi practice has been on and off over the years. The longest break that I took from Tai Chi was seven years.” Ms. Tang joined her first Tai Chi group at a neighborhood park. “I learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set from an experienced Tai Chi practitioner who was a friend of my current Tai Chi class instructor.” She practiced Tai Chi with that group every morning before going to work. “It is better to practice Tai Chi in a group because you can benefit from the energy that the group generates.” She also read some Tai Chi books and watched video demonstrations.

Ms. Tang practices Tai Chi every morning for one hour and a half with her current group in the courtyard of her apartment building. They practice the Simplified 24 and the 48 sets. On rainy days, they practice in an indoor space in a partially constructed building. In good weather, there are 30 participants. When it is raining, there are only about ten. Ms. Tang does not think her daily practice affects her family. “I get up at 5am and go out practicing Tai Chi. When I return home my husband is not up yet.”

¹⁴⁵ See page 25, section 2.3.3. Tai Chi Styles.

Ms. Tang “became devoted to Tai Chi after the first six months.” In the very beginning, “I suffered leg pains that lasted for two months.” Ms. Tang is proud of her achievement. “My Tai Chi techniques have improved. When I started, I only moved my limbs. I now know how to control my limb movements with my core strength. When my group practices in the morning, the people who walk by us all comment that my Tai Chi technique is the best of the group!” She also says, “I’m glad that my Tai Chi skills have improved. But I know that I have only learned the basics of Tai Chi so far and there is so much more that I can learn from books and instructors.”

Ms. Tang says, “Unlike my classmates, I didn’t start taking the Tai Chi courses at *Organization A* at the beginners’ level. I only came here last term to learn the Wu Style Tai Chi because the instructor in my informal group doesn’t teach the Wu style. This term I’m taking the advanced Tai Chi course. My current course instructor will teach a push-hands course next term and I’m planning to take it. Even though my father showed me some moves of push-hands, he wasn’t an instructor. I want to learn push-hands in a formal class.”

In Ms. Tang’s opinion, “Practicing Tai Chi is not easy. It requires hard work and getting up very early. Some people have a hard time getting up in the morning. That is why mainly older people are practicing Tai Chi, because they can get up early. As for men, they don’t like morning activities because they are lazy! Actually, I think it is better to start Tai Chi at a younger age, when you’re in your twenties.”

Ms. Tang says, “Tai Chi is an indispensable part of my daily life. It brings me the greatest pleasure in life. When I practice Tai Chi I forget all my worries. Practicing Tai Chi makes me feel younger. Once someone offered me a seat on the bus and I wondered why, because I don’t think I’m old. I don’t think you’re old until you’re over 70. People live longer nowadays, which raises the standard of what ‘old’ means. To me, there is no activity that can replace Tai Chi. Tai Chi is unique. For example, swimming is not suitable for older people because of its high intensity. Yoga is for young people. Tai Chi is slow with low intensity. After practicing Tai Chi you won’t feel short of breath or get too sweaty. If for any reason I can’t practice Tai Chi, I will practice standing meditation instead.”

Ms. Tang keeps her interest in Tai Chi “for health and wellbeing and as a pastime.” She is only interested in the Tai Chi courses, not any of the other courses at *Organization A*. “I like watching any program on television and going on trips to other provinces. I also like table tennis but there is no public facility available and not enough space to put a table in my home.”

16) Mr. Peng

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. Peng was 59 years old. He had been an instructor for two Tai Chi courses at *Organization B* for six years. He was also a leader of two informal Tai Chi groups (*Group C* and *Group D*) in a park. He had been practicing Tai Chi for 24 years.

General impression

Mr. Peng is the only male Jinan participant who had not retired at the time of the research fieldwork. He was due to retire in less than a year. He is of average height and weight for a northern Chinese man of his generation. He appears to be fit and younger than his age. He stands and walks with very good posture. He always has a smile on his face. He is patient and friendly with all the members of his Tai Chi class and Tai Chi groups. He talks a lot and often tells jokes during the break. He always wears a Tai Chi uniform and Tai Chi shoes to his group practice. During the break, he is usually busy answering questions about Tai Chi techniques or details of social events that he organizes for his Tai Chi group members. He was born in Jinan and has lived there all his life. Based on his vocabulary and his manners, one can tell that he has not had much formal schooling. He speaks in pure Jinan dialect.

Family

Mr. Peng and his wife live in an apartment of their own because neither of their workplaces had employee housing. Mr. Peng’s apartment is not close either to his work or his Tai Chi groups. He travels by bicycle. Mr. Peng’s wife is retired. Their only child is married and lives with her family in Jinan. Mr. Peng says that his wife helps babysit their grandchild. She also does all the housework. All of his relatives live in Jinan.

Health

Mr. Peng says, “before I was five years old, I was sick a lot. My immune system was not good. I was staying in the hospital five days a week on average.” Mr. Peng’s father was a practitioner of martial arts. His father started teaching him a type of martial art called Long Fist¹⁴⁶ when he was only six years old. Since that time, Mr. Peng says he has never been ill.

Education and employment

After completing high school during the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Peng was employed as a martial artist with the city’s sport team. He specialized in Long Fist. After three years with the team, Mr. Peng had an accident during a sports competition. He then became the coach of a factory’s martial arts team. After working seven years in the factory, Mr. Peng changed to work in a company. Mr. Peng is respected as a long-term martial artist at his workplace. His employers even allow him to arrange his work shift in order to go to *Organization B* two half days a week to teach Tai Chi.

Tai Chi experience

Mr. Peng says that he has been practicing Tai Chi for 24 years of his 53 years of martial arts experience. His father taught him Long Fist for three years and then Mr. Peng continued learning from two of his father’s martial arts friends for the next six years. In the beginning he was not very motivated but after the first three years, he states, “I became willing to learn and I practiced voluntarily after I finished my school homework. I felt that it was more interesting to practice Long Fist than running around with the other kids.” Throughout high school, Mr. Peng was the leader of his school martial arts team. He also participated at the city’s Amateur Sports School in his free time after school.

Mr. Peng started practicing Tai Chi in his mid-30s. He switched to Tai Chi because of knee injuries. Mr. Peng says, “Tai Chi was briefly mentioned throughout the training at the city’s sport team when I was there. At the competitions, the team earns

¹⁴⁶Long Fist (Chang quan 长拳) is a type of bare-hand Chinese martial arts similar to Boxing. It can be practiced alone or with a partner.

most of its score from Long Fist, so Tai Chi was only done as a way of increasing your team's total score.”

Mr. Peng has been teaching a beginners and an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization B*. He says, “the president of the institute once saw my Tai Chi performance at a martial arts competition and really liked it. He then invited me to teach Tai Chi at the institute.” Mr. Peng organizes a free of charge Tai Chi practice group (*Group C*) that meets once a week for three hours in a city park. The group consists of more than 40 members from his two current Tai Chi courses. They practice the newly learned Tai Chi moves. Mr. Peng also helps *Group D*, which consists of his former students including Ms. Qi and Mr. Ou. *Groups C* and *D* meet at the same time and practice about 15 metres apart. During practice, *Group C* always uses the background music that Mr. Peng brings in, while *Group D* also uses music that can be the same music as *Group C* or different. This is possible because the volume of both groups' music is kept very low. Mr. Peng devotes himself mainly to *Group C* and just helps out the leader of *Group D*.

Mr. Peng believes that “the foundation of Tai Chi is the *Eight Principles of Martial Arts*.¹⁴⁷ But most Tai Chi instructors don't teach it. Each time I start a course, I spend the first few classes teaching the breathing exercises before teaching Tai Chi moves. I think those principles should be learned before Tai Chi because they help people to learn Tai Chi properly.”

According to Mr. Peng, he is a certified first level Tai Chi coach. He says, “the third level coach is at the city level. The second level is the provincial level. When I took my qualifying exam for the first level, I had to do one month of intensive training in a different province.” Mr. Peng says, “I see Tai Chi as my profession. I have liked Tai Chi since I was young. If for some reason I couldn't practice Tai Chi, I would just sit and meditate and practice Tai Chi internally.”

Mr. Peng believes that “Tai Chi, calligraphy, and Beijing Opera are components of Chinese culture. Practicing Tai Chi is not just the physical moves. It is more about the internal energy. For many years, I have been thinking about Tai Chi beside my actual practice. When I figured out something, I immediately shared it with other people. My

¹⁴⁷Wu Gong Ba Fa, 武功八法 is a set of eight breathing techniques. A practitioner stands at the same spot moving his or her limbs while regulating his or her breathing.

family members thought I was addicted to Tai Chi. My body and spirit are young, only my face looks old. At a recent high school reunion, my former classmates told me that I hadn't aged!" Mr. Peng says, "I don't feel I'm old. My plan is to continue teaching Tai Chi ten more years after I retire."

Mr. Peng feels that "there is nothing else that can replace Tai Chi. Long Fist and Tai Chi are like two cars running in the same direction on the same road. Long Fist is about external force while Tai Chi is about internal energy. The routines of Long Fist and Tai Chi are complementary. The only difference is that Long Fist is fast and Tai Chi is slow. I practice both every day of the year, including the Chinese New Year day." Mr. Peng gets up at five o'clock every morning and practices Long Fist for one hour and then Tai Chi for one hour.

Mr. Peng thinks, "the best age to start learning Tai Chi is in your 40s. People in their 40s have good comprehension and flexible limbs. Of course, starting to learn Tai Chi younger would be better. But when people are young, they don't think about doing Tai Chi to improve their health."

Mr. Peng also loves photography. He has been an amateur photographer for 30 years, "mainly for interacting with older people." Sometimes he discusses photography techniques with some of his Tai Chi group members who are also amateur photographers. He often brings his digital camera to the Tai Chi group practice and takes pictures of landscapes and plants near the lily pond in the park after the group practice.

17) Ms. Wang

At the time of the interview, Ms. Wang was 55 years old. She was teaching a Tai Chi class (*Group H*) in a public park. She had been practicing Tai Chi for 25 years and other forms of martial arts for a total of 44 years.

General impression

Ms. Wang is one of the shortest among all the Jinan participants. She is very fit and looks athletic. Her hair is always pulled back in a bun like a ballet dancer. She always wears her Tai Chi shoes and one of her sets of colorful Tai Chi uniforms when practicing by herself and teaching a group. Unlike the vast majority of Tai Chi group

leaders in public parks, she charges a fee based on the number of classes of various lengths being taken. She teaches both groups and individuals. As opposed to the older students in the elders' institutes, her students cover a range of ages. For example, during the fieldwork period, there was an eight-year old boy who had been taking one-on-one Tai Chi lessons from Ms. Wang for two years. Ms. Wang speaks in a high cheerful voice during the group break, but her voice sounds very serious when she is teaching. Her manners and her pure Jinan dialect reveal her blue-collar background and Jinan native status.

Family

Ms. Wang and her husband are both retired. They live on the ground floor of an apartment building. They take advantage of the small outdoor space behind their unit to grow some vegetables and flowers. Their building is located very close to one of the city's most popular parks for Tai Chi groups, especially in the early morning throughout the year or in the evenings in the summer time. Their only child graduated from university in a different province several years ago and has been working there since then. Ms. Wang's parents are no longer living and her five brothers are all retired and living with their own families in Jinan.

Health

Ms. Wang says that she has always been very near-sighted. Except for that, she considers herself a healthy person. As she describes, "I always have a good attitude and never get mad. I don't worry about things because I believe that anger and worries are the root of all illnesses. It is better to 'go with the flow' throughout life."

Education and employment

Ms. Wang completed high school around 1975 near the end of the Cultural Revolution. She was unemployed for a while before getting a temporary job as an assistant to a martial arts coach in one of the districts of the city. She eventually obtained a full-time job in a factory where she worked for 28 years. She retired at her mandatory age of 50.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Wang started her martial arts journey at a very young age. “I watched my oldest brother practicing several forms of martial arts at home when I was little. I liked what my brother was doing and learned a few moves of Long Fist from him. In 1967, when I was ten years old, I was one of the 100 children chosen as young trainees by the city’s martial arts team. Most kids soon dropped out but I was one of the few who stayed with the team. I practiced very hard on my own with my mother’s support. She accompanied me jogging early every morning to increase my strength and she watched me practice on the street late at night because there was not enough space at home.” Ms. Wang “switched to Tai Chi at the age of 30.” As she explains, “I was getting older. And one of my martial arts instructors switched to Tai Chi, so that also influenced my decision. I thought it would be better to do Tai Chi instead of various other forms of martial arts that I had been practicing.”

Ms. Wang practices Tai Chi by herself from 6:30am to 7:30am every morning seven days a week in a park located less than five minutes by foot from her home. During her own practice, she goes through several sets of Tai Chi including the Simplified 24, the 42, the 32, the traditional Chen, and several forms of Tai Chi sword and Tai Chi fan. Immediately after her own practice, she teaches her group at the same location. During the period of the research fieldwork, she was teaching several groups and individuals. One of her Simplified 24 Tai Chi group (*Group H*) was observed regularly. Ms. Wang prefers to practice on her own to “maintain [her] Tai Chi skills,” as she believes, “It is important to separate my own practice from teaching because I can concentrate better. Besides, practicing and teaching at the same time is not good for cultivating my internal energy.”

Ms. Wang has been teaching martial arts, including Tai Chi, for many years. Her students have ranged in age “from 5 years to 75 years.” For the one-year temporary job after high school, she assisted a martial arts team coach. During her permanent factory job, she taught martial arts to pre-school children for several years at the daycare centre of the factory. Since retiring, she has taught Tai Chi (mostly the Simplified 24 set) to individuals and small groups from different organizations in Jinan and other cities in the province. For example, the CEO of a private company in a smaller city hired Ms. Wang

to teach his employees because he had benefitted from Tai Chi during his recovery from heart surgery. Ms. Wang traveled by the train to his company once a week for three years. In Ms. Wang's opinion, "The CEO was very smart. His employees' health improved from practicing Tai Chi. As a result, they were rarely ill, so they saved a lot of medical costs for his company." On one occasion, Ms. Wang was even invited to teach Tai Chi in Japan. She refused the three-year contract because "I couldn't leave my young child and my elder mother for that long."

Regarding the appropriate age to start Tai Chi, Ms. Wang believes that it is better to start at the age of five. "A child younger than five is hard to teach, especially because most kids are spoiled nowadays." Ms. Wang also thinks, "Practicing Tai Chi is a personal choice. It is not related to any social obligations regarding what men or women are supposed to do. In reality, there are more older women practicing Tai Chi than men of the same generation. I think that's because men are lazy and they don't want to get up early to do morning exercises."

Ms. Wang believes that "Tai Chi is part of Chinese culture. Although Tai Chi originated in China, it belongs to the world. Practicing Tai Chi means promoting Chinese culture. The best outcome that you can hope for is cultivating your inner energy and your overall wellbeing. I became addicted to Tai Chi as soon as I switched to it. I have learned Tai Chi from different instructors. No matter which instructor, they all teach standard Tai Chi sets. I also took a short training program at a sports college in 1995 to improve my Tai Chi skills."

Ms. Wang's professional credentials include first level martial arts referee, first level coach, and member of the Chinese Wushu Association.¹⁴⁸ For instance, she was one of the judges at the Tai Chi competition that Ms. Bai's group participated in during this field research. Over the years, Ms. Wang has earned first prize in numerous Tai Chi competitions at the city, provincial, and national levels. A number of framed certificates and metal cups are proudly displayed in her living room.

¹⁴⁸ Chinese Wushu Association 中国武术协会 is the national organization for professional martial artists (www.wushu.com.cn)

Ms. Wang also likes ballroom dancing. When she was young, she danced regularly and also taught ballroom dancing for three years until her baby was born. She never stopped practicing Tai Chi even during the years she was dancing.

18) Ms. Shen

At the time of the interview, Ms. Shen was 88 years old. She was leading an informal Tai Chi group (*Group J*) at the same location next to *Group A*. She had been practicing Tai Chi for 42 years. For 20 of those years she had taught individuals and groups.

General impression

Ms. Shen is the oldest and shortest Jinan participant and one of the most experienced practitioners of Tai Chi. She is much shorter than an average Chinese woman. Although her posture is somewhat stooped forward, she walks briskly with good balance and strong strides. She is cheerful and appears much younger than her age. She is very articulate and speaks Mandarin in a clear and soft voice. She is always pleased and excited when her group members or anyone ask her questions about Tai Chi techniques. She always answers those questions logically, providing a lot of details, possibly a habit produced by her many years of teaching experience. Her comfortable everyday clothes and friendly, easy manners exhibit her elegance and sophistication.

Family

Ms. Shen and her husband lived for many years in a different city in the province. Their apartment building is owned by Ms. Shen's workplace. She remained in the same apartment after her husband's death in 1991. A few years ago, at the request of her children, Ms. Shen moved in with her oldest daughter and son-in-law in Jinan. One of her other three children also lives in Jinan. She visits and spends time with all of her children's families.

Ms. Shen was born and raised in a different province in China. According to Ms. Shen, her mother was able to read and write, which was very rare for a woman in China in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Because of her own experience, Ms. Shen's mother

sent all of her daughters to school despite the fact that it was usually only boys who benefited from an education at that time. Ms. Shen's parents passed away a long time ago and her sisters are now all retired and live with their own families elsewhere in China.

Health

Ms. Shen says, "I developed a bad headache during the year my employer sent me for upgrading at a college in Jinan. The pain was very sharp and only in one spot. It prevented me from reading and I became very frustrated. The pain medications prescribed by the hospital doctors didn't work." She started learning Tai Chi from an elder colleague at the college. After several months of Tai Chi, her headache disappeared. Since then, Ms. Shen says, "My health has been good."

Education and employment

Ms. Shen says that her schooling started before the Sino-Japanese War (July 1937-August 1945) and continued on through the Liberation War (August 1945-September 1949) until after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. She had private tutors, attended a school run by a church and then a public school. After graduating from a university in the 1950s, Ms. Shen was assigned a teaching position in the math department at a college in a city close to Jinan. Several years later, her employer sent her to a one-year teacher-upgrading program at a college in Jinan. She then returned to her teaching position after the training. She was later re-assigned to an affiliated college in another city where she taught until she retired at 65 years old.

Tai Chi experience

Ms. Shen started learning Tai Chi at the age of 36. As she explains, "I was in a teacher-upgrading program. All of a sudden, I developed a bad headache. Thinking it might help me get rid of my headache, an older colleague offered to give me lessons in Tai Chi." Every morning, he taught her and another person Tai Chi free of charge on campus. Ms. Shen says, "once a week, the older colleague took me to a city park for a Tai Chi master to check my Tai Chi moves." She had to pay the park Tai Chi master a small fee each week. Eventually her headache disappeared and she "became addicted to Tai

Chi!” Ms. Shen wanted to read about Tai Chi, so she searched the college library for Tai Chi books and found one book on the 24 Tai Chi set. “That was in 1960 when printed materials about fitness for health were very rare in China.” Over the years, Ms. Shen has collected many Tai Chi books. She was proud to show off her favorite set that she bought after the Cultural Revolution.

Ms. Shen’s Tai Chi practice was interrupted during the Cultural Revolution from 1967 to 1977. The political and social upheaval at that time prevented her from practicing. Her daily activities, like those of all her colleagues at the college, were restricted.

Ms. Shen feels that “practicing Tai Chi has become a part of [her] life,” and she practices every day. Her favorite Tai Chi sets are the Simplified 24, the 48, and the 42. She also practices Tai Chi sword and Tai Chi fan. When she lived in her own home, she taught a number of various sized Tai Chi groups outdoors. On rainy days she was able to practice by herself in her living room. At the time of the interview, she led a small group of her daughter’s friends every morning in the yard of her daughter’s apartment building and practiced on her own after her nap in the afternoons.

Ms. Shen believes “Tai Chi is good for your health. When older people practice Tai Chi, they will get benefits for themselves, their families, and the society. If you understand how Tai Chi works, you will get more Tai Chi benefits. Tai Chi is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. It was passed on to us from our ancestors. The basic principle of Tai Chi is the Yin-Yang harmony. When practicing Tai Chi, the movements of our limbs follow the Yin-Yang routine. If you grasp this concept, your Tai Chi practice will fall into place. Consequently, when your Yin-Yang is in harmony, you are in good health. The best way to benefit from Tai Chi is to combine Tai Chi practice and theory. Both are indispensable. The best outcome you can get from Tai Chi is to train your mind to reach pure thoughts.” She considers herself a happy person. As she explains, “A person belongs to a family. All families have their conflicts. I am a quick-tempered person. Why am I so happy now? Because I figured out how to understand other people’s point of view. Having lived through the Cultural Revolution, I have learned to really appreciate what I have now. Compared to those days, I feel like I am in heaven now! I am glad that I

practice Tai Chi every day. I also sing on my own.” She then happily sang a song for me during the interview.

Ms. Shen says that she has taught Tai Chi to many people of different ages from teenagers to retirees. Towards the end of his life, her late husband encouraged her to “be strong and help other people.” Teaching Tai Chi is her way of doing this. She has strictly followed her own rule of never taking money or gifts from her Tai Chi students. Ms. Shen believes “people should not be selfish. It is more important to think about other people before oneself. During the process of teaching others I also benefit myself. I enjoy teaching Tai Chi. I often thank my students for giving me an opportunity to teach them despite how much or how little they understand my point of view. I always prepare for my Tai Chi class whether it is for an individual or a large group. Through teaching others, my own Tai Chi skills have improved.” Ms. Shen taught all four of her children Tai Chi. All of them practiced at one point in their lives. Her children also taught their colleagues at their workplaces. Ms. Shen says, “I taught my children Tai Chi, but never make them practice. It is better to let them follow their own interests because if they are interested they will continue.”

Ms. Shen believes that when it comes to learning Tai Chi, the younger the better, even though the participants in her groups are likely to be in their fifties. There have always been more women than men in her Tai Chi groups. For example, one typical group that she taught before moving in with her daughter had three men and 27 women.

Ms. Shen thinks, “Tai Chi has defensive aspects, which make it a form of martial arts. It was neither created as a leisure activity, nor as a social activity. Tai Chi does not have to be a group activity, although some elders may feel lonely and enjoy talking to members in their Tai Chi groups.”

Ms. Shen also loves singing and dancing. She says, “There is no conflict between Tai Chi and dance. Tai Chi and dance both revolve around the centre of the body.” When she was in her sixties, Ms. Shen organized a choir for fellow retirees and an elders’ disco dance group at her former workplace. She was also part of a social dance group for ten years.

19) Mr. Kang

At the time of the interview in 2012, Mr. Kang was 74 years old. He was a Tai Chi instructor for several Tai Chi courses at *Organization A*. As a certified judge, he has worked for numerous Tai Chi competitions. He has been practicing Tai Chi for 56 years and teaching it for more than 30 years. Given his vast experience as both a practitioner and an instructor, he had many thoughts about Tai Chi that he wanted to share.

General impression

Mr. Kang looks like a typical martial artist. His back is very straight. He walks elegantly. He talks slowly in a soft but strong voice. He is taller than average and of medium weight for a northern Chinese man. He appears much younger than his age. He is fit and energetic. He always looks happy and is very friendly with all the students in his Tai Chi courses. He wears a Tai Chi uniform and Tai Chi shoes to all his classes. He seems to have collected quite a number of Tai Chi uniforms in various colors over his many year of practicing Tai Chi. He travels by bicycle, wearing his Tai Chi uniform, between his apartment and his Tai Chi classes. Mr. Kang is very patient especially with the older members or the ones whose memory is not good. His general attitude and kindness explain why his Tai Chi courses have always been popular. (Several of the research participants attempted several times/years to register for Mr. Kang's Tai Chi courses before they were able to get in.) Mr. Kang's manner and bearing suggest that he is educated. He speaks Jinan dialect.

Family

Mr. Kang and his wife live in a spacious apartment in a new condominium building. They lived in an old apartment building for many years until their children helped them buy this new unit. Mr. Kang and his wife are both retired. He teaches Tai Chi courses five days a week. After teaching on a weekday and on the weekend, he bikes to different parks to visit several informal Tai Chi groups so he can watch his students from *Organization A* who practice with those groups. His wife is taking a Tai Chi course at a different elders' institute because she "wants to take Tai Chi from someone else." Their two grown children are working in Jinan and living in their own apartments. Mr.

Kang and his siblings were all born in Jinan and are all retired and, except for one brother, are living with their own families in Jinan.

Health

Mr. Kang was diagnosed with some sort of lung disease when he graduated from high school in 1956. He says he “did not feel any symptoms”. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, universities in China required an entrance examination and a medical examination. Mr. Kang’s lung problem disqualified him from writing the entrance exams. Since he “really wanted to go to university,” he took one year off to have his health problem treated. During that year, he started learning Tai Chi. However, his lung problem had still not improved enough to pass the medical exam for university. According to Mr. Kang, it gradually healed over the years.

Education and employment

Mr. Kang was admitted to a special school of traditional Chinese medicine several years after he had graduated from high school. The city government established that school for training high school graduates in an apprentice style. The instructors were experienced practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine. Some of its graduates became healthcare workers. However, the school’s diploma was lower than a medical school degree from a university in North America. The school only lasted for a few years and closed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Mr. Kang was fortunate to have just graduated before the shutdown. Consequently, that year’s graduates were not assigned any jobs.

Mr. Kang worked in a community office near his parents’ home for a while, and then he was hired by a local factory as a healthcare professional in its clinic. Towards the end of his 30 years of employment he was promoted to director of the clinic. Over the years, he says he taught Tai Chi to the factory employees in order to improve their health. He retired from the factory in 2002.

Tai Chi experience

Mr. Kang first started learning Tai Chi after high school. He met an elder Tai Chi practitioner who was teaching a group in a city park. At that time Mr. Kang learned the Simplified 24 Tai Chi over a period of one year. He then joined a different Tai Chi group in a different park when his first instructor moved away. He stayed with his second Tai Chi instructor for many years. He would leave home at 5am every morning to walk to the park for his 6am Tai Chi class. Each class lasted for at least two hours.

While he was working at the factory, Mr. Kang's employer sent him to Beijing for intensive training by some famous Tai Chi experts for several months. Like Ms. Wang, Mr. Kang also holds memberships in different professional Tai Chi organizations in China, including the Chinese Wushu Association. He has been a certified judge or referee at various Tai Chi competitions at the provincial and regional level.

Mr. Kang has learned, practiced, and taught many Tai Chi styles, including the Simplified 24, the Yang, the Chen, the Wu, and the Sun styles, Tai Chi Sword, and push-hands. During the research fieldwork, Mr. Kang was teaching five Tai Chi courses of different levels at *Organization A*. Over the years, he has taught Tai Chi groups of different sizes with different organizations. This includes teaching the Simplified 24 Tai Chi to his fellow classmates at the school for traditional Chinese medicine and “a 30-minute Tai Chi group practice before starting a workday” at the factory. He also instructed a Tai Chi group of several hundred people on how to prepare for a Tai Chi competition in Jinan. Mr. Kang has been invited to teach Tai Chi by different companies in a coastal city in the province. He traveled by train periodically and taught Tai Chi there for several years.

Mr. Kang says, “Tai Chi is a form of martial arts. It is a special kind of fitness exercise. Your own attitude toward Tai Chi is very important. Practicing Tai Chi requires a life-long commitment. Sometimes, I thought about a Tai Chi move for the group Tai Chi performance when I was half sleeping. I would immediately get up and write it down. Learning Tai Chi is about cultivating one's longevity and training one's behavior. To most people, practicing Tai Chi is for health. But I think it even better for achieving self-confidence, self-improvement, happiness, and a desire to contribute to our society.” Mr. Kang thinks, “it is better to start practicing Tai Chi at a young age. It is too late for

my students at the elders' institute to start learning Tai Chi at 50 or 60 years old. But my own children love to play basketball. They don't want to learn Tai Chi because they think that Tai Chi is too slow."

Mr. Kang says, "I have many hobbies such as Tai Chi, traditional Chinese medicine, singing, Beijing Opera, music, calligraphy, and Chinese painting. But the problem is I do not have time for them all. Before retiring, I was always the director and choreographer for my factory's annual end-of-year party." According to Mr. Kang, he "loves to watch basketball and large-scale gala or performance on television." Mr. Kang is very proud to show his collection of books on traditional Chinese medicine, Tai Chi, and Chinese literature. For many years, Mr. Kang has been responsible for the choreography of Tai Chi performances of his students. He says the administrators at *Organization A* are confident that he "can design and direct a winning competition piece because of his Tai Chi skills and artistic talent." His students' Tai Chi performance earned top prizes for *Organization A* at various Tai Chi competitions and their end-of-year celebrations. Mr. Kang combines "[his] knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine and [his] Tai Chi skills when teaching." To better serve his students who are all retirees, he "encourages the older people a lot" and "breaks down each Tai Chi pose and slowly shows them how to move their arms and legs." Mr. Kang says that he "cares about his students." If a student misses a class due to illness, he "bikes to see the student after class" either at the individual's home or in the hospital.

Mr. Kang believes that "Tai Chi should be men's specialty because it is a form of martial art." On the other hand, he admits "there are more women practicing Tai Chi than men in today's society. Some retired men are lazy. They may see Tai Chi as a women's activity."

Mr. Kang has "loved music since [he] was in elementary school." He says, "the background music for the Simplified 24 Tai Chi was specially written for the Tai Chi set and other types of music would not be appropriate." In Mr. Kang's opinion, the background music is especially important in a large-scale Tai Chi performance without a director or group leader in the front of the performers, such as the Tai Chi performance at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games.

5.4 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ALL HALIFAX RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The field research for the second cultural group took place in Halifax, Canada, from September to December in 2012. All eight Tai Chi groups (seven formal, two informal) were selected based on the age of their group members.¹⁴⁹ The 19 Halifax research participants were recruited from a pool of 160 Tai Chi practitioners.

5.4.1 Halifax participants' age range

This research focuses on older people, so the research participants' minimum age was set at 55 with no restriction for the maximum age. The Halifax research participants were born between 1928 and 1955 and ranged in age from 57 to 84 years old. Table 11 shows the male and female participants in three different age groups: 57 to 60, 61 to 70, and 71 to 84. The gender quotas were considered in the recruiting process.¹⁵⁰ The final selection included 9 men and 10 women.

Table 11: Halifax participants' age range

Age range (years)	57-60	61-70		71-84	
Participants: In order of the youngest to the oldest	2 (2M) Nick (57) Pierre (57)	4 (4M, 0F) Harry (63) Gary (66) Victor (66) Jeff (70)	7 (4M, 3F) Irene (62) Karen (63) Cathy (64) Lynn (65) Helen (66) Brenda (70) Fiona (70)	3 (3M, 0F) Andy (80) Earl (81) David (84)	3 (0M, 3F) Jill (71) May (73) Jenny (70s) ¹⁵¹

The lives of the 19 Halifax participants cover the years from 1928 to 2012. Unlike the 19 Jinan research participants, they did not live through major social upheavals. Three of the Halifax participants (David, 1928; Earl, 1931; and Andy, 1932) were born between the two World Wars and may have experienced the effects of the Depression. The majority of the Halifax participants (11 out of 19) were born after World War II (post-

¹⁴⁹ I observed and visited more than these nine groups. However, the Tai Chi groups with participants who were younger than 55 in 2012 were excluded from this research.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of selection of participants, see page 97, section 4.3.2.7 Halifax recruitment.

¹⁵¹ Jenny preferred not to mention her date of birth and she said, "I'm in my 70s."

1945). Unlike the Jinan participants who were all born in mainland China, four Halifax participants were born outside of their current home country – three of them (Andy, Helen, and Jenny) were born in Europe and one (May) in Asia. However, they have lived most of their adult lives in Canada.

Partly because of the level of their formal education and partly because of the frequency of personal interviews appearing on radio and television, the Halifax participants were familiar and comfortable with the interview process used for North American academic research. They focused on their Tai Chi-related experiences during the interviews and conversations but were very forthcoming with details about their personal lives. They did not mention any historical, political or socio-economic event that had an impact on any period of their lives.

5.4.2 Family

Except for one man, all the Halifax participants were currently or previously married. There was one widower, one widow and one divorcee. The remaining 15 were living with a spouse. Of the 18 married or previously married participants, 16 of them had children. One participant had five children, three participants had three children, six participants had two children, and four participants had one child. Two other participants mentioned their children but did not specify how many they had. The two married participants without children were husband and wife. The one participant who had never been married had no children. Most of the Halifax participants spoke cheerfully about their grandchildren during the interview and other conversations with them during the field research.

In the case of several of the Jinan participants, their Tai Chi practice had been interrupted for a certain length of time because of their caregiving duties with their elder or sick parents or with their newborn grandchildren. None of the Halifax participants indicated that they had to stop their Tai Chi practice due to caregiving obligations. Nevertheless, several of them did help out with their grandchildren. For example, when Lynn visited her son's family for several days, she helped look after her two school-aged grandchildren while her son and daughter-in-law worked night shifts. Jenny also helped

care for her school-aged granddaughter when the latter stayed at Jenny's home for several days.

None of the Halifax participants took care of their parents personally on a daily basis. For example, sometimes Brenda and her husband drove to visit her mother in a nearby city for a weekend and she also kept in touch by telephone. Victor frequently telephoned his elder mother who lived in another city. This was apparently in keeping with Canadian culture.

5.4.3 Housing

As is common in Canada, the Halifax participants had purchased and paid for an individual dwelling before retiring. They remained in the same house for at least some time after retiring. However, in order to downsize, Jill moved into an apartment with her husband (who is not a participant of this research) after they sold their house. Twelve currently married participants remained in their own house with only their spouse. Two participants lived with their spouse and one of their children. Two participants lived alone in their own house, one of whom was widowed and the other divorced. The participant who had never been married always lived in his own house. After the widowed participant's husband passed away, she sold their house and moved into an apartment when she relocated to Halifax in order to be close to her son and his family.

5.4.4 Language

All the Halifax participants are fluent in English regardless of their mother tongue or other languages that they are able to speak. All of them have lived and worked in Halifax for many years. English has been their language of work and daily life. Fifteen participants speak English only. Two other participants speak several European languages other than English because of their family background. A Canadian-born participant speaks English and French. The only Asian-born participant speaks her home country's official language, as well as English and some Mandarin Chinese.

Interviews and conversations with all Halifax participants during my field research were carried out in English. Occasionally, the Asian-born participant spoke

Mandarin Chinese with me briefly at her Tai Chi group’s break time. However, during the interview she chose to speak English only.

5.4.5 Education

The level of formal education of the Halifax participants ranges from a high school diploma to a PhD (see Table 12). Three participants completed high school, one of whom also took a training course when she was looking for a job after her military service. Eight participants graduated with a bachelor’s degree. One of them has two bachelor’s degrees and three of them took training courses after graduating. Eight participants have post-graduate degrees. Seven of the eight participants have at least one master’s degree. Among them, Earl has two master’s degrees and Fiona has three. Andy is the only participant who has a PhD.

On the whole, the Halifax participants had a higher level of education than the Jinan cohort. However, if one compares the Jinan participants to their own cohort in their own country, their relative level of education is higher, especially the three older ones who completed their university degrees before the Cultural Revolution.

Table 12: Halifax participants’ education level

Category	High school and above		University degrees			
	High school	High school plus training courses	Bachelor’s	Bachelor’s plus training courses	Master’s	PhD
Participants	Jill Karen	Cathy	David Gary Irene (x2) Nick Pierre	Brenda May Victor	Earl (x2) Fiona (x3) Harry Jeff Lynn Jenny Helen	Andy

5.4.6 Employment

All 19 Halifax participants were retired. At the time of the field research, two participants (Gary and Victor) were working part-time for organizations other than the

ones they retired from, but were doing the same type of work that they had done prior to retirement. Two other participants were volunteering for either where they used to work (Lynn) or a different organization (Jenny). Several participants were very devoted volunteers at their Tai Chi organization and did things such as organizing events (Helen, Brenda, and Lynn), helping with minor building repairs (David) or regular tasks (Andy, Cathy, Nick, Pierre, and Jenny).

The career categories¹⁵² of the Halifax participants (see Table 13) include eight company workers; one retail sales person; four government office workers, two of whom were administrators and two technicians; three health care professional or workers who worked in a hospital, a clinic, or an elders' facility;¹⁵³ and three educators who taught in public schools. Ten of the Halifax participants had had more than one job at different times as a result of military service, raising children at home, or volunteering overseas. For example, Cathy joined the military after high school. When she completed her military service, she took a training course and found a job in a company. Irene's first job was as a school teacher. She retired as a salesperson from a retail business. Fiona volunteered for an international project and lived overseas for several years. When she returned to Halifax, she found a different kind of job in a company.

Table 13: Halifax participants' career distribution

Career Category	Company Worker	Military	Sales-person in retail	Government office worker		Health care professional or worker	Educator
				Adminis-trator	Technica l worker		
Participants	7 (4M, 3F)	1 (1M)	1 (1F)	2 (2F)	2 (1M, 1F)	3 (1M, 2F)	3 (2M, 1F)
	Cathy David Earl Fiona Gary Karen Pierre	Nick	Irene	Helen Jill	Andy Jenny	Brenda May Victor	Harry Jeff Lynn

¹⁵² For participants who had more than one job at different times throughout their employment years, the individuals are placed in the category where their last job prior to retirement was.

¹⁵³ In order to respect participant confidentiality, the type of health care professional or worker is deliberately not specified in this dissertation.

The Halifax participants who had a long-term job all retired with a pension whereas the participants who had done more than one job throughout their career ended up with no retirement pension from their place of work.¹⁵⁴

Unlike the government assigned ways of entering the workforce for the Jinan cohort, Halifax participants' pattern of getting employment was based on individual choice and the available opportunities at the time. For example, educational institutions in Canada do not assign jobs to their graduates. The government is not to be responsible for providing a job for individuals who completed their military service in the Canada Forces. For stay-at-home mothers, absence from the workforce for several or more years raising children at home tends to force them to re-train in order to find a job, which is often different from what they were doing prior to the gap.

Four Halifax participants served in the military for various lengths of time. Unlike several of the Jinan participants, the location where they first enrolled in the military had no influence on their employment after leaving the military.¹⁵⁵ Nick served in the military for a long period and then retired from the Forces. The other three participants left the military at a much younger age and then found jobs with or without re-training. For example, David was a technician while serving in the military so that he was able to find a technical position at a local company after his service. Cathy and Gary both served in the military after high school. After her three year military service, Cathy took a training course that qualified her for an office position at a company where she worked until retiring. After his two year military service, Gary found a job and he worked for the same company until his retirement.

Starting a short-term job and then turning it into a long-term job did not seem to be a common pattern of employment for Halifax participants. For those who had more than one job throughout their careers, they usually had different types of jobs not necessarily in the same profession. For example, Jill started working as a health care

¹⁵⁴ All eligible Canadians receive the Old Age Pension from the federal government at the age of 65 and most Canadians who worked and contributed to the pension plan received the Canadian Pension Plan around the age of 65 (there is some flexibility in the system, which has been amended since the fieldwork period).

¹⁵⁵ For the cohorts of Jinan participants who originally lived in a village, their ways of getting a job in a city were limited. Two major routes were joining the military and becoming an officer or entering university and being granted a job after graduation in the city (not true anymore today due to policy changes).

worker in a hospital. After staying at home for her five children, she was self-employed for a short time and eventually as an administrative assistant in a government office.

Although all ten female Halifax participants were career women, three of them had several different jobs during their employment years due to the gap from their stay-at-home mother years when their children were young. Irene was a school teacher before she got married. She stayed at home for several years until her two children started school. At that time, she found a job in the retail business and she also worked at home doing odd jobs. In May's case, she was a health care worker at a hospital when she first started her career and later she quit her job to care for her children. When her children were old enough, she took a training course that enabled her to get an administrative support position at a university. After working there for several years, she decided to go back to her health care profession. She had to take a re-entry training course and then she worked at an elders' facility until her retirement. It is important to note that all 11 female Jinan participants had children. None of them became a stay-at-home mother when their children were born or growing up. Since 1949 in China, becoming a stay-at-home mother has not been a possibility for the cohorts of Jinan participants who were urban residents, when they were at childbearing age.

Compared to the mandatory retirement policies in Jinan, there are no mandatory retirement ages for the Halifax participants and their contemporaries. Some organizations where those participants worked for may have a recommended retirement age range, but it is not strictly enforced (according to the Halifax participants). It is mostly up to each individual to decide when he or she will retire. Halifax participants' actual retiring age ranged from 53 to 65 years of age. Jeff, a school teacher, retired at the age of 53, which is the youngest age at retirement among Halifax participants. David, who had three jobs throughout his working years, retired at the age of 65, the oldest retirement age of the group. The exceptions include Irene and Karen. Irene stayed at home looking after her two children and only had short-term jobs afterwards so that she "did not have an official retirement." Karen did not have children but she also worked at short-term jobs outside her home and she had spent a lot of time "doing craft work at home," which she was still doing at the time of my filed research.

5.4.7 Tai Chi experience

Ten of 19 of the Halifax participants had practiced Tai Chi for less than ten years (see Table 14). Four participants had been practicing Tai Chi for less than two years. The participant with the longest Tai Chi experience had been practicing for 30 years.

Table 14: Halifax participants' length of Tai Chi experience

Years	10 years and less				12-13	18	20	23	30
	Less than 2	2	4	6-10					
Parti- pants	4 (3M, 1F)	2 (1M, 1F)	1 (1F)	3 (1M, 2F)	4 (2M, 2F)	1 (1F)	1 (1F)	2 (1M, 1F)	1 (M)
	Nick Karen Pierre Victor	Cathy David	Irene	Helen Jill Jeff	Earl Jenny Fiona Andy	Brenda	May	Gary Lynn	Harry

The Halifax participants were selected from seven formal Tai Chi courses and two informal Tai Chi practice groups. All the formal courses required payment whereas the two informal groups were free of charge. Twelve participants only took formal Tai Chi courses. Seven of the twelve participants took one formal Tai Chi course and practiced in two other Tai Chi courses. They paid the membership of their Tai Chi organizations so that they could practice with other Tai Chi courses on different days without extra charge. Six participants only practiced in informal Tai Chi groups. Two of the six participants practiced in two informal Tai Chi groups. There was only one participant who taught two formal Tai Chi courses and led an informal Tai Chi group.

There was no association between the Halifax participants' clothing and their socio-economic status. Members of the formal Tai Chi courses are not required, but are highly encouraged, to wear their Tai Chi organizations' uniforms. In fact, almost all members of the formal Tai Chi courses wore their uniforms in class. Such uniforms were different from the ones that some Jinan participants had. The Halifax participants' Tai Chi uniforms were T-shirts or sweatshirts and sweatpants whereas the Jinan participants' Tai Chi uniforms were in the Chinese style. The two informal Tai Chi groups had no uniforms of any kind. Members of those two groups wore their everyday clothes. The Halifax participants did not wear Tai Chi shoes. Most of them wore flat shoes in an indoor classroom or walking shoes or winter boots in the outdoor group in a park.

Halifax participants were exposed to Tai Chi through various sources. Four participants saw Tai Chi demonstrations and they liked the way it looked. Three participants had a long-term interest in martial arts and they joined Tai Chi as a martial art. Six participants heard about Tai Chi from friends or read about it. Two participants joined Tai Chi together with their spouse only to support the spouse's interest, but soon after they themselves became very involved in it. Eight participants were looking for an age-appropriate activity that they could do over a long period of time. Four participants joined Tai Chi for both socializing and health improvement. Six participants either joined Tai Chi hoping to reduce stress or experienced stress reduction after they started. Eleven participants reported that they had good health prior to taking up Tai Chi. Three participants had serious health problems and the other five participants had minor health concerns.

The Tai Chi styles that Halifax participants practiced ranged from the Canadian Style Tai Chi, the Simplified 24, the 42, the 108 Yang, the Chen, and Tai Chi for a specific health problem. There was one participant who took a first Tai Chi course more than ten years ago and could not remember what the style was taught in that course. Ten participants started learning the Canadian Style Tai Chi and continued practicing it. All the other participants started with different Tai Chi styles, including the Simplified 24, the 42, and the 108 Yang style. Other than these barehanded Tai Chi styles, four participants also learned Tai Chi Sword and Tai Chi Fan. One other participant mentioned that she was interested in learning Tai Chi Sword but did not know where to take a course for it.

The majority (17) of participants practiced Tai Chi at home either intensively or at least occasionally. The two participants who did not practice at home were those with the shortest Tai Chi experience and they explained that they were too busy at home. Eight participants started Tai Chi two or three times but discontinued due to various reasons such as inconvenient Tai Chi class location (Nick), health condition (Karen), family obligation (Irene), employment demand (Cathy, Victor and Helen), or had a short first attempt (Pierre and May). Four participants reported that they "felt the group energy" while practicing with their Tai Chi groups.

Four participants, who were members of *Group K*, enjoyed the background music while practicing with their group. In fact, *Group K* was the only group that used background music. *Group K's* music was exactly the same Chinese Tai Chi music that all the Jinan Tai Chi groups used.

Among the participants, there were five Tai Chi instructors, four “corners,” and two group leaders. The instructors taught the formal Tai Chi courses at different organizations. The “corners” were class members, usually more experienced with higher-level technique, who stood at the left or the right of the first row in class. The regular class members could watch the two corners’ moves when they turned in different directions during class practice. In an informal group, the group leaders would not teach anything new. They led the group’s regular practice. *Group K* was the only outdoor group that was located in a city park and *Group L* was located in the basement of an apartment building. Harry, the leader of *Group K* had been a long-time Tai Chi instructor who had taught Tai Chi courses at several local community centres in previous years.

It is important to note that in both Jinan and Halifax an instructor’s teaching of a formal Tai Chi course led to the formation of an informal Tai Chi group. The term “corner” was only used in Halifax formal courses. Although the Halifax “corners” functioned much the same as the individuals who stood at the two corners of the front row during the practice of a formal class in Jinan, the word “corner” was not used in Jinan. Otherwise, there were no differences in the role of “corners” between Halifax and Jinan.

5.4.8 Limitations

In order to protect the identities of Halifax participants or to respect their wishes with regard to how much personal information they were prepared to share, certain sensitive details are not included in their individual background descriptions. For example, the four non-Canadian born Halifax participants were referred to as born in Europe or Asia without revealing the countries of birth. If a participant preferred not to reveal an aspect of his or her life, it was noted in a footnote in the individual description. In all cases, the wishes of the participants were respected.

5.5 INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS OF ALL 19 HALIFAX RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The individual background descriptions of all 19 Halifax research participants are presented in the order of the length of their Tai Chi practice, from the shortest (four months) to the longest (30 years).

1) Nick

At the time of the interview in 2012, Nick was 57 years old.¹⁵⁶ He was taking a beginners' Tai Chi course at *Organization D*, where only Canadian Style Tai Chi¹⁵⁷ courses are offered. The class attendance ranges from six to ten. He had been practicing Tai Chi for four months. At Nick's request, the interview was conducted at his favorite café in the city on a Sunday.

General impression

Nick is friendly with everyone in his Tai Chi class despite his perception of himself as a "closed person." During class break time, when most classmates sit in a circle and drink tea and chat with each other, he is one of the few who always helps move the chairs and pour the tea and wash the cups. He pays attention to details and often asks the instructor to demonstrate slowly whenever he has a question regarding a Tai Chi move. He said that he wants to make sure that he remembers what is newly learned not only for himself but also for his wife Karen, who is taking the same Tai Chi course. Both of them are participants in my research. Nick is of strong build and taller than an average Caucasian man of his age group. His good posture likely is a result of working in the military and "going to the gym a lot" for a number of years. Nick attends his class with his Tai Chi T-shirt that he received when he paid for the course. He

¹⁵⁶ Whenever the present tense is used in these descriptions of the Halifax participants, it refers to the time of interview.

¹⁵⁷ Discussion of this individual's activities would risk compromising the researcher's ethical obligation to keep the participants and the Tai Chi organizations to which they belong confidential. A Tai Chi master who moved to Canada from Hong Kong created a Tai Chi set in Canada. Some moves in this set have been altered from the original Yang style Tai Chi, which is practiced by the Jinan research participants and the practitioners in China. This set of Tai Chi is referred to as the "Canadian Style Tai Chi" throughout my dissertation but the term is not in general use.

speaks English. He used a French phrase to make a joke during our conversation but added that, “I only speak a little French.”

Family

Like most of the Halifax research participants, Nick and his wife live in their own house, which is located in the suburbs of Halifax. They are both retired and do not have any children. Nick was born in central Canada. He moved to Halifax for work and has been living here for more than 20 years. His relatives do not live in Halifax. Nick’s wife was also born in Canada. Her family members are not in Halifax either.

Health

Nick says that he has been having some health problems such as arthritis and high cholesterol.

Education and employment

Nick states that he has a bachelor’s degree. He traveled a lot throughout his career as a technician in the military and retired two years ago at the age of 55. According to Nick, “55 is the required retirement age, but you can ask for an extension if you are healthy. You can get five more years. Some people don’t want to lose the companionship of work. They go to work and they know all the people at work and that’s their life. They work with them, drink with them, and socialize with them. I was never like that. My work was separate from my home life. I didn’t follow a group. I was on my own. I don’t want to drink and I want to see the place when I travel [for work]. I would only go out with them to a party if someone was promoted.”

Tai Chi experience

Nick says that he has started Tai Chi twice. Prior to his Tai Chi experience, once he saw “a group of Tai Chi demo in front of the library and that was beautiful!” And “whenever they do a documentary or travel show in China, you always see big groups doing it and it always looks so graceful.” In 2012, he was inspired by what he saw at a Tai Chi open house. The group demonstrated the Canadian Style Tai Chi. Nick says that

his wife and he “enjoyed it and we decided we will do beginners.” Immediately after the open house, they started taking a beginners’ course where the Canadian Style Tai Chi was taught. However, Nick and his wife stopped going after two weeks because “it was too far to go and it was very hot!”

Nick started taking his current Tai Chi course, with his wife, at *Organization D* three months after his first Tai Chi experience. *Organization D* offers the Canadian Style Tai Chi in all of their beginners’ and intermediate courses. Nick says that he goes to a two-hour Tai Chi class twice a week because “the location is very important. It’s very close to home. It’s only a 9-minute drive.” Nick joined to support his wife. “I did it, so she would also do it, eh? Because if I didn’t do it, it would be harder for her to do it by herself.” Nick now thinks that “first it was support, then I liked it.”

Nick’s perception of Tai Chi has evolved. “Tai Chi is different. I just like it! I’m 70% satisfied now, because I don’t know how to do the whole set by myself. I know it’s going to be a good workout because Pierre [a member of *Organization D* and also a research participant] is always sweaty. At first, I didn’t like it because I felt stupid all the time. Because I didn’t get the move and I felt I was too slow and I didn’t pick up fast enough and I was thinking I only learned four moves [out of the 108]! And I felt I’m stupid and I can’t figure this out.” Nick says his break-through happened around week four. Nick’s class was practicing a set with the intermediate class. He thought, “well, these guys know exactly what they are doing, but they didn’t! I was following somebody in front of me. I wasn’t looking at the corners.¹⁵⁸ And that person in front of me didn’t have a clue! That gave me confidence. We didn’t feel so stupid! We started to feel, well, it’s not me. It’s part of the process.” Nick appreciates the support from his Tai Chi class. “If you make a mistake, and you know you made a mistake, even if you made a fool of yourself, they say, ‘you have got the feet correct. You are improving.’ They ignore the mistake. Yeah, they are never negative!”

Nick values the socializing aspect of his Tai Chi group. “I think the social benefit of this outweighs everything. The social is more important for me. I love the

¹⁵⁸ At *Organization D*, each class has two “corners” who are experienced practitioners, who stand at both ends of the first row. The instructors of each class do not always practice together with the students. Some instructors walk around while the class practice is ongoing. Members of the class watch the two corners when they turn to the left or the right during their class practice.

group! And the group is fun. The instructor is funny. It's like an outing we don't have. I always wanted to be in sync with other people doing the same thing. And it feels really nice! I don't have too many friends. I don't socialize outside. We [with his wife] are together all the time and we don't have close friends. So this is an opportunity for me to meet with other people. Now I'm retired and I no longer go to work and my friends are gone. I never had close friends in the military. Every two years, the people I work with will change. We used to belong to a rec centre. But it doesn't appeal to us. There is no social. There's nothing there. Like you go and you sweat and you come home, right? And that's why we want to go here because everyone is friendly. You can talk to anybody."

Nick says that he does not practice Tai Chi at home because "we don't have time. We have our garden. We have to take care of our property and I fix everything. We have a lot of crafts and interests and we are always traveling, not traveling outside of the city. We fish at the summer time. We go downtown have coffee and buy things. But if we don't get out of the house, we could be comfortable and we are just sitting there all day and doing nothing. I like walking, fishing, or hiking. But I'm not going to join another group or a rec centre. I'm not going to join a gym. We have gym equipment at home."

In answer to the question about what Tai Chi means or represents, Nick responds, "I don't like it as a religion. I like it as a philosophy. I don't think I'd like it if it's a religion because I don't like religion. Religion is about God. And philosophy is about wellbeing of an individual. I can't place a meaning on Tai Chi. But it's fun to go to class."

Nick sometimes feels the group energy. "If you know the moves, let's say the first ten moves, you follow the group and you feel the energy. You feel like everybody in the group moving like one! But after that you watch the corners to make sure you don't make a mistake. But if you don't feel comfortable with the moves, you watch the corners and you are trying to blend in. If you are out of step you are out of the group."

In terms of the priority of daily activities, Nick places Tai Chi "in the middle. It's not top of the list. For example, if there's the tall ships coming to town, it's more important to see the tall ships to me than doing Tai Chi. Because it's a once a year thing and I'll skip Tai Chi that day."

Nick does not seem to mind being one of the few men in his Tai Chi class. He says, “Once I joined an aqua exercise class. There were all older women and I was in really good shape. I came over and I started doing the water exercise and I got tired real quick and all these older women, they were still bouncing around! So I felt I was more out of place there than I did here.”

Nick thinks, “Our age is the ideal age to start Tai Chi. It would be nice if they started Tai Chi before. But our age is good. And you are more settled to your life. You don’t have to look for a better job. I’m doing this for myself. From what I’ve seen, the people who currently practice Tai Chi are 50 and above.”

Nick thinks it is fair to pay for Tai Chi because “the venue costs. Everything you do costs. Everybody is volunteering.¹⁵⁹ The thing is they are not paying the instructor because the instructors are doing it for free. The only thing they pay is for the building. The government should supply the building. I think it should be free for people who cannot afford it. I think people on welfare should be given it for free.”

2) Karen

At the time of the interview in 2012, Karen was 63 years old. She was taking a beginners’ Tai Chi course at *Organization D*. Her class attendance ranged from six to ten people. She had been practicing Tai Chi for six months. The interview took place at a local café of Karen’s choice.

General impression

Karen is outspoken and very humorous. People can hear her laughter when walking by the closed door of her classroom. She is taking a beginners’ Tai Chi course with her husband Nick. Karen is tall and heavier than an average North American Caucasian woman of her generation. She walks slowly and always sits down on a chair (most members sit on folding chairs while a few sit on cushions on the classroom floor) before class and during break time. She engages easily in conversation with her classmates. Karen always stands in the front of the class. She explains, “It’s better I’m

¹⁵⁹ The instructors at *Organization D* are certified by their committee and are volunteers. They do not get paid for teaching Tai Chi classes.

in the front row because I don't see other people. Because if I watch other people, if they make a mistake I start to laugh and I lose it!" Her course instructor thanked Karen for asking questions in class because "all those people don't have a clue what they are doing, but refuse to ask questions." Karen's manners and the way she talks reflect her working-class background. Like most of the Halifax participants, Karen goes to class with the Tai Chi T-shirt that she received when she paid for the Tai Chi course. She speaks only English.

Family

Karen and her husband live in their own house, which is located in the suburbs of Halifax. They are both retired and do not have any children. Karen was born in Western Canada. She moved to Halifax more than 20 years ago. Neither she nor her husband has any relatives in Halifax.

Karen seems to have a close relationship with her husband. "I did make friends from work, but like my husband, I never had real friends because after work I'm home with my husband. Maybe that's old fashioned, but that's what we are. And I didn't need my friends to fulfill my life, even when my husband is away for work. Because I've learned if I get into a group with the wives of my husband's coworkers, when they get transferred, you might never see them again. I think the reason we get married is to be with the other person, not to go off with friends or couples. I guess you can sort of say that we are loners and we are 'joined at the hip'."

Health

Karen says that she has been having some health problems such as diabetes and arthritis. She had several hip and knee surgeries prior to beginning Tai Chi. She had to stop gardening because of her "knees and health." After 12 weeks in her Tai Chi course, Karen felt that "I've already noticed my balance on one foot is improved when I step out of the tub." Karen says, "I'm using my knees a little bit more during Tai Chi, because I've never been good, arthritis-wise, in the winter weather. I'm better in the summer when it's warmer."

Education and employment

Karen graduated from high school. Throughout her working years, she had short-term positions such as “an administrative assistant at a government office, a teller at a bank, and a healthcare worker in a hospital.” Unlike most of the Halifax participants, she did not have an official retirement date. In Karen’s own words, “I’m a homemaker for the longest time. So I don’t have a pension.”

Tai Chi experience

Karen says that she has started Tai Chi three different times. Several years ago, she took a “Tai Chi for Arthritis” course¹⁶⁰ “only for health reasons.” She says that the course “was run through Continuing Ed. And it was completely different from this Tai Chi. I did a full session which was probably 8 to 10 weeks.” After completing the course, “I started the second time, but I got sick and I didn’t complete the second time around. I took four lessons and never went back.”

Karen’s second time taking up Tai Chi was in the summer of 2012. The friend who took the Tai Chi for Arthritis course with Karen invited her and her husband to a Tai Chi open house located quite a distance from the city. A local Tai Chi group demonstrated a Canadian Style Tai Chi set and also encouraged the attendees to join their group. Karen says that she and her husband “enjoyed it and we decided we’ll do beginners. So we started the beginners’ class and we went for only two weeks because it was too far to go and it was very hot!”

Karen started taking her current Tai Chi course at *Organization D* several months after her second Tai Chi experience. “The location is very important” to both Karen and her husband. As she says, “It is nice for us to go because we don’t have to go so far. So the class is only two hours, 15 minutes there and 15 minutes back [by car]. And I think it makes us want to go more because it doesn’t take us so long to get there.” The same Canadian Style Tai Chi is taught in her beginners’ course. Karen and her husband go to the Tai Chi class Mondays and Wednesdays.

¹⁶⁰ Based on my observation of a “Tai Chi for Arthritis” course offered in Halifax in 2012, the Tai Chi moves were modified. The course instructor told me that the modification was to focus on the joints.

Karen compares the two types of Tai Chi that she has taken. “I like this Tai Chi. It’s much better than the Tai Chi for Arthritis, even though that teacher was very good. I think this Tai Chi is more advertised and more well-known and popular. I also liked the other one [Tai Chi for Arthritis] because it’s more dance-like. And I like to dance and I like to move to music. I found that easy because to me it’s like I was doing a dance. This Tai Chi is more meditative and probably because there is no music and there is nothing to distract you. Well, I like the music but I don’t think this Tai Chi would work with it because the way they do it allows you to do meditation. But they don’t want this to be a dance. They want it to be martial art with distinct moves. It is considered a martial art and they say that. The instructor said, ‘you want your balance because your opponent can’t pull you apart.’ It’s a gentle martial art.”

Karen believes, “Tai Chi means the start of me returning to health. Now we are going to continue because we want to get better. And we want to continue to feel better. We don’t want to stop and start feeling stupid and not part of the group, feeling clumsy, and start over again.” Karen took up Tai Chi because “I suffered from arthritis in a lot of my joints. And I’m overweight. I needed to get moving. But I needed something that was gentle and easy on the joints.” Karen is happy with the results of her Tai Chi practice thus far. “Sometimes I do feel really great the whole day! I go Wednesday morning, I feel great all day Wednesday and Thursday. So I got two days that I feel really really good! The next day of Tai Chi I feel more cheerful and I have less pain. I have way more energy and that’s what I really like about it! It was getting the energy, because that means I am getting back my health. And if I keep moving and I can lose weight so my health is only going to improve and hopefully the diabetes will go and I will be more mobile. Once I am more active and the weight will come down. I know it’s going to help me feel better. And that’s not just wishful thinking! I know it has already affected me. The balance issue I noticed it almost right away, and the feel good, two very important things.”

Karen says that the other members of *Organization D* are very friendly. “They are so supportive! Right from day one they were very supportive. They make a point of introducing themselves to the new people. I’ve learned all the 108 moves and we came a long way. I’m satisfied. It takes time but I found that all these people, even the

intermediate class people and the instructor are all very positive and reinforcing and encouraging you. And they say ‘you’ve got the rest of your life to do that. Don’t worry about it. We were like that and it takes time.’ They are very encouraging.” Karen thinks, “The socializing helps you to keep coming back, a lot. It very much motivates.” Karen excitedly says, “I was saying last night that how many people we met since September! And you feel like you are part of the group now. I don’t feel like an outsider anymore. And it’s so good to see our group doing it in unison. It’s like we are in sync. Everybody was together. Even sounded good. You know, at the end, we all slap our knees together. So that means we were equal and we were all part of the unit. And nobody was left behind. And that’s one good way of telling you are together and in sync.”

Karen says, “We have a collective ‘sigh’ when we finish a set. Everybody turned and smiled at each other. We all sort of like a collective ‘we did good.’ It is a collective ‘hey, we did that together’ kind of feeling! It is hard to put that in words, I think. They say that eventually your muscle memory will know where to go. You will automatically know the next move. I feel that for certain moves but not the whole set yet. When I get to that point where the muscle memory just kicks in, then it’ll be matter of slowing down or speeding up.” Karen seems to prefer a particular learning style. “In the beginners’ class, the instructor says ‘let’s stay together,’ but in intermediate class they say ‘watch your corners.’ I don’t like that.”

Karen says that she does not practice Tai Chi at home because she is busy with various craft projects such as spinning, knitting, or weaving. She and her husband also “fish together at summer time. And we go out do a lot of coffee and Internet sort of things.” Other than her busy schedule, Karen has another reason for not practicing Tai Chi at home. “I think if we practice at home we do it wrong. I don’t think we can do a whole set without help because it’s really complicated.”

Doing things together with her husband seems to be important to Karen. She says that she likes Tai Chi because “I like what it’s doing for me and I like the fact that we are doing it together. I like the fact that there’s a lot of couples. It’s not just a bunch of singles... The location is awesome! And the time is good.” Karen also feels, “Tai Chi helps with our comedy life. If there’s something upset, he just makes a Tai Chi move [at home] and I’ll start laughing!”

Karen thinks that Tai Chi is intensive. When Karen told her father on the phone that she is doing Tai Chi, he said, “oh yeah, I saw some people waving their arms in the air on TV. They do that in China.” Karen says, “My father is very opinionated and negative. He is 98 years old. That’s just his opinion. He doesn’t know how intense that is and he has never talked to anybody that is taking Tai Chi. So I explained it to him that it’s a real workout. In the beginning, you just wave your arms around. Then when you get into it you can break a sweat quite easily doing Tai Chi! And it’s a good stretch, a good workout. I knew it’s a good workout because I got super warm after the first half hour.”

The experience of practicing with more advanced Tai Chi practitioners boosted Karen’s confidence. “When our class first practiced with the intermediate class, I was nervous and worried if I do something wrong. I actually sat it out for the first few sets. Someone who has been doing it for three years doesn’t do it right, so I’m feeling pretty good.”

In answer to the question what Tai Chi means or represents, Karen responds, “I only know the moves. I don’t think about it. I don’t think it’s a religion. It’s more like a philosophy. It doesn’t matter one way or the other. If it helps me to get mobile and it helps me to feel better, then it doesn’t bother me. The most important [thing] is our health. We haven’t been exposed to anything other than the moves that we do. And socializing with those people during that time, that’s enough for us.” Karen says, “It’s obviously good for the Chinese all these years and it’s got to be good for us, seriously! Because I don’t know how long it has been going in China, and you don’t see many fat and out of shape Chinese. Surely if it’s good for them and it’s good for me, my next forty years or whatever.”

In terms of her priority for activities, Karen says, “I’d put Tai Chi in the top third because it’s something that we’ve committed to. We would give up coffee with our friends before we would give up Tai Chi in the morning. Because I’m committed to Tai Chi and because I know it’s going to make me feel good. And because we’ve paid for it. And because we’ve decided Tai Chi is going to be part of our life, actually an important part. If I had a choice about what I do above Tai Chi and housework, I would do crafting or reading about crafting, or learning about crafting, which would involve YouTube.

And I'm always learning something new on YouTube, like different stitches. Yoga does not appeal to me at all! To me, my hands and my brain making things is more important than housework. But I wouldn't give up Tai Chi to do that."

Karen shares her opinion about paying for her Tai Chi course. "The membership is not cheap but it's not expensive because if you are going to join a gym you'd pay more. I would like to know if you have to pay in China. Is that free in China? Maybe our healthcare system should subsidize Tai Chi. And I think there would be a lot more healthier people."

Karen thinks that the best age to start Tai Chi is in the 50s. "By 50 you are supposed to know what you want. And you will be motivated to continue it. And you are more settled. You know what's good for you, not what looks good on you. You are not there to impress your friends. And when you are 30, you still want go to the gym to look good for the girls, for the guys. We now are retired and we have the time to do it for four hours a week, together."

Regarding the gender ratio, Karen says, "I was surprised that there are so many men in my Tai Chi class because you always see all these women and few men in a group. It's about even in our class. And I'm glad there are a lot of men in our group. Otherwise he [her husband] will feel bad."

3) Pierre

At the time of the interview in 2012, Pierre was 57 years old. He was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization D*. He had been practicing Tai Chi for one year. His Tai Chi class attendance ranges from 30 to 40. The interview took place at the Tai Chi centre just before Pierre's 10am Tai Chi class. Initially, Pierre wanted to have the interview the first thing in the morning at a diner on the corner of his Tai Chi centre. But it was too early and the shop was not open yet, so we had the interview at his classroom prior to his class.

General impression

Pierre is involved in more physical activities than any of the other research participants. He is muscular and taller than an average Caucasian man of his cohort. He

is probably the youngest among his 40 classmates. Contrary to his classmates, he perspires profusely, whereas most of his classmates do not sweat at all. Before half way through a class, his T-shirt looks like he has walked in the rain without an umbrella. Pierre is quiet in class. During the break time, he always helps making tea and cleaning up afterwards. Like most classmates, he wears his Tai Chi uniforms and drives to all Tai Chi classes. Pierre speaks English and French.

Family

Pierre and his wife live in their own house outside of the city. Their two children are both in their twenties. One moved out and the other still lives with them. They do not have any grandchildren. Like most Halifax research participants, Pierre was born in Canada. He retired two years ago. His wife is still working. Pierre says, “I do a lot of gardening. We have many gardens! Our property is about one acre big, so there’s always lots of things to do.”

Health

Pierre says, “I didn’t have physical problems. I was just overweight. The last five years that I worked were very stressful, very intense and demanding and not much physical activity. I’m trying to even the scales, to increase my health. I was hoping to lose some weight. I’ve increased my physical activity significantly in the last year since I’ve had more time. During the last year I’ve lost about 25 pounds.”

Pierre says, “Many years ago I used to be a competitive diver. I had shoulder problems because of that. I think the Tai Chi has definitely helped my shoulders and their flexibility. I used to, at nighttime, I would wake up and my hands were numb. And that seems to have gone away. I don’t know if it’s just the Tai Chi or the exercises combined. But I think the Tai Chi definitely helped, because there’s quite a bit of focus on arm movements, flexibility, and upper body. Some of the things I’m doing now are activities that I’ll be able to do for the next 30 years, swimming, walking, running, even weights. You can always do those and just reduce the weights so things that I wanted to be able to do as I get older and they’ll help to keep me healthy.”

Education and employment

After completing a bachelor's degree, Pierre worked for a large Canadian company for more than 30 years. "I've done many positions with the company but for the last ten years I was in sales. I had an office in my home. But I traveled quite a bit for my work, [driving] to Atlantic and other provinces." He retired at the age of 55 with a severance package because of his company's downsizing.

Tai Chi experience

Pierre says he has had "a long-standing interest in Tai Chi. I didn't know anything formally. But I have seen Tai Chi at different places. Some of my friends have been to China and they talked about people doing Tai Chi. It seems to be something that I was fascinated about." One year ago, Pierre first practiced Tai Chi with his wife at a resort. "We were only there for a week. We did it every morning. I think some of the moves were very similar [compared to the Canadian Style Tai Chi that he is practicing now]. But the instructor was pretty basic." The exposure at the resort "was part of the reason. The other part of the reason was that I was just retired and I was looking for something to do and something I can continue for a number of years into the future and that had health benefits. I was hoping it'll help to improve my balance and my memory."

Pierre says, "As far as Tai Chi is concerned, it's a goal for me to learn the set and to do it properly and so I try to take it very seriously. Actually, I learned the set within six months. I learned quickly because I put a lot of time in it. It paid off for sure. I usually go to three classes per week and the weekend workshops once a month. I practice at home once or twice a week and usually do a set probably about half of an hour." Pierre attends a class at *Organization D* and practices with two other classes at *Organization C* because his membership allows him to go to both Organizations in two different districts of the city. He says, "It's either there or here, so the driving doesn't affect my decision to go to Tai Chi classes." Each of his classes is two hours long.

Pierre is trying to include Tai Chi "as part of my daily life, even on the days that I don't do Tai Chi [class]. I run usually about two or three times a week, about 40 minutes, five kilometers at a time. When I finish my run I actually do some Tai Chi. I'll

do a set or do some exercise after my running. And I do weight training three times a week. And I swim usually about three times a week. The pool is actually about half a kilometer from Brenda's [an instructor and a research participant] class, just down the road. So on Monday nights, I do Brenda's Tai Chi class and I go do weight for half of an hour. I've never done yoga. And I always thought [it was] quite interesting, just from the stretching perspective. My wife did yoga for quite a few years before the operation on her feet."

Pierre is grateful for the benefits from his Tai Chi practice. "I know for sure my balance is better than it used to be. And that's not something I do in running or swimming, weights or anything, so that's pretty much Tai Chi! And I found I enjoyed it as well. I found it relaxing. I [feel] the group energy when the class is together. Brenda's class [tends] to be synchronized, but the other class everybody goes with their own pace. I think that's pretty normal. It depends on how long they have been doing Tai Chi. People in Brenda's class, most of them have been doing Tai Chi for a longer period of time than the people in other classes. I think as far as Tai Chi is concerned, once I have retired, it definitely filled in the void. The health benefit is always there as well. And there is the social aspect as well. Some people say that 'these are my Tai Chi friends.' Because when you work for a company, there's your work associates. When you are retired, those people disappear. I've met quite a few people through Tai Chi. I didn't know anyone before I joined. Every week it's the same people and it's a large group. It's kind of enjoyable. It's fun to meet different people, they all share the common interest."

Pierre seems to be familiar with his Tai Chi set routine. "This is really interesting. When I first started Tai Chi, the set to me was a long process. Now sometimes when I do the set it just kind of flows and I don't think about it! So I think I'm kind of getting into a zone or state of mind where I just do it. The funny thing about Tai Chi is that if you don't do the set properly you don't end up where you are supposed to end up. If you ever notice, when you have done the 108 moves you almost stop at the exact same spot where you started. We live near the ocean. I've gone down to the beach several times to do some Tai Chi sets on the sand. It's really quite interesting to look at

the footprints in the sand. It's interesting that you always end at where you started within about two-foot radiances. I noticed the first time I did it on the beach."

Regarding support, "My kids laugh at me! They have no understanding of what Tai Chi is. They are the age that they are focused on themselves. They think it's amusing, interesting, and something for old people to do. My wife supports it. I think she is quite interested by the fact that many people in the club that practice Tai Chi are school teachers. She is a school teacher. So when she has more time, I think she'll probably try. Some of my friends and neighbors don't know and some of them do know I do Tai Chi. They find it interesting but not anymore than that. Some of them are curious about it."

In answer to the question about what Tai Chi means or represents, Pierre responds, "The religious part of it has no impact on me whatsoever. I don't really think about it and it's not something I'm interested in. I don't think it's negative or positive. As a philosophy, I'm not subscribed to it. I'm neutral. It doesn't affect me either way. The reason that I do Tai Chi is more of the physical part. So that's the extent of my interest, I guess at this point."

Pierre is aware of being younger than most of his classmates. "Sometimes I feel a little bit of minority because I am one of the younger people in class! But that doesn't bother me. I've never had anybody mention that to me. Maybe they think I'm the same age as they are. Knowing what I know now, I'm not sure what the ideal age would be. I think it can be done at any age, quite honestly. If you started a little bit earlier it probably is little bit easier to learn the moves. I think once you've learned the moves that might help you later on. From what I can see, predominately I would say from about 50 years old up, 50 to 80. I think most people are from 60 to 70."

Pierre expresses his opinion regarding the gender ratio of Tai Chi practitioners. "I do it primarily for my own reasons. Regardless they are men or women, it doesn't really matter to me. Whenever you take a look at a demonstration that people are practicing Tai Chi, it's usually 2/3 women and 1/3 men. I think some men probably may not look at it that men do. There's probably a cultural bias that against something like Tai Chi. So there is quite the same reason that why there are not a lot of people taking ballet. There are lots of females taking ballet and very few males. A lot more males play

hockey than females. So the activity itself probably has led people to a gender bias. At the same time, I'm sure in China maybe it's not the same? I think it depends on whether you as a practitioner find benefit at what you do. If there is a benefit, then why not?"

Pierre thinks, "Tai Chi is part of the Chinese culture. I think back to sometime when I saw it whether on TV or something like that, it's usually done by Asian practitioners, always associated with the Chinese culture." Pierre also expresses his perception of Tai Chi and martial arts. "I'm not interested in martial arts. When I took the beginners' course, they talked about the connection to martial arts. For me, I see it as more about moving meditation type of activity. And it has the roots in martial arts. So that helps you to inform some of the reasons that why you do certain moves. The arms are in a certain position because in martial art the arms are there to protect the head, the body, and the stomach, whatever. So it helps you to understand why you place your arms in a certain position, why you focus on the balance. But I don't believe for a second that because I do Tai Chi I'm a martial arts expert! I'm not going to go defend myself against somebody doing Tai Chi."

Pierre thinks at this point, "Tai Chi is a challenge because I'm so new at doing it. So I'm still learning and there's a lot of learning to do. I've got some basics and I think I would continue, unless if something else came up, I probably do less of Tai Chi if I get another job or start working again (for the same company)."

Pierre believes, "Tai Chi is like a lot of activities you can do it at many levels. I think that's one of the reasons I was attracted to do Tai Chi. The key benefit of Tai Chi is that regardless of how you do Tai Chi, the benefits are all there. You can just do the moves not do the set. When you start as a beginner, there are basic steps. But as you go on you learn that every move can be done in different ways. That will increase the stretch, the flexibility, the balance, so you know there's always things to learn. So that's something I always mention to the beginners, even though it hasn't been that long that I've been doing it. I keep repeating 'the hardest thing about Tai Chi is to come to the next class.' Once you come to the class you will enjoy it. You will get the health benefits. I have been helping Lynn [an instructor and a research participant] with her beginner class. I was doing the corners. Most of them came twice a week and they learned much quicker and they were more encouraged. I think sometimes people drop off, because once a week

is too far, you forget everything. Twice a week you start to remember things and it's encouraging that you actually learn a set quickly. The more constant feedback they receive is better. Having to learn a set in itself it's a memory challenge. It's so easy to make a mistake if you are not focused and concentrated. There are some activities, swimming for example, is very intuitive, you just move your arms and kick your legs once you learned the strokes. But Tai Chi is never intuitive, because there are so many components to it. It doesn't take long when we do a set start going to the wrong direction."

Pierre is concerned about how sweaty he gets from practicing Tai Chi. "I'm not sure why this is, but when I do a Tai Chi set, I perspire like crazy, for no reason that I know of, because I don't perspire like that in any of the other sports. There is something about Tai Chi. I'm not moving a lot, but the internal energy that is being generated, for whatever reason, it's definitely there! So I look at other people and there's not a drop of sweat on them! So it depends on what level you want to do it. When I'm ready to do a set, I do it the most I can. I try to stretch everywhere. I try to move the way it's supposed to be done. I'm very persistent with what I do. So I think it's because of that, maybe my internal organs are working? I don't know how that works but my other activities are not like that! Like I run usually about 40 minutes, when I finish I'll be a little bit sweaty. When I do 15 minutes of the Tai Chi set, I've never perspired like that in my life! I don't understand the physiological aspect of Tai Chi. And maybe someday I'll look it up. Maybe it's just peculiar to my situation. I keep saying that it's all the negative of *qi* in my body from so many years of work, that's coming out!"

4) Victor

At the time of the interview in 2012, Victor was 66 years old. He was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. His class attendance ranges from 25 to 35 people. He had been practicing Tai Chi for one and a half years. The interview was conducted in the living room of Victor's own home as he insisted that was the most comfortable place for him to be interviewed. His house is very close to my university. I biked there in a cool and clear December evening after his evening meal, his choice of time.

General impression

Victor is the least talkative individual among all the Halifax research participants. He is calm and his voice is very low. He neither asks the instructor questions nor initiates conversations with classmates. During the class break time, all the folding chairs are lined up in a circle. Members of the class sit around while drinking tea and chatting with each other. When Victor has to respond to someone who sits next to him, he gives a very brief, usually one-word response. Victor participates in his Tai Chi class regularly. He blends in with his classmates while completing a Tai Chi set together in class. Like almost all of his classmates, he wears his Tai Chi uniform to class. He is of average height and weight for a Caucasian North American male. He was enthusiastic about participating in my research. During the interview, he answered most of the open-ended questions briefly, except when he started talking about his interest in music.

Family

Victor and his wife live in their own house in downtown Halifax. Their house is within walking distance to his Tai Chi class and his other regular activities, such as his part-time job and his aerobics class. His wife retired several years ago.

Victor says, “I guess my wife is supportive because we are in it [Tai Chi] together. When I told my mother that I was doing Tai Chi, she said, ‘that’s good.’ She is 93 and pretty weak. She thought it was a good idea for me!”

Health

Victor says that he “was in good health before Tai Chi and I’m sure I have improved.”

Education and employment

After graduating from university with a graduate degree, Victor worked as a health care professional¹⁶¹ in a private business for many years and retired one year ago at the age of 65. He says, “I’m semi-retired and I’m still working part-time [for a

¹⁶¹ In order to respect participant confidentiality, the type of health care professional or worker is deliberately not specified in this dissertation.

different business]. I worked three afternoons this week and next week I will work every afternoon. I have some control, but it's up to the people who organize the schedule. I just say that I want to work afternoons only. So they give me what they can give me.”

Tai Chi experience

Victor says, “My first experience with Tai Chi was 15 years ago. It was a community program. It was advertised in a small magazine that was delivered to all the homes in my area. I think it was sponsored by the city. Each class was about two hours a week for three or four months. I took it to learn to move my muscles and keep my joints conditioned. It's a short version with 24 steps. I don't remember if there was music. But I do remember I brought a CD to the instructor. It was very nice flute music – Songs of the Seashore.” Victor finished that Tai Chi program and says he enjoyed it but “I was a professional and didn't have time to pursue it. I had to do too many other things.”

Fourteen months ago, Victor joined an intermediate Tai Chi class that his wife was taking at *Organization C*. There are several intermediate Tai Chi courses at the organization. He says, “When I had more time, I was trying to go back to Tai Chi and my wife was already doing it because she retired a few years before I did. We took the same 24 steps Tai Chi class 15 years ago.” The intermediate course “is not completely new, but I've forgotten every move!”

Victor practices Tai Chi at home “a couple of times a week. I do what I know. This house is small, so if I practice here I have to move myself back and forth. But if I go down to the gym when I do my elder aerobics, I've got a whole lot of space to practice, before the instructor gets there. Actually, most people there know what I'm doing. So I have enough time to do 30 or 40 moves uninterrupted. I can probably remember the first 40 of the 108 moves. I can't do the whole set. I need visual cues to see what other people are doing.”

Victor seems satisfied with his Tai Chi experience. “Tai Chi is a positive experience. It makes me feel good. It helps to keep my muscles limber and stay mobile. Tai Chi is a way of enjoying the movement of my body. It's very relaxing and lets my mind go and just feel what I'm doing, focus on that and not think about anything else. I don't feel old in a sense of looking at my capacity. I think Tai Chi is making me feel

more confident in the way that I move because I'm more conscious. I have to think about where my feet are and where they are going. But that's only part of it. If you are doing it you have to feel where your whole body is moving. I just started to feel being conscious and feel where I am." In the beginning of his Tai Chi experience, he says, "I didn't know what it would do for me and now I see that it's probably very good for coordination, balance, and overall muscle strength. It's a good way to relax, too. Tai Chi is important and I'll keep doing it with my other hobbies: music, reading. They are equally important and I don't have to give up any one of them. Right now, it's probably, the movement part is the most important. If there were no Tai Chi class available, I'd do walking, and even take up ballroom dancing! Yoga is very relaxing. I guess I could recommend Tai Chi or yoga if anyone is feeling stressed out or anxious."

Victor says that he is not interested in socializing with his Tai Chi class members because "I've got enough to do. I don't particularly need or want any more demands. It's only a couple hours I'm there in class. I don't do anything with the people after Tai Chi. I only go to one class per week and that's all I have time for." Victor comments further, "Maybe it's a social thing? I mean, there's a social aspect to it. And there's certainly a social aspect to the elder aerobics, too, because the members will go for coffee afterwards. So maybe women are more social than men. Men maybe are more used to the team sports and contact sports." Victor thinks, "There's definitely a gender bias. I'm pleased to see there are a number of men here [in his Tai Chi class]. In my elder aerobics class, I'm the only man in the class most of the time. I'm fine, doesn't bother me a bit! Sometimes there are other men that drop in and very quickly drop out."

When Victor talks about his daily routine, he says, "In the mornings, that's why I have all the mornings free, I have Tai Chi, plus go to an elder aerobics class three times a week in a church gymnasium. There are about 25 to 30 people. I just walk down the road. It's an hour session and a good workout. You can work as hard as you want. I walk a fair amount. It's not every day. If it's a nice day and I don't have to work in the afternoon, I walk from here [his home] up to the Tai Chi centre with my wife. It takes 25 minutes. I don't consider myself very active. That's why I go to the elder aerobics. If I didn't go there, and have an instructor in front of me, I probably wouldn't be motivated enough to do that kind of exercise on my own, so that's good for me that way."

Victor comments on the age range of his Tai Chi classmates. “Most of the people, I think, they are probably over 65. There are some people probably from 40 on up. I think the 40s are probably a good time to start. I assume that younger people are interested in more vigorous, more physically demanding kinds of sports, like running, lifting huge weights in the gym, skiing, hockey, and team sports. By the time you get to your 40s, those kinds of sports are getting too much for you, too hard on you.”

In answer to the question what Tai Chi means or represents, Victor says, “I just try to learn the Tai Chi. The question is ‘what is Chinese culture?’ There can’t be just one Chinese culture, like any society it must be very complex. I’m sure that there can’t be just one religion. Like in many societies, there must be many religions. I haven’t been very curious about the religious part of Tai Chi.”

Victor is obviously interested in music. He could not wait to show me his two musical instruments in his music room on the second floor after the interview. He has been practicing both instruments for 16 years and he says, “It’s embarrassing to think about, I’m still essentially an amateur. But I do it for fun. I do it for my pleasure. I don’t care what kind of music they would play. I sometimes put some music on down here [at home] when I do Tai Chi.”

5) David

At the time of the interview in 2012, David was 84 years old. He was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. His class attendance ranges from 25 to 35. He had been practicing Tai Chi for two years. At David’s request, the interview was conducted after his morning Tai Chi class at his classroom. There was more than enough time for the interview before the beginning of the centre’s next Tai Chi class.

General impression

David is the oldest Halifax research participant and one of the oldest members in his class. He also is the tallest among his thirty-odd Tai Chi classmates.¹⁶² Like the majority of Halifax research participants, he is Caucasian. His good posture, firm step,

¹⁶² The core of a Tai Chi class at *Organization C* consists of the regular long-term members. However, the membership grants all members the right to attend any class at their level in the organization.

and brisk pace make him look at least ten years younger than his age. He always arrives early and never misses a class. He is quiet during the two-hour class and does not ask questions. He is friendly with everyone. He mops the classroom's wooden floor when everybody else rushes out the door after class. He also helps with minor repairs of the building where his Tai Chi classroom is located. Like almost all of his classmates, David wears his Tai Chi uniform to class and "always drove to work and [he] is now driving to Tai Chi."

Family

David was born and grew up in Western Canada. He says, "I grew up on a farm. I was doing men's work when I was 14 years old. That's the way life is on a farm. All the hard work didn't hurt me. We were a family of five (his parents and two siblings). My sister is 88 years old and my brother is six years younger than me. My father lived to 94 years old and my mother to 92 years old."

David and his wife had two children who are both married. "One has moved away and the other one is in Halifax." He did not indicate whether he has any grandchildren. David "lost [his] wife three years ago."

Health

David says that he has been healthy in general, except "when I was in my early 60s I had an accident and I had an operation on my knee. The knee has never had problems after that."

He says that most of his Tai Chi classmates "at some point had arthritis. Some people come here to get rid of that. So I'm one of the lucky ones so far! I hope I continue that way. I've never had arthritis, but practicing Tai Chi gave me more flexibility. Maybe if I continue Tai Chi, I won't get arthritis! I feel healthier and I do feel a difference. When I walk I notice my balance is much improved. My legs are stronger than they used to be. I guess because I feel better and I feel healthier, it does make a difference!"

Education and employment

David says that he has had three jobs throughout his employment years. After graduating with a bachelor's degree, he started a contract with the military. He took some training and worked at a technical job. David says, "I worked a lot of extra hours and traveled a lot. After five years, I could sign up for another five years, but my wife wanted me to be home." David then took a job in the West. He says, "In the three months I made more money than in a year because I needed to buy a house." At his last job in a company in Halifax, David says, "I started as a technician and later on I was a supervisor for 50 people. I was on call 24 hours a day." David says that he worked for almost 30 years at this company and retired 19 years ago at the age of 65.

Tai Chi experience

David says, "I joined Tai Chi and want to make [myself] healthier." He started taking a beginners' Tai Chi course at *Organization C* two years ago because "my daughter is in martial arts and she talked me into Tai Chi." David and his wife "actually visited the Tai Chi centre once 22 years ago." He started at this location "because it is convenient for me. It's only a 10-minute drive from home. When I start something I always follow through. At my beginners' class, we had 15 people. Now there are about five at the most" (who continued and are in his intermediate class). David says he knows there are different styles. "I have a neighbor. He is Chinese. He told me he does Tai Chi every day. I haven't seen him practice. He must be doing it inside his house."

David says that he practices Tai Chi five days a week. "I come to the centre for Tai Chi classes on Tuesday and Thursday. I practice Tai Chi at home about three times a week on the days I don't come to class. When I practice at home, I don't do the whole set, just part of it. I can remember all the moves but just can't put them together. There's a lot of repeating."

David states, "Overall I feel much better. I was healthy and I still see the difference. I want to stay healthy so I like the physical part and it made me very mobile. I can do some things a lot of people much younger than me can't do." David says, "About two years ago, before I started Tai Chi, I got off the bus and walked in a hole and hurt my knee. About one year after I started Tai Chi beginners' class, the leg pain went away. I

felt it then but it could have already gone away before I noticed.” During the interview, David showed me how he effortlessly stands up from a soft and low-level couch without touching the couch handles and he says, “Before, I had to use my arms to help me get up standing from sitting in a chair. Now I can get up easily and freely.”

David explains, “I’m a social person. I like to be with people. I came here for two reasons, one for exercise for my health and one for the social aspect. That’s what Tai Chi represents to me. I didn’t think it was going to be a social thing. I didn’t really know. I thought it was just physical. I really like the social part of the class. I’ve made a lot of friends. I was going to learn one name every day. I learned a lot of names and I know a lot of people. I’ve been invited to two people’s homes and one of them twice. When people sit around for tea [at break time], I sit next to somebody different each time, so I can talk to them and get to know them. When you go to a gym, you don’t meet anybody and you are on your own.” At the company where David worked, “We had a very close group, like a family unit there. I feel the same way at the Tai Chi centre because of all the dinners we have had here. It’s a lot of cooperation. It’s just like the social club I participated in before my wife got sick and I was the chair of board of committees for the club. We had judges, lawyers, doctors, but we meet on the same level. It’s the same here at the Tai Chi centre. We have a doctor here. I said, ‘Do you want to be addressed as a doctor?’ He said, ‘No, I want to be addressed by my name.’”

When David explains the activities that he enjoys doing, he says, “Now I walk three kilometres every day, the days I don’t come here. I don’t watch much TV, just the news and sports. I have a hard time sitting around. I enjoy hands-on type of work. When I was a supervisor, I enjoyed the time I had to show somebody how to do something. I like woodworking. I’ve got a lot of tools pretty much for everything. I like to fix everything at home. That’s why when I came here I patched some holes downstairs to help out. I do lots of yard work.”

Regarding any potential activity as a substitute for Tai Chi, David says, “Substitute for Tai Chi is not for me. I’m not a swimmer. I suppose that’s good exercise, I just never learned. At one time I thought about doing yoga because I thought it was easy. But I watched my daughter doing yoga [and realized] that was not for me! I went to a lot of social dances with my wife. I coached hockey, but I didn’t play. I went along being the

coach with my son when he was 16 years old. I was coach and manager for six years until my son got older and moved away.”

David thinks, “the 50s are a good age to start Tai Chi.” He says, “When I first came here, the people in my beginners’ class were much younger than me. I wasn’t sure if I was doing the right thing because there were no older people in my class! It’s hard to tell what age these people [in his current class] are. Most of them are retired. They are older than 65. I know a lot of people don’t know how old I am. When my father came to visit in the early 1960s, I thought he was so old. Now I’m his age and I don’t feel old!”

When asked about his opinion regarding the gender ratio of Tai Chi practitioners, David believes, “Men may think Tai Chi is something that men don’t do. I didn’t think about that myself. When I joined I was really surprised. In the intermediate class, there were only four men. I think a lot of women were friends before joining the Tai Chi centre. I think they go to a lot of gatherings together. I went to a Tai Chi class when I was traveling in Western Canada. They had only five men in that class. When my daughter took the black belt [in Karate], there was not another woman so she had to spar with a man.”

6) Cathy

At the time of the interview in 2012, Cathy was 64 years old. She was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. Her class attendance ranges from 25 to 35. She had been practicing Tai Chi for two years and four months. At Cathy’s request, the interview took place at her Tai Chi classroom after her class had finished.

General impression

Cathy is one of the two Halifax research participants who rent an apartment. All the other participants own their own homes. She is slimmer than most participants. She is of medium height for a North American Caucasian woman and was born in Eastern Canada. She always has a smile on her face and loves talking to people. In her Tai Chi class, Cathy is the only one who participates only for about the first 20 minutes of the two-hour class. In the beginning of her class, she starts with all of her classmates but then she stops after the first Tai Chi set and before the break time. She sits down on the side of

the classroom and watches her classmates finish. Her classmates and the instructor are all aware of her routine. Like most of her classmates, Cathy wears her Tai Chi uniform to class. And she wears the same uniform all the time. On a day when she does not have a class, Cathy helps out at the Tai Chi centre. She waters the plants, answers the phone, or makes the tea. Sometimes she just sits in the office talking to others. Cathy travels by city bus. She says that she “has a perfectly valid driver’s license but hates driving.” She took the bus to work before retiring. From her comments, it is obvious that Cathy and her late husband were very close and shared the same hobbies. During the interview she talked about what they had done together. The next day when I was observing her Tai Chi class, she proudly showed me a beautiful and unique necklace that her husband had made for her and she “only wears it for special occasions.”

Family

Cathy says she was “a country kid and was very tough!” She says, “I grew up on a farm with my kid brother. We are three years apart. We had lots of time outdoors. I did everything he did, climb trees, swim in nature, ride bikes, and go fishing and camping. My mom taught me to cook and sew, but she didn’t teach my brother. I used to accuse my mother of being Victorian. I know my mom couldn’t understand that I pushed to have a career!”

Cathy lived with her husband in their own house in Western Canada for many years. They have one child who is married and living in Halifax. After her husband passed away, two years ago, Cathy moved to Halifax to be close to her son’s family. She now lives alone in an apartment. Cathy does not have any grandchildren. She “likes the weather in Halifax and the people are nicer here.”

Health

Cathy says that she has arthritis and blood pressure problems. “I was never athletic but always physically active. I can’t do too much physical exercise. I have to watch my blood pressure. It runs in my family. I can’t take medication because it hurts my stomach. I have to watch my salt intake.” She told me that that was why she only participates in part of her Tai Chi class. Cathy seems to be cautious about her health. She

says, “I didn’t take prescription drugs. I took and still take vitamins to maintain my health, to not get too many colds. I’m too busy and I haven’t got time to be sick!” Cathy is happy that her arthritis has improved. “After a few weeks in the beginners’ Tai Chi class, my shoulder arthritis is gone and it doesn’t bother me anymore!”

Education and employment

Cathy stated that she completed high school and “joined the military at the age of 18 and served for three years. I was stationed in Halifax.” After her military service, she took some “professional training courses” before getting a sales job in a company out West. Cathy states that she worked for the company for 25 years and retired two years ago at the age of 62.

Tai Chi experience

Cathy first saw a demonstration of the Canadian Style Tai Chi at a recreation fair in the city where she used to live and “fell in love with Tai Chi because of its gracefulness. It looks like ballet!” She says that she did not have expectations for Tai Chi and “just wanted to learn it.” At that time she had a “sedentary job” in an office and she “needed something physical.” Cathy took the beginners’ class in 2005. “The course was four months long and we learned all 108 moves. There were eight or nine people in that class and most of the members were still working.” Cathy’s beginners’ class learned the same style of Tai Chi as her current class. She says, “I found this Tai Chi form and I liked it and stuck with it. I get in a comfort zone. I’m not looking at other [Tai Chi] forms. Tai Chi is constant. I need constancy in my life.”

Cathy joined her current intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C* two years ago as soon as she moved to Halifax. She takes two buses to her Tai Chi class from her apartment and a friend whom she met in her Tai Chi class gives her a ride home after class. She says, “I could’ve joined another sport. Yoga never appealed to me. I don’t know why. It’s just not appealing. I thought about taking up dancing. I used to dance as a child. I took lessons. I was an active dancer from six years old until 19 years old. I stopped dancing after I joined the military. I was just too busy.”

Cathy says, “I practice Tai Chi twice a week [in class]. Sometimes if I feel stiff enough I do some Tai Chi at home. If I move one chair, I’ve got a lot of room in my home. I don’t have any space outside of my apartment building. I do 15 or 20 minutes each time. I tend to do it a little bit faster on my own at home. I like to do it in class better because of the energy flow or just the group dynamic. I can feel the energy in class. I started feeling that energy flow after I had been practicing Tai Chi for six or eight months.”

Cathy believes, “The socializing part of Tai Chi is as important as the practice.” She told me a story of her first impression of the Tai Chi centre and how much she likes “the stimulation and being around the other people.” She says, “When I started Tai Chi in Halifax, I only knew two people in the city – my son and his wife. I came in the door [of the Tai Chi centre] and I met Jennifer.¹⁶³ She introduced herself to me and said, ‘Hi, my name is Jennifer. I’m an instructor. Welcome!’ I felt at home! The Tai Chi members are retired and we are more relaxed. We are more interested in enjoying each other socially. The chitchat before class is very relaxed. The level of relaxation is high while practicing Tai Chi. At Tai Chi you can be yourself. At your workplace you have to maintain your professionalism.”

When talking about support from family and friends, Cathy says, “Most friends are just curious. My husband wouldn’t practice Tai Chi because he wasn’t a ‘joiner.’ But he supported me fully. He had supper and coffee ready for me when I came home from work. So I could eat and rush out to my bus to get to my Tai Chi class. My son is supportive. He thinks I’m going to live longer because I do Tai Chi! He’s got bad knees from playing hockey. So I told him ‘if it bothers you, you come here to do Tai Chi.’”

Cathy seems to be involved in various activities. She believes, “You need the variety. You can’t just do Tai Chi. You’ve got to do other things. You got to stay interested in life. If something catches my eye, I’ll do it. I’m taking courses for elders. I’ve done a number of courses just for personal interests – no exams, no pressure. It’s wonderful! For me, practicing Tai Chi and my continuing education courses are equally important for my body and for my brain. You use it or lose it. I’ve got a novel to read,

¹⁶³ The instructor’s name has been changed in order to respect that individual’s privacy.

I've got a sweater started and I'm trying to get some paperwork ready to send away. It'll all get done."

Cathy's goal is to "stay more physically active and stronger." She notices her increased energy. "Before Tai Chi, after supper I would just sit in front of the TV with a book. I was tired and couldn't be bothered. And now I am bothered! I found myself going out for no reason! If I've got nothing to do, I'm going out anyway. I go down for a walk. It's an energy improvement. I tried taking vitamins to boost my energy but it didn't work. You need energy to build energy. I just want to get out. I have lots of energy now."

In answer to the question about what Tai Chi means or represents, Cathy says, "Oh that is a good question! Tai Chi has become so much of my whole life. It's exercise, social, and it's friendly. It's a whole package. They are all important. And it's a place I belong! I mean as well as the exercise, I've got a whole social life. A group of us are getting tickets to go to a live theatre. We've done that before. If I'm down here for whatever reason and want a cup of tea or just warm up or something, I'm welcome in the building [Tai Chi centre] at any time, whether I come for a class or just to see the office assistant. There are a lot of elders' organizations. I looked them up when I first came here. When I read about them they didn't appeal to me. Other groups are not for any benefit that I'm interested [in]. They are going on bus trips. They are playing bingo. It's great if that's what they want. But it's not for me. I can go to a bingo on my own. No, they are not doing anything really to better themselves. I'd rather be doing something like Tai Chi. I'm not through with myself yet! I still want to be physically active. I still want to be mentally active. The health benefit is important. How am I going to live forever if I don't stay healthy? I don't want anything to do with the religion part of Tai Chi because I have my own religion. I don't always get to church. It's the time and the distance getting to the church. I don't have a vehicle. I can't afford to buy a vehicle." Cathy thinks the membership for her Tai Chi class "is a reasonable amount. It's worth it for the benefit I get. We've got this beautiful centre. And I don't mind helping to support it."

When she was asked whether there might be any substitute activity for Tai Chi, Cathy says, "I don't think there's a substitute for Tai Chi. No matter what, even if there is a substitute, it is not for me because of the benefits I got from Tai Chi. I could feel the benefit only few weeks in class."

When asked about the ideal age to start Tai Chi, Cathy responded that, “Tai Chi is absolutely for seniors. I mean at least 55 years old and above. Working people have high-pressure jobs. I found my job was stressful. When I did Tai Chi, whatever happened during the day was just kind of all gone away. The current Tai Chi practitioners, I’d say are anywhere from their 40s and up. The younger they start Tai Chi the better. My son is in his 30s. I’d be very happy if I could get him into Tai Chi.”

When Cathy comments on the male and female Tai Chi practitioner ratio, she says, “I really don’t know why there are more women than men. I don’t think it’s a stigma that men feel is not masculine. Maybe it’s the delicate male ego!”

7) Irene

At the time of the interview in 2012, Irene was 62 years old. She was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. Her class attendance ranges from 25 to 35. She had been practicing Tai Chi for four year. At Irene’s request, the interview was conducted at the Tai Chi centre prior to her Tai Chi class.

General impression

Irene is the most outspoken individual in her Tai Chi class. She always responds eagerly to her instructor’s questions or jokes and sometimes she extends the question into a discussion in class. She asks the instructor questions whenever she has an opportunity. She is cheerful and laughs a lot during class. She interacts with all her classmates in a respectful manner, but obviously she is closer to certain classmates who have “the same sense of humor.” As she says, “I don’t like all of them and I think some of them don’t like me either.” She always wears Tai Chi uniforms to class. Irene is taller than an average North American Caucasian woman of her generation. She has good posture and is fit and energetic. Irene says that she reads a lot and walks three kilometers five days a week. Irene’s first language is English. Irene lived in a French-speaking Canadian city for a number of years and says, “I can speak a fair bit of French. Sometimes I forget a word in English so I have to say it in French.”

Family

Irene and her husband live in their own house in the suburbs. They have been married for “almost 30 years.” Her husband works full-time. Their two children are both in their twenties. The older one has moved out but the younger one still lives with them. She does not have any grandchildren. When the children were young, Irene was a stay-at-home mother for some years. Irene and her four sisters were all born in Canada.

Health

Irene says that she has arthritis in her back and shoulder. “At times I have pain if I sit too long. Tai Chi didn’t give me a sore hip, but Tai Chi didn’t fix my sore hip. I think I made it worse by squaring my hips. I think if I didn’t do Tai Chi it would be worse. The hip was made worse not by Tai Chi but by the way I was doing it. In class, I was pulling my hips around. The instructor could’ve probably helped me, but I didn’t get any correction. And I think I left Tai Chi too soon in 1999. I think a certain move actually helped my shoulder. People talk about they get shorter as they get older. I think Tai Chi won’t make you taller, but you won’t get shorter. I can feel it and can see the difference. I always had fairly good posture but I think Tai Chi has helped me to be more upright. That’s a good thing about Tai Chi!”

Education and employment

Irene states that she has completed two bachelor’s degrees and has had several jobs over the years. Irene became a school teacher after graduating from university. She taught for 11 years and then quit her job to get married. Since starting a family, she has worked part-time on short contracts, such as an assistant at a company or a salesperson in a store. She enjoys “making special cookies for a store every two weeks.” As she says, she “doesn’t have a retirement.”

Tai Chi experience

Irene says that she has taken the beginners’ Tai Chi course three times. “I first started Tai Chi in 1999 because a neighbor asked me to take Tai Chi with his wife. So I took the beginners’ course with her, on and off, for a year. I stopped because I had two

young children and I was too busy to go.” Irene’s second start was in 2006. “I went back and did beginners’ course again and stayed for a little bit. The class was at the same location as the first time.” In 2009, Irene’s friend told her that a beginners’ course was offered at a new location so “I started the beginners’ again. I was 59 years old. I was getting older. I had more time and realized that I needed the stretching. The class was a ten-minute drive from home and it was very convenient. Since 2009 I’ve been going to Tai Chi class twice a week continuously for three years. Sometimes I do it at home but not religiously. I’ll do a part of a set at home for ten minutes. If my instructor corrected me something in class, I’ll practice that part at home. When I suddenly try a Tai Chi move at home, my son will laugh. It’s an open-concept home and it’s not like a gymnasium. I have to move a few chairs. I can do it on the deck in the summer.”

Irene says, “Tai Chi is pretty important to me. If I have other commitments, I’ll say I can’t go because I have to do Tai Chi. I think Tai Chi has become a good part of my life and it has happened in the past three years. I’m not obsessed with it and I hope I don’t have to give [it] up. I realize that sometimes I take a day off or I don’t do Tai Chi for a month. But I come back to it. I hope it becomes like brushing my teeth, combing my hair, and eating. I don’t regret I tried it because I did get something out of it. If I had not done Tai Chi ten years ago, would I at almost 60 years old have had the confidence to come back to Tai Chi? I don’t know. It is not just the Tai Chi, it’s the people in Tai Chi. The Tai Chi moves and the people I meet here are both important. I have made some Tai Chi friends. I like socializing with them when I’m in class. We are all retired and we are old. I don’t know what they did [their jobs]. You watch the cleaning lady doing Tai Chi better than the minister! We are meeting on a Tai Chi level. It’s about Tai Chi and not anything else. That’s perfect. It’s good for everybody. I’m sure that there are people, who may not be really into it, but it’s still Tai Chi. Think about martial arts, there are a lot of males. If you look at the classes, the women and men ratio is easily five to one! If you look at the men who do Tai Chi, I don’t know how many stay. When they do stay they do well. The Tai Chi society’s celebrations are good but I don’t feel the need to come to the banquet. I think the membership is very affordable!”

Irene believes, “My husband probably influenced me to do Tai Chi. He is always in martial arts. He has a black belt in karate and he also does two other martial arts. He

started quite young. He is ex-military and pretty fit. So he thinks it's great that I do Tai Chi. He encourages me to do it. In fact, I would come home and talk about a move and he would talk about it in terms of what he knows about martial arts. And it transfers because I can see the martial arts aspect, for example the punches. It's definitely a martial art but it's not used in the same way." Irene has encouraged her husband to do Tai Chi. "Once he came to pick me up and he sat there and watched my class. He said, 'It's not only too slow, but also the weight shifting and there is something very different about it.' My prediction is that he will eventually do Tai Chi when his body can no longer do karate and his joints start to hurt more."

Irene thinks, "North Americans are competitive. We go in and we say 'give me my 108 moves and give me my money's worth! And I'm going to leave here knowing how to do Tai Chi!' I can tell you that it has been very good for me because I am competitive! Maybe I'm less competitive now because I'm ten years older [compared to her previous start]. I like this Tai Chi and I haven't tried other Tai Chi forms. I like it because there is no competition. I tell people that this is 'my Tai Chi.' I don't know what is like in China but I always tell the people in beginners' class that there's no test, no badges, and no pressure on you. It is totally yours. Personally I like watching somebody doing it and I can imitate, but I think there is a danger just imitating because my perception may not be what's happening, so I think in order to get people to do it you have to have a comfort level. It's good to have the combination of 'tell me what's supposed to be happening' and I have to see if that is what's happening. If you can't do Tai Chi physically, you can do it mentally. If you have trouble sleeping, you close your eyes and think about the set. I do that and I think about it in my head. I'm getting close to having the ability to sustain the set. It's been only in the past few months that I memorized the set."

Irene has thought about what Tai Chi represents. "I realized that in Tai Chi it's not only your body, it's also your mind. I've done transcendental meditation. I think you can see Tai Chi, as they talk about it, as moving meditation. It does make sense! I am spiritual but I don't call myself religious. I did try meditation and I found it interesting. I admire the religious part of Tai Chi. I'm interested in a superficial way. Tai Chi is theirs (the Chinese)! And why would we do it? I think we are lucky that it has been transferred and

somebody from China has been here and says ‘I can give you something that we do in our country that might help you.’ I think it will take a longer time for me to learn it than a person from China would do it. I may never do it their way. I realize it’s not just the 108 moves. It’s so much more than the moves. It’s a combination of body, mind, and heart. I would be very interested to know how people from China look at us doing Tai Chi and what we get out of Tai Chi. It wouldn’t be the same Tai Chi style obviously. Tai Chi is getting popular and it’s good for you! Tai Chi is not something to sell. Like yoga, it becomes popular and you start to sell it as a commodity.”

In Irene’s opinion, “I don’t think there is any ideal age to start doing Tai Chi. I suppose it would be good if people are in their 40s were interested in Tai Chi. Would I have liked Tai Chi when I was 30? Probably not. I think you need to evolve a little more. I can see the people in the beginners’ class have so much anxiety. When you turn to your 40s, you begin to think you can’t learn something new. Tai Chi is excellent for that! I think the point of Tai Chi is – you don’t have to perform for any reason, so you do it just for yourself. If you want to get it, you keep trying.”

Irene has noticed some instructional changes in her Tai Chi courses over the years. “When I first started in 1999, there was a lot of emphasis on ‘square your hips.’ So I would REALLY square my hips. My left hip got very sore. I usually took an Advil before I went to class. Now if you fast-forward to 2009 when I started again, so we are looking at ten years later when I came back to Tai Chi, the way they taught had changed and they were saying ‘square your hips as much as you can’ or ‘shift your weight’ so I think they began to accommodate in their teaching because there are people who couldn’t square as much or who had whatever and couldn’t square. It’s great! It made me feel that now I’m starting to do it correctly. Brenda [an instructor and a research participant] looks at me and says ‘drop your belly and make sure your hip doesn’t go out’ and that has made the world of difference for me! Brenda knows the people in her class. For example, a big guy has back problems. Yesterday Brenda looked at him and said ‘your stance is a little too wide. But because you have a back problem, this is good for you and your pelvis will go down.’ That guy is a doctor, so he knew what she was talking about.”

Irene has discovered that being a corner in class enhanced her Tai Chi skills. “I think that I’m very analytical. I’ve been asked to teach. I’m only a corner now. A corner

is not supposed to say anything, but it doesn't stop me sometimes! Do I want to do beginning instruction? As crazy as this sounds I don't think I'm ready to do it yet. They will say 'oh yeah you are!' When I started in 2009 for the third time, Lynn [an instructor and a research participant] said 'would you corner for me?' I said yes, so we talked about the moves and we were doing it slowly. Something happened there and I think I benefited more than the beginners in class. So I got a lot and picked up all kind of stuff from being the corner for two instructors! Like anything else, you benefit from not having just one teacher."

Unlike most of the research participants who are only interested in the barehanded Tai Chi, Irene says, "I was interested in the Tai Chi sword. My husband made a sword for me. But in order to learn the sword, I have to go to a different city and pay an amount and nobody is doing the sword here. So I might use my sword someday."

Irene believes that left-handed practitioners have more difficulty doing Tai Chi. This is a point that no other participants mentioned. "When I went back the second time in 2006, I brought a coworker with me. She was little older than I was. She had a lot of difficulty and I think part of it was that she was left-handed. Being a teacher, I watched her and I thought it's very difficult for a left-handed to do Tai Chi. Once I asked someone in a beginners' class, 'Are you left-handed?' and they said yes. I think the Tai Chi creator must have been right-handed. I think it's more difficult for people who are left-handed. I'm right-handed. And I think it would be so difficult for us to do Tai Chi the opposite way! [Irene stood up and moved her arms and legs to the left side and then the right side to show me her point.] My suggestion is if you teach someone who is left-handed, you have to show them both ways. Like some people play sports, if they are right-handed, when they play golf they go left."

8) Helen

At the time of the interview in 2012, Helen was 66 years old. She was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. Her class attendance ranges from 25 to 35. She had been practicing Tai Chi for six years. The interview took place at Helen's home at her request. Her house was in a very quiet residential area, especially quiet on a weekday morning, when the interview was conducted.

General impression

Helen always has ideas about how to organize various events for her Tai Chi organization, such as a Tai Chi demonstration to promote the organization or a weekend workshop for local members of the organization and for Tai Chi practitioners from out-of-town. She shares her ideas during the tea break at her Tai Chi classroom. Her classmates respect her suggestions. When they ask her to be in charge of an event, she politely refuses because she is “very familiar with the amount of work that’s involved and that’s one of the reasons why [she] decided to leave it to others.” However, she helps out by regularly driving to a special store to purchase the Chinese tea for the class. She always wears her Tai Chi uniforms and is always early for her Tai Chi class and never misses one. She is very clear about her expectations from Tai Chi and how to achieve her goals. She is highly organized and goes to two of her favorite instructors to “learn the details of new moves” and another instructor’s class for “guided practice.” She is of average height and slightly overweight. Helen speaks perfect English. She is also fluent in a European language that was spoken by her parents when she was a child.

Family

Helen lives alone in her own house in the city. She was divorced many years ago. Her only child lives elsewhere and she does not have any grandchildren. Helen was born in Western Canada after her parents immigrated to Canada from Europe. Her parents have passed away and her relatives all live in another province.

Health

Helen says that she has had neck, shoulder, and back pain “from spending many hours sitting every day. Tai Chi really has improved my physical health and wellbeing. Now I don’t have any pain on my back at all. My legs are quite strong. I think Tai Chi is particularly useful for an older adult to keep moving! Honestly, I can’t tell whether it was Tai Chi that made this difference, or whether it was the fact that in my retirement I spend much less time sitting in meetings and in front of a computer. It is a combination of factors. I was sedentary and I am now physically active. One day I was sitting with the

group at the Tai Chi centre. Someone commented ‘you sit like the Queen!’ They referred to my straight body posture and the change was all because of my Tai Chi practice!”

Education and employment

Helen states that she earned a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree from a Canadian university before getting a job with the federal government. She had several administrative positions with the same department and worked for more than 30 years until her retirement in 2009 at the age of 63.

Tai Chi experience

Helen says, “I have two start times. I can’t remember what exact year that I started Tai Chi the first time. I think it was 1989 or 1990. I found Tai Chi was a substantial time commitment and it was not easy to stick with it if you traveled a lot and had a lot of evening meetings. The class was once a week. The class location was a concern to me and it was one of the several reasons why I stopped doing Tai Chi at that time. I didn’t have a car then and I really hated walking home alone at night after class. At that point, I did Tai Chi for three years. And then I gave up because of the demands of my job and I couldn’t commit the time for Tai Chi. In 2009 when I retired I started again intensively.”

Helen says, “I had heard about Tai Chi from friends. I was curious about it and went to try it out. I also wanted to do something physical on a regular basis. I felt I shouldn’t be so sedentary and Tai Chi gave me one opportunity for doing that. When I first started Tai Chi, I was under a great deal of pressure and I was living a life that was extremely stressful. I went to Tai Chi, in part, as a stress management tool. One of the good things about stress management through Tai Chi is that whatever nasty stress is out there bugging you, you just can’t think of that when you are doing Tai Chi. You absolutely only think about the motions and the movements that you are doing. I’ve done Tai Chi long enough now that this form of stress management is something that I take for granted to the point that I almost forgot to mention it. It is true that when there is something negative going on in my life, it ISN’T going on when I’m doing Tai Chi! Tai Chi gives me a break from the concerns and troubles of daily life.”

Regarding her current Tai Chi practice, Helen says, “I go to my Tai Chi classes three times a week, two mornings and one evening. Each class is two hours long. I don’t practice at home. Well, it’s not that I’ve absolutely never done it in my garden. The only comment was that my neighbors asked me why I didn’t teach them how to do it. I told them that I wasn’t qualified to do that. I certainly have no interest in being a Tai Chi instructor because the time commitment would be more than I would be able to give. I would say that it’s in total one working day per week my time goes to Tai Chi. If I look at the time commitment that I put into Tai Chi as a proportion of my total time available to do anything, then I would say Tai Chi is a significant priority.”

Helen believes “Tai Chi is a long-term commitment. And that’s the nice thing about it. I can do Tai Chi for the rest of my life!” She says that she “would be very interested in another form of Tai Chi” in addition to the Tai Chi that is taught in her class. “I’ve looked up on the websites. It’s so interesting to see the other forms of Tai Chi, but there isn’t any way to learn those around here on an on-going basis. No one is teaching them here. The Canadian Style Tai Chi is the only readily accessible form.” Once she heard about a Yang style Tai Chi class. “But they were only doing it a few months out of the year on an occasional basis and I’m not interested in that. I think if there is one thing that got through to me is that if you are going to do Tai Chi, there’s no point to think that I’m going to start for a few weeks and then I’m going to stop again. In fact, that’s one of the things that I enjoy about Tai Chi – you have a long road of gradual improvement and learning. I’ve done it for a few years now. As I go on I can begin to learn how to do the various moves in a more effective way.”

The physical exercise (the Tai Chi moves) seems to be “the most important aspect” to Helen, and “the rest (socializing, religious, or philosophical) is not important. I think Tai Chi is a beautiful form of exercise and that’s what I do it for. It’s a lovely practice. I love it! I think for some people, Tai Chi can become a spiritual practice. But it is not for me. It’s fine with me if some people want to do chanting. But I don’t want to be pressured into that. The people I know at Tai Chi that I only see at Tai Chi. I do not socialize with them outside the Tai Chi class. I don’t go to the dinners and meetings or anything like that. I just go to classes. At one time I did attend some workshops because I like the seniors’ week and I might go again.”

Helen once met the originator of the Canadian Style Tai Chi at a workshop. In her opinion, “What he brought us in the West was a really great gift, an important gift that we should always treat with respect and appreciation.” In answer to the question what Tai Chi means or represents, Helen excitedly responds, “Chinese culture is quite interesting! But there’s nothing taught about that and there is no one who is really expert in that area. I would be very interested in that sort of thing. For example, lectures or presentations about Chinese culture, even how to properly make tea, which we never do. I wouldn’t mind to learn about Chinese tea culture and Chinese literature. But that’s not part of the Tai Chi society’s programming. It is just about doing the workshops or doing the classes. And that’s just fine. I do not feel critical toward the society. They should do what they do well. Nobody can be all things to all people. They do very well in teaching Tai Chi and they have a number of excellent Tai Chi teachers.”

Helen states that she needs to supplement her Tai Chi practice. “As I got older, the consequences of my sedentary occupation began to show in pain in my back. It wasn’t a case of arthritis. It was just the result of sitting for a long time. I went to Tai Chi because it exercises the spine and I continue to do Tai Chi for that reason. Now I do think that I need to add something to Tai Chi. For example, I found that Tai Chi doesn’t give me the heart and lung workout that I should have. I’m going to start a walking program. While Tai Chi certainly keeps my body limber, I also need to strengthen my body and particularly my heart and lung capacity. The other thing I want to do is to lose weight and Tai Chi is not a weight loss program. Tai Chi keeps the fat you carry better. I can be quite fat and do Tai Chi fine. So it needs to be supplemented.”

Helen says that her regular activities include doing Tai Chi, meditating, and walking. “I do gardening because of property maintenance but I sure don’t like doing it! I am a reader. I read extensively. I participate in a book group. I am also involved in various advisory bodies related to persons with mental illness.”

Helen makes a comparison between yoga and Tai Chi. “I had done yoga at various times off and on, but found that I didn’t particularly enjoy yoga. I found the philosophical basis of yoga unattractive to me. That was why I left yoga and went to Tai Chi instead because there wasn’t much emphasis on the sort of belief system in Tai Chi. You could also see it is a similar thing with Tai Chi – the whole matter with *qi* and the

Eastern notion of how the physiology works. It's something that's quite strange to me and not necessarily consistent with Western ideas of how the body works or Western ideas of scientific approval. I'm not opposed to all aspects of this. So the good thing now is that I actually don't pay any attention to the philosophical basis of Tai Chi. I just do it! I don't understand the philosophy of Tai Chi and I don't care. If it works, it works."

Regarding whether she had encountered any negative effect or inconvenience from doing Tai Chi, Helen says, "When I first did Tai Chi, I hurt my knees repeatedly. It took about one year to learn how to do Tai Chi correctly to avoid knee pain. In fact, it's an odd thing because the pain in my knees helped me learn how to do Tai Chi correctly. Every time I made a move in Tai Chi that hurt my knees, I knew I was doing it incorrectly and I made corrections. Now it's very rare that I feel pain in my knees when I'm doing Tai Chi. The very odd time that I might feel a bit of knee pain, I immediately stop and adjust my posture. There is patience required and that's part of the attraction of Tai Chi to me. You have to be patient, persistent, listen, and pay close attention to your body and the instructors' body because you learn a lot by watching them. Tai Chi is also an internal art. You experience things internally. For example, you feel your spine that you might not be aware of otherwise. It is in many ways you can see it and feel it as a meditative experience."

Helen states that her Tai Chi experience has not changed the way she thinks about her age because "I'm quite happy to be an older adult. I'm happy to be at this stage of life where I have very much more control of my time than I once did. I have much more opportunity to pay more attention to not only my physical health but also my emotional and spiritual health, which intensively affect my relationship with the world and with other people."

In Helen's opinion, starting Tai Chi can be done at "any age at all. It would be interesting to see what happens if you started at a young age, because it should cultivate patience, perseverance, and a form of concentration. That is not a characteristic of children, particularly Western children. The kind of self-discipline and physical discipline that you see in arts, like Tai Chi, might be indeed quite beneficial to younger people to create more stillness. That is often absent from the lives of the young people."

Helen thinks, “Most of our Tai Chi practitioners are at least 45 and above. For a lot of young people in their teens and twenties, you get their comments that they dislike the idea of Tai Chi. They miss the point of being slow and still and meditative. They do not necessarily grasp the heart of the practice. Even though I go for physical reasons, I know that there are other aspects both psychological and somewhat spiritual that are involved with Tai Chi. And that’s where I see Tai Chi as a form of meditation. If I were younger, I might try karate or Kong Fu. But I think that’s more a young person’s practice.”

Helen comments on the gender ratio of Tai Chi practitioners. “Men are more likely to do weightlifting or something else, but they are not likely to pick Tai Chi or yoga as their first choice. It is more of something that women do. I have no real explanation for that. It may have to do with speed, like something is slow and meditative. Some men like things that are more active. If you look at yoga, there are more women involved in that and you don’t see so many men. Of course, we have some men in the Tai Chi group and they do it wonderfully. But I think there might be a barrier to male participation. That has to do with the notion that what is manliness and that what are the kind of things that men are attracted to? Notion of what is male strength?”

Helen seems to have a lot to share about gender and physical activities. “I do know something about male/female exercise patterns. If you look at physical activity as a form of positive health, it is the one area of positive health behaviors where men exceed women! Men are more likely to exercise than women are. At every age of life, men are more physically active. Except for exercise, I think women are far more likely to do better at all kinds of health behaviors such as controlling alcohol consumption and smoking or getting medical check-ups, except exercise. One of the reasons that women don’t do too much exercise, at least in my generation, is because we are too busy between employment and housework. We work all the time and we have an unpaid job at home! For example, you do the gardening, you take the children for their soccer games. There’s not much time left over for you. I’m not sure if that’s a fair assessment of the situation.”

Helen believes, “The membership for Tai Chi is a good deal to me. But if you think, a person on social assistance, really poor people can’t afford to take Tai Chi. Any recreational activity is limited to them. Are you able to get there? Do you understand

what Tai Chi is? A number of people I know, they stopped because they felt discouraged. Some teachers told me, 50 people started in a class, five people stayed after a few years.”

9) Jill

At the time of the interview in 2012, Jill was 71 years old. She was a member of *Group L*, an informal Tai Chi group located in her apartment building. The group attendance ranges from four to eight. She had been practicing Tai Chi for six years. The interview was carried out in the basement of her building, where there is a common area for the residents. We sat at a card table. It was Jill’s choice to have the interview on a Monday because she wanted to reserve her energy for her Tai Chi group’s weekly practice on Friday.

General impression

Jill is physically frail. She walks slowly and speaks in a soft and slow voice. She is shorter than the average Caucasian women of her age group. In spite of her less than perfect physical health, she is optimistic and cheerful. In her own words, “That’s what keeps me going.” She is committed to her Tai Chi group practice and schedules her other activities, including her medical appointments, accordingly. Jill is kind and caring. She always asks how the other members are doing before their group starts. She brought everyone, including me, an individual Christmas card at the last group practice before their December holiday break. One can sense the warm friendship between her and the other group members. Like all other members, Jill wears her everyday clothing to her Tai Chi group. She was born in Canada and speaks English only.

Family

Jill and her husband currently live in an apartment in a building that has many elders. Although the building is not located in the centre of the city, it is fairly convenient and there is a bus stop at the front entrance of the building. Prior to moving into this apartment, Jill and her husband lived for many years in their own three-storey house in a different district of the city, where they brought up their five children. When they decided to downsize after they both retired, they sold their house and their car. As Jill says, “We

sure got smaller. Our apartment is like a cookie box!” Four of their children and a number of grandchildren live elsewhere; the fifth (adult) child still lives in Halifax.

Health

Jill says, “I got sick after I retired.” She has been suffering from arthritis and several other severe diseases. “There was a period of time when I was bedridden and couldn’t do anything. But I was always trying to move my hands and my feet while in bed.” Jill had worked as a healthcare worker for some years, and reports that “I know what could happen and that’s why I keep moving. I don’t take a lot of medication in general. I don’t have heart or blood pressure problems.” During my fieldwork, Jill frequently saw healthcare professionals and had treatments at a hospital.

Jill says, “I still feel I’m 40 in my head, but my body has mobility problems. That’s my problem! I think any stimulation of the body and mind is going to help you. Tai Chi is stimulating my body and mind.” She gives an example about the effect of her Tai Chi practice on her health. “I broke my right arm from a fall not long ago and I couldn’t move my arm back. I couldn’t do the complete Tai Chi set, but I did parts. Now I can move my arms back and up. Medication doesn’t help. It’s all my exercise.”

Education and employment

Jill completed high school. She had different jobs during her employment years, such as secretary in a government office, healthcare worker in a hospital, and self-employment. She also “stayed home to look after the kids when they were young.”

Tai Chi experience

Jill had had some exposure to Tai Chi before she started with *Group L*. Her husband [who is not a participant in this research] started Tai Chi two years before she did. Jill has met all the members of her husband’s Tai Chi group at their group picnics. She also visited a Tai Chi class at a recreational centre, which was a few minutes walk from their apartment. She “has gone with [her] husband to many Tai Chi events. They [the members of her husband’s Tai Chi group] are lovely people.” During the interview, Jill asked me whether I had met her close friend [who is one of my research participants

from a different Tai Chi organization]. Jill and her friend belong to the same church and they “sing in the church choir together. My friend has tried, I don’t know for how long, to convince me to join her Tai Chi organization, but I wasn’t stable. Right now I’m sort of semi-stable and my energy level is pretty good. And her Tai Chi was a bit too strenuous for me. I have looked at websites and read about Tai Chi. I know my Tai Chi is a different type of Tai Chi from my friend’s [Canadian Style Tai Chi] and it is also different from my husband’s group [The Yang Style Tai Chi]. My husband is very supportive of my Tai Chi, the gym, and everything.”

“I started Tai Chi for health reasons in 2006 when I was very ill and needed to gain strength and energy.” According to Jill, after her husband had retired from a company, he worked for the school board for a few years. He joined his particular Tai Chi group because the group leader was a school teacher and they had met through work. When Jill talked to two members [Earl and Fiona, who are both my research participants but do not live in Jill’s building] of her husband’s Tai Chi group about her health condition, they told her that they would come to Jill’s building to start a Tai Chi group for her and any interested individuals who are residents of the building. Their group was permitted to use the community room in the basement of the apartment building. That was the beginning of her Tai Chi group.

Jill’s Tai Chi group meets for one hour every Friday morning. All the regular group members live in the same building, except Earl and Fiona. Since the other male member stopped coming, Earl, the group leader, is now the only male in the group. During their 15-minute break, members share what has been going on during the past week. They talk about their health, the local news, or someone whom they all know. Once Jill happily shared with the group that she had received a positive test result from the hospital in that week. At the end of their group practice, they all stand in a circle facing the centre and recite a healthy-living mantra twice and then do deep breathing three times before wrapping up the group practice. Jill’s Tai Chi group is free of charge. Based on my observation, each member brings in a few dollars when they come. They put the money in an envelope to show their appreciation. The money contributes to a scholarship that the group leader has set up with a local university.

Jill says, “Tai Chi has become second nature to me. It is very important. If I can’t do Tai Chi standing, I will do it sitting. There’s always something that you can do. Every day when I get up I do Tai Chi for 15 minutes in my apartment in front of a window facing the lake.” Jill is a devoted member of her Tai Chi group. She says, “I keep on going to my Tai Chi group every Friday. I knew my Tai Chi group members in passing before our group started and now we have become close friends because of Tai Chi. Several friends and I are core members of the group. We have had as many as 15 people with this group. It’s too bad that some members have moved away or they got very ill. Someone joined another group.”

In addition to her Tai Chi practice, Jill started going to “a gym for ladies” in 2004, two years before starting Tai Chi. Her goal in going to the gym was “for strengthening and getting some muscles for [her] knee surgery. We have about from 15 to 18 people we always go together to the gym. The gym class has about 60 participants. We have an 83-year-old and she is as smart as a whip. There are some young ones, so we are all ages.” Jill says that she now walks as frequently as she can for 20 minutes each time. She used to walk an hour every morning when her children were teenagers, and she “enjoyed that.” She has been volunteering for a local community centre for more than 20 years. Going to the centre to volunteer twice a week “has become part of [her] morning routine. I consider myself lucky to get help. I have a friend, we have been friends for 40 some years, and she drives me to the gym. I have another friend and we volunteer together and she drives me to the volunteer place. I don’t take the bus on my own because I don’t want to fall. When I’m with my husband we use the bus during the day. I wouldn’t want to be out on the bus at night.”

Jill thinks, “Tai Chi is good for any age to start and to continue. In reality, I see people in Tai Chi groups from 20s to 80s. Some people don’t do Tai Chi because they don’t understand the value of Tai Chi. When my husband and I went away with a group of friends for a month, I taught them how to do Tai Chi. That was the first thing we did in the morning before our coffee. We got outside and did Tai Chi together. It was fun! I have a sister living in the province. Every time I visit her I do Tai Chi. She asked me what I was doing and now she has found a Tai Chi group over there and she enjoys it.”

It seems that Jill lived an active and organized life before her retirement. “I’m always focused and programmed. Before I retired, I always planned my day and I made my lists. When I took the bus to work, I got off the bus a few stops early and walked to the office in the mornings. My husband and I used to dance a lot. We did Scottish dance. I did a lot of music. I directed variety shows at a church for about ten years as a hobby. When I was in my 20s, I played basketball and baseball and I skied a lot. I did yoga for a couple of years when I was in my 20s when yoga was sort of getting started here. I stopped doing yoga because of circumstances – we moved and I had a child. I liked it but I was too busy. Life goes on. I like the meditative part of yoga. I can’t do yoga anymore because I can’t get down on the floor. I prefer Tai Chi over yoga because Tai Chi is more peaceful for me. I sing in the church choir. There’s only so much you can do when you hit a certain age.”

Jill believes, “I don’t think there is any negative side of Tai Chi. We are very blessed to have Earl and Fiona helping with the Tai Chi group in my building. We are very relaxed because we have been together for a number of years. There is no substitute for Tai Chi because of the meditative aspect. I like meditating. I don’t practice the religious part of Tai Chi. The socializing is very important. The socializing and the Tai Chi moves are equally important to me. The people who live in my building are about 60 years old or older. In my case, I get out every day. But I think a lot of people need to socialize and be part of a group and do things.”

Jill comments on the gender ratio of Tai Chi practitioners. “I talked to my husband about that. It takes a certain mind set to do this type of thing. Because a lot of men think ‘Oh my dear! I’m not going to do that [Tai Chi] and I look stupid!’ They allow their ego to get in the way. They want to be macho men and they don’t want to do that kind of stuff. And they want to be able to do it right away. But it takes time. It’s a practice. It’s not something that you do it once.”

10) Jeff

At the time of the interview in 2012, Jeff was 70 years old. He was a member of *Group K*, an informal Tai Chi group that met outdoors at a city park. His group’s

attendance ranged from two to 14. He had been practicing Tai Chi for 10 years. The interview was conducted indoors in front of a local gallery, at Jeff's request.

General impression

Of all the Halifax research participants, Jeff has practiced the most Tai Chi forms, namely, the 24 set, the 42 set, and the 108 Yang Style; Tai Chi sword; and Tai Chi fan. He is fit and does not look his age. As Jeff says, "Age is just a number. Practicing Tai Chi makes you feel much younger. You are more active and you are more energized." He is cheerful and pleasant. He is very friendly with all members of his Tai Chi group, particularly Harry, the group leader (who is also a participant of this research). Jeff has traveled "with Harry and his wife to three countries in Europe." It is obvious that Jeff is also passionate about paddling. He belongs to a paddling club and a dragon boat club. At the interview, he brought a photo album and proudly showed me many photos of his two trips to China with his Tai Chi group and of numerous competitions he has participated in with his two paddling clubs. Jeff's Tai Chi group practices outdoors year-round despite weather condition. There is no dress code so every member wears clothing of their own choosing. Jeff always dresses neatly and appropriately for the weather. During the winter, he wears layered sportswear.

Family

Jeff is single. He has his own house in the city and has been living there for many years. Jeff was born in Eastern Canada. He was an only child but both his parents "had many siblings" and Jeff has "a great many cousins." He says, "Both my parents are gone and I have only an aunt left and she is 86 and she does Tai Chi!" Most of Jeff's relatives live in his hometown. One cousin's family lives in Halifax. "My cousin and I, in many ways, share similar interests. She is also a school teacher. I'm very close to her children. She is married to a Chinese man. I love authentic Chinese food and my cousin's husband is a fantastic cook!"

Jeff has a lot to say about his mother. "My mother was quite a traveler. She and my aunt had a business in New York City when she was very young in the early 1920s. She had a long career before she settled down. When she was probably in her mid-30s

she came home and met and married my father. In many ways, she was the last of the Victorians and the first of the liberated women, a very weird mixture! She loved to travel and she loved shopping for clothing. Of course, that was the New York influence. She ate well and always watched her weight. She was very fashionable and kept a nice figure in her 70s. I got the wanderlust from her because my father was not much of a traveler. One thing that I learned from my mom was her curiosity.”

Health

Jeff says that he has arthritis and hypertension. “I take medication for my hypertension. My dosage is not very high and it’s controlled. I eat carefully and exercise. It is not my lifestyle that caused my hypertension. It’s an inherited thing from my mother’s side of the family.”

Jeff believes, “Tai Chi is a pain reliever and a stress reliever. Last year I hurt my leg muscle playing tennis. The surgeon suggested getting some physiotherapy to avoid surgery. I asked him if I could continue to do Tai Chi. He said ‘yes, that would be good to supplement the physio, particularly in getting the balance back.’ I took physiotherapy three times a week and practiced Tai Chi every day. Several months after I went back to check, the doctor said ‘everything looks fine.’ The Tai Chi really complemented the physio and I avoided the surgery! It was a natural way to heal rather than the invasive surgery.”

Education and employment

“My university had a great impact on me. I had such a good time there. It’s a small campus so everybody knows everybody else.” After completing his bachelor’s degree with “one major and three minors”, Jeff taught two years at “a public school in a rural area” near that university in Eastern Canada. He then went back to school in Halifax and earned his master’s degree. Afterward, he taught at a public school in Halifax for many years until his retirement in 1995 at the age of 53. Unlike most of the Halifax research participants who have had various jobs during their career, Jeff had only one, he was a school teacher for all of his employment years.

Tai Chi experience

Jeff started Tai Chi “ten years ago in 2002. I learned the 42 Tai Chi set from Harry and learned the 24 set from the teacher who now leads the sword in my group. I’ve been sort of taking Tai Chi courses in an on-going fashion. Every year, I took classes with Harry. This fall, he took some time off and didn’t teach. So I signed up for a Tai Chi course at the community centre but they didn’t have enough people so the course didn’t run. I had sporadically taken Tai Chi courses before that. I liked Tai Chi but before meeting Harry I had never found an instructor whom I really liked. As a teacher myself, I recognize a good teacher. It’s more about the attitude. You’ve got to put some humor in it. Actually, teachers make the most critical students! Harry is an excellent instructor and he is a teacher by profession. And he knows how people learn. After the first class with him and I thought, ‘okay, he knows what he is doing.’ And the others might be good practitioners of Tai Chi but maybe didn’t have the training for teaching.”

In Jeff’s opinion, “Our Tai Chi group is an attraction in the park. People keep telling me ‘I saw you doing Tai Chi at the park.’” Jeff’s group meets on Sunday morning for one and a half hours. There is the only Halifax group that plays background music identical to that used by all the Jinan groups. They first practice the 24 set twice, followed by the 108 Yang style. After the 10-minute break, they divide evenly into two groups. One group repeats what they did before the break and the others, including Jeff, move over to the right side of the park to practice Tai Chi sword. Harry continues to lead the repeating group. There is another Tai Chi instructor, who shows up at the break time to lead the sword group. The two groups end at the same time. Jeff’s Tai Chi group is free of charge. However, all members except one have taken paid Tai Chi courses from Harry in previous years. The attendees in his group vary depending on the weather, the personal schedule of the members, or their health. During my fieldwork, the highest number of attendees for one group practice was 14, and the lowest was two.

“I have always been interested in martial arts. I took karate when I was very young. Karate was very aggressive and you can get injured quite easily and I didn’t like it. At my age, I don’t think I should be doing karate. I wanted a martial art that I can do for the rest of my life. Tai Chi suits me better. I see Tai Chi as an exercise form. I have done the Tai Chi fan, but didn’t find it very interesting. I really like the Tai Chi sword. I

don't know why I didn't like the fan. Maybe I just relate to the sword. Maybe I got interested because of the many martial arts movies that I watched when I was young, like Bruce Lee and Jacky Chan. Another thing I like about Tai Chi is the meditation part. Years ago, I took a transcendental meditation course. I think it was originally from India. You were given a mantra and you just repeated it over and over. To tell the truth, after a while I just found it sort of boring. I like Tai Chi because it is a moving meditation, which suits me better than a sitting meditation. When I was doing transcendental meditation I fell asleep. It was too slow.”

“In the morning I spend an hour doing stretching, qigong,¹⁶⁴ the 24 set, the 108 set, the 42 set, and two forms of the Tai Chi sword. After I finish all that I'm fine and I'm ready to go! It has become part of my daily routine. My living room is large, but I've poked a few little holes in the ceiling with the sword! Sometimes I practice out on my deck in the summer. It freaks out the neighbors. The Tai Chi group location is okay with me. I drove to work before retirement and I drive to Tai Chi now. The only disadvantage is that it's cold at the park in the wintertime. But you learn to dress for it.”

Jeff is “fascinated with Chinese culture and fascinated with Eastern cultures and religions.” He has just completed “an Asian history course” [with the city's continuing education program]. Jeff “loves authentic Chinese cooking. We had Peking duck in Beijing when we visited China!”

“I'm retired but I'm busier than ever! It's a different kind of busy. It's a great kind of busy! In terms of priorities, Tai Chi is probably number one and the gym and paddling would be number two. I read a lot. I have done a fair amount of artwork. I've done oils, acrylic, sketching, and watercolor. In fact, I volunteer for this gallery [the interview took place just outside the gallery]. I am physically active. I did kayaking, rowing, and cycling and I used to play tennis and badminton until I tore my Achilles tendon. I took yoga for two years. That was a good exercise. I go to a gym three times a week and I'm probably getting more than enough exercise. I had a personal trainer who set up a program essentially for paddling and there is a fair amount of variety in it, like one day you do shoulders, the next day you do arms, and the next day you do legs.”

¹⁶⁴ “Qigong and Tai Chi are the two most popular traditional Chinese exercises, known as mind-body movement therapies. Qigong focuses more on the internal energy flow than Tai Chi” (Liu et al., 2015).

Jeff seems to enjoy the social aspect of his Tai Chi group and his paddling groups. “The socializing aspect is equally important compared to the Tai Chi moves. There is a real social aspect to it. I traveled to China with the Tai Chi group in 2004 and 2007. On our first trip, we practiced Tai Chi outside a hotel in Tibet. The local people who worked at the hotel took photos of us because they were amazed to see the foreigners practicing Tai Chi there! On our second trip, we practiced Tai Chi once with a large group of the local Tai Chi practitioners at a city square in Beijing. It was nice to mix in with them. I became very close with Harry and his wife. They love to throw parties for the Chinese New Year or someone’s birthday. And the other people in the group all became very close. Seven years ago, the Tai Chi group members started a canoe club and after a couple years we shifted to a dragon boat club. With canoe you kneel, with dragon boat you sit. So it’s easier on the knees. I think the dragon boat racing is the most popular in the world. I have a wide circle of friends. They are sort of separate. There are my teacher friends, the paddling friends, and the Tai Chi friends. And I can sort of move effortlessly between those. In some cases, there is an overlap. One of my colleagues does take Tai Chi but it’s a different form.”

Jeff seems to have discovered a connection and integrated his practice of Tai Chi with paddling. He believes, “There is a great deal of similarity between Tai Chi and paddling. Some people think paddling is all about shoulders and arms. It’s not. The strength is from the core. And of course, that’s what Tai Chi is all about. In Tai Chi, for example, if you make a move, you don’t necessarily move your arms. You move your core. So Tai Chi is particularly good for the paddling because you learn to work your core. Some of the best paddlers are little tiny people but they have a lot of strength in the core. So the similarities between Tai Chi and paddling are great! I started paddling ten years ago when I was 60 years old. One of the reasons that I changed to another paddling club was a schedule conflict. My old paddling club had a practice on Sunday, which interfered with my Tai Chi group practice. I made some inquiries and shifted over to my new paddling club so that I would be able to go to my Tai Chi group. One of the things that I like about my new paddling club is that they are more social. Friday night we go out to have dinner together. That’s another reason that I changed my paddling club. The

other thing is that people of all ages can do it. Like in my club, someone is 17 and I'm 70. So there are all ages.”

Jeff comments on the reactions of some people toward Tai Chi. “My neighbors and colleagues think Tai Chi is funny. They don't understand that Tai Chi is good for you. I guess people are afraid of anything that is a little different. One of my colleagues lives across the street from the park where my Tai Chi group meets. He said, ‘I saw you crazy people out there waving your arms around and flashing swords.’ He thinks it's all very silly. I keep telling him ‘this would be good for you’ because he's got some health problems. I said ‘you should join us.’ But he said it was too cold. But he would come out on his balcony and watch us. He is a very bright man and usually open-minded. Years ago, my neighbor Eugene¹⁶⁵ practiced Tai Chi sword out in his yard. Once my other neighbor, an elderly lady phoned me and asked, ‘has Eugene lost his mind, waving a sword around?’ I told her that he was not crazy and he was just practicing Tai Chi!”

Regarding the age range of Tai Chi practitioners, Jeff says, “From what I see now, most Tai Chi practitioners are from 40 to 80 years old. We have an 80-year-old in our Tai Chi group. I think Tai Chi practitioners can be any age. I have an aunt who is retired now but she lived in Western Canada for years and there was quite a Chinese population and she took Tai Chi out there and she still practices it. Now she is 86 and her mind is crystal clear. She has her own apartment and drives her own car. She has all sorts of interests and a wicked sense of humor and is very much involved in politics. She attributes her longevity to Tai Chi! She talks about her younger sister, my other aunt, who died at 83. That aunt had all kinds of problems and all the horrible surgeries. When she was in the wheelchair, I remember she said, ‘If I had known about Tai Chi I would probably still be walking.’”

When asked whether there might be a substitute for Tai Chi, Jeff thinks, “Yoga could be a substitute. I've done yoga and I liked it. I took it for a couple of years. I think it's a great exercise. But I prefer Tai Chi because it's constantly moving whereas yoga you get into a position and you stay there!”

Jeff sheds some light on the gender ratio. “In our group there are more men than women. Our group is outdoors. Maybe the women don't like the cold? In the regular Tai

¹⁶⁵ The name has been changed in order to protect the individual's identity.

Chi forms, I think it's evenly divided. In the sword form there are more men. I think in the sword form men are attracted to the weapon. Several of our group members came from a bit of a martial arts background. I think that's probably part of it."

11) Earl

At the time of the interview in 2012, Earl was 81 years old. He was the leader of *Group L* (the attendance ranges from four to eight) as well as a member of *Group K* (the attendance ranges from two to 14). Both are informal Tai Chi groups. *Group L* meets indoors in an apartment building. *Group K* meets outdoors in a city park. Earl had been practicing Tai Chi for 12 years. The interview took place in the living room of Earl's home at his request, after his group (*Group K*) practice.

General impression

Earl is the second tallest individual among all the Halifax research participants (almost as tall as David). He is cheerful and humorous. He tells more jokes during the break with *Group L*, compared to *Group K*, perhaps because he is the leader of *Group L*. Earl is very sincere and considerate. He is friendly with all the members of the two informal Tai Chi groups that he regularly participates in. During my fieldwork, Earl only missed one practice for *Group L*, due to a medical appointment. His wife Fiona (who is also a participant in this research) stepped in to lead the group for that day. There is no dress code in either of his groups. Most members go to their weekly practice wearing their everyday clothing. In the wintertime, Earl wears layers of sweatshirts and pants and sneakers to both groups. He wore the Tai Chi shirt he bought on his trip to China (long sleeve shirt with Chinese style buttons) on the day *Group L* had a party before the December holiday season. Earl has traveled with some members of *Group K* to several countries, including two trips to China with special group traveling rates. As a tradition, the members of *Group K* used to go to a nearby coffee shop together after each practice up to last year. They have stopped going for coffee because most of them are busy going to the next planned event on their daily schedule and they have already had their chat during the Tai Chi group's break. Earl always went with the group. He is Caucasian and a native speaker of English.

Family

Earl and his wife have been married for many years. They live in their own house in a residential district of the city. Their only child has moved away. They do not have any grandchildren. Several years ago, they got rid of their car. They occasionally rent a car for a short trip in the province. Earl and his wife almost always go to the same activities together, such as Tai Chi classes, Tai Chi groups, or the gym to “warm-up” after *Group K’s* practice in the winter. He regards his walking as part of his daily exercise. The closest bus stop is a five-minute walk from their house. However, Earl rarely takes the bus.

Health

“As a child I played sports. I was brought up in a suburb and was naturally healthy. I was a ‘couch potato’ when I was trying to get my university degree. I never took exercise and watched television for six to seven hours daily. My health condition, the natural health part from childhood, was used up later on.”

Earl says that he has had hypertension and some heart problems and he takes “the least possible medication.” He found that doing Tai Chi helped his lower back pain. “It also reduced tension and it’s good for flexibility. We paid to learn Tai Chi, so we wouldn’t have to pay pharmaceutical fees. The membership for the gym should be deducted for income tax purposes.” Since he started Tai Chi, Earl has lost a lot of weight. Two years ago, Earl took a test that was offered by “the Healthy Living Program,” a part of the local health authority. The test result showed, “My physical age is 18 months younger than my chronological age.”

Education and employment

Earl states that he has a bachelor’s degree and two master’s degrees. During his employment years, Earl worked in the fields of computer analysis, city planning, and public education. Earl has also done volunteer work overseas. He retired 17 years ago in 1995 at the age of 64.

Tai Chi experience

Earl started Tai Chi 12 years ago in 2000. “I wanted to start something easier and fit in my capacity for my own body. Since then I have taken the 24, the 108 Tai Chi, Tai Chi sword and Tai Chi fan.” Earl took his first Tai Chi course with his wife at a community centre, which was just “around the corner” from his home. He learned the 24 Tai Chi set in that course. After a year, the instructor was “no longer available.” By that time Earl and his wife had been regular members in a sports centre for “strengthening and weights.” They found out that there were Tai Chi courses offered at the centre and there was a member’s discount. “It was the cost of learning and worked out to be about only five dollars per lesson.” Most of his classmates in that course are now regular members of his *Group K*.

Earl has been practicing Tai Chi “almost on a daily basis since 2000.” His wife started Tai Chi one year before he did. “I looked at what she was doing. I noticed with my wife that the health benefits on her were very good. So I thought, let me try this! I didn’t want her to get too healthy in comparison to me! In fact, she convinced me to ‘just come in and try it.’ And she had taken it for a whole year before I became convinced, because men resist physical exercise. Men are very slow to pick up these types of things, but when they get involved and committed to it they can continue to do it for a long time. It is typical of all physical activities, including group exercises or team sports. Men want to belong to a team. They think it’s the identity of a group. I think that’s generally true. If you look at just health-related activities, they are dominated by women in terms of the numbers. But the men who are involved, they have been doing it for a long time. So if you can convince men that health-related exercise like Tai Chi is useful, then you get them started and [they] keep their commitment. To convince men to do Tai Chi is absolutely the most important!”

“I see the physical health benefits of doing Tai Chi. You can do it at your own home or you can participate collectively in a group. The energy shared in your group is different than doing it on your own. As you learn the Tai Chi form and if you practice long enough, your body remembers the routine of the Tai Chi set. Tai Chi is ‘meditation in motion.’ You are going from movement to movement and pay attention to where your body is. You are at the level between sub-conscious and un-subconscious. You can’t keep

your thoughts but the thoughts are coming and going, almost like a ‘time out.’ Sometimes it’s one or two seconds, or a few seconds, before bringing yourself back to the present. We Westerners have a busy mind, in the future and in the past. We need to respect our body and nature. Healing and health is always a big picture. Tai Chi as a moving meditation is a holistic integrated process. For example, if you have pain in your lower shoulder, Tai Chi holds your whole immune system and generates the resources of energy.”

“Teaching Tai Chi takes you a whole stage further in your practice with a way to go back and rediscover how you do things. You also articulate when you teach and demonstrate it to students. The best thing is to know how you do the moves. When I am teaching it I understand why Tai Chi is so difficult. Because the moves are not intuitive, because we are not used to the concept of Yin and Yang, and we are not used to fluent movement and we are not used to the idea that gentle exercises are actually better than pumping iron, for long-term ability and strength! And you have to re-think to change your opinion and your ideas about what is beneficial and that’s difficult, particularly if you are a macho man. You think pumping steel or running hard or sweating is associated with healthy activities, and once you can’t do that or find difficulty in doing that because of your heart or knees or something, you give it up completely, whereas with Tai Chi and qigong, these are lifetime things that can extend to the very end of your life! And they keep on giving you health benefits. I would say it is true for most people in North American culture. Most of the people who practice Tai Chi with me are Canadian of European background. Although, there have always been Asian participants [in *Group K*] over the years, simply because they relate to Tai Chi and qigong so much more readily and they don’t think it’s strange to be on a Sunday exercising at 23 below! Tai Chi is a martial art and it is associated with the Asian culture and the root of Tai Chi, of course, is Chinese. The group [*Group K*] is open for anyone to join and there is no cost.”

“Once I taught a group with mental challenges. The participants of the group were particularly stressed out and they found Tai Chi beautiful. There were the potential benefits in the Friday group [*Group L*]. It’s important to integrate support and the two sources of energy – the mind and the matter of the body. Some common concerns include ‘not sure if Tai Chi is for me’ and ‘not sure if I can continue.’ I’ve been teaching a Yang

style Tai Chi class just this term at the sports centre. I'm substituting as a favor for my instructor while he is away."

"Tai Chi is a path in which great understanding can come. I had no expectations when I first started learning Tai Chi. The results of my Tai Chi practice raised my expectations. Like a religion, once you are converted you want everybody to be doing it. My friends and relatives think my Tai Chi exercise 'is nice, but not for them.' The attitude of friends and relatives would not affect me."

"A priceless dimension of Tai Chi is the social part. People want to support others in our group dynamic. We see these people as people who share our belief and interest. Personal health is important. Socializing is added. The group dynamic is a motivating factor to my individual practice. We tend to make friends around the Tai Chi group."

"I will be doing Tai Chi up until I lie down in my coffin! It's a lifetime activity. I like music, including guitar, keyboard, and singing folk songs. But Tai Chi is the top priority. Practicing Tai Chi takes time and discipline. It's a matter of setting priorities. It would be difficult if you were lazy or working full-time. I have been doing some general stretching exercises. I have been introduced to Pilates and have done a little yoga. The form of yoga to me was too strenuous. Tai Chi is gentler. Yoga has the meditation element and the stretching comes with the same philosophy as Tai Chi: holistic and making mind-body connections. So yoga could be a substitute for Tai Chi for some people. I have been taking the health-related qigong since 2007. It's Chinese and there are six levels of training. I've done up to level four. The level one is basically the exercise. Level two, three, and four are meditation. Level five is teaching. It takes several years to get certified before you become an instructor."

12) Andy

At the time of the interview in 2012, Andy was 80 years old. He was a member of *Group K*, an informal Tai Chi group that meets in a city park. The group practices all-year-round regardless of the weather. The group is free for everyone. The number of

attendees ranges from two¹⁶⁶ to 14. Andy had been practicing Tai Chi for 12 years. At his request, the interview took place in the living room of his house.

General impression

Andy is taller than average for a Caucasian man of his generation. He has a strong build and is energetic. As the oldest member of his Tai Chi group, he does not look his age and is in a better shape than most of the other members. Andy loves talking with his group members during the break, before and after their group practice. He smiles a lot, except when practicing with the group or occasionally leading the group when the leader is away on vacation. Andy always arrives at the park early with a heavy battery and a CD player in his car for the group's background music. On cold winter mornings, members tend to be few minutes late. However, Andy and the group leader always arrive on time. Andy is interested in bare-hand Tai Chi and Tai Chi sword. After the break, he always joins the Tai Chi sword group with several other members. Andy comes to his group practice wearing his everyday clothing, such as a sweatshirt, sweatpants, and a heavy winter jacket. He was born in an English-speaking country and English is his only language.

Family

Andy and his current wife are both retired. They live in their own house within walking distance of where he used to work. He bought the house at this location to enable him "to walk home for lunch" as his daily exercise for many years before retiring. Andy and his wife did not have any children together, but he and his late former wife had three children and he has a number of grandchildren.¹⁶⁷ All of his children's families live far away from Halifax. Andy has had a dog for many years. He takes the dog for long walks every day.

An only child, Andy was born in Europe. His father died when he was a child and his mother brought him up. "There is a tradition of long life in my mother's side of the family. My mother died at age 97. My aunt worked in Hong Kong for 30 years. Through

¹⁶⁶ The only time with two participants was a Sunday in December. Andy and the group leader attended the practice in a heavy snowstorm. The three of us practiced their regular Tai Chi routine.

¹⁶⁷ Andy did not specify how many grandchildren he has.

her, I got interested in China. She died in 1960 when I was in my early 20s. There was very little information about China at that time.”

Health

“I am reasonably fit. I have strong legs from my physical exercise. In the last two or three years, I am noticeably tired after the Tai Chi sword. I think it is the aging process. Practicing Tai Chi has certainly helped my arthritis. I strongly encourage people to practice it. Once I talked about my Tai Chi practice with a consultant who specializes in arthritis. She strongly advised me to continue with Tai Chi.”

“I recognize that Tai Chi is a good physical activity. It is not stressful and yet it seems to be beneficial to the body as a whole. My Tai Chi practice helped me to be relaxed and reduced some stress in the way I carry on with my daily life, to keep the balance of what I do for the day. It’s the Yin-Yang thing.”

“I subscribe to some health-related journals. One of the things that I learned from the literature is that your mind affects your body. If you tend to have a positive attitude, it helps with your body. For example, acupuncture at one time was regarded very skeptically in the West. Now it has become a very respected art. It’s interesting to see how long it takes for the new things to come in. As far as Tai Chi is concerned, I am starting to see the new references in the literature.”

Education and employment

Andy states that he has a doctoral degree. He came to Canada for a job when he was young and never left. Over the years, he worked for three organizations in technical and administrative positions. The job he worked for the longest time was in a government department in Halifax. He retired 16 years ago in 1996 at the age of 64.

Tai Chi experience

“It was about 12 years ago, I first heard about Tai Chi from a friend. She told me that Tai Chi had helped her. There was very little information about Tai Chi in the public press. And there were very few people practicing in my area. At that time, I visited Hong Kong and Mainland China. I saw people doing Tai Chi in Hong Kong and in Beijing. I

was impressed. Soon after, I saw an ad for courses that the city was offering, including Tai Chi. I signed up and there were 12 people in my first Tai Chi class (about 80% female). The course instructor was very good. His background was in martial arts and he was also interested in various forms of healing. The course lasted two or three months. At the end we were just able to do half of the set. It wasn't the short form Tai Chi. I don't know what it was called. The first thing we learned was to 'hold the ball.' To me that was learning how to coordinate my hands and feet. It proved to be very difficult right from the beginning. The instructor used some music suitable for class, but not Tai Chi music.¹⁶⁸ The music helped us to be calm. I signed up for the second level course and found out there were only two of us who were continuing from the beginners' class. We were equally bad at doing Tai Chi. We made a bit of progress, but at that stage we both had problems learning and memorizing the Tai Chi moves. What we really needed was extensive time to practice. The second course was two months long, one class per week with eight or ten classes. Each class was one hour. After the second course, the instructor moved away and there were no Tai Chi courses offered. So without an instructor, I was a bit lost."

"In my volunteer group, I met Harry [who is also a participant in this research] who was interested in Tai Chi. He was willing to help me. I went to his house for a few private lessons. About the same time, he started an informal group at an outdoor location. The group met once a week for free practice on Sunday mornings. It became a social group. Members get together usually at Harry's home for a potluck. We celebrate the annual get-together of our group. Your rapport with your group leader is important. Harry is patient. His Tai Chi skills have really improved. He goes to a different city to attend advanced Tai Chi training once a year. I have gone through three different Tai Chi teachers. When I talked to people who are interested in learning Tai Chi, I told them to find the instructor you like and you can work with, just the same as in school. Harry started teaching Tai Chi classes when he was close to retirement. I took a number of his Tai Chi courses over the years. At my age, I'm learning very slowly. It's hard to remember the 108 moves. Learning the moves didn't come to me naturally, at first. The

¹⁶⁸ Andy's group plays the same Tai Chi background music that is also played by all the Tai Chi groups in Jinan.

difficulties include long-term memory and training my body to remember the moves. A challenge of Tai Chi is learning to be patient. It took me a long time to master various Tai Chi moves in the forms. I now realize that I had some disabilities for learning Tai Chi. I don't have good visual memory. I need to train my body to memorize the sequence. Once Harry told our group, 'if your mind goes blank, let your body take over.' Some of the moves involve the pressure on your knee joints. If your foot is in a wrong angle, you can actually hurt your knee. I will never be able to do some Tai Chi moves, such as the 'sneak.' The break-through probably came about five or six months ago when I was taking formal Tai Chi classes three times a week in addition to the Sunday group practice."

"I practice the long form and the short form every day at home. I spend from two to two and a half hours practicing every day in the morning and in the evening. At home, my original problem was that I couldn't remember the sequence. I suddenly realized the only video that was helpful was the 'back view.'¹⁶⁹ I have a room downstairs just big enough for my Tai Chi practice, but the flooring is uneven because of the carpet so it is as if you are doing it on grass. The ceiling is too low for practicing sword indoors."

"This fall, Harry is taking time off from his Tai Chi teaching. As a result, no formal classes are offered. Sometimes he still leads the Sunday group. I act as a 'leader' when Harry is not in town. I think I'm more advanced than most people certainly in terms of being able to keep in time with the music for the most part of the Tai Chi form. One of the difficulties is to keep a steady pace because people are at different levels of Tai Chi. It would be easier if you had a group of people at a similar Tai Chi level. I have seen some very good Tai Chi demonstrations. There is almost always some sort of empathy between the people in the group. I like to take some formal classes and also practice with my group on Sundays. Some people never took lessons and they just come to our free group practice. I think the best way is to mix the two ways of learning."

"I am basically a loner. In other words, I am an independent person. In Hong Kong, I saw a group of 20 people practicing Tai Chi together and at the same park there was one old man practicing Tai Chi by himself. I think solo Tai Chi has much more internal meaning. I have a few friends that go back years, even though we live thousands

¹⁶⁹ "Back view" is a Tai Chi demonstration done with the demonstrator's back facing the audience.

miles apart. I like social activity occasionally. There are some members of the Tai Chi group that I like to spend time with because we have common interests.”

“I’m more interested in the calm and gentle parts of Tai Chi, not in the martial arts component. My initial hope for Tai Chi was a rewarding form of exercise and hopefully being more than that. It has far exceeded what I hoped for! I found Tai Chi rewarding and challenging. Learning Tai Chi is on-going, unlike the step aerobics or many forms of other exercises. I like the part that there is always more to learn and improve. Tai Chi is more complicated compared to other exercises. I have come to realize that there are things in China’s five thousand years history that the Western world hasn’t come to realize. There must be things that are valuable just like Chinese medicine. There is more public awareness and acceptance of Tai Chi now. When I practiced Tai Chi outside my house, my neighbors admired and some even wanted to learn.” Andy has been volunteering for a university life science program, helping with students’ discussion groups. “Tai Chi is mentioned during the students’ group training.”

“I feel Tai Chi is a good thing and I have to share with other people. In my philosophy, if you have special skills or special knowledge and if the time is right, you find a group to share them with. For example, I practiced Tai Chi in a hotel yard when traveling. A man asked what I was doing and I told him about Tai Chi.”

“I always liked physical activity. My main activities are Tai Chi and walking. I walked three times a week to work. I walk at least five kilometers a day with my dog. I used to do running and cross-country skiing. But as I got older, I needed a gentler activity as far as physical exercise was concerned. I was also interested, what I heard about, the calming effect of Tai Chi, the meditative effect on the mind. I have read about this. I am always interested in the approach of people who live in Asian countries – their mind is very different than in the West. I’m always curious about these things. The way their minds work is a question of culture or how you were brought up and so on. Western society is rather direct, scientific and materialistic. This does not apply to everyone, but it’s common.”

When asked whether his Tai Chi practice has had any impact on the perception of his age, Andy says, “I don’t think the Tai Chi practice has influenced the way I think about my age. Perhaps it has helped me to accept my age. It’s surprising how the years

have passed. I'm perhaps the oldest person in my Tai Chi group. It doesn't worry me to be the oldest person in the group. On the other hand, as a scientist I realize that people are living longer. It's not surprising because of all the new advances in medicine and in diet."

"Practicing Tai Chi is like self-discovery – you learn about yourself. More people are beginning to realize Tai Chi is a good and gentle way to exercise. Tai Chi is a different kind of exercise. It is 'moving meditation.' It's your way to wellness. The most important reason that I practice Tai Chi is the benefits that I see physically. I began to learn the meditative aspect of Tai Chi. It is intriguing. I am reasonably self-confident. I try to be open-minded. When you are interested in something like Tai Chi, you don't want to give up. You can do Tai Chi at all sorts of levels. You do enough to challenge yourself. I can see myself to do some forms of Tai Chi sitting down if I couldn't move. I was an 'ignorant novice' 12 years ago. Now I'm an 'intermediate with better understanding.' I remember when I first practiced the long form, it took 18 minutes and I felt it was very long. I no longer have that feeling. The learning process is like, you gain, lose, and gain again. I am definitely not a master in Tai Chi. The mental aspect of Tai Chi is just beginning. For the first 10 to 11 years, I was trying to remember the Tai Chi moves."

"I read a little about Tai Chi on my own and Harry supplied us readings about various aspects of Tai Chi when he first started teaching Tai Chi courses. I gradually came to the realization that Tai Chi has much more to offer. I now realize that until you reach a certain level of proficiency, you don't even begin to experience some of these things. I'm just at about the level now where I can achieve the 'inner calm' that you need, to do good Tai Chi. It's not necessarily focusing on the move, but focusing on yourself and excluding the world around you. But it is something that you work at. There are days that it just doesn't work. For example, the distractions in the park – people walk dogs and it's hard to concentrate when dogs approach our group and bark. Or an ambulance passes by the park."

"I have an inquiring mind. There is always more to learn and to improve. I like to read and play chess. I enjoy listening to classical music. I always try to keep fit and involved with a certain amount of physical activity. I enjoy walking. I probably did more useful things for my job because I was thinking while walking to work. I always enjoyed

swimming. I grew up near the sea so I learned and enjoyed swimming. I was a substitute member of the dragon boat group when they needed a person to fill in. I drive to my Tai Chi classes and to the Sunday practice group only because I carry a 40-pound battery for the Tai Chi music.”

“It’s interesting to learn to relax between the Tai Chi moves. The novice is tense all the time. When you make the move you may make it very quickly. It is to relax instantly. You don’t stop but you relax after each move. Ideally the moves should be virtually continuous. There is a necessity that you learn each move separately. That is the Western way of learning Tai Chi. The 24 Tai Chi set is suitable for foreigners who ‘like results quickly.’”

“I visited China twice. Once with my Tai Chi group and the other time with a friend. Once our group joined a local Tai Chi group’s practice in Beijing. When we traveled on a boat, we got up early and practiced Tai Chi. Two elder Chinese ladies joined us. Some German people joined our Tai Chi practice on the boat. A local Chinese person commented that our group leader’s Tai Chi was very good for a foreigner.”

“In my opinion, there probably are other activities that can be a substitute for Tai Chi. One thing I like about Tai Chi is the active movements. Yoga is more passive than active. I don’t have good flexibility. I tried one yoga class. It was interesting. At that point, I had practiced Tai Chi for six years. Because my wife wanted to go try yoga, I went with her. I did not like it. It was embarrassing because I could never get in the lotus position, even to sit with my legs closed. My wife decided yoga was not for her, so we didn’t continue. I’d rather stay with Tai Chi. I like activities that involve moving. Yoga and Tai Chi both control the body through the mind. I think it is easier for dancers and yoga players to practice Tai Chi.”

When asked about his perception of Tai Chi practitioners’ age range, Andy says, “Certainly in what I see in the Western world, usually it is people in their 40s or older who are doing Tai Chi. Perhaps the younger people are doing other physical activities. I can’t comment on China because I can’t judge people’s age in China just by their appearance.”

“As you get older you begin to realize that it is not your age that matters. It is the quality of your life. Good health is a major factor of life. If you have a chronic disability,

particularly if it involves pain, it is much more difficult. There is very little information about good lifestyles for older people. It's improving but there's still a long way to go. One of the advantages of living an older and a healthier life is that we are much less dependent on medical intervention. In many cases, the medical treatment is still necessary. Tai Chi does promote general good health. One of the nice things about Tai Chi is that you can do it as a group activity. On the one hand, you sometimes can get one person who is ruining the group rhythm. On the other hand, if you get in a nice group you can get feedback. I remember when my mother got to her 90s, her friends and acquaintances were very important to her. Tai Chi as a group activity is very social and good for people. The friendly social talks in my group are very helpful."

13) Jenny

At the time of the interview in 2012, Jenny was "in her 70s."¹⁷⁰ She was taking an intermediate Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. There are usually about 30 participants in her class. The attendance ranges from 25 to 35. She had been practicing Tai Chi for 12 years. At Jenny's request, the interview was conducted at the Tai Chi classroom after her class had finished.

General impression

Jenny is very thin and looks fragile. She speaks slowly. She was enthusiastic during the interview but is usually quiet in her Tai Chi class. Like the majority of her classmates, Jenny always wears one of her Tai Chi uniforms¹⁷¹ to class. She always stays after each class to wash the tea cups left in the sink by her classmates after their break. She is very involved with her Tai Chi organization. For example, she answers the Tai Chi centre's phone and takes messages for general inquiries when the secretary is not there. She also helps various events for the centre. She states that she studied languages at university. She used to speak "French, German, and Spanish when [she] was using them." She now speaks English.

¹⁷⁰ Jenny preferred not to reveal her date of birth and she said, "I am in my 70s."

¹⁷¹ The Tai Chi uniforms at *Organization C* consist of a T-shirt or sweatshirt and sweatpants with distinctive designs and the organization's logo. Members purchase whichever uniforms they wish. The first T-shirt uniform is free when they join the organization and pay for the beginners' course. I learned that it is not mandatory, but highly recommended for members to wear a uniform in class.

Family

Jenny was born in a European country but has been working and living in Halifax for many years. She and her husband live in their own house in the city. They are both retired. Some of their children's¹⁷² families live in Halifax. "I work a lot with my grandchildren, particularly with my granddaughter. When she was small, I made a dollhouse for her. I enjoyed that. I always knitted and made clothes for my grandchildren. I read an awful a lot! I am European. I studied and lived in Europe so I always go back there every opportunity I can, when I don't have too many medical appointments."

Health

Jenny says that she has had some severe health related issues. "Tai Chi has definitely affected my health in a positive way. It certainly helps my circulation and breathing. It helps to maintain my health. I can easily walk up and down the hills now. I'm sure that must be from doing all these Tai Chi exercises. When I came home from the hospital after my surgery, I couldn't stand on my two legs. It took me a month just walking around the house holding on to things. When I was able to support myself on my feet, I came back to my Tai Chi class and bit-by-bit I got my strength back. Tai Chi helped my recovery tremendously – it really strengthened my legs and my body! Probably the support of my Tai Chi group is therapeutic. Being with the group again is very important to me. I am not taking any treatment now. I get checkups." Jenny says, "I don't have knee problems. Sometimes when I do 'wave hands in a cloud' [a Tai Chi move] for too long, I can feel my back muscles aching. But it goes away."

Education and employment

Jenny states that she has a bachelor's and a master's degree. She had a technical job at a university in Halifax for many years. "At work, I was on my feet all day to help students. My job was not physical as such but certainly I was not sitting at a desk." She retired 12 years ago in 1999.

¹⁷² Jenny did not specify how many children or grandchildren she has.

Tai Chi experience

“I first saw people doing Tai Chi on movie trailers in the 1980s and 1990s. I thought it was interesting and so attractive! It was a beautiful form of movement. So I thought that’s something different and I’ll try it. In 2000, one day I walked past a community centre and I saw the Tai Chi organization’s advertising. So I spoke with the instructor and started the beginner’s course. At first, I didn’t find it very interesting. I thought it was very slow because I had been going to the gym and working out with equipment and weights. But I decided to finish the course. By the end of the course, I got to know the people in class. So it became a social occasion. The further I progressed with Tai Chi the more I realized it was not only interesting, but it was unattainable! And I think that’s what challenges me the most – the fact that it was unattainable and you could never be perfect. It is always a learning experience in class and that intrigues and interests me.”

“I found Tai Chi was mentally challenging as well as physically challenging. Tai Chi is a very individual journey. You are not competing with anyone. You are listening to your own body and focusing on your own thoughts. And it changes every time you do it because your body has a different vigor and responds in a different way each day. So I found that interesting. I also found it very interesting to feel the amount of energy when doing it with all the people in class. I can feel the energy vibrating! It took me seven or eight years to feel this energy. Usually I don’t practice at home. I’ll do a Tai Chi move only when I’m watching something cooking on the stove. I don’t have the willpower to set aside some time each day to do it on my own. My life doesn’t work that way. Sometimes I have grandchildren to look after. Sometimes I have a lot of medical appointments. So I found it much more entertaining and instructive to come to class.”

“I attend five Tai Chi classes every week. Each class is two hours. Usually I do two classes here [*Organization C*] and three at another location. One of the Halifax locations is accessible by foot. When I come here I combine it with the walking. I walk, take the bus, then walk again when I come to my Tai Chi class and do the same on my way home. So it’s about 50 minutes’ walk plus 10 minutes on the bus. It’s about an hour each way. And I come as much for the walk as for the Tai Chi. So it’s good exercise. It’s my gift to myself. I don’t need to go to the gym now. When I walk up here, I walk

through attractive streets. I like to see what's going on. I don't walk to the other Tai Chi class location because that road is too far and it's not attractive. I drive there and usually pick up a friend, who is a neighbor and also my Tai Chi classmate. We both started the beginners' class at the same community centre so we met there. When there is an intensive Tai Chi class outside of the city, usually people in my class car pool, so I go with someone. I have been going to different gyms for 40 years. I used to go first thing in the morning. The gym is too far to walk. During the winter I don't drive, especially when there's snow or ice on the ground. So it became nerve-wracking when I was trying to get to the gym, whereas with Tai Chi I can always walk here for classes. The gym was starting to get too much of a routine and too boring, doing the same thing over and over with the machines, with the weights, even with the gym classes."

"I like the social aspect of Tai Chi. I chat with the people in my class and participate in the social events. I think the social aspect of Tai Chi is slightly less important. My initial idea was to do Tai Chi. It was the physical aspect that interested me the most in the beginning. I've made many friends from Tai Chi. But we don't necessarily all get together outside of Tai Chi. Some of us sometimes meet for coffee after class. Amy¹⁷³ and I became friends and we go out for coffee and she comes to my house to have lunch with me. We go to movies quite often. Amy and another friend that I met through Tai Chi used to come to see the exhibitions at the museum where I volunteered... The friends you make outside of Tai Chi may be because you have been neighbors for a long time; or they have the same hobbies as you; or your children grew up together. Even at Tai Chi you can relax, but you certainly have to be careful about what you say. I don't think you can entirely let your hair down with anyone else but maybe your own intimate family circle. So I am relaxed just as much with people at Tai Chi as people at work."

"I started Tai Chi for exercise. But it turned out to be much more! I know when you begin to learn something new you have to concentrate, but I didn't think that you would have to keep concentrating for the rest of your life! It's a lifetime journey. I'm very satisfied. I certainly have an improved attention to focus on my body. I'm aware of each step that I take and the distribution of my weight, especially in the winter. I will

¹⁷³ The individual's name has been changed in order to protect her identity.

continue doing Tai Chi until physically I can't do it. Tai Chi is the second most important thing. My family comes first. The whole Tai Chi experience is important, including the Tai Chi [moves], the walking, and the friends.”

When asked whether her family and friends support her Tai Chi practice, Jenny says, “It never occurred to me to ask them. I'm an adult so I made the choice. When my granddaughter was here, she came to the Tai Chi centre with me for a social occasion. My son and my grandson also came. At least my husband knows about Tai Chi because I've talked to him and I've shown him the Tai Chi book that I've been reading. But it wouldn't occur to him to say 'why do you go to Tai Chi? And why do you go so often?' I'm retired and I keep the house and I do as I please with my time. My husband did ask me, 'How was the class? Did you have a good time?' He is not a physical type of person. When I went to the gym he was still sleeping. When I showed him various moves and he would say, 'Oh that looks interesting.' But he is not interested and doesn't want to do Tai Chi. He is interested in the Daoism, the philosophy. He likes walking and we do go for walks. We used to go abroad when we were younger, before I was ill. He is pleased to see that I get out of the house to do something I enjoy. He is supportive of the fact that I get out a lot to get to Tai Chi, but I could be doing anything.”

Regarding other forms of Tai Chi, Jenny comments, “I don't think I'd try a different form of Tai Chi because I wouldn't want to do Tai Chi in a park outdoors. It's too cold for me. In the summertime, my Tai Chi class practices outside anyway.”

When asked whether there might be a substitute for Tai Chi, Jenny says, “I'm sure there are a lot of things, probably another martial art, a course learning to speak ancient Greek or Latin, except you wouldn't be exercising your body, you would be exercising your mind. It would be something that it is interesting to do and if there is walking involved to get there then I would do it. About 10 years ago, I tried yoga. I didn't like to go barefoot. My feet are in dreadful shape! Yoga was too slow. I can see the stretching and balance are very beneficial and maybe I'll try yoga again one of these days. But yoga is also very expensive. I'm not ready to put that money out right now. Tai Chi is very reasonable.”

In answer to the question what Tai Chi means or represents, Jenny says, “I think the Daoism is a philosophy and a way of life. I don't see it as a religion. I don't think that

influenced me when I was trying to improve my health. I was trying to regain strength in my legs and in my body. Certainly, I appreciate the people who consider they are Daoists and Buddhists. I really admire their view and perspective and the way they live. But from a spiritual point of view, I'm not Buddhist and I'm not Daoist."

Jenny believes, "Tai Chi has become part of Western culture. Many people practice it in North America and Europe. I don't think many of us really understand the Chinese philosophy of sharing. For example, sharing the work, the cooking, and the cleanup. Sharing is not a Western concept. The Western concept about the cleaning would be, 'okay, we'll hire a lady to clean and she will be paid and she can feed her children,' whereas the Chinese would say, 'no, the group will all do the cleaning.' They are willing to take part. In Western culture we are not. It's always the same people who do the dishes and clean the bathrooms. You'll see at the end of the class here, very few people will wash the tea cups. Everyone dives for their coat and for the door. They feel, and this is again how Western people think, 'I paid my dues and I come to do Tai Chi. I don't come to wash dishes, cook meals, or clean up. I do all that at home!' And this is how the majority of people in my class think, whereas a Buddhist or a Daoist person will share the workload. So that's the great difference. Here it's very individualistic and the community comes third or fourth to your own family. After all, it's a cultural difference. Cultural differences take many, many years to change, don't they? The West is also very arrogant and they think their way is better."

"I think Tai Chi has become an expression of myself because it is how I express my physicality. It's very important to me. It's become part of who I am! I don't focus as much on the Daoism as I do on the Tai Chi. I certainly hope that Tai Chi will make me more broadminded. It has certainly introduced many Chinese customs to me. I don't feel part of it but I'm aware of it. And I suppose, as you grow older you become more aware of the spirituality. I've met young people who started Tai Chi when they were 17 and they have a definite sense of being part of the Daoist aspect of Tai Chi. The majority of the young people want something more challenging and high kicking, something more martial art. The ideal age to start Tai Chi is 17 because a person that age is open to all kinds of ideas and is more flexible than a 60-year-old. I was told by one of my teachers not to start practicing Tai Chi before you are 17 because your bones are still soft. I'm

obliged to think about my age. I have so many age-related things to do. I know I'm not getting younger! I don't think about my age when I'm doing Tai Chi. And I never feel that I can't do something because of my age! I feel any of the Tai Chi moves are accessible to whatever age."

Jenny teaches a beginners' course once a week. There are seven participants (including one man) in her class. "It's kind of a nice exploration. You are still exploring your own Tai Chi, but you are doing it by showing others how to do it." She also helps two instructors as a corner for two of her weekly five Tai Chi classes. "I don't know why there are more female Tai Chi practitioners. Maybe men don't survive as long as women? Or maybe men prefer to take pursuits they feel are more manly, like hunting, shooting and fishing, or chopping wood. The hard part is the transferring from the beginners' class to the intermediate."

14) Fiona

At the time of the interview in 2012, Fiona was 70 years old. She was a member of two informal Tai Chi groups (*Group L* and *Group K*). The attendance in *Group L* ranges from four to eight and in *Group K* from two to 14. She had been practicing Tai Chi for 13 years. The interview was conducted at Fiona's home at her request.

General impression

Fiona is of medium weight and taller than average for a North American Caucasian woman. She speaks with a warm, soft voice and she is very friendly with members of her two Tai Chi groups. Compared to *Group K*, she initiates more conversations with members of *Group L* that her husband Earl leads (he is also a participant in this research). Fiona is very kind and caring. When anyone shares health issues, she asks with sincerity how they are feeling. Fiona participates in her Tai Chi groups regularly and is very involved in their social gatherings, especially with *Group K*, where she has been a long-term member. Fiona always wears her everyday clothing to both of her groups. She went on several trips with her Tai Chi group, including twice to China. She speaks English only.

Family

Fiona was born in Western Canada. She and her husband have been married for many years. Their house is located in a residential area of the city. Their only child has left home. They do not have any grandchildren. Fiona and her husband sold their car several years ago before they went to a developing country for a volunteer project. She loves walking and walks whenever possible, such as attending her Tai Chi groups' practice, going to her fitness classes, getting groceries, or going to the libraries. Fiona "grew up on a farm and worked in a small town and that job involved a lot of walking.

Health

"I didn't take medication before Tai Chi. I always had terrible balance. I have had headaches. When I first starting learning Tai Chi, I didn't have any pain. Tai Chi is very helpful in a nice way. I am calmer and less stressed. Tai Chi is wonderful for balance-coordination! At the age of 70 I have better balance [now] than [during] all my younger years! It's all because of Tai Chi. It has helped my balance and coordination and being aware of the things around me. My headaches are getting better. The 'reposed monkey' [a Tai Chi move] works well for my headaches. I use it a lot. I used it while we were on our group trips. I told people how helpful it was to me. I learned it through my own Tai Chi experience and also from the reading I have done. I appreciate that Tai Chi helped me."

Education and employment

Fiona states that she has completed four university degrees. She first obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from a university in Western Canada. "In my mid-40s, I went back to school and got two more master's degrees." Over the years, she worked at different jobs, as a scientist, a librarian, a computer programmer, and an instructor. She also volunteered for a Canadian project overseas in a developing country. After working and studying for more than 40 years, she retired at the age of 61.

Tai Chi experience

Fiona started her first Tai Chi course 13 years ago. "I came back from volunteering overseas in 1999. I was sitting in front of a computer 10 hours a day when I

was working there. I was 59 years old and it was hard to get a job at that age. I wasn't able to get a job for the kinds of work I had done before. I was an unemployed senior. When you are at that age nobody wants you anymore so you have to find things to do. I felt I needed some stretching and gentle exercise. And I didn't want to drive to some place that is very expensive. It was important to get to a place very close [to home]. There was a Tai Chi course next door at the recreation centre three minutes walk from my house. It was offered by the city's Parks and Recreation Department. So that's why I started Tai Chi."

"The structured Tai Chi classes are important. I never would've learned properly if I hadn't taken the Tai Chi classes. In my first Tai Chi course, I learned the 24 set. I took two sessions. Each of the two courses was one class per week for 10 weeks. And then they stopped offering Tai Chi courses there. At that point, my husband joined me and we drove about five kilometers to a school gymnasium to take a Tai Chi course for less than a year. Three years after that, I started Tai Chi at the sports centre. As a member, I got a cheaper rate for taking the Tai Chi course. There were 10 or 12 people per class. My husband and I were the only non-teachers. The rest of them were school teachers because the course instructor was teaching with the school board at that time. Some of those people are in my Sunday Tai Chi group [*Group K*] now."

"I practice Tai Chi three or four times per week. I practice with my two Tai Chi groups once per week and at home no more than twice a week because there is so much housework I have to do. My husband practices Tai Chi more often than I do because women always have more work to do than men at home. I have been taking fitness classes at the sports centre for three years. I go to three exercise classes every week. Each class is one-hour long and I do weights and stretching. I do qigong four or five times a week at home. I do qigong more often because I usually can make myself more focused with qigong, but when I do Tai Chi I think about other things. When I do qigong my feet stay in one place, which helps to concentrate my mind. I love the Tai Chi music [The Chinese Tai Chi music is played in Group K, which is one of her two groups]. But I can do Tai Chi without it. I love the sound of the water at the park where my Tai Chi group meets."

“When I started Tai Chi, I expected to improve the mobility of my joints. I have achieved my goal to a certain degree. Tai Chi is a positive way to keep active and keep healthy, to keep your muscles and your mind in shape. Tai Chi is soft. If you play hockey, you won’t be able to do it when you get older. The stretching part of Tai Chi is very important. I know I have to do Tai Chi because it is important for my health. I am not musical and the Tai Chi fan was too much moving around. I’ve tried the push-hands, but didn’t like it. I like to do my regular Tai Chi moves well, instead of picking up something else. Once I saw an instructor at another park doing the Chen Style Tai Chi. It was too fast. It is more a martial art. In general, if I’m able to do something, I am happy to stay and I don’t have to go out finding the next thing. So I like my Tai Chi form.”

“I love the socializing part of my Tai Chi groups. We need structured classes, but I enjoy the Sunday morning group [*Group K*] the most. My husband and I didn’t know the members before we joined the group. I can feel the support from my group. I enjoy the positive chat during the break. With the support of the whole Tai Chi group, I care about other people and they care about me. We have rituals in the Sunday’s group. There is the Chinese New Year party and there are birthdays. Seven of the original people have their birthdays in the same month including the instructor Harry¹⁷⁴ [who is a participant in this research]. We usually have a potluck at Harry’s house to celebrate their birthdays.”

Fiona expresses how she feels about other people’s comments regarding her Tai Chi practice. “I do things differently from others. My family saw me practicing Tai Chi and they thought it was strange, but my own family thinks I’m different anyway. I go out and take a walk and do some Tai Chi and come back to the house. My neighbors think we are rather odd when we practice Tai Chi in our yard. Some people think Tai Chi is too slow and ‘you are just waving your hands.’ They don’t see the body movements. Their opinion doesn’t affect me practicing Tai Chi. I’ve never worried about my age. I never mind being old.”

In Fiona’s opinion, “Older women are more likely to join exercise group activities. When you get older, your kids are grown up and you have so much more time. Usually men are hard to get in, but once they see the value, they are more consistent with Tai Chi than women. Young people think Tai Chi is too slow. Ideally, I would say

¹⁷⁴ “Harry” is a pseudonym.

probably people in their twenties could start practicing Tai Chi. Women or men at their 40s should start Tai Chi for their health. If you wait until you are 60 or 70, you can do Tai Chi but it would probably be more difficult. Your ability to bend down is limited.”

When asked about any potential substitute for Tai Chi, Fiona says, “I don’t think there’s a substitute for Tai Chi. I’m too old to take up yoga seriously. If there were no Tai Chi people and I forgot to do it completely, I could do walking. I love walking. I have been walking since I was about 10 years old. I think walking is good for me. You can’t walk leisurely because in order to make it valuable you have to stand up straight. I walk faster than most people. Most of my 40 years’ work involved the outdoors. I walked to work if possible. One of my jobs involved using the library a lot so I walked to the libraries. Now I walk an hour and a half for 10 kilometers a day. I walk to grocery stores and to the gym. I probably walk too fast for most people. Walking is good for anyone. When I had several places to go then I took the buses. I did drive but it was not my first choice. When you drive you don’t really meet anybody.”

“I like to read. I’d like to read more than I do now. I do volunteer work for different agencies. I have done some volunteer work for a developing country and am still doing a little bit for them. I used to sew and I made curtains and other things.”

15) Brenda

At the time of the interview in 2012, Brenda was 70 years old. She was taking a Tai Chi course at *Organization C* (the number of attendees ranges from 25 to 35). She was an instructor for a Tai Chi course at *Organization D* (the number of attendees ranges from 30 to 40). Brenda had been practicing Tai Chi for 18 years. At her request, the interview was conducted prior to the Tai Chi class that she takes at *Organization C*.

General impression

Brenda is a devoted member of her Tai Chi organization. She wrote her “Tai Chi story” and posted it along with her “before Tai Chi photo” at her Tai Chi centre to encourage more people to practice Tai Chi. She goes to her Tai Chi classes four or five times a week. She laughs a lot and always has a smile on her face and is pleasant to everyone. She wears a Tai Chi uniform to all her classes. Brenda is tall for a Caucasian

woman of her generation. She has a reputation as a good Tai Chi instructor. Some members of her organization would rather drive a long way to attend her Wednesday intermediate level class instead of going to another class closer to where they live. In the class that she teaches, a member (who is not a participant in this research) made an effort to come to tell me, “We also have fun practicing Tai Chi in Brenda’s class!” Brenda is a native English speaker.

Family

Brenda and her husband are both retired. They live in their own house in a residential district of the city. They have a son and a daughter, who live independently. When she was in her 60s, Brenda helped to take care of her granddaughter.¹⁷⁵

Brenda was born near Halifax. Her mother is over 90 years old and lives alone in her hometown. Brenda’s sister takes care of their mother on a daily basis. Sometimes Brenda and her husband drive to visit her mother on the weekend to give her sister a break. Sometimes she takes her mother back to her home in Halifax for a short visit.

Health

Brenda states that she has had severe health-related problems, including arthritis, back injuries, breathing problems, and some conditions requiring surgery. “Before the diagnosis of my problems, I was so unwell and the doctors couldn’t diagnose what was wrong. I remember a doctor said, ‘Well, you are over 60 and you are looking after your granddaughter.’ All of my friends were 60 and they were all working! It’s terrible when you are a woman. Even today, if you have symptoms that they can’t diagnose right away, they’ll say you are menopausal and you are getting older.”

“I first injured my back at work when I was a teenager. In my 20s and 30s I hurt my back again. At the worst, I was in bed for nine weeks. Prior to Tai Chi, my severe back pain was a constant problem. I became obsessed with my back because I was in pain all the time. I called myself a ‘back cripple.’ I had no core strength – I guess that’s how they would put it now. I had very poor posture. I wasn’t able to sit or stand for any period of time. I was not able to sit in the car and I had to lie in the back seat. I spent so much

¹⁷⁵ Brenda did not indicate how many grandchildren she has, other than the granddaughter she mentioned.

time stretching out on the couch at home because I couldn't sit up. I wore braces and I used footstools at work. I couldn't do any lifting. I always had my portable footstool whenever I went to a meeting. I went to a chiropractor, physiotherapy, and acupuncture and took injections of pain medication, and the whole nine-yards! My back pain ruined my life for many years. I had a whole article written about my story. I did a testimony for the Tai Chi Centre. I wish I had brought the picture to show you how much my posture has changed.¹⁷⁶ The picture was taken when I was only 54 and now I'm 70. You wouldn't believe that it's the same person! I put that picture on the community board to show how much Tai Chi has helped me and they called me 'the poster child!'"

"I wouldn't say my back pain is completely healed. I still have some problems from time to time. I know if I keep doing Tai Chi, I can work it out. And I still go for massage therapy to correct my posture, my biggest enemy. For many years, I have been working on my 'roundish shoulders.' I'll slouch if I'm too tired. For example, last week I only practiced Tai Chi once. I had a lot of family visiting and was busy with cooking, cleaning, and talking. As a result, my shoulders were slumping again. So I have to keep working at my shoulders. I go to massage therapy once a month or whenever I can afford to. The therapist knows I do Tai Chi. My massage and Tai Chi work well together."

"I tried swimming because that was all I could do at that time. I didn't continue swimming because it didn't do anything for me. During the nine months' sick leave, the first thing I did was go to a heated pool. But when I started doing Tai Chi and going to my Tai Chi practice four times a week, there was no time for anything else. I still would go swimming in a lake in the summer."

"When I started doing Tai Chi I was on all kinds of medication. I don't require any now. It's been years, I haven't taken any medication. Like my friend says, 'Motion is lotion.' I think the fact that I'm using my joints all the time when I do Tai Chi, it must be the effect on the fluid."

¹⁷⁶ The day after the interview, Brenda brought me her "before Tai Chi" photo. She was pleased when I suggested that I take an "after Tai Chi" photo of her. She was pleased to receive a copy of the photo that I took of her as soon as I had the photo printed out and brought to her class.

Education and employment

Brenda has a university degree. She considers her healthcare career as having begun with taking care of her younger brother when she was young. “I worked in an old building of a hospital for 32 years. I think the building had a very bad effect on my health, such as the hard cement floor and the bad air from a ventilation system that was never cleaned.” Brenda retired from the hospital 15 years ago in 1997 at the age of 55.

Tai Chi experience

“I started my beginners’ Tai Chi class at a local community centre in 1994. When I started, I didn’t know anything about it, so I had no expectations. When my neighbor heard about it and phoned me, I told her that I didn’t know anything about it but I’d like to go because I saw Tai Chi as my last resort. I don’t remember how long that course was. It only taught the first 39 moves of the Tai Chi set [a total of 108 moves]. I started with fear as the beginners’ class was large and there were no chairs around. I didn’t know if I could stand for two whole hours. When I came home after class, I had so much pain and it made tears run down my face. But I knew the pain was simply from stretching my unused muscles, not my familiar joint pain. When I would lie down and put my legs up, the pain would go away. I persevered because somehow, I knew Tai Chi was going to help me. That pain probably lasted for a few months. That’s what I tell my students, ‘If you have a little bit of pain, it’s important to know that it’s gone by the time you get home.’ If they say ‘yes,’ I know they haven’t hurt themselves. It’s just stretching.”

“After the first course, I came to the centre to continue learning the rest of the 108 moves. After completing the set, I couldn’t do anything, so I repeated the beginners’ course. At that time, there were only three or four students in my class. The course was two classes per week. The instructor was busy, so we had a different instructor for every second class and that was confusing. Following much hard work and perseverance, my back is remarkably straighter and I proudly share my story with students in my classes. Thanks to Tai Chi, I have learned how to sit, stand, and walk to keep my weight balanced. I have been able to take long car trips and can now sit comfortably for two or more hours. I forget I have a ‘bad back.’ My family and friends continue to marvel at my

changes. I plan to continue with Tai Chi for as long as I am physically able, which I am sure is a good deal longer than I had envisioned when I started in 1994!”

“I now practice Tai Chi at least three times a week. For many years, I went to my Tai Chi classes four times during the weekdays. And sometimes I came for the Saturday practice as well. When I teach a class, it is not the same as taking a class. It’s hard when you are standing there demonstrating a lot, but you are not constantly moving like you do when you do a set. Whenever I teach, I only practice the last set with the class because I want to conserve my energy. I try to help each student and I can handle between 35 to 40 students in a class. I can’t practice too much at home because it’s hard to do the whole set in my living room. I practice parts. For example, last week we learned a hip turning move, so I practiced that at home. I encourage my students to practice the segment that they just learned, when they get home.”

When asked whether the Tai Chi class location makes a difference, Brenda says, “It does make a difference. This location is not the closest to my home. I have to pay for gas to drive a long way here. It costs a few dollars every time I come over. Quite frankly, the fact that Gary [who is a participant in this research] teaches here motivates me to come over to take his class. Although I’ve gone to many instructors’ classes and many workshops, Gary has been my mentor over all these years. Additionally, all instructors are required to take classes as an instructor. You can never just teach because you know it all. The instructors also have to go to at least one workshop a year, which usually costs 200 dollars.”

With regard to the Tai Chi styles, “I like the type of Tai Chi¹⁷⁷ I’m doing. I have never joined or visited another group that does a different form of Tai Chi. The master [creator] of my Tai Chi [style] studied a lot of different forms of Tai Chi and he incorporated them. For example, many members say that the ‘Tor Yu’ [a Tai Chi move] was a gift to us from the master because with this move you turn your hip. And I think the ‘Tor Yu’ helped my back. But I have nothing against other Tai Chi forms.”

“I like our Tai Chi style and I also like that we are all volunteers. None of us is paid to teach the Tai Chi classes. We don’t pay people to clean the floor or anything. It’s

¹⁷⁷*Organization C* and *Organization D* both practice the Canadian Style Tai Chi.

all member participation. The idea is that you have to be in it for the right reason. You do it because it's helped you and you want to help other people.”

Brenda believes that her health improvement encouraged her family members to do Tai Chi, but they did not continue for various reasons. “My husband started Tai Chi. He usually came to the class I was teaching. Other things came up and the first thing you noticed was that he had missed six weeks. He said, ‘oh, no, I’m not going back.’ To me, Tai Chi came first. I always rated Tai Chi a priority because it’s so important for my back! If somebody asked me to do something on Wednesday, I’d say, ‘No, I have to go to Tai Chi.’ But my husband didn’t give it the same priority. It has been my experience that the people who don’t give Tai Chi priority will fall away. My husband drives me to Tai Chi class. If I want to go somewhere for Tai Chi, he goes with me. But sometimes he says, ‘You’re going to Tai Chi again?’ not in a joking way. My son took it for a while but it’s really difficult when he was working all the time. My daughter also tried it, but she started to have children. It wouldn’t surprise me if, as they get older, they come back because they can’t get over what Tai Chi has done for me. They marvel at it! I have encouraged many people. Many of my friends from the church now are in my Tai Chi class. When I went to my workshop in another city, I encouraged my cousin and she took it but didn’t stay. It is hard for people to realize that they have to stay with it. Like myself, I came in with a bad back and Tai Chi didn’t cure it in a week or two weeks or a month. It takes a long, long time to change the body. And you have to practice. A lot of people come but a lot of people don’t stay. It’s the discipline you need. I worked full-time and had my family. I didn’t have time to go to a gym or join groups. So Tai Chi is the first type of exercise that I found that I stuck with and I enjoy because considering my bad back and my time, I wouldn’t have been able to do any of those other things like aerobics or step aerobics.”

In answer to the question about how practicing Tai Chi has affected her, Brenda couldn’t wait to say, “Tai Chi helped me in every way! Not only has Tai Chi helped my back pain and opened up my chest and improved my posture, but also speeded up my recovery from the surgery I had seven years ago. I started Tai Chi while still working. I had a stressful job. When I went to Tai Chi after work, I felt better because I was concentrating so much on learning the moves and there was no room in my brain to think

about what went wrong at work or whoever was nasty to me. So Tai Chi is a wonderful stress reliever. I do think Tai Chi is uplifting. I've been through a lot and I was really sick with a few major problems. Prior to Tai Chi, I would just lie on the couch and go to bed. After I started doing Tai Chi, I would go to my Tai Chi class after work and two hours later I came home and felt much better. I don't remember how long it took my body to start to change. Probably it took a number of years. Even without my body changing, I enjoyed the stress relief part of Tai Chi. Tai Chi taught me how to do every day things to protect my back. For example, I learned how to use a Tai Chi move to open the door. Some Tai Chi moves enable you to reach higher in the cupboard, so you don't have to climb on stools. You will do this automatically because your body knows."

"I didn't know at the outset what the effect on me was going to be. That was very, very gradual. It's still happening. As I tell the people in my classes, 'Don't worry. You are on the journey for the rest of your life if you choose to do Tai Chi. If you don't get it today, you get it tomorrow. If you don't get it tomorrow, you'll get it eventually. But all the time you are working towards it.'"

Brenda seems to be very proud of her ability to take care of others. "I feel that teaching the seniors in my Tai Chi class and seeing them improving fills that void that retirement caused in me." Brenda views her Tai Chi organization as "a wonderful support group. When I lost my dad last year, it was wonderful to get the support from my 'Tai Chi family.' We refer to the members of our Tai Chi group as our 'Tai Chi family.' I see them more often than my own family! This relationship is stronger than my work [employment] relationship. At work I was a manager and people saw me as the boss. But with my Tai Chi friends, we play Tai Chi together and we are equal and closer. The nice thing about our Tai Chi organization is that we don't have labels. We don't have different colored belts. Once you finish the beginners' course and you come to our intermediate level, we are all the same. We are learning and sharing. For example, [at] the workshop I attended two weeks ago, there was one man who finished the beginners six months ago and someone else who has been doing Tai Chi for 20 years. The comfortable setting makes people feel good. Nobody is critical. When people just join, maybe it's a little intimidating. For example, the beginners' class is going on just next door while my class is going on. But when we break for tea, they come to join us. In that way, they are kind of

getting comfortable with the group and getting to know the people a little bit. And then they will be comfortable to continue taking the intermediate course. Before we did that some people were always afraid to go on to the second level. I believe as an instructor you have to be kind to new people. I really DO enjoy teaching and enjoy seeing people's health improve. It fills a void. It made me feel good when I saw an 80-year-old lady got it. It's rewarding."

When asked whether her Tai Chi experience has affected the way she thinks about her age, Brenda excitedly says, "Yeah! I recently had my 50-year class reunion. I just couldn't believe how fortunate I was when I looked around. There were so many of my classmates who had canes. I just couldn't get over how fortunate I was that I have the health that I now have! I often wonder what I would look like if I had never started Tai Chi. I really think I would look like a little old woman."

In Brenda's opinion, "Tai Chi is not for everybody. I find in our Western society we want instant results. We want instant gratification. We want to be cured of anything we have with a pill. We don't want to work at it. Tai Chi is wonderful. But you do have to work. I want to have my body as good as it can be and as long as I am here. When I said to my husband, 'You are looking like an old man.' And he said, 'I AM an old man.' But I am not an old woman! I found that he is bent over and is letting himself get old, but I won't. I don't intend to let myself get old. So I keep trying to encourage him to join me."

In answer to the question whether there might be a substitute for Tai Chi, Brenda was very firm. "No, I have respect for yoga and Pilates. But I don't do them. I'm not interested in jumping around because I'm too old for that. I see the similarity in stretching between Tai Chi and yoga. I don't know much about Pilates."

Regarding the ideal age to start Tai Chi, Brenda comments, "I wish I had known about Tai Chi when I was 30. I wish Tai Chi were here then. We are all seniors, but it's easier to learn when you are young. In my Tai Chi centre, it's about 80% seniors (55 and above). In terms of the gender imbalance among Tai Chi practitioners, Brenda says, "For people who don't know Tai Chi, they think it's a female thing or an older people's thing."

"I'm more a homemaker type. My hands were never idle for years. I used to knit, crochet, and sew a lot when I was younger. I might watch TV, but I'd also knit or

crochet. I had to give it up because of my back pain. All because of Tai Chi, I was able to go back to sewing and I made my daughter's wedding gown, my granddaughter's clothing, window curtains, and duvet covers. I don't buy those kinds of things. I enjoy doing those things and I'm able to do all that now because I do Tai Chi! So Tai Chi is my top priority."

16) May

At the time of the interview in 2012, May was 73 years old. She was a member of *Group K*, an informal Tai Chi group that meets in a city park. The number of attendees ranges from two to 14. She had been practicing Tai Chi for 20 years. At her request, the interview was carried out in the living room of her home.

General impression

May is one of the four Halifax research participants who were born outside of Canada and she is the only one born in an Asian country (not China). She is short for an Asian woman of her generation and is thin but fit. She loves talking to every member of her group during the break. She is the only female member who joins the Tai Chi sword group after the break. Like all the other members of her Tai Chi group, she wears her everyday clothing to her group practice. She usually walks there from her home, only driving when she has to go somewhere afterward. She speaks three languages: English, the language of her home country, and the Mandarin Chinese that she learned as a child. During my observation with her Tai Chi group's regular practice, sometimes she spoke Mandarin Chinese with me, but at the interview, she chose to speak English only.

Family

May and her husband live in their own house within walking distance of one of the city's major shopping centres. Their two children work in two different cities far away from Halifax. One of their children is married. They have two grandchildren.¹⁷⁸ May's husband just retired and is "trying to figure out his new daily routine." May does all the housework and has her routine of exercises, including Tai Chi.

¹⁷⁸ After the interview, May showed me their family photos on the wall in her home.

May has lived in Canada for many years. “My ancestors were Chinese. A relative told me that my ancestors were from the southern part of China. I had a Chinese name as a child. When I got married I took my husband’s family name.”

Health

“I always eat nutritious food and exercise regularly. I was always in good health until last year. I developed a sleeping problem and it affects my whole body. I’m tired and losing weight. I’ve had lots of tests done but the doctors couldn’t diagnose anything. I’m not taking any medication. My doctor sent a referral to a specialist but the waiting time is one year. In the meantime, I don’t know what to do. I don’t know if my Tai Chi is helping the problem. When I started Tai Chi, I didn’t have any health concerns.”

Education and employment

May states that she has the equivalent of a university degree and some professional training courses. She took that degree at a university in a foreign country (not her original home country). She had several different types of jobs during her working years. She first worked as a healthcare worker. When she started her family, she quit her job and became a stay-at-home mother. When her children started going to school, she took a one-year training program that resulted in an administrative job at a local university. After several years, she was so busy with her office job that she “sometimes even had to bring work home.” That made her go back to take a one-year re-entry training program, which enabled her to return to her healthcare profession. Eventually she worked at a Facility for Elders. She worked “23 years altogether” and retired nine years ago at the age of 64.

Tai Chi experience

“I took a Tai Chi course at a local community centre 20 years ago. I couldn’t follow the instructor and didn’t learn much. And I didn’t like the pop music that the instructor used. So after a while I just quit. After that, when I went to visit my family back home, my sister-in-law asked me to practice Tai Chi with her group (they were all housewives). I didn’t enjoy their type of Tai Chi so I only went a few times. When I came

back, I saw a Tai Chi group performance at a dragon boat festival in Halifax. I was very impressed by the performance and I liked the music they used. Then I decided to join the group. I learned that their group leader was giving lessons at the sports centre. I started taking his Tai Chi course in 2000. At first, I thought I couldn't remember all the moves and I asked the teacher for private lessons. But he said, 'you don't need private lessons.' Later I found that he was right. He was very patient and repeated all the moves very slowly. The course was eight months long. I learned the 24 and the 108 Tai Chi sets over three months. It didn't take me long because I'm a serious practitioner. I also took a sword class by the same teacher. I was surprised that I could learn it because at that time I hadn't learned anything new for a long time."

When asked about her expectations prior to Tai Chi, May said, "When I first started Tai Chi, I just wanted to learn and do it correctly and enjoy it. Now I truly enjoy it! Tai Chi is very slow and gentle. It's like meditation. You have to relax when doing Tai Chi because when you relax you do Tai Chi better and your Tai Chi will look smooth and flexible. And you know how to sink down your *qi* to the bottom of your body. The more you practice the better. Tai Chi is like self-expression. You do the moves and the forms, but there is a certain personal expression that you can put in your Tai Chi practice."

"Since I started Tai Chi, I've been practicing regularly. I've been going to the Sunday group for 14 years. The group setting in the open air is enjoyable. It's cold but only once a week, so I dress properly. We do the 24, the 108, and the Tai Chi sword. I also continued taking Tai Chi courses at the sports centre during the week. Every morning I do my 30-minute walk outside when I get up. After my walk, I practice Tai Chi for 30 minutes in my garage. I do the Chen style, the sword, and my own stretching, lifting exercises in conjunction, because Tai Chi and other exercises complement each other. Tai Chi alone sometimes may not be sufficient to give you good health. Practicing the Chen style at home alone, I use my own music to help me to remember the moves and to keep in tune. I usually do my morning exercises for an hour and a half to two hours. If I have an appointment, I'll cut my exercise time shorter. I used to go play Mahjong.¹⁷⁹ If I wanted to leave home at 9:30am to go play Mahjong, I would do fewer Tai Chi moves.

¹⁷⁹ Mahjong is a well-known game of Chinese origin that consists of 144 small tiles and is played by four people who can play in pairs or individually.

Because I do Tai Chi every morning, I feel okay when I cut down just one day. Tai Chi is slow, but it doesn't mean it's easy. Doing Tai Chi made me do other exercises because I have to be strong to do Tai Chi well. I could go through the entire day without getting tired until last year. If you do it at home, you don't have the interaction with people. It's nice to follow a teacher to get corrections. I learned that most of the original members of my Tai Chi group were school teachers. I think some of them knew each other before the group started. They are very loyal and they have been taking Tai Chi lessons from the group leader at the sports centre for many years. They don't go to other Tai Chi teachers. There is definitely loyalty involved in the group."

May shared her experience learning the Chen style Tai Chi. "A few years ago, I took some Chen style Tai Chi lessons from a Chinese Tai Chi master in a public park.¹⁸⁰ For about one and a half years, I took the Chen style there while still going to my Sunday group to do both the short and long forms.¹⁸¹ Before I started the Chen style, I had learned the long form, so I was curious and wanted to learn a different form. The Chen style was very powerful and you jump and you scream. That's why the young people like it because it is like Kung Fu. There are some people in their 30s or 50s in the Chen group. I didn't like the way that the instructor just put people in different groups and different people came on different days. I went three times a week. He didn't give me instruction and just said to follow the group. And the course was very expensive. I also paid him to learn the sword. The reason that I stayed was because there were some nice professional people in the group that I could learn from. That group didn't use music. It was all very quiet during the group practice. They also did push-hands. I didn't like it because the male members were too strong and there were very few female members. At that time I loved the Chen style. After a while I quit because I found that I wasn't improving anymore. I liked a lot of the people in the Chen group. But it was the teacher who spoiled it. There are also things I liked about the teacher. For example, he used some Chinese words to give instructions. I knew what the words meant but many people in the group didn't know. So he had to explain in English. I think it's okay to use Chinese words. After all, Tai Chi is part of Chinese culture. Using Chinese words makes it more

¹⁸⁰ I observed the Chen style Tai Chi group, but it was not included in my research because all of the group members were younger than 55 in 2012.

¹⁸¹ May uses "the short and the long forms" to refer to the 24 and the 108 Tai Chi sets.

authentic and I like it. I think you have to be a Chinese speaker in order to use the Chinese terms just to point out a few things.”

In answer to the question what Tai Chi means for her, May says, “Tai Chi is beautiful. Tai Chi is very suitable for me. It makes me feel good and it’s good for my health. Tai Chi is part of my life, part of my routine now. I always think that if I stop doing it, my body will be too stiff and I don’t want that to happen. That’s what kept me going because I feel very flexible. Doing Tai Chi, you have to be conscious all the time. The breathing will come automatically. When you move your body, it’s better to move your whole body, not just your arms. The arms are like branches that touch the tree trunk. So the branches don’t move. It’s the tree trunk that moves.”

“I like Tai Chi and I like the people who are in my Sunday Tai Chi group. We get along well. I think it’s the same cultural interest that keeps us together. They are nice and not prejudiced. I think the people who are prejudiced wouldn’t come to do Tai Chi because Tai Chi is foreign to them. So if you come to do Tai Chi, you must like this Chinese art, in a way. This is one thing that has kept me with this group for 14 years. Our group meets to practice Tai Chi every week. We have a conversation during the short break. We also have regular social activities such as an annual picnic. We used to have coffee afterward. But that slowly went away because people were busy with different activities after the group practice. The group leader usually organizes birthday parties and Christmas and Chinese New Year get-togethers at his house. Usually it’s a potluck and many people attend. Some members sometimes throw a party at their house. Our group took up running and did our own training. Once we joined a marathon in a different province. Several families went together and we rented a cottage to stay there for the event. We all ran the 10K. That was the first time that I did a 10K! I even got a certificate for it. It was fun! It is nice to start your Sunday with the group Tai Chi in nice weather. You have the rest of the day you can do anything else. Wintertime there are fewer people. Since I started with the group, I have never missed one Sunday, except when I was out of town. I go in the rain and in the snow. I enjoy being with the group.”

“The friendship with my group members and the Tai Chi exercise are both important to me. You can’t have the party without joining the group. I guess it’s the regular group meeting that forms the friendship. The friendship is a group friendship. It’s

not a very personal friendship for me. I have met one lady in my Tai Chi group and I consider she was a personal friend because we went to different events together and she came to my house for meals. But she has moved away. Now we still write to each other.” May believes that her former co-workers are “on a personal level because you meet your co-workers on a daily basis through the year. It’s different from the people you meet at Tai Chi for only an hour each week. So the friendships I made at work were deeper. I had two friends at work and we have remained friends.”

When asked whether there might be any negative effects or disadvantages regarding her Tai Chi practice, May responded, “I didn’t have any physical difficulty doing Tai Chi.” Then she talked about negative examples of being in a group situation. ‘When the group leader is away, Andy [a research participant who substitutes for the group leader] sometimes wants me to stand next to him at the front in case if he forgets a move. People always said, ‘you are too fast,’ or ‘you are too slow.’ They wanted to do it at their own pace! Once one man joined us and he was from a group with a different Tai Chi style. He told our group about the way his group did Tai Chi. That kind of disagreement is not very good. It’s like a religion. There are always people who like to branch out and modify something and get their followers. Well, Tai Chi has already been modified a lot through the years. I read Tai Chi books and I learned that the very beginning Tai Chi style was the Chen style. I think Tai Chi should be standardized internationally. I think our group’s Tai Chi style is very close to the original Tai Chi, as close as you can get.”

In answer to the question as to what motivates her to continue with Tai Chi, May says, “Tai Chi is an art. It’s part of Chinese culture. It’s long term and enjoyable. Tai Chi helps my memory. I won’t stop doing Tai Chi. There’s no point taking it just for a year or two. It takes a long time to learn, so it’s better to make a routine in your daily life, just like brushing your teeth. I think it’s important to have a routine for myself. I don’t play golf or a lot of other things that other people do. I don’t know how to swim. I used to run when I was much younger. I love dancing but my husband doesn’t like it. We only go once a year. Yoga doesn’t appeal to me. I know two people who went to do yoga after they left Tai Chi. Maybe they got tired of Tai Chi or maybe they wanted to do something different. I don’t know why.”

With regard to the aging process and Tai Chi, May says, “The most important [thing] is your health. It’s not about your age or how you look, it’s how you feel. You could be 50 and feeling lousy. I don’t think age is an issue. I think anybody can learn Tai Chi at any time, except if your memory is very poor. For example, the seniors’ home where my neighbor works was looking for someone to teach Tai Chi and my neighbor asked me. So I taught Tai Chi there for eight months. I didn’t know how old the participants were because it was inappropriate to ask their age. They looked over 80 and their memory was poor. I went once a week for an hour. In the beginning, there were 10 people. The attendance was getting lower. I repeated each move many times, but they couldn’t remember. It’s not easy to memorize the moves. If you can remember the 108 moves, that means your memory is intact. Tai Chi is best for retired people, or maybe 10 years before retirement to prepare you. I think 50 years old is a good time to start doing Tai Chi because by then you would want to cultivate a hobby before you retire. So Tai Chi is a good pre-retirement activity and you can carry on for as long as you like. In my opinion, the 108 set is too long and it’s for people to practice on their own while the 24 set is for performance. Nobody wants to watch the 108 with lots of repeats.”

“Tai Chi has been a steady hobby for a long time so I will always find time for it. Mahjong was also a priority for me. But there is no conflict with Tai Chi. I used to get up early and do my walk and Tai Chi, prepare my supper and then go to Mahjong. It was busy but I liked to be busy. At that time, my health was good. I played Mahjong twice a week for three years. One player had a time conflict so she dropped out. We became shorthanded, so sometimes my husband came along. This year, one player suddenly had health problems. Another player lost interest. So the group sort of disintegrated. There is a lot to learn in Mahjong. It was very stimulating and challenges your mind when you learn the many rules. There were quite a few years that I didn’t work when my children were young. So I did a lot of volunteer work then. I took piano lessons and played for many years when I was young. When I was working I didn’t have time to play. Lately I took a few piano lessons because I had more time after stopping Mahjong. The lessons are expensive and if I can’t practice two hours every day, I’m wasting my money. I’m not taking a piano exam. It’s just a hobby. I felt pressured and it was not good for my nervous system, so I quit.”

May comments on the gender imbalance of Tai Chi practitioners. “Maybe men think Tai Chi is too slow. I think it depends on the person. My husband is not interested in Tai Chi and he thinks it’s too slow and he has a back problem. Actually, I was surprised to see that men have the patience to do Tai Chi because I always thought Tai Chi is a feminist thing. You can see a husband and wife come together to our Tai Chi group because there are not too many activities that husband and wife can do together. So it’s something for a couple. Nowadays, everything costs. My Tai Chi group doesn’t cost anything, which I think is one attraction. When people see our group consistently in the park for years and years, they might think that there must be some value in the activity. Some people like to be part of something. For example, in our group, Mike¹⁸² is very muscular and he is very interested in Tai Chi. I think people like to belong. I think it’s a sense of belonging.”

17) Gary

At the time of the interview in 2012, Gary was 66 years old. He was teaching a Tai Chi course at *Organization C*. He was also a member in a Tai Chi class at *Organization D*. The number of attendees ranges from 25 to 35 in both classes. He had been practicing Tai Chi for 23 years. At his request, the interview was conducted in his classroom prior to the Tai Chi class he teaches.

General impression

Gary is tall and has a strong build for a Caucasian man of his age group. He has a great sense of humor and is well liked by the participants in the Tai Chi class that he teaches. It is very common to hear laughter in his Tai Chi classroom. He is a friend of several instructors in the Tai Chi organization and they tend to take each other’s Tai Chi classes in order to practice. Unlike all of the other instructors who teach their class silently, Gary gives brief instructions at different points during the Tai Chi set, such as when all the participants are supposed to turn in a different direction. From time to time, he says, “Let all the weight be on your feet,” or “Do not lock your knees.” Before the last set, Gary often asks the class if anyone wants to lead the set because he feels that leading

¹⁸² The individual’s name has been changed in order to protect his identity.

the group is good practice. Gary knows the names of all the regular participants and he corrects them individually during the class time when they practice a particular Tai Chi move on their own. Gary always wears his Tai Chi uniform to class. He and his wife (who is also a participant in this research) always go to Tai Chi classes and events of their Tai Chi organization together. Gary is a native English speaker.

Family

Gary and his wife live in their own house in the city. They have three children who all live in other cities. They often take short trips to visit their children's families. One of their sons has two children. During their visit, they help to look after their two grandchildren when their son and daughter-in-law are both working night shifts.

Health

Gary says that he has had good health until several weeks ago when he had a health-related emergency. He spent several days in the hospital and is still recovering. "I knew I had to re-train my body after the procedure that the doctors had done on me. The second day I was in the hospital, a nurse showed me how to get up and go to the washroom. But on the next day I was doing Tai Chi in my hospital room! Before retiring, I was doing a lot of entertaining with clients. So I had some bad cholesterol. I don't think about the fact that I'm 66 years old. I feel I'm very young and I'm very flexible."

Education and employment

Gary has a bachelor's degree. He says, "I was in the military for a couple of years when I was a teenager." He worked for the same company for many years. He was in sales and his job involved a lot of traveling in the Atlantic Region. He retired officially seven years ago at the age of 59. "The company didn't have a mandatory retirement age, but the recommended retirement age range was 60-65 years old." After retiring, he worked part-time for another company.

Tai Chi experience

“Prior to taking up Tai Chi, I had read about it from the magazines that my family subscribed to, such as *National Geographic* and *Readers’ Digest*. When I was young, martial arts were starting to be shown on television. Bruce Lee and Jet Lee influenced me. I wanted to be able to do what they did. I also watched some Tai Chi programs on TV. So I learned that Tai Chi is a good exercise and it IS a martial art. I started Tai Chi 23 years ago because I wanted to do a martial art. I took it up just as an activity, not for health reasons. At that time, I didn’t know about the social part of the Tai Chi group. The Tai Chi organization offered the Tai Chi class at a school in the evening. The course lasted for three months. Each of the weekly classes was two hours long. When I started, I was old and I wanted to learn martial arts but I didn’t want to fight with anybody. There were about 20 people in my first Tai Chi class. It was about 60% men and 40% women. Most of us were middle-aged, not seniors. I didn’t have expectations about Tai Chi. In the beginning, I thought I could learn it within a week. I figured that when I finished the 108 moves, I would be an expert in martial arts. My wife and I both took the beginners’ course. I had asked her and she did it to support me. She was extremely supportive and we support each other for everything. Before we finished the beginners’ course, the Canadian Tai Chi¹⁸³ founder came to visit Halifax and we went to his workshop. That was when I realized that there was more in Tai Chi.”

“After the beginners’ course, I continued taking more Tai Chi courses for about five years. And I continued practicing in different classes. When I traveled with my job in the eastern part of Canada, I practiced Tai Chi anywhere I went. I practiced at night while traveling. It was hard to get out of the chair to go to Tai Chi when I was still working. I came home after a day’s work and had my supper and the TV was right there. I didn’t want to go to my Tai Chi class, but I got up and went because I knew I would feel better after my two-hour Tai Chi class. Normally I don’t practice the whole Tai Chi set at home because I practice four or five times in Tai Chi classes during the week. Sometimes I practice a part in my living room. Sometimes I discuss a Tai Chi move with my wife at home.”

¹⁸³ Gary’s class practices the Canadian Style Tai Chi.

“I have had four instructors and I had my last instructor for 18 years. She is over 80 years old now, and in a wheelchair, and doesn’t teach Tai Chi anymore. My wife and I take her out once a week to go to the bank, see the doctor, get food and take her out to eat. I have been teaching [Tai Chi] for 20 years. Many of those years while I was teaching I was still taking her courses as a student. Today you have to be certified to teach. Back then it was a little different. When I first finished my own course and a workshop, they asked me to teach. I was working with my first instructor so he was the corner for me when I taught a beginners’ class. When the Canadian Tai Chi founder came to Halifax, he gave me permission to teach the intermediate level course. I was on the board of the organization for the Atlantic Provinces for four years. I was on the instructors’ committee for ten years. I was very involved. But I’m not interested in power. I don’t want to be the president, ever! I want to be in the background.”

Gary seems to have integrated his Tai Chi practice into his everyday life. “As long as I have been doing Tai Chi, I’m practicing ALL the time! For example, I push my feet when I get up from a sitting position. I don’t lock my knees and I stand or sit properly with my muscles relaxed. So that is part of my lifestyle now. When I go to my part-time job, the younger co-workers ask me, ‘You have been on your feet all day, don’t your legs and your feet hurt?’ I told them, ‘No, because Tai Chi taught me not to lock my knees. I don’t tighten up my back and my stomach muscles. I practice Tai Chi all day long.’ This process of integrating Tai Chi into my daily life took at least 17 years. When I first started doing Tai Chi I used my muscles. I don’t use muscles anymore. Tai Chi is part of me now! My body has been trained after so many years practicing Tai Chi. I don’t feel tired after a long day’s work because my body automatically keeps straight. Besides being relaxed, Tai Chi has a tendency to keep me calm throughout the day. I don’t get excited and I don’t worry about small things. Years ago, when my kids were home, if they left something on the floor, I would get mad. After I started practicing Tai Chi, one day my son took my car out and damaged it. Everybody was saying, ‘Your dad will be mad!’ And as long as he didn’t get hurt, I didn’t care about the car and I could replace the car. So Tai Chi keeps me calm and keeps me focused.”

“The Tai Chi practice and the socializing are equally important to me. The socializing in [a] Tai Chi group is very important to everyone. If you go to a class and

there's nothing but Tai Chi, you could get bored. But if you go to a class and you have a good laugh every so often and you have a little talk, it makes Tai Chi easier. I'm a people person. If something is bothering you when you are in Tai Chi, if I can fix it, I'll fix it. In my Tai Chi class if you want to stand there doing nothing, it's fine with me. But if you want to work, I'll work with you. I know a lot of them will never do Tai Chi well. But they move around and talk to people, they are not home sitting in a chair, they are having a good time. So if I can help them to have a better time, I'll do that. The socializing is important for me, too. I didn't know any of the people before Tai Chi. I've made a lot of friends through Tai Chi. I can go everywhere in this region and meet people from Tai Chi and I like it! But I very rarely socialize with them outside Tai Chi because everybody has their own life. I have a variety of friends. I'll do other things with my other friends, like going away for a weekend. There is no social class in Tai Chi. That's the simplest way to put it. You can be a doctor and the person standing next to you can be a gas station attendant. You have no idea who they are. With colleagues at work you have to be careful that something you say might embarrass or hurt them."

In answer to the question what Tai Chi represents, Gary says, "Tai Chi means exercise and social activity to me. They are both important. To be honest, if I were not doing Tai Chi, I would miss the people. I would miss coming here. I've built strong relationships with the people here. I'm one of the lucky ones. I practiced Tai Chi everywhere when I traveled for work. I met a lot of people and formed good friendships."

With regard to the reaction of family members and relatives about Gary's Tai Chi practice, he says, "My kids support me. But my friends don't understand me. For example, a friend who is the same age as me can't walk. I told him to do Tai Chi. But he said, 'Never.' I don't care what everybody else says, I think Tai Chi is good for me. I like it and we [he and his wife] like it. We have fun. I can see things in your body that you can straighten, just small things that you can hurt yourself. My instructors taught me that. For example, if I see someone walking on the street and all bent over, I want to put my hands on their shoulder to straighten them out. And a lot of the students in my class say that they want a straighter back."

When asked whether there have been any negative aspects of his Tai Chi practice, Gary said, "I didn't have leg or joint pains when I first started. The only negative thing is

about doing “Doynus” [a Tai Chi move]. We are supposed to do 25 Doynus as part of our foundation practice. If you have never done Doynus, after 25 of those, it really tires you out. That was the only negative part and I hated doing that! When I was doing Doynus in the beginners’ course, I thought, ‘What was that going to do with martial arts?’ Even now, I think the same way. In the class I’m teaching, some people just do the set and go on to do some of the moves. I don’t believe you have to do Doynus in class. I told them, ‘If you get up in the morning and you want to do a Doynu, go do a Doynu.’”

In terms of his priorities, Gary says, “I put Tai Chi up on the top of the line! The only thing I can think of as a substitute for Tai Chi would be walking because there is no stress in walking. But I won’t give up Tai Chi. I walk for an hour and a half regularly. I don’t walk on the street. I walk on the trails. If my wife has time she walks with me. I’m not a sports-minded person. I play sports for the fun of it. I’m not like someone who plays football on Saturday and hockey on Sunday. Many years ago, I played baseball, football, hockey, tennis, badminton, and skiing. I did them all. When I was a teenager, I swam in the Olympics. I didn’t continue swimming because I don’t like competition. That was part of the reason why I joined this, because there’s no competition in Tai Chi.”

“I knew there were all kinds of Tai Chi styles. I was never interested in trying another type of Tai Chi. All the instructors in this organization are volunteers. I don’t have a problem paying for the membership. If I didn’t have to pay it would be better. But I understand that. If you need to come to the building you have to pay. It’s like maintaining a house.”

When asked what age he thinks would be good for people to start Tai Chi, Gary says, “I would recommend that people start Tai Chi in their 30s for health reasons. When you get to your thirties, nine times out of ten, you have a family and you have had children. Your life is getting set in a routine. I’m going to use parents as an example. The dad goes to work and the mom gets up in the morning, makes breakfast for the kids and sends them to school, does the laundry and so on. Going to Tai Chi gives her a chance to get other exercises and do other social things and that makes her happier. Even if the dad stays home, it’s the same thing. When I retired, my wife was still working and I did most of the housework then. In reality, the age range in my class is from the 50s to the 60s. I think the reason that younger people do not join Tai Chi is because they are too busy. For

example, my two boys both had physical training for their jobs and they are in good shape. But they are very different. My older son is a macho man. He doesn't do anything at home. His wife does it all. That's his life. But my other son does everything at home. He's in his 40s with two children. I think he should start Tai Chi now. But neither of my sons is doing Tai Chi. Most people wait until they are in their 50s. Sometimes we have young people come to join us [his class], but they never stay because they are too busy."

Regarding the gender imbalance of Tai Chi practitioners, Gary believes, "Because Tai Chi is not macho! Most people believe if you are a woman you do the easy job. You are a man so you go do taekwondo and you fight. I'm a man but there is no way in the world I will get into a fight. I was in the military for a while and I didn't like it."

Regarding different aspects of Tai Chi, "The religion part of Tai Chi is fine. But I don't want anything to do with it. The cultural part of Tai Chi, I'm very interested in it, but I don't believe it should be 100% of my culture because Tai Chi is from China and I'm Canadian. In different cultures people do things differently day in and day out. For example, respect is very important in all languages. But respect is different in the Canadian language than in the Chinese language. For example, like my sons, they still talk to us and still ask us questions, but they do what they want to do. And they do not feel embarrassed about it. On the other hand, I heard that Chinese parents are different."

18) Lynn

At the time of the interview in 2012, Lynn was 65 years old. She was teaching a beginners' Tai Chi course at *Organization D*. The number of attendees ranges from six to ten. She was also a member of a Tai Chi class at *Organization C*, with the number of attendees ranging from 25 to 35. She had been practicing Tai Chi for 23 years. At her request, the interview took place in the classroom prior to her Tai Chi class.

General impression

Lynn is of average height and fit for a Caucasian woman of her cohort. She is good tempered and kind to everyone. She volunteers at the school she retired from and helps students on a one-on-one basis with their school work. She is also very involved in her Tai Chi organization. She volunteers for two committees and helps organize their

holiday dinners and weekend workshops. She always goes to Tai Chi classes with her husband (who teaches an intermediate Tai Chi class and is also a participant in this research). They attend each other's class. When they are not teaching, they go to another class together to practice. Like the majority of her classmates, Lynn wears a Tai Chi uniform to all her classes. She is a native English speaker.

Family

Lynn and her husband live in their own house in the city. They are both retired. Their three children live in different cities. She and her husband often take short trips to visit their children. One of their sons has two children. Each time they visit, she tells me, she enjoys playing with the two grandchildren. During their visits, Lynn and her husband usually practice Tai Chi in their son's backyard. Sometimes their two grandchildren join them.

“My three sisters and I are close in age and we always played outside together when we were young. I'm a physically active person. I don't want to stay still. But I'm not sports-minded. I played a little basketball in high school.”

Health

“I was in good health for many years until I had a bad back in 2004. One morning I suddenly couldn't walk and couldn't stand on one leg. My doctor told me that it was a nerve problem. I was off work for three months. Since then, there have always been issues with this leg. It feels different than the other one, so I have to be careful. I'm not taking any medication. I just do lots of stretching and keep moving. Tai Chi has really helped my back. It keeps me stretched and flexible.”

Education and employment

Lynn has a bachelors' degree and a master's degree. She worked at two public schools during her career. Towards the end of her teaching career, she took an administrative position. She retired four years ago at the age of 61. “I don't think there's a mandatory retirement age. I think it's expected when you get to 65 they would like to see you go. But if your health is good, nobody can force you to leave your job.”

Tai Chi experience

“I started my first Tai Chi class 23 years ago. The reason I started was because my husband always wanted to do martial arts. I wasn’t interested in martial arts, but I wanted to support him. And we decided Tai Chi was something we could do together. So we started and we both enjoyed it and we have stayed with it ever since. The Tai Chi class was located at the school where I was teaching and it was close to home. We learned the Canadian Tai Chi and we never tried a different style. After the beginners’ class we came to the centre and took the intermediate class. When I was working I drove to work. Now we drive to Tai Chi classes, so the transportation is not an issue. One of the Tai Chi classes is about five minutes down the road from our house. The other Tai Chi centre is a 25-minute drive from our house if there’s no traffic.”

“At the very beginning I didn’t have any expectations because I didn’t know anything about Tai Chi. As time went on, we got to know people who had been doing Tai Chi for a long time. We knew it was something very good for our health and that would certainly help our flexibility. My husband and I have gone through four instructors together. One of them was the first Tai Chi instructor who was sent here by the Canadian Tai Chi founder to start teaching Tai Chi in this region. The instructor who taught us for the longest time said that Tai Chi helps increase your bone mass. I thought that was a good thing. I have also been taking my husband’s Tai Chi course. He is my main instructor now and I go to his class regularly.”

“I usually go to three Tai Chi classes per week. One is in the daytime and two are night classes. The beginners’ class that I teach is in the evening. Additionally, we also try to come on Tuesdays. So it’s three or four classes per week. I rarely practice at home because life gets busy. I do practice once in a while in our garage -- if there is something I want to teach I practice it at home first. And I will talk with my husband and he’ll correct me. I would like to practice at home every single day. When my husband and I travel to see our older son, we practice Tai Chi in his backyard. We also tried to do Tai Chi in the yard where his kids go to school. We are trying to convince our older son that he should do Tai Chi because he’s got arthritis in his knees. But he thinks Tai Chi is too slow for him. He’s not interested in it yet. Young people find it too slow. I remember one year I had four or five teenagers in the beginners’ class that I taught. When we started the

class, one of the young girls put her hand up and said, 'Excuse me Miss, are we going to do this to music?' Because she was thinking that with music it'd be fast like a dance. They stayed through the Tai Chi course because their parents were with them. But they never came back. Well, they have a lot of energy and they want to be moving around. They don't want to be meditating and quiet. Our Tai Chi organization has been trying to get younger people but we only get a few."

"Tai Chi means good health and good friends to me. For health reasons, I put Tai Chi very close to the top of my priorities. We have made really, really good friends and we are in better health because of Tai Chi. My husband used to go to all the classes to teach or to practice. I went with him so I got to know a lot of people too, which was nice! I don't mind hearing about the religious part of Tai Chi. But I don't participate in it because I have my own religion. I'm interested in learning about Chinese culture because it's always interesting to learn different cultures."

"I didn't have knee pain when I first started. My balance is better and I'm much more flexible. I see some people who are the same age as us and they can't bend down and they can't squat and we can still do both. I don't really think about my age. I do realize that I may not be able to do something that I did a few years ago. Tai Chi keeps me going because I want to keep being able to move and I want to keep being able to be flexible, and to be able to get up from sitting on the floor. So that motivates me to keep going because I know Tai Chi is good for me."

With regard to when would be the ideal age to start Tai Chi, Lynn says, "It would've been wonderful if we had started in our late 30s or 40s. When I was in my mid-30s, probably Tai Chi was here but I didn't know about it. It has been getting very popular in the past few years. I suppose because there's been more publicity with YouTube and a few programs on TV. There've been articles in magazines about the health benefits of doing Tai Chi. Years ago, a lot of the doctors didn't even know what Tai Chi was. But now the doctors and physiotherapists seem to know what we are doing and they advocate it to their patients, which is good."

Regarding the socializing aspect of a Tai Chi group, Lynn remarks: "I think the socializing part is very, very important for a lot of the people in our Tai Chi classes because they are seniors. To some of them, coming to Tai Chi class is probably their

outing for the week! Especially the Tuesday and Thursday morning classes, the people do Tai Chi and they see their friends and they sit around and talk. They are perfectly happy and that's all they want out of it. I think the older you get the more the socialization is important. And I think that's why it's important to make people feel welcome and comfortable. We [she and her husband] enjoy doing the exercise and we enjoy seeing the people, too. It's like a second family, away from home! I have some friends from the church, but I find I'm closer to the people in my Tai Chi group. I've been going to the same church since 1984. But they are not real friends. They are acquaintances. It's not the same. I've known people in my church for 20 or 30 years. I go to church and I read at church. Besides 'hello' and 'how are you,' I don't socialize with them. I guess part of that is my husband doesn't come to the church. It's just me that goes. He used to come when the kids were small. He was never interested in church. It would be very different if we were there together. We don't see our Tai Chi friends outside of Tai Chi. But we come a lot to Tai Chi. I don't see my former colleagues very much because you tend to go to your separate ways after retiring. I think here in Tai Chi we have something in common because of the exercise and because of what we are doing. With work, after you retire that part of life is over. But with Tai Chi it's on-going. I love working with kids and that's why I volunteer. When I do my volunteer work, my husband enjoys doing his part-time job. He always jokes with me, 'Why did you retire? You are doing the same thing you always did.' When he retired in 2005, I was still working. He did a lot of the house cleaning and the cooking."

"I remember I was frustrated when I first started Tai Chi because I couldn't remember all the moves and I couldn't do them properly. I used to get very upset because I couldn't get it. The first few years I got very frustrated. In the early years of our Tai Chi practice, my husband was on the road a lot. He practiced Tai Chi five times a week. I had the kids at home. I didn't do Tai Chi during the week and I could only do it once or twice on the weekend while he was traveling for work. So he did Tai Chi much more than I did. Now he pushes his energy from his feet, not from his muscles. I'm not there yet. I can do that in some moves, but not in all the moves. Now I've been teaching the beginners' class, I understand that when you are taking the beginners' class you are not expected to know the whole 108 moves by the time you finish the course. It's just sort of like an

introduction to the set, so that when you go on to the intermediate class, if the instructor says, 'let's work on brushing your knees,' [a Tai Chi move] so at least you know what it is. I know people who are taking the beginners' class and they think when they finish they'll know everything and be able to do it all by themselves. But it's not going to happen. It takes a long time to be confident enough to do it all by yourself. That took me about four or five years. I didn't start teaching Tai Chi until I retired because before that I didn't have the time and didn't feel I knew enough. You don't need a certificate to be a beginner instructor. You can come to be a corner when I'm teaching. It's sort of like an apprenticeship. If you want to teach the intermediate course, you have to write a letter to explain why. The organization expects you to go to as many workshops as possible. You are on your own for all the costs. It could get as expensive as more than one thousand dollars to travel to one workshop, especially for my husband and I, the cost for everything is multiplied by two. Some people don't understand that if you are retired you are on a fixed income. You can't afford to go to all those things."

When Lynn shares her comments on the gender imbalance of Tai Chi practitioners, she says, "I think Tai Chi doesn't appear to be macho or physical enough for men. It's slow and it's very quiet. So a lot of men may think it's not something they should do. We are getting a few men now as time goes by. Years ago, there were all women in all the beginners' classes. If people join as a couple then they tend to stay. It's nice that both my husband and I are doing it because it takes a lot of time. If it's just one of us doing it, that's time taken away from your spouse. I've heard from some men that they are doing it, their wives complain about it. It makes it a little easier if they are both doing it. Some nights you will feel like you don't want to go. But your spouse will say, 'Let's go,' and when you get here you'll feel better."

In answer to the question about any possible substitute for Tai Chi, Lynn says, "I think if I didn't do Tai Chi, the other thing I might've been doing is yoga because there's a lot of stretching in that, too. I've never done yoga. I've just seen it and heard from people who do it. Yoga could probably be a substitute for Tai Chi from the point of the stretching and flexibility. My friend's daughter does yoga. She is in good health and she is more flexible than before."

In answer to the question whether her Tai Chi experience has impacted her daily life, Lynn says, “I don’t think it’s changed how I would live my life. It’s made me more cautious of the fact that as you get older you need to stay healthier to do the things that you need to do. But I don’t think it’s changed how I interact with people. I like being around people, talking to people, and doing things with people. I like organizing things and getting things done. I was on our branch council for three years. I was part of the workshop and event committee. Whenever there’s a workshop, we organize the whole thing. I walk every day. I try to walk 45 minutes to an hour every day. And I have done that for years and years. Just lately I walk with my husband since he had that health emergency. I love to read and I knit. I’ve been knitting hats and blankets for the children’s hospital.”

19) Harry

At the time of the interview in 2012, Harry was 63 years old. He was the leader for *Group K*, an informal Tai Chi group that meets in a city park. The number of attendees ranges from two to 14. He was also the instructor for two beginners’ Tai Chi courses, one of which was *Organization E* (the number of attendees ranges from four to six) at a local sports centre. The other was *Organization F* (the number of attendees ranges from six to nine) at a community centre. Harry had been practicing Tai Chi for 30 years. At his request, the interview was conducted in the common area of a local community centre.

General impression

Harry is the longest Tai Chi practitioner among the Halifax research participants. He has taught many Tai Chi courses at several organizations in the city. He started *Group K* and has been leading it for 14 years. Most members have been participating in this group for as long as it has existed. He is of medium height and average weight for a Caucasian man of his generation. He is fit and full of energy. He is friendly with the regular members of his Tai Chi group. He also welcomes any random visitors. Sometimes people walk by their group in the park and ask what they are doing, Harry always invites the individual to join the group to try Tai Chi. At the time of the interview,

Harry was taking time off from teaching and had two individuals substituting for him. However, he was still leading *Group K* on Sundays. “Every day I had to schedule my day around Tai Chi classes. I took this term off just to do some other things.” Harry is a native English speaker.

Family

Harry and his wife live in their own house in a residential area of the city. They are both retired. Their two children live in two different cities not far from Halifax. They have two grandchildren. Sometimes they drive to visit their children and grandchildren on weekends.

Harry was born in a small town near Halifax. His wife was born in Asia (not in China) and came to Canada at a young age. Her parents moved to Canada later and live in a different city.

Health

“My health was always good. I’ve done a lot of exercise since I was a teenager. I always maintained pretty good health even when I wasn’t exercising regularly. I’m just lucky that genetically I didn’t inherit any particular diseases or conditions, but I also take good care of myself. I’ve had a couple of family doctors over the years and they remarked on the fact that I’m in very good health. Once my doctor checked my blood pressure and joked that my blood pressure is about the same as my son’s. My son is an athlete. When I was 40 years old, I had colleagues of the same age who already complained about the pain in their knees. A number of my colleagues of my age or younger have passed away. They didn’t get a chance to enjoy retirement or they didn’t get a chance to retire with good health. It really makes me appreciate how fortunate I am.”

“Practicing Tai Chi definitely has improved my overall well-being. Tai Chi has made me relaxed and enabled me to think about myself in a positive way, like what I can do and what my limitations are as I’m getting older.”

Education and employment

Harry has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. He taught in public schools for 31 years. He retired eight years ago at the age of 55. He seems to enjoy his retirement. "I have so many things to do. Eight years have gone by too fast! My days are filled. There is no such thing as a boring or dull day. I can never understand people who are saying they are bored. I have always had so many interests. I had various hobbies over the years and my wife and I love to travel. As often as we can, we go to different countries just to experience different cultures and different food and so on. For me, retirement is just an opportunity."

Tai Chi experience

"I was first introduced to Tai Chi in 1982. Up to that time I had never heard about Tai Chi. My wife thought I might be interested because I have always been interested in physical fitness. I started to learn the simplified Tai Chi [the 24 set] from a member of the local Chinese society. As my wife had expected, I did like it and found it very interesting and very challenging to learn the sequence of the movements. As I practiced more, I realized that I enjoyed the sensation of the movements. So I practiced the Tai Chi form for quite a few years. And then I learned the traditional long form [the 108 set]. I also learned the Chen style, just because I wanted to broaden my understanding of the Tai Chi techniques. Primarily, I practice the Yang style. I like the smoothness, the evenness of the speed, just the overall sensation of doing the form. The Chen style looks more vigorous and is much like the martial arts. I learned that the Chen style is the original Tai Chi style and the Yang style is based on the Chen style. I also observed the Wu style and found the sequence of the Wu style is the same but the techniques are different."

"Tai Chi is actually a martial art. It's used for fighting, for self-defence. For those who get into fighting or join the Tai Chi competitions, of course, they move very quickly. Yang style practitioners work more on the relaxation techniques. The Yang style is preferable for those of us who are older, because it's easier on the body. Even the Yang style is very slow and gentle, for some older beginners who haven't been doing exercise, they may not have much mobility or flexibility, so in the early stages the moves can be modified to suit them. They don't have to do very high kicks and very low squats. But as

time goes by, they usually find their strength, balance and flexibility improved and they start to kick a little higher and squat a little lower. The Chen style is more suitable for younger people. The punches are quick, the kicks are really high, and the squats are very low. But if an older person is learning it, all the moves can be modified to the level of the learner's fitness."

"In the first few years when I started Tai Chi, I was practicing on my own irregularly. So I wasn't aware of any obvious benefits except the fact that I enjoyed doing the movements. After about six years, I started to practice regularly and that's when I started to notice some improvement of my health. My energy level improved considerably. At that time, my job was very stressful and demanding. By the end of the day I would be exhausted and almost falling asleep driving home from work. I had to have a nap as soon as I got in the door. I started getting some lower back pain, which I never had before. And I was waking up exhausted and feeling really tense all the time. I didn't want to start taking medication. I thought Tai Chi would be a natural way to exercise the body and it wouldn't require a lot of time and a lot of effort. I took it very seriously because I really believed in the therapeutic benefits of Tai Chi. In the morning I was always very busy to get the kids ready for school. So I thought the only way I could do Tai Chi is to get up earlier and make some time. So I got up 30 minutes early to practice Tai Chi before I started the regular day. I did the 24 Tai Chi set and repeated it three times. Then I would do a little bit of deep breathing. I did it inside my house. You don't need too much room to do the 24 set. By the time I finished my morning Tai Chi, I really felt good and felt I had energy and with that kind of sensation and attitude, I could go to work and feel good about it. Driving home one day I just suddenly became aware that I wasn't tired! And my energy level stayed very consistent throughout the day. I didn't feel at any time in the day that I was exhausted. When I got home at the end of the day, I didn't feel the need to have a nap. It's just occurred to me that the only thing I really changed was that I was doing this daily routine of a Tai Chi workout every morning! Even when things were stressful at work, I could think about relaxing and taking several deep breaths that would make me feel much better. I felt I was much more in control. So after experiencing that, I decided this is what I should do all the time. Even

after retirement, I thought I'd just keep on doing Tai Chi because it's obviously good for me."

"I practice Tai Chi every day for at least an hour. I just like Tai Chi. It's not only because I'm retired. I do the 108 and the 24. Sometimes I review the Chen style so I don't lose the techniques. Sometimes I take a Tai Chi move, just hold it as a standing meditation, relax and breathe, and feel the sensations, feel my muscles are all relaxed, feel my breath coming in and going out. I usually do it just by counting the breath. Maybe 10 deep breathes for one posture. My wife is very interested in meditation. She goes to a meditation group once a week. Sometimes I do the sitting down meditation with her. It's funny that she is the one who suggested Tai Chi to me and I was the one who took it up. Afterwards, she started learning from me. She came to most of my Tai Chi classes and I teach her what I know at home."

"Teaching Tai Chi to other people was a way of teaching myself more about Tai Chi. It gave me an advantage in the sense that I have to be able to explain the directions and be prepared to answer the questions. I had to bring my own level of understanding higher. I really like the teaching side of it just like when I was teaching in public school. When I practiced Tai Chi in my backyard, a few neighbors would see me. Eventually I offered to teach them what I was doing. So they came over and joined me to learn the 24 set. My first students were my neighbors. After I had been doing that for a few years, a local sports centre was looking for a Tai Chi instructor. So I started teaching there and it has been 14 years. It's very gratifying to see my students' health improve."

"My wife is very supportive. My family back home knew I was doing some kind of exercise. It didn't matter to them what I was doing. And they know that I was always interested in physical fitness. I've never been much for team sports. My interest has primarily been individual activities, like weight lifting or martial arts. I did a lot of exercise, particularly in my teens and early 20s. For example, I joined weight lifting competitions. We had weight lifting classes but we competed at different weights. Collectively we would bring home some trophies, but it's an individual sport. I've never been interested in hockey, baseball, and other sports. I grew up in a very small community. There wasn't much there for us to do. There were few of us who were

interested in martial arts. We read a few books about karate and we practiced with each other. When I was in university, I practiced karate and judo very informally.”

“At the Sunday group, we’ve had people coming and going, but there’s a core group. Over the years, they keep coming back! I think they enjoy the exercise and they enjoy the socialization. After all those years they got to know each other. Occasionally we have people who join us who had never been with us before. They like what they see and they think the movements are very interesting and usually they are very appreciative for the opportunity to try out the movements. We don’t advertise and we don’t announce it, but people noticed us. The park is a very public place.”

“I’ve never had any problem as a result of doing Tai Chi. The only mildly inconvenient thing could be because I’ve been teaching several Tai Chi classes sometimes the commitment that I have to teach a class interferes with other plans. For a while I taught every evening during the weekdays and on weekends. There were a few times that we were thinking about going to visit our daughter, but I couldn’t do that because I had a class on Sunday or I had a class in the evening. There were some times we had to forgo some part of a social event because of the class I had to teach. Other than that, teaching Tai Chi classes have been a real joy for me. I got to meet so many people.”

“I really enjoy the energy when we practice in a group. Everyone in the group is moving the same way at the same time. Basically, you focus internally on what you are doing at the moment. You can be aware of the people around you, but not be distracted by them. I often cautioned my students, particularly the ones who have been with me for a long time, ‘when you are in a group doing Tai Chi, don’t look around the other people and follow them. Turn your attention inward and follow yourself.’ Because if you start looking around you will get distracted, if somebody is going a little bit faster or slower than you are, you’ll try to match them. If they make a mistake, you’ll make a mistake. Even the ones who have been with me for almost 20 years, if someone is making a mistake the person next [to them] is also making a mistake. I always tell people if you make a mistake, don’t panic, just slowly get back, nobody will notice that you made a wrong move.”

“We have music to accompany us when we do our Tai Chi. The music we use is specially composed to the form that we do. So if you practice with the music often

enough, you get to recognize the different melodies within that set of music. For example, when we were doing the ‘cloud hands’ movement, you can notice the change of the instrument in the music itself. So very often, at the early stages, if you are doing it, you haven’t heard that particular melody so that means you are too fast, so you slow down. Sometimes if you are a little slow, you can catch up. So we use the music as a bit of a guide for the speed and that’s the main purpose of it, just to provide a standard speed for the movements. It also provides a soft background sound. At the same time, it doesn’t have to be precise. It’s not like we were doing a stage performance. So if you can keep the music in your head and also think about the body movements that helps with the focus that Tai Chi requires. Most of the time, I use the same music when I practice on my own at home. If I’m not using the music, I use my breath, so almost every movement requires one full inhale and exhale. I found that the timing is just the same as if I were using the music. Again, it’s the ‘moving meditation.’ That’s what Tai Chi is. In Tai Chi we are doing the same meditation as the sitting meditation, only we are moving around. Basically, we are imitating some martial arts movements, but at a very slow and controlled speed.”

“Tai Chi is my basis. It’s one thing that I do consistently. I do other things just for variety, like walking the dogs. I read a lot every day. Both my wife and I did the half marathon twice. Last year around this time, we did yoga. We started working with a group of friends. They wanted to learn Tai Chi from me, in exchange, one of them is a yoga instructor and she’d lead a yoga practice. There was no money exchange; it was just a trade-off. We would meet on Saturday mornings to do an hour of Tai Chi. I taught them the simplified form [the 24 set] and we’d do an hour of yoga. So my wife and I sometimes practice the yoga movements that we learned at that time.”

When asked whether there might be a substitute for Tai Chi, Harry says, “Yoga is pretty close to Tai Chi in terms of the benefits. It’s a different kind of exercise. But it has a similar philosophy, the idea of relaxing the body, improving balance, flexibility and focus. In some ways, it’s very much like Tai Chi. I think it offers an alternative for people who don’t like Tai Chi for whatever the reason. They can always try yoga. Yoga might be a little bit easier because it doesn’t require a specific sequence. In Tai Chi forms, there is a very specific sequence. If you are going to do Tai Chi with other people, especially if

you are traveling and want to join a group somewhere else, it's good to know that you are all going to be doing the same movements in exactly the same order and the same speed. With yoga, along with the fact that you can do it individually, even if you are with a group, there is no specific order. You can do pretty much any kind of movement at any time. It's almost like a spontaneous exercise. You don't have to remember a sequence. I don't see yoga as competition. I see it as an alternative, another way of exercising the body and the mind, particularly calming the mind, keeping yourself relaxed and maintaining a high level of health. That's really important to me and I tried to emphasize that to my Tai Chi students. We'd all like to live long. But if we are going to live long, we should live long in a healthy way. If you are going to live to 100 years old and spend your last five or ten years in the hospital on a support system, that's not a very good quality of life. So it's much better to be able to move around, to have some strength and flexibility, so you don't require medical care or hospitalization. That's what I hope is the long-term result of doing Tai Chi and exercises. I hope to live a long life and more importantly I hope to live a long and healthy life. So I don't have to depend on other people. I can just take care of myself. And Tai Chi is a nice and simple way to do it."

"At the very beginning, I didn't know very much about Tai Chi. After some time, I started reading books and magazine articles about Tai Chi and had discussions with my Tai Chi teachers. I realized there were a lot of benefits! I started thinking that Tai Chi was not a bad investment in myself. Tai Chi is an exercise that's relatively easy to do and that'll really help me to maintain and maybe improve my health. And it's a kind of exercise that can be done for your entire life. I read lots of articles about people in their 80s and 90s still doing Tai Chi. Most sports activities are kind of limited [as] to how long you can do [them]. For example, if you are a hockey player, you are not likely to play hockey when you are 80. In fact, most hockey players give up by the time they are 40 because there's so much impact. And they are very prone to injuries. But Tai Chi is relaxing. The older you get, as long as you can practice Tai Chi, you'll get better at Tai Chi. You understand your body more and you understand how to take care of it more. One of the greatest advantages of Tai Chi is that once you've learned the form, it's free. It doesn't cost you anything to do it. If you rely on medicine or even if you join a gymnasium for exercise, there are costs for both. If you learned Tai Chi, you can do it

anywhere at any time. You don't need any special equipment, no uniforms, just a little bit of space and some comfortable clothing and you are all set. So in terms of helping our healthcare system, if you can get more people doing things like Tai Chi and yoga on their own, just taking care of their own health, and our healthcare system won't be as badly strained as it is now. People in my age bracket are called the 'baby boomers.' And we are a big part of the population. More and more of us require medical attention. So if we can get more people just taking care of themselves, they don't have to go to the hospital. They don't have to get medication. They don't have to be a burden on the families or on the healthcare system in general. So [there are] a lot of benefits if people just do a little bit of Tai Chi every day."

In Harry's opinion, "If you learned the 24 form you can go almost anywhere in the world [and] you'll probably find someone to practice with. When my wife and I first went to China in 2000, we asked someone in the hotel, 'Where do they practice Tai Chi?' and they said, 'Just around the corner.' And we went around the corner the next morning, there were people doing the 24 form, so I was able to step in the group and do the form with them. Nobody from the group said anything. Everywhere we went on our tour, I made a point of getting up early and going out to find some Tai Chi practitioners. And the next time we went to China with a group of our friends, we did the same thing. We got up early and sure enough and walked a very short distance from the hotel and started doing Tai Chi. The groups that we joined were always very welcoming and very pleased to see us westerners doing Tai Chi! I think they were a little bit surprised that we could do the same Tai Chi. So it was a very pleasant experience to travel and find people who were doing Tai Chi and have an immediate connection. Even if we couldn't communicate [in speaking], we could do the same form of Tai Chi."

"I taught myself the Tai Chi sword. I found a video and just practiced on my own for a while and eventually felt confident to start showing my students. So now that's also part of our Sunday morning practice. We do almost an hour of Tai Chi, we take a short break and some go off to one side and do the sword form. The others continue doing the empty hand form."

"I'm hoping that Tai Chi will be the key for long term health, keeping me physically and mentally active. Tai Chi is a lifestyle. It's not just something that I

practice once a week or a couple times a week. It's a lifestyle and I try to encourage my students to think about it in those terms. It's not something you only do in class. You practice on your own at home and you try to take the qualities and the characteristics of Tai Chi and apply them to everything you do. For example, breathing deeply, relaxing, whether you are driving a car or working at the computer or teaching at a classroom, try to breathe deeply regularly, so it keeps your body erect and keeps your posture better and it's less fatiguing. It's better for people to transfer what they learned in Tai Chi to their daily life."

"The essential in Tai Chi is balance and harmony. The physical balance enables you to stand on one leg and not fall over. The emotional balance calms your mind, so there is definitely a psychological and philosophical aspect to Tai Chi. Daoism and Buddhism both had a great impact on the development of Tai Chi. Everything has its opposites. We shouldn't think of them as confrontational opposites, rather as complementary opposites. Just like the light and dark they simply blend in to make a day. Or like work and family, you can't devote completely to one or the other. You have to find that middle ground to do your work effectively and have a family."

"I find the Chinese culture quite interesting and the Chinese language is very complicated but beautiful. I took Mandarin courses for a few years. I only started after I had been retired for a few years. I was 60 years old at that time and everybody else was about first or second year university students. But it was fun and stimulating to be with those young people so full of energy. I enjoyed that very much. That was a couple years ago and I have forgotten the little bit I learned."

"The people we are associated with now are almost all connected with Tai Chi. My present social circle is made of people that come to my Tai Chi classes, either they are students or they come to the free group. We have had quite a number of activities with our Sunday group. We celebrate our birthdays. Chinese New Year is a good excuse to invite the Tai Chi group people and other people to our house for a party. The moon festival is another opportunity for a party. For several years in the summer we had our 'Tai Chi picnic.' We started with our Tai Chi practice. Then we played some silly games about Tai Chi. By the end of the day, we all went to a restaurant for a big meal. We have all these social events around our Tai Chi. I guess we all have similar interests in

maintaining our health, and to get together with like-minded people. It's a diverse group of very well-educated people in a variety of different fields. It's much more social than any of the other connections that I had through work. With all the teachers I worked with for years, very rarely did we get together socially. We were always on good terms, but we didn't have any connections. One of the reasons that I didn't like to get together with the teachers was that the conversation always came back to work. Even before we retired, at the Tai Chi group we didn't talk about work. We talked about traveling and Tai Chi related issues and things we had in common."

Regarding the ideal age to start Tai Chi, Harry says, "I think literally any age, whether young people or seniors, if they take it seriously and do it faithfully, in a very short time they feel better, their posture improves, their digestion problems go away and they are more focused. The people who currently practice Tai Chi are middle aged, in their 30s to 50s. Over the years I've had very few teenagers. The oldest I had were a few people in their 70s. The majority of people are in their 50s. One of the appeals about Tai Chi is that it looks nice. It's not physically demanding. You don't have to have a background of martial arts. You don't have to be an athlete. You can just be willing and interested. One of the things we work in is how to walk, how to place your foot and the awareness of your weight distribution. That transfers to daily life. So they got used to it and unconsciously when they walk they place their foot carefully on the steps and they don't fall."

With regard to the gender imbalance among Tai Chi practitioners, "I think a lot of men are just shy about exercising and not comfortable being in the same group with women. And also they don't understand what Tai Chi is. It looks like a very slow dance. I think a lot of men think that's a feminist activity. So they shy away from it. The men who have come to my classes almost always stay and enjoy it. I think the lack of understanding of what Tai Chi is keeps a lot of men away from joining Tai Chi. Some of them hear it's a martial art 'that sounds manly so I'll go learn that.' I think the men in the Chen style group think that they are learning a martial art."

Harry recently read an article about longevity research. "It's interesting. The research found out that the people who lived the longest time on earth are in Hong Kong. It was very surprising because Hong Kong is very crowded, polluted, and stressful. What

they've determined is there are two contributing factors – Tai Chi and Mahjong. A lot of people do Tai Chi and they play Mahjong. Mahjong is a game of strategy. You have to really think what tiles other players have put down. It's the same mental activity. In Tai Chi, you have to remember the movements and focus on them. Again, it's very important for people to socialize. I think the physical movement is essential in Tai Chi. But if you are doing Tai Chi with a group of people you have the sense of belonging and you have things in common with those people. As you know, our break is like a 'free for all' chat. People break in smaller groups and talk about everything, the weather, their families, or their social activities. Seniors, even if they are healthy, if they live by themselves it's very easy to get depressed. When people are socially engaged and involved, they are more likely to be healthier and happier people. You have to get the mind and body in harmony.”

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The descriptions of the two groups and the 38 research participants illustrate similarities and differences that are either cultural or specific to individuals or both. However, health and wellbeing constitute the most commonly shared motivation for starting Tai Chi practice and for continuing. Regardless of their cultural differences, most participants have, in varying degrees, integrated Tai Chi into their lifestyle and believe that Tai Chi is a positive and suitable long-term activity for maintaining their health as well as fulfilling their need to socialize with “Tai Chi friends.” As might be expected, there are cultural and individual differences among the participants regarding how they perceive Tai Chi and how they prioritize Tai Chi practice in their daily routine. The similarities and differences are discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6 COMPARISON OF THE TWO CULTURAL GROUPS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide the similarities and differences between the two cultural groups as a foundation for the analysis and discussion of the research data in the next chapter. It outlines the similarities and differences between the two groups' respective backgrounds and perceptions regarding their Tai Chi experience.

6.2 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO CULTURAL GROUPS

Participants in Jinan and Halifax shared some perceptions of their Tai Chi experience. This may have been because, despite cultural differences, all participants in both cities were from the same age group and included individuals deeply committed to Tai Chi,¹⁸⁴ including Tai Chi instructors (5 of the 19 Jinan participants and 5 of the 19 Halifax participants were Tai Chi instructors.). In addition, they all practiced the barehanded form of Tai Chi (for discussions of types of Tai Chi, see Chapter 2.3.3 Tai Chi styles).

6.2.1 Educational level

The majority of participants in both cities were highly educated compared to their respective age group.

The Halifax participant with the highest degree had a doctorate and the lowest was a high school graduate, while the highest degree among Jinan participants was a university undergraduate degree, the lowest had elementary school education. The overall education level of Jinan participants was lower than that of the Halifax participants. A breakdown of the education level of all participants is shown in Chapter 5 (see p. 114, Table 8 and p. 192, Table 12).

As indicated in the general description of the research participants, 16 of the 19 Halifax participants had received university degrees. Eight of them had graduate degrees

¹⁸⁴ My selection process guaranteed that most participants would be positive about Tai Chi, simply because individuals who tried Tai Chi but did not like it would have quit and so could not participate in my research. This is not a research design problem because my research is on people who practice Tai Chi, not on those who do not.

and two individuals (Earl and Fiona) had more than one graduate degree. The two Halifax participants with the least formal education had completed high school. Among the 19 Jinan participants, eight had completed university, which is a high level of education for their generation. Three of the older participants (72, 81, and 88 years old in 2012) graduated from university prior to the Cultural Revolution and the other five (between the ages of 59 and 66 years old) attended and completed university during the Cultural Revolution. The complexities of attending university in China during that period in Chinese history are explained in section 5.2.5 (p. 114).

6.2.2 Tai Chi's advantages: age appropriate, no equipment, low cost, can be done in a group or alone

Participants in both cultural groups believed that Tai Chi was an age-appropriate activity for older people, including themselves, regardless of the age at which they had started. For example, Mr. Kang (74 years old) started Tai Chi when he was 18 years old and had been practicing it for 56 years. In contrast, Nick (57 years old) had only practiced for four months. Despite the difference in starting age and the length of practicing time, both participants believed that it would be better to start learning Tai Chi at a young age when the body is more flexible. They agreed with the other participants that Tai Chi is an age-appropriate exercise for retirees.

Participants in both cities appreciated the fact that no equipment or special clothing was needed for barehanded Tai Chi, which was the type of Tai Chi used in this research design and practiced by all 38 participants. When attending a formal Tai Chi course or an informal practice group in Jinan and Halifax, some participants would wear their everyday clothing. For special occasions, such as participating in a Tai Chi performance (some Jinan participants participated in their end of Tai Chi course performance, while some Halifax participants participated in a Tai Chi group in public to promote their organization's Tai Chi courses) or a competition arranged by the city sport commission office (several Jinan participants participated in local Tai Chi competitions which they had joined as individuals and which had nothing to do with their own Tai Chi class or group), or on the suggestion of their Tai Chi organizations, participants with their

group members would put on their Tai Chi uniforms to show the unity of their group or organization.

There was no registration cost for any of the 12 informal Tai Chi groups in either Jinan or Halifax. The ten Jinan informal Tai Chi groups were all outdoors in public places. One of the two Halifax informal Tai Chi groups met outdoors in a public park and the other was indoors in an apartment building. There were fees associated with 11 formal Tai Chi courses (four in Jinan and seven in Halifax). Research participants who took formal courses in Jinan were satisfied with the course fees because they felt they were investing in their health. It should also be noted that the fees were low because Tai Chi courses and all other courses at the two institutes for retirees are heavily subsidized by the Jinan municipal government. In Halifax, research participants also thought the cost of the Tai Chi courses was reasonable and appropriate, in the light of the North American cultural concept that “you get what you pay for.”

All 38 participants belonged to at least one Tai Chi group. Most participants practiced alone at home as well as with their groups, while others (five Jinan participants and two Halifax participants) only practiced with their groups.

6.2.3 Reasons why some participants stopped and started Tai Chi several times

It was not uncommon for participants in both cities to have started Tai Chi more than once. The fact that they resumed after having stopped is an indication of their desire or determination to practice Tai Chi. The reasons why they quit vary. As a general rule, they were young and employed when they first started Tai Chi. Some of them tried a second time and quit again. Most of them finally started again after retirement.

Two Jinan participants (Ms. Feng and Ms. Jia) first started practicing Tai Chi at their respective workplaces. Although learning Tai Chi was not work-related, they had the opportunity to join an informal group with their coworkers to learn Tai Chi during work hours. When their respective employers changed regulations, their Tai Chi groups were discontinued and they stopped practicing. Apart from workplace Tai Chi groups, Mr. Liu began Tai Chi with an informal group in his neighborhood while he was young and employed. When his family moved away from the Tai Chi group location, he stopped. Mr. Meng took Tai Chi as an optional course when he was in university, but

only attended a few classes. Ms. Shen started Tai Chi because of a health problem. She was forced to stop by her employer during the Cultural Revolution. With the exception of Ms. Jia, these Jinan participants started a second time and were still practicing at the time of their interviews for this research. Ms. Jia started Tai Chi three times. She started a second time when she retired but had to stop when her father became very ill. She started the third time ten years later after her father passed away.

Nine Halifax participants (Nick, Karen, Pierre, Victor, Cathy, Irene, Helen, Andy, and May) started Tai Chi more than once. Among them, Karen, Irene, Andy, and May started Tai Chi three times. Their reasons for quitting included family or work demands, inconvenient Tai Chi class location, family relocation, and a preference for certain Tai Chi styles. Helen, May, and Victor were too busy at work when they first started taking a Tai Chi class so they quit. Karen and Nick first took a Tai Chi course and completed it, but disliked the long drive to class and the Tai Chi style that was taught. When Irene first started Tai Chi, she did not stay long because she was too busy at home with her young children. Cathy also took a Tai Chi class while working. After she finished the class, she did not start again until after she had retired. Andy and May both had three starts with three different Tai Chi organizations. Helen also mentioned that it was very difficult to attend her first Tai Chi course at night after a busy working day since it meant taking a bus and walking in the dark. Eventually, all nine Halifax participants returned and joined their current Tai Chi groups after retiring.

6.2.4 Participants' perception of how Tai Chi influenced their health and wellbeing

Participants in both cities spoke about the impact of their Tai Chi experience on various aspects of their health and wellbeing. Fifteen Jinan participants and 17 Halifax participants mentioned health improvements since starting Tai Chi. The areas of improvement are summarized in Table 15 (p. 314). One Jinan participant and one Halifax participant reported that there had been no change with their health since starting Tai Chi. Four Jinan participants and five Halifax participants believed that they had good health even before starting Tai Chi. Those who claimed that they already had good health prior to Tai Chi nevertheless stated that they felt the positive impact of Tai Chi on their physical and mental health.

Table 15: The health improvements that participants mentioned

	Self-perceived being healthy prior to Tai Chi	Mentioned health improvement	Explicitly state or clearly imply their health has been improved since beginning Tai Chi
Jinan	Mr. Liu Mr. Ou Ms. Wang Ms. Shen	15 mentioned health improvement <u>Except:</u> Ms. Feng (inconsistent practice)	<p>Lowered Blood Pressure (5 participants): Ms. Li, Mr. An, Ms. Ning, Mr. Deng, Ms. Tang,</p> <p>Gained strength and more energetic (5): Ms. Meng, Ms. Han, Mr. An, Ms. Bai, Ms. Qi</p> <p>Reduced pain (3): Mr. Cai, Ms. Ning, Ms. Qi</p> <p>Higher spirit and increased mood (8): Mr. Meng, Mr. Cai, Ms. Han, Ms. Jia, Ms. Geng, Mr. An, Ms. Bai, Ms. Tang</p> <p>Overall health improvement (4): Ms. Geng, Mr. An, Ms. Bai, Mr. Kang</p> <p>Satisfied in life and integrated TC into daily lifestyle (10): Ms. Bai, Mr. An, Mr. Liu, Ms. Ning, Mr. Deng, Mr. Peng, Ms. Wang, Ms. Shen, Mr. Kang, Mr. Ou</p> <p>Feel younger and relaxed (5): Mr. An, Ms. Tang, Ms. Shen, Mr. Kang, Ms. Wang</p> <p>A natural way of healing and Yin-Yang (3): Mr. An, Mr. Peng, Mr. Kang</p>
Halifax	Pierre Victor David Andy Harry	17 mentioned health improvement <u>Except:</u> Nick (no change)	<p>Lowered Blood Pressure (1 participant): Cathy</p> <p>Gained strength and more energetic (5): Karen, Irene, Helen, Jenny, Brenda</p> <p>Reduced pain and increased flexibility (11): Pierre, David, Cathy, Helen, Jill, Jeff, Earl, Andy, Fiona, Brenda, Lynn</p> <p>Higher spirits and increased positive mood (7): David, Cathy, Helen, Andy, Jenny, Brenda, Harry</p> <p>Overall health improvement (8): David, Helen, Jeff, Andy, Jenny, Brenda, Gary, Harry</p> <p>Satisfied in life and integrated TC into daily lifestyle (8): Cathy, Jeff, Andy, Jenny, Brenda, Gary, Harry, May</p> <p>Feel younger and relaxed (5): Victor, Jeff, Earl, Fiona, Harry</p> <p>A natural way of healing and Yin-Yang (3): Jeff, Earl, Andy</p>

6.2.4.1 Tai Chi’s impact on participants’ physical health

The majority of participants in Jinan and Halifax believed that their health had been improved by their Tai Chi practice. For example, five Jinan participants said that

their blood pressure became lower. Three Jinan participants and 11 Halifax participants explicitly stated that they felt their physical pain (head, neck, shoulder, back, or leg) had been reduced since beginning Tai Chi. Six participants, three in each city expressed the idea that Tai Chi was a natural and holistic way to supplement the western medical treatment of their various illnesses. Only two participants (Ms. Feng in Jinan and Nick in Halifax) felt that their health had not been changed because of Tai Chi. Of those two participants, Ms. Feng practiced Tai Chi the least regularly compared to her Tai Chi group members. She explained that she was not a morning person and it was difficult for her to get up so early to join her six o'clock daily Tai Chi group. Nick was the individual with the shortest Tai Chi experience (four months) among all 38 participants. He believed that it might take more time for him to feel any changes in his health.

Participants with multiple illnesses (e.g., Ms. Ning, Mr. An, and Brenda) felt that their health had improved dramatically. Ms. Han, Ms. Geng, Jill, and Jenny all had several severe illnesses prior to beginning Tai Chi and they felt their symptoms had lessened. Jeff used Tai Chi to supplement his other treatments and successfully avoided surgery. Ms. Qi, Jenny, and Gary used Tai Chi successfully as part of their recovery process after surgery.

6.2.4.2 The effect of Tai Chi on mood, spirit and stress management

It should be noted that the nine participants (4 in Jinan and 5 in Halifax) who stated that they had already had good health prior to Tai Chi felt that their health improvement was in how they felt, e.g., feeling more energetic and relaxed. Many participants, including the participants who had good health prior to Tai Chi, felt less stressed and more confident in general. For example, 15 participants (8 in Jinan and 7 in Halifax) stated that they experienced higher spirits and a better mood. Eighteen participants (10 in Jinan and 8 in Halifax) reported that they were more satisfied with life and had integrated Tai Chi practice into their daily routine.

Some participants felt that they looked and felt younger than their contemporaries. When Ms. Han, Mr. Peng, and Brenda went to their respective school reunions, their former classmates all commented on their youthful appearance and positive attitude. Mr. An and Mr. Meng's neighbors also said that they looked younger than their

contemporaries when the neighbors saw them practicing Tai Chi outdoors in their respective neighborhoods.

Twenty-five of the 38 participants (16 in Jinan and 9 in Halifax) mentioned that practicing Tai Chi had affected their mood and spirits. Many participants felt that the morning Tai Chi practice either with a group or on their own at home was a good way to start the day. For example, Mr. Meng felt more cheerful because of a good feeling after each morning's Tai Chi practice. Mr. Cai, Ms. Bai, and David said that they enjoyed the friendly chat with Tai Chi group members and it was the friendships that produced good spirits and a better mood. After six months of Tai Chi, Ms. Han felt that she had gained more strength and a better mood. Ms. Jia, Ms. Geng, and Cathy all said that they felt happier and in better spirits from their Tai Chi practice and the interaction with their respective Tai Chi groups. Mr. An experienced good spirit from his daily morning Tai Chi practice. Ms. Bai and Victor felt more confident, relaxed, and young. Mr. An and Ms. Tang were both happy because they believed that Tai Chi had made them more youthful looking. Jeff felt Tai Chi was a pain and stress reliever that made him feel better. Earl, Andy, and Fiona felt that Tai Chi had reduced their stress. Helen and Harry both believed that Tai Chi had reduced their stress in life and improved their overall wellbeing and that they felt more relaxed.

6.2.4.3 Participants talking about their feelings

Participants in both cities shared the same positive feelings regarding their Tai Chi experience despite their cultural differences or their expectations and perceptions of Tai Chi when they started. It is important to note that it is not a common practice for Chinese people to express their feelings openly, especially people of older generations such as the Jinan participants. Therefore, the fact that they actually shared their feelings is an indication of how important their feelings about Tai Chi were to them.

According to the participants in both cities, the positive feelings about their Tai Chi practice seemed to result from the on-going personal interaction with their Tai Chi group members as well as their boosted energy from practicing Tai Chi persistently. The length of their active involvement with Tai Chi seems to be the key, so that some participants experienced positive feelings earlier than others.

6.2.5 Tai Chi class or group scheduling

Participants shared similar patterns in terms of their group schedule. All Tai Chi courses were scheduled on a weekly basis by the various Tai Chi organizations. The five Jinan Tai Chi courses were offered throughout the day ranging from 8am to 1:30pm. The six Halifax Tai Chi courses' starting times ranged from 9:30am to 6pm. The scheduled Tai Chi courses were convenient for participants in both cities. The daytime Tai Chi courses in Jinan were suitable for their attendees because almost all of them traveled to class by public transportation. Halifax daytime courses consisted of retirees. At the same time, the evening courses provided an opportunity for members of their organization who were still working as well as for some retired members who would go to an evening class if they were unable to make to the daytime class. Almost all members of the Halifax Tai Chi courses drove their own vehicles to class, so that it was not a problem for them to go to an evening class if necessary.

As for the informal groups, the earliest starting time for Jinan groups was 6am (Group A) and the latest was 9am (Group E) because it is a long-standing tradition in Jinan and urban China generally for the elders to start their day with physical activity. The two informal Tai Chi groups in Halifax started their practice at 9am (Group K) and 10am (Group L), respectively.

6.2.6 Lifestyle change: Tai Chi practice became a part of a daily routine

Sixteen Jinan participants and 16 Halifax participants stated that Tai Chi had become part of their daily life and practicing Tai Chi was as natural as eating and sleeping. The perceived good feelings from their Tai Chi experience enabled participants to keep doing their Tai Chi practice on a regular basis. Fourteen of the Jinan participants practiced Tai Chi every day. Four of them (Ms. Han, Mr. Deng, Ms. Wang, and Mr. Kang) practiced more than once per day. The other two participants (Ms. Li and Mr. Liu) practiced several times a week in a group and also on their own. As for the Halifax participants, Pierre, Jeff, Brenda, and Harry practiced every day. The majority of the 19 Halifax participants practiced several times a week. Some only practiced once a week due to their busy schedule (Victor) or a serious illness (Jill).

In addition to practicing in a Tai Chi group, 13 Jinan participants and 17 Halifax participants also practiced at home on his or her own. Their shared belief was that

practicing by oneself was as important as with a group for improving their Tai Chi skills and maintaining consistency. The group practice (they believed) enabled them to follow the group's rhythm and share the energy the group members generated together. On the other hand, they explained, practicing at home permitted them to concentrate better on the details of each Tai Chi move without being distracted by others. Some participants also believed that the self-practice could supplement the group practice because one could practice repeatedly the particular move(s) that he or she had difficulty with. It is impossible to stop a group practice to work on one move just for one group member. For those participants who attended their Tai Chi class on a weekly basis, practicing at home on the days that they did not have a class helped them memorize the Tai Chi moves and maintain their Tai Chi skills.

6.2.7 Tai Chi can be a long-term activity into later life

Participants in Jinan and Halifax unanimously believed that Tai Chi was an activity that they could continue for many years. The Tai Chi styles that the participants practiced consisted of the Simplified 24, traditional Yang, and Canadian Tai Chi (for most Halifax groups). The moves and techniques of these Tai Chi styles are not aggressive, compared to some other Tai Chi styles (e.g., the Chen Style). In fact, many Tai Chi moves can be modified to adapt to the physical abilities of each practitioner.

When asked the question regarding the best age to start Tai Chi, some participants believed that the younger the better because of the flexibility of their joints. However, most participants believed that Tai Chi is appropriate for older people because of its gentle and slow moves, regardless of the starting age. As participants learned the basics of Tai Chi moves in any style, they also learned that an individual Tai Chi practitioner could modify the level of difficulty for almost every Tai Chi move. For example, a practitioner could decide how low or how high he or she wanted to squat. Some participants (e.g., Mr. Peng) even told me that they intended to continue practicing Tai Chi sitting on a chair if they could not practice standing on their feet, due to their age or other factors.

6.2.8 Tai Chi can be a form of Chinese martial art

Most participants knew that Tai Chi is a form of a Chinese martial art. Seven participants (Jeff, Gary, Harry, Irene, Mr. Peng, Ms. Wang, and Mr. Kang) had a long-term interest in martial art. Two Jinan participants (Mr. Peng and Ms. Wang) started with another form of martial art at a young age and switched to Tai Chi later in life. Mr. Peng started learning martial arts when he was six years old (for health reasons) and he switched to Tai Chi in his thirties due to an injury. Ms. Wang had also joined a martial art training program for children (at Jinan's Children's Palace¹⁸⁵) and she switched to Tai Chi in her thirties when she found that the other martial art form had become too demanding for her. As for the Halifax participants who were interested in martial arts, they had been inspired by martial arts performances they saw in films (e.g., Bruce Lee or Jacky Chan) when they were young. For example, Gary always wanted to learn martial arts and he decided to take a Tai Chi course when he retired. Harry had always been physically active and developed a strong interest in martial arts as a teenager. He started taking Tai Chi lessons just before his retirement.

It is worthwhile noting the gender difference concerning martial arts. Five of the seven participants who had a long-term interest in martial arts were male. As for the two female participants, Ms. Wang had an older brother who practiced several forms of martial arts when she was a child while Irene's husband had been a very experienced martial arts practitioner for many years. Irene said that sometimes she discussed a Tai Chi move with her husband at home.

6.2.9 Tai Chi is a low-cost activity

Tai Chi was considered a low-cost activity by my participants in both cities and this view is supported by the literature (Taylor-Piliae, 2003; Wang, Collet, and Lau, 2004; and Kerr et al., 2008). It was possible for Jinan participants to take a government-subsidized¹⁸⁶ Tai Chi course with affordable fees, or simply join a public informal group

¹⁸⁵Every city in China has a palace (usually it is one building or a complex) operated by the city government, especially designed for children, which enables various types of games and activities. These places are known as "Children's Palace" (Shao Nian Gong, 少年宫)

¹⁸⁶Government-subsidized course fees apply to all courses (including Tai Chi) and for everyone in the seniors' continuing education institute.

to practice for free. There was only one Jinan participant (Ms. Bai) who self-identified as belonging to a low-income category. I learned that in Halifax one Tai Chi organization offers the option of paying reduced fees if the person proves he or she has a low income. Regardless of this policy, the members of the Halifax Tai Chi classes self-identified as middle class with adequate pensions, thus paying the full fees for Tai Chi courses did not appear to be a problem for them. Consequently, none of them took the offer of a reduced fee. Obviously a reduced fee policy would benefit low-income Halifax elders if they were aware of Tai Chi and interested in it. Other than this particular Halifax Tai Chi organization, there are Tai Chi courses offered by community centres in the city. Those classes are even more affordable because of the support of the municipal government.

6.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO CULTURAL GROUPS

As might be expected, there are a number of differences between the participants in Jinan and those in Halifax.

6.3.1 Age at retirement

The different socio-political policies and customs in China and Canada influenced participants' various retirement ages in Jinan and Halifax. The details are presented in Tables 16 (p. 323) and 17 (p. 324). The mandatory retirement age in China is primarily based on the individual's category of work and professional level within the category. Details of those differences are noted after Table 16 (p. 323). Three points are worth noting: first, there were mandatory retirement ages for the Jinan participants and their cohorts, whereas Halifax participants and their contemporaries had more variability with regard to the age at which an individual retired. In Halifax, however, retirement was not always a matter of choice. Several of the participants would have liked to take early retirement but needed to work longer in order to increase their pension. Second, all the participants had retired prior to my interviewing them, except for three Jinan participants. Third, in both cities, after their official retirement, in principle, individuals in good health could get at least a part-time job if they wished (assuming they could find one). For example, after Ms. Tang retired from a factory, she found a part-time job in a shop and worked for several hours a week. Gary also worked part-time several hours a week in a

store after his retirement. In contrast, after Victor retired as a health care professional, he did the same type of work part-time at a different organization.

With regard to their pensions, all Jinan participants received (or would receive) a retirement pension from their employers. The pension system is different in China, especially for the older generation whose employment pension had been in place before the government pension reform introduced in 2015 (Liu and Sun, 2016). Because all the Jinan participants had worked in state-owned enterprises or had been civil servants, their pensions were secure and regulated. Although their pensions were only a percentage of what their salary had been, they were still able to afford their daily necessities. In this regard, two factors to consider are the relatively low cost of living in China and the typically thrifty lifestyle of the participants' generation. In contrast, not every Halifax participant received a pension from their respective employers due to a short or inconsistent employment history. For example, Irene, Jill, and Karen had no employment-related retirement pension due to their short and irregular work histories. Most of the Halifax participants received the two government-provided income sources for older people in Canada: Old Age Security (OAS) and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP).

Table 16: Jinan participants' age at retirement

Retirement age (years)	48	<u>50</u>	<u>55</u>	58	<u>60</u>	61	64	<u>65</u>	Not yet retired
Jinan Participants In order of the youngest to the oldest	Ms. Jia	Ms. Bai Ms. Li Ms. Tang Ms. Wang	Mr. An Mr. Cai Ms. Han Ms. Ning	Ms. Qing	Mr. Deng Mr. Liu Mr. Meng	Mr. Ou	Mr. Kang	Ms. Shen	Ms. Feng Ms. Geng Mr. Peng

Note: The four underlined ages are the most common mandatory retirement categories in general and the most relevant to the Jinan participants:

- 1) Female factory workers and shop salespersons retire at 50;
- 2) Male factory workers, health care workers, and school teachers retire at 55;
- 3) Male government officers and engineers alike retire at 60 and female government workers retire at 55; and
- 4) University full professors retire at 65.

Table 17: Halifax participants' age at retirement

Retirement age (years)	53	55	59	61	62	63	64	65	Special Cases*
Halifax Participants In order of the youngest to the oldest	Jeff	Brenda Harry Nick Pierre	Gary	Fiona Lynn	Cathy	Helen	Andy Earl May	David Victor	Irene Jill Karen Jenny

* Irene, Jill, and Karen had no employment-related retirement pension due to their short and irregular work histories.

* Jenny had been retired for ten years in 2012.

6.3.2 Social class

In both cities, the social class of most participants seemed to be closely related to their level of education. All Halifax participants believed that they belonged to the middle class and there were no obvious indications that they did not. Despite individual differences in income, family situation, and lifestyle, all Halifax participants appeared to be satisfied with their social status. All Jinan participants were proud to be respected members of their society, but they did not all self-identify as middle class. Like the Halifax participants, Jinan participants' income levels differed. However, they seemed to be living their lives based on what they could afford, and their lifestyle did not require a high income. Their way of living was not unusual compared to their generation in China. As already indicated, members of the Jinan research participants' age cohorts tend to be very frugal. For example, Ms. Bai believed that her family income was below the city's poverty line, but she was able to make ends meet. She was not ashamed or embarrassed to tell me this during the interview. Traditionally, saving what one can is considered a good habit in China. Similarly, most Halifax participants also seemed to live within their means.

In Jinan and Halifax, the participants had had (or still had) a similar range of jobs in healthcare, engineering, teaching, government, and factory or white-collar and blue-collar work for private or governmental organizations. In neither group had anyone worked in the entertainment industry. The companies that Halifax participants worked for were in the private sector whereas Jinan participants worked for state-owned factories or companies.

6.3.3 Length of time since beginning Tai Chi

The length of time since beginning Tai Chi was very different for each participant within each cultural group, and there were also differences between the groups. The details of individual participant's length of Tai Chi practice were examined in Chapter 5, Table 10: Jinan participants' lengths of Tai Chi experience (p. 119) and Table 14: Halifax participants' lengths of Tai Chi experience (p. 196).

The length of time for all 38 participants ranges from four months (Nick) to 56 years (Mr. Kang) (see Table 18, p. 325). The range for the 19 Jinan participants is from one year (Ms. Li and Mr. Meng) to 56 years (Mr. Kang). The range for Halifax participants is from four months (Nick) to 30 years (Harry). Looking at each city separately, in Jinan, Ms. Wang had practiced for 30 years, Ms. Shen for 42 years, and Mr. Kang 56 years. In Halifax, Brenda had practiced for 18 years, May for 20 years, Gary and Lynn both for 23 years, and Harry for 30 years. The following two tables summarize the length of Tai Chi practice for all 38 participants.

Table 18: Participants' length of Tai Chi practice by city

Years – from the shortest to the longest																			
Jinan	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	8	15	20	24	25	42	56
Halifax	0.25	0.5	1	1.5	2	2	4	6	6	10	12	12	12	13	18	20	23	23	30

Table 19: Comparison of the longest and shortest lengths of practice by city

(In years)	Shortest	Longest
Jinan	Ms. Li (1)	Mr. Kang (56)
Halifax	Nick (0.33)	Harry (30)

To sum up, in the category of less than five years of practice, there were more Jinan participants (11) than Halifax participants (7); in the 6-10-year group, there were two Jinan participants and three Halifax participants; and there did not seem to be a pattern to compare the participants from both cities who had practiced for longer than 10 years. There does not appear to be any reason to believe that the differences in years of practice between the groups biased the study's conclusions (Chapter 8) in any way.

Not surprisingly, there appears to be a close association between length of practice and being a Tai Chi instructor. To take the participants who practiced for the longest in each city, the four Jinan participants (Mr. Kang, 56 years; Ms. Shen, 42 years; Ms. Wang, 25 years; and Mr. Peng, 24 years) were all Tai Chi instructors. Correspondingly, the five Halifax participants (Harry, 30 years, Gary and Lynn, 23 years; May, 20 years; and Brenda, 18 years) were also instructors at the time of the interview or had taught at some point in the past (May). The only exception was Ms. Tang, who had practiced for 20 years but did not teach Tai Chi or express any interest in doing so. The main motivation for teaching Tai Chi among these instructors in both cities was that they were devoted Tai Chi practitioners and they wanted to promote Tai Chi. It also appears that they loved teaching. It did not appear that most of them were teaching Tai Chi primarily for financial gain because some taught Tai Chi as volunteers (Ms. Shen, Gary, Lynn, and Brenda), some taught for a small honorarium (Mr. Kang and Mr. Peng), and only a few taught as a paid job (Ms. Wang, Harry, and May).

6.3.4 Various motivations at the starting point

As indicated previously, research participants began Tai Chi for various reasons (Table 20).

Table 20: The initial reasons of all 38 participants regarding their decisions on joining a Tai Chi group

Why participants joined a Tai Chi group	Number of participants	
	Jinan (19)	Halifax (19)
1. Fill in the time gap immediately following retirement	2	5
2. Preserve Chinese culture	9	0
3. Long-term interest in martial arts	3	4
4. It looked good (watched local Tai Chi group demonstrations or on film)	10	5
5. Heard about Tai Chi's health benefits from friends	8	9
6. To support spouse who was interested in joining a Tai Chi group	0	2
7. Look for something to do for the long-term	16	15
8. To socialize and make friends in a Tai Chi group	3	4
9. To reduce stress	0	6

The largest difference reflects the Chinese identity of the Jinan participants: pride regarding taking Tai Chi because it was part of their Chinese culture was shared by all Jinan participants (though not in those exact words). In comparison, Halifax participants were aware of the fact that Tai Chi had originated in China, but this awareness did not appear to be a strong motivator for their interest in Tai Chi.

Jinan participants had all been exposed to Tai Chi practitioners or groups in public parks or city squares frequently and long before they themselves began Tai Chi. The persistence and good health of the Tai Chi practitioners they had observed contributed to the motivation of the Jinan participants. For example, there had been a Tai Chi group practicing by the side of the street on Ms. Ning's morning commute to work. Every morning her bus passed the Tai Chi group and that was one of the reasons that she started Tai Chi when she retired. In Halifax, some participants had seen martial arts films in their younger years and some had seen demonstrations of Tai Chi groups in Halifax promoting their programs. Moreover, Halifax participants had usually heard about Tai Chi from other people before starting. Their middle-class status and educational level enabled them to read about Tai Chi. For example, Andy, as a scientist, was so used to

reading scientific journals that when he heard that Tai Chi was helping his friend's health, he decided to read some health-related journals to learn more about Tai Chi before taking his first Tai Chi course.

Reducing stress through Tai Chi practice was a motivator for some Halifax participants. This was not articulated by Jinan participants because the concept of stress was not considered or talked about by their generation in China. (In fact, until very recently mental health issues have not been openly talked about in China.) Six Halifax participants said that they were hoping to reduce stress when they started Tai Chi. It seemed that their stress was related to work, personal health, family situation, or a combination of those factors. In contrast, Jinan participants were more motivated to take Tai Chi for their overall health, especially for their physical health, without referring to stress. However, some Jinan participants did mention that they became much more relaxed at some point due to their Tai Chi experience. In Chinese culture, working hard to reach one's full potential is considered a good character trait. It is generally assumed that one can work through obstacles on the way to success. This notion was particularly true for the generation of Jinan participants in this research. In all probability the Jinan participants experienced stress similar to that of the Halifax participants, but they would not have identified it and would have treated it as part of life and just dealt with it on their own. Some Jinan participants and their contemporaries had gone through extreme hardships in their life. The fact that they did not say they started Tai Chi to reduce stress does not mean that they did not have any stress.

As witnessed by the number of self-help books, "the self as a project" is a theme in North American culture (Dolby, 2005). This is the idea that people need to work on themselves, constantly maintaining and improving themselves, much in the way they might work on owning a house or a boat. Halifax participant Cathy stated this explicitly. She said that she wanted to constantly improve her health and herself as a whole. She felt much more energy from her Tai Chi practice and would "go out for no reason" on a regular basis. On the other hand, living in a collective culture, perhaps Jinan participants have never heard of this concept, although they were definitely concerned about improving their own health. Ms. Jia emphasized that she had to make sure she had good health in order to live a long and healthy life without being a burden on her only child.

She used her own example of caring for her older father and sharing the long-term daily care with her two sisters and came to the conclusion that when she became older it would be too much responsibility for her only child to care for her.

6.3.5 Support from participants' respective spouses

Another distinct difference between the two groups was how a spouse demonstrated his or her support for the partner who was practicing Tai Chi. It was not unusual for Halifax participants to be in the same Tai Chi course or group as their partner. Two Halifax participants began Tai Chi mainly to support their respective spouses. Lynn started taking her first Tai Chi course with her husband to support his decision to fulfill his long-term desire for martial arts. Nick started taking a Tai Chi course to support his wife because he thought that his wife would be more likely to stay with the Tai Chi beginners' course if they took it together. The spouses of Jinan participants were also supportive, though it was much less common for a couple to take a Tai Chi course together. For example, the respective husbands of Ms. Jia and Ms. Han supported their Tai Chi practice. Ms. Jia's husband would cook lunch at home while she was out taking her Tai Chi course. He also watched and encouraged her when she practiced in their courtyard in the evening. Ms. Han's husband often did housework and commented on her good progress. Mr. Deng is the only participant who practiced Tai Chi with his wife (she was not a participant in this research) on a daily basis in their informal group and at their home. He and his wife shared the same interest when they began their first Tai Chi course.

6.3.6 The differences between Jinan and Halifax Tai Chi instructional organization

There are Tai Chi instructional organization differences between the two cities. All Tai Chi courses offered in Jinan had a class leader (Ban Zhang 班长) whose role was to help communication between class members and the Tai Chi institute's administration office. The class leader was a member of the class. Unlike the paid Tai Chi instructors, a class leader was a volunteer appointed by the school. There was no class leader in any Halifax Tai Chi organization. However, in some Halifax but no Jinan organizations, there

were one or two corner(s)¹⁸⁷ in a class. The so-called corners place themselves at either end of the front row so as to provide a model for classmates to follow during practice. The instructor taught the class by standing in front of the group facing the class members. When the class members turned left or right during class, if they were not familiar with the sequence of the moves they could follow the moves of one of the two corners. Some corners intended to become instructors in the future, so that being a corner was considered good experience. Most corners were members of the class. Sometimes a corner was in an intermediate course, but served as a corner in a beginners' course.

The Tai Chi instructor qualifying methods are also different in Jinan and in Halifax. Jinan instructors were all certified by the Chinese Sports Commission,¹⁸⁸ not by the schools where they taught Tai Chi. In Halifax, depending on the organizations where Tai Chi courses were offered, some instructors were paid by their Tai Chi organization while others were volunteers. Some Halifax instructors were certified by their own Tai Chi organization to teach classes within the organization.

6.3.7 The Tai Chi forms that participants practiced in the two cities differ

Most Halifax participants practiced a Tai Chi set that was different from any of the Tai Chi styles in China. To protect the privacy of the Tai Chi organizations, the Tai Chi set that the majority of the Halifax participants practiced is referred to as “the Canadian Tai Chi set” (see Section 2.3.6 Tai Chi’s transformation from China to Canada, p. 30). It was developed specifically to provide a Tai Chi set to improve health. The early practitioners who joined such a Tai Chi organization in Canada mostly looked for a means of improving their health.

Tai Chi is about balance and harmony. The main differences between the Canadian Tai Chi set and the Tai Chi styles in China relate to the type of movement and the way of achieving harmony. The aim of a Tai Chi set is to cultivate the internal balance of the practitioner with circular moves around the Dan Tian (an acupuncture point in the abdomen, see footnote on p. 32). Irrespective of the style, Chinese

¹⁸⁷A corner is a volunteer and is expected to be skillful in Tai Chi. However, the corner may or may not be the highest skilled member in a class.

¹⁸⁸The Chinese Sports Commission provides nationwide qualifying examinations. And then it is up to each individual to search for a job teaching a Tai Chi class.

practitioners practice with slightly bent arms and legs and their arms always move in a circular motion as if they were holding a ball (Sutton, 1991). However, when Halifax participants learn and practice the Canadian Tai Chi set, their limbs tend to be outstretched to the maximum. This modification of the moves seems to be contrary to the original aim of Tai Chi, which is based on perpetual circular movement. During my observation of Halifax Tai Chi groups, some participants and their classmates actually mentioned that they had experienced back pain that they suspected was from stretching their limbs too hard.

6.3.8 Whether Tai Chi instructors are paid for teaching a class

As was already mentioned in section 6.3.3 (p. 325), getting paid or not for teaching Tai Chi did not seem to be an important factor for Tai Chi instructors in either city. Whether an instructor was paid or not depended on the Tai Chi organizations' policies. Not all Tai Chi instructors in this research were paid to teach Tai Chi courses. All Jinan Tai Chi instructors from the five Tai Chi courses (Organization A and B) received a small honorarium. These Jinan instructors were either retired with a pension or still working, so that the payments they received from teaching Tai Chi did not constitute their main income. They said that they enjoyed teaching Tai Chi, whether they received payment or not. In Halifax, two Tai Chi instructors (with Organizations E and F) received payment for teaching. Four instructors (with Organizations C and D) were volunteers. The leaders of the informal Tai Chi groups (10 in Jinan and 2 in Halifax) were all volunteers.

Participants in both cities respected the Tai Chi skills of their course instructors and their group leaders, but they told me that they apparently felt that they were on an equal footing with the instructors and leaders. In other words, based on the interviews and on their behavior that I observed, teaching a class or leading a group did not significantly change the status of a person within a Tai Chi group.

Participants who were Tai Chi instructors were certified, but the certifying process was different in Jinan and in Halifax. Jinan Tai Chi instructors went through a national examination system and received various levels of certification (e.g., national, provincial, or municipal). The certification provided credentials that enabled the

individual to teach a Tai Chi class or to be a referee or judge at a Tai Chi tournament. The instructors all had earned the appropriate credentials before they were hired. At the same time, there were other Tai Chi practitioners who had the equivalent credentials but were not necessarily hired to teach. In contrast, the five Halifax participants who were instructors had followed various routes. Gary, Lynn, and Brenda all started as members taking beginners' Tai Chi courses in their respective Tai Chi organizations. After each of them completed the beginners' and the intermediate courses, they took training within their organization and then became instructors. Harry had taught Tai Chi at various Tai Chi organizations. He started by taking private Tai Chi lessons, and then he taught private Tai Chi classes. Gradually, he became an instructor for several Tai Chi organizations. May taught one Tai Chi class for a short time as a paid job. A neighbor recommended her to a seniors' facility that did not seem to require formal credentials.

6.3.9 The connection between Tai Chi clothing and socio-economic status

Tai Chi uniforms existed in both cities but the style of the uniforms differed. Details of Tai Chi uniform styles were discussed in section 5.2.7 (p. 118). Almost all participants had at least one Tai Chi uniform. Jinan participants' uniforms consisted of a long-sleeved shirt and long pants with no logo and made of soft, thin material, while Halifax participants' uniforms consisted of a T-shirt or sweatshirt and sweatpants with their Tai Chi organizations' logo on them. Jinan participants could go to their formal class or informal group practice wearing any type of clothing. Halifax participants were generally encouraged to wear their Tai Chi uniform in formal classes. The members of the two informal Halifax Tai Chi groups never wore uniforms.

Clothing is important in the sense that it can be an indication of a serious commitment to Tai Chi or evidence of the unity of their Tai Chi organization, but it was not a social status marker for participants in either city. For some individuals it was a question of personal preference. Jinan participants likely purchased their first Tai Chi uniform for their class performance at the end of the first course they took. They would have purchased them in retail shops because their Tai Chi organizations did not sell uniforms. If several classmates bought the uniform together, the shop owner would offer them a discount. In Jinan, it is common to see Tai Chi practitioners wearing either their

Tai Chi uniform or everyday clothing for their group practice and on the buses to and from parks. The Tai Chi uniforms are affordable for people with a low income. For example, Ms. Tang always wore her Tai Chi uniform in class and she told me that it was to show her dedication to Tai Chi. Ms. Bai considered herself in the low-income category, but she owned three Tai Chi uniforms. Ms. Geng always wore her everyday clothing in her Tai Chi group simply because she said that she did not like Tai Chi uniforms. As a health care professional, she could have easily afforded a Tai Chi uniform. In Halifax, individuals who took their beginners' course in most Tai Chi organizations generally received their first Tai Chi uniform included in their course fees. As they continued with their course, the organizations would periodically distribute new uniforms (with the same logo but a different design). It seemed to be a commercial practice or a form of unifying. The organization encouraged its members to purchase more uniforms and strongly encouraged them to wear them in class. In any given Halifax Tai Chi course, the majority of people wore a uniform. Since the two informal Halifax groups were not part of a formal organization, they always practiced in their everyday clothing. As a class instructor, Garry always wore his Tai Chi uniform in class. Karen, who had no retirement pension, also always wore her Tai Chi uniform to class. Victor, a health care professional, wore his everyday clothing to his Tai Chi class because he found it more comfortable.

6.3.10 Practicing with classmates outside a Tai Chi class

Practicing with classmates outside a Tai Chi class was common in Jinan but not at all in Halifax. At the time of my field research, 14 Jinan participants were taking formal Tai Chi courses. Thirteen of them practiced with their classmates in informal groups in public places outdoors. The exception, Mr. An, lived more than a two-hour bus ride from the city so he practiced by himself at home on the days when he had no Tai Chi class. The other five Jinan participants were not taking a Tai Chi course, so they practiced with their informal groups as well as at home on their own. Twelve Halifax participants were taking Tai Chi courses at the time of my fieldwork, but none of them practiced Tai Chi with classmates outside of their respective classes. The other seven belonged to two informal groups. Among the seven, Jill was the only one who had never taken a formal

Tai Chi course, so she only practiced with her informal group. The other six participants all had former Tai Chi classmates in their groups. In other words, some had become acquainted in a previous Tai Chi course or some had been coworkers before retiring and before taking a Tai Chi course.

The repeated regular practice provided participants with an opportunity to help each other improve their Tai Chi techniques. For example, Ms. Ning practiced with all her classmates once a week in class and with three of her classmates three days a week in their informal group. In total, they practiced together four days a week. Jinan participants told me that the original idea of having informal groups outside of their Tai Chi course had been suggested to them by one of their Tai Chi instructors, who thought it would help them remember the Tai Chi moves during their summer break. They found that it was helpful and they enjoyed seeing each other more often. Furthermore, it is common to see random Tai Chi groups practicing in public places in Jinan. Based on my daily visits to several public parks where many Tai Chi groups' practice took place and on my casual conversations with them, the members of most of those groups knew each other as neighbors or former coworkers, but not from having taken a Tai Chi course together. Halifax participants seemed to be comfortable practicing on their own at home and were not in the habit of getting together to practice outside their class. Jenny mentioned that once she had a Tai Chi classmate with whom she was very close and the two of them would go to a museum or watch a movie together, but they did not meet to practice outside class. The fact that Halifax participants did not practice together outside class may also be an indication of a less strong commitment to Tai Chi and to each other; they may have also felt that practicing at home is enough. The climate difference could be another explanation, since Jinan's winter season is shorter and warmer than that of Halifax. In addition, perhaps the most significant factor is that there is not a long-standing tradition of practicing Tai Chi in outdoor public places in Halifax.

6.3.11 Background music used in Tai Chi class or individual practice at home

All five formal courses and 10 informal groups in Jinan used the same background Tai Chi music. It was created for the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set and promoted by the National Sports Committee in Beijing in the 1950s and has been used by Tai Chi

practitioners in China and many other countries where the Simplified 24 Tai Chi set is practiced. When the Jinan groups practiced other sets of Tai Chi such as the Traditional Yang or the Competition Set, they played different background music. Only one Halifax informal group (Group K) used background music when they practiced the Simplified 24 set and it was identical to that used in Jinan. Group K's leader Harry provided the music, which he received from his Tai Chi instructor who had emigrated from China to Canada. All other Halifax groups (six formal courses and one informal group) practiced Tai Chi silently in their respective groups.

Individual participants in both cities practiced Tai Chi on their own at home either with or without music depending on the individual's choice. For example, Mr. An and Mr. Cai both practiced at home respectively with Tai Chi music to keep their concentration and the rhythm of the Tai Chi moves. Ms. Bai sometimes used music at home for the same reason, but other times she practiced in silence so she could concentrate on each movement. Victor was one of the few Halifax participants who used music when practicing at home, although it was soft, calming Western music without lyrics. Harry also practiced with music at home and he used the Chinese Tai Chi music to keep the rhythm. May used Chinese music (not Tai Chi music) at home for a calming background. All the formal Tai Chi courses involved in this research in Halifax assumed that any music would break concentration, so no background music of any kind was used in their classes.

It is important to point out that all formal Tai Chi courses in Halifax practiced the Canadian Style Tai Chi. This set was created without any background music. Consequently, the popular Chinese Tai Chi music for the 24 Tai Chi set would not have matched the moves.

6.3.12 Whether having grandchildren makes a difference in Tai Chi use, socializing, or commitment to Tai Chi

The effect of having grandchildren on Tai Chi participation is of cultural significance. Unfortunately, no questions related to grandchildren were included in my Interview Guide (Appendix D). Any information on this topic was unsolicited, consequently the participants themselves provided the information spontaneously. Many

more unsolicited details about grandchildren were given by the Jinan participants than by the Halifax participants.

Having grandchildren had an impact on Jinan participants with regard to how they prioritized their Tai Chi practice, but it did not seem to have an impact on those Halifax participants who had grandchildren. It is considered normal in Jinan for ordinary people to talk about their children and grandchildren. Jinan participants (except Ms. Tang, who talked little about her children) were eager to talk about their children and grandchildren. Halifax participants volunteered less information about children and grandchildren but I did learn that two Halifax participants each had two grandchildren; eight Halifax participants had at least one grandchild, and nine had no grandchildren (see Table 21).

Table 21: The number of participants’ children and grandchildren

	The number of children							The number of grandchildren			
	None	1	2	3	4	5	At least one child, but the total number unknown	None	1	2	At least one grandchild, but the total number unknown
Jinan	0	11	6	1	1	0	N/A	7	6	2	4
Halifax	3	4	5	4	0	1	2	9	0	2	8

Almost half of the participants had no grandchildren (7 Jinan participants and 9 Halifax participants). Nine Halifax participants specifically stated that they had no grandchildren. Three Jinan participants (Mr. Deng, Mr. Liu, and Ms. Shen) talked about one of their grandchildren. Ms. Tang mentioned that all her children had moved out, but did not provide any more information. Two Halifax participants (Harry and May) both talked about their two respective grandchildren. Eight Halifax participants talked about at least one grandchild, but they did not specify how many grandchildren they had.

That Jinan participants brought up grandchildren frequently likely reflects a cultural difference between them and the Halifax participants. It was a common belief among Jinan participants (and their generation in general) that caring for grandchildren full-time once the babies are born should be a top priority, more important than their Tai Chi participation. Of the six Jinan participants with one grandchild and the two participants with two grandchildren, all of their respective grandchildren and those

grandchildren's parents lived in Jinan, except for Ms. Li (her grandchild and her son's family lived in a different city). Mr. Ou, for example, spent seven years caring for his grandson. The boy was born after Mr. Ou's retirement while he was taking his first Tai Chi course. During those years, Mr. Ou attended his Tai Chi classes, but he did not practice Tai Chi at home or socialize with his Tai Chi classmates because taking care of his grandson was his top priority. Ms. Qi also took care of her grandchild full-time for seven years until the child was ready to go to school. This is a common practice for the generation of the Jinan participants. For example, Ms. Geng's first Tai Chi group disbanded because several group members moved away to care for their newborn grandchildren.

Halifax participants' Tai Chi practice did not seem to have been affected by having grandchildren. None of the Halifax participants mentioned that having grandchildren had interrupted or altered their Tai Chi practice in any way. Unlike the Jinan participants, it does not seem to be a general practice for Halifax participants and their generation in Halifax to provide full-time care for their newborn grandchild. During the interviews, Halifax participants did not talk as much about their children or grandchildren as Jinan participants did. May showed me her family photograph during the interview at her home. Harry announced at the break of his informal Tai Chi group practice that he would be away for a week to visit his grandchildren so there would be a substitute group leader for that week. During the interview, Lynn mentioned that she showed several Tai Chi moves to her two school-aged grandchildren when she and her husband visited their son's family in a different province for several days.

6.3.13 Tai Chi practice results in taking less medication

All participants were asked if practicing Tai Chi had impacted their general health, including the medication that they were taking. None of the Halifax participants indicated that they had reduced the dosage of their medication or stopped taking their medication as a result of their Tai Chi practice. On the other hand, three Jinan participants stated clearly that they had either reduced the dosages/amount of their medication (Mr. Meng) or completely stopped taking medication (Ms. Han and Mr. An) since the beginning of their Tai Chi practice. Among the three, Mr. Meng had numerous

health problems and took medication prior to Tai Chi. He believed that Tai Chi enabled him to become stronger and reduce his medication. Ms. Han, a health care worker, took medication for various health problems prior to Tai Chi and after six months she felt her symptoms greatly improved so that she gradually stopped taking medication. Mr. An took various medications prior to Tai Chi but felt they were not having any beneficial effects. He started feeling his health improve after about four years of Tai Chi practice.

6.3.14 Tai Chi and cultural identity

Considering the fact that Tai Chi originated in China and given its widespread popularity, Jinan participants obviously shared a strong perception that Tai Chi was part of Chinese culture. Half (9 of 19) of the Jinan participants firmly believed that practicing Tai Chi was not only benefitting them personally, but was also important in preserving an aspect of Chinese culture and carrying on a tradition. Several Jinan participants referred to Tai Chi as a “Chinese treasure.”¹⁸⁹ They expressed their pride in being a Tai Chi practitioner and being Chinese. Although it was not part of my research questions, Jinan participants voluntarily told me that they believed that Tai Chi should be taught to children in school in China, together with other “Chinese treasures” such as Chinese calligraphy, and Beijing Opera.

As already stated, Halifax participants were aware that Tai Chi had been brought to Canada from China. However, most Halifax participants viewed Tai Chi primarily as a physical activity. They appeared to pay little attention to the philosophical foundation of Tai Chi, for example, the Daoist Yin-Yang Theory that guides its practice. Halifax participants did not refer to Tai Chi as an aspect or icon of Chinese culture. The majority of Halifax participants learned and practiced the Canadian Tai Chi style. In their beginners’ course, they were informed that the founder of this version of Tai Chi had modified the moves. Most Halifax participants never learned other types of Tai Chi. They were satisfied with the Tai Chi style that they started with and intended to stay with it. Few Halifax participants told me that they were interested in knowing the technical differences between the Canadian Tai Chi style and the Tai Chi styles that were practiced in China. Irene and Pierre, however, were interested in knowing what types of Tai Chi the

¹⁸⁹ guo cui, 国粹

Chinese practitioners in China might practice, but they believed that there were no courses offering these in Halifax. When asked why Halifax participants chose the Canadian Style Tai Chi, they said that this style was locally available and since they had started with it, they did not see any reason to change to a different style.

The outdoor informal group in Halifax actually practiced the Simplified 24 and the original Yang style Tai Chi, which were the styles commonly practiced by the Jinan participants and other Jinan Tai Chi practitioners. Participants in this group had learned these two styles from their group leader in various courses at a local fitness club. Several members of this group had joined a tour group to visit a few cities in China. They were excited to watch the local Chinese Tai Chi practitioners practicing the same styles of Tai Chi in open spaces near the hotels where they stayed on their trip. On two occasions, they even joined local Tai Chi groups' morning practice and were proud to be able to practice the same type of Tai Chi as the locals in China.

6.3.15 The religious or philosophical meanings of Tai Chi

No participants in either city saw Tai Chi as a religious or a spiritual experience, but they did perceive Tai Chi with different philosophical meanings. The Jinan participants were not religious but they were aware of Yin-Yang Theory as the core of Daoism and they told me that they knew that the founder of Tai Chi, Zhang San Feng, had been a monk in a Daoist temple in China. However, they were not followers of Daoism and none of them attended a temple or monastery. As for the Halifax participants, most were not aware of the Yin-Yang Theory or Daoism, except that they were able to recognize the Daoist symbol on their Tai Chi uniform. Almost all Halifax participants appear to have grown up as Christians and had been practicing their own religion in their own church with their families for many years before starting Tai Chi.

The Jinan Tai Chi course instructors mentioned Yin-Yang Theory when they explained the logic of keeping one's balance in a Tai Chi move, without going into the theoretical foundation of Daoism. Halifax instructors taught their Tai Chi classes the physical Tai Chi moves, without mentioning either the Yin-Yang Theory or Daoism.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed a number of similar and dissimilar cultural characteristics regarding the two cultural groups of participants. The most interesting similarity is that all participants in both groups viewed Tai Chi as a long-term activity that they could continue late in life for their wellbeing. Another notable similarity is that most participants in both groups had started Tai Chi more than once. Although the reasons for them to quit varied, the fact that they re-started and continued demonstrates their dedication and commitment. Almost all participants in both groups have integrated Tai Chi into a daily routine that further reinforced their commitment to Tai Chi.

The most important cultural difference between the two groups was their point of view with regard to the meaning of Tai Chi. The majority of Jinan participants emphasized a common understanding regarding Tai Chi as an icon of Chinese culture while most Halifax participants paid little attention to Tai Chi's philosophical meaning. There was also a marked difference between the two groups regarding how they prioritized Tai Chi and caring for their grandchildren. Caring for grandchildren was more important than Tai Chi for some Jinan participants. Halifax participants' Tai Chi practice seems not to have been affected by having grandchildren. Chapter 7 presents additional research findings and discussion.

CHAPTER 7 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

7.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis began during the Jinan field research and continued throughout the Halifax field research and the thesis writing process.

7.1.1 Preparation procedure

This section explains how the collected data were processed and analyzed. While searching for themes in the data, the similar concepts that were repeated by research participants became the common themes. The four main themes then derived from the common themes.

7.1.1.1 The collected data

The data collected from interviews in Jinan went through both transcription and translation prior to and during analysis. All 19 Jinan interviews were conducted in Mandarin or the Jinan dialect, depending on the personal choice of each participant. The majority of Jinan participants was either born or had lived in Jinan for their whole life, so the local dialect was their only spoken language. Two participants who were born elsewhere in China spoke Mandarin and several others spoke Mandarin by choice, probably because of their professional work experience over the years.

All Halifax participants spoke English as their mother tongue or the dominant language of their adulthood permitting the data to be collected in English. The majority of Halifax participants were English-Canadians, except for one French-Canadian who is bilingual and two European-born Canadians. Of those two European-born participants, one was from an English-speaking country. Data collected from the Halifax interviews were generally more abundant than in Jinan, perhaps partially due to the audio recording in Halifax so that every sound and tone of the interviews were captured.

7.1.1.2 Data formatting

For both field sites, the data were gradually converted to text format even while additional data were being collected. The original forms of raw data included individual interview transcripts, participant observation notes, fieldwork daily logs, and insights

gained on site. In order to best capture the socio-cultural context and perceptions of the participants from the Jinan site, all conversational data (either in Mandarin or the Jinan dialect) collected in Jinan, together with other forms of data, were written down in Simplified Chinese. Occasionally, some data were directly written in English in my notes in Jinan because certain concepts or perceptions of the participants were more precisely captured with English phrases regardless of the fact that none of the Jinan participants spoke any English. Sometimes the insights that I gained from day to day field research in Jinan and my thoughts for data analysis were immediately recorded in English in my notebook for the same reason. More importantly, the research methods used in this study originated in the English language.

All data collected in Jinan were translated into English on site or later after my return to Halifax. Data collected in Halifax were recorded in English, regardless of whether they were in written or audio-recorded form. The latter were transcribed verbatim, and all identifiers including personal names were either removed from transcripts or anonymized to protect the research participants' privacy. Names of organizations (except for the two institutes for retirees in Jinan where most Jinan participants took their Tai Chi courses) and locations involved in my data were also anonymized.

7.1.1.3 Pseudonyms

The pseudonyms used for my participants are in two styles. The Halifax participants communicated among themselves on a first name basis so they are referred to by a first name pseudonym. However, calling an older person by her or his first name in China would show a lack of respect and would not be acceptable. In addition, unlike most English given names, the Chinese characters used in given names do not indicate the gender of the individual. Once the Chinese given names were written in Pinyin (the phonetic form of Chinese that uses the Latin alphabets), there would be no way of knowing the gender of the individual. Therefore, the Jinan participants were given arbitrary surnames with a prefix of either Ms. or Mr.

7.1.2 Analytic approaches

Content analysis is a set of methods for systematically coding and analyzing qualitative data. These methods are used across the social sciences and the humanities to explore explicit and covert meanings in text (Bernard, 2011, p. 443). Content analysis studies various forms of data, including documents, interview audio or video recording, drawings or photographs. Coding serves to extract concepts from raw data and “develop them in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 159). Following Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey’s (2011) suggestions for analytical methods, in my analysis I applied both inductive and deductive coding through Open Coding and Axial Coding. Open Coding breaks data into manageable smaller pieces while coding for categories or themes. Axial Coding relates codes (categories or themes and concepts) to one another inductively and deductively. In my analysis process, the initial codes were developed through deductive and inductive coding, and then themes were developed through Axial Coding.

Inductive codes came directly from the collected raw data to allow the data to “speak for itself.” Inductive codes allow themes to emerge from collected data that had been gradually identified from issues and concepts during the coding process. For example, identified repetitions of what participants said during interviews (e.g., many participants told me how much they appreciated the health benefits that they perceived as resulting from their Tai Chi experience) and emphasized concepts or ideas (e.g., participants enjoyed the socializing aspect of their Tai Chi group) by different participants were selected as inductive codes.

I determined the deductive codes using topics in the interview guide or concepts from the research literature and these were later validated with collected data. I had some general ideas of what I was to discover prior to starting my field research. Those general ideas were derived from the Tai Chi literature and from forming my own research questions as well as insights gained from discussions with my co-supervisors. Recurrence was the key to discovering themes (along with their relevance to recurring themes to my research question, of course). Although those general ideas contributed to the preliminary framework of themes, I entered field research with an open mind expecting to find new and recurring themes, which did indeed happen.

The goals of my data analysis were to systematically sort the contents of collected data into categories, and identify shared themes produced by the two cultural groups. One way to find what Tai Chi meant for the participants of my research was to look for recurring themes in the interview data. I decided not to use data analysis software, preferring manual analysis.

In order to conduct a content analysis, coding the textual data was essential. The first step for coding data was the codebook development. As field research was carried out first in Jinan, theme development began there. Accumulated themes from Jinan (see Table 22, p. 344) were carried over to Halifax. Eventually, common themes were developed (see Table 23, p. 345). Some were shared fully or partially by research participants in both research sites while others were unique to one of the two cultural groups. For example, Tai Chi's health benefits were mentioned by all participants at both my research sites while pride in Tai Chi, as part of Chinese culture, was almost exclusively shared by participants in Jinan.

However, there appeared to be some overlap between deductive and inductive codes throughout the data analysis process. Coding was saturated (no more new themes were appearing) by the completion of Jinan field research. Almost all codes identified in Jinan data appeared in the data collected in Halifax. Additional codes were identified at the Halifax site. As a result of open coding, 12 themes were coded from collected data when I was in Jinan in the sequence of the field research process.

Table 22: Themes derived from data collected in Jinan (in the sequence of discovery)

1	Leadership
2	Socializing
3	Self-perceived body changes
4	Attitudinal differences
5	Lifestyle change
6	Increased self-confidence (spiritual, beyond physical health)
7	Tai Chi represents Chinese culture
8	Learning Tai Chi properly at an institute as formal education
9	Learning and doing Tai Chi to fulfill dreams or things wanted to do before retirement
10	Convenience regarding location and equipment for Tai Chi practice/age appropriate exercise
11	Women love physical exercise; women like group activities; men have different/more choices
12	Swimming can be a replacement for Tai Chi

At the completion of data collecting in Halifax, coding resulted in a total of 16 themes (see Table 23, p. 345). Some of the themes from the Halifax research site coincided with themes at Jinan site fully or partially. For example, the positive physiological changes were shared by participants at both research sites. At the same time, learning Tai Chi at an institution was perceived differently by participants at the two field research sites. Jinan participants highly respected the organizations where they took Tai Chi courses because those institutions represented formal educational institutions that they had never before had experience with. Halifax participants had had higher formal schooling at a younger age and did not put much weight on the Tai Chi organizations as educational institutions. Other themes in Halifax were new developments that did not appear in Jinan research site. For example, “Tai Chi versus Mahjong”¹⁹⁰ was only mentioned by participants in Halifax.

Table 23: Themes derived from data collected at both Jinan and Halifax

1	Leadership
2	Socializing
3	Self-perceived body changes
4	Attitudinal differences
5	Lifestyle change
6	Increased self-confidence (spiritual, beyond physical health)
7	Tai Chi represents Chinese culture; interested in Chinese culture or Asian cultures
8	Learning Tai Chi properly at an institute as formal education; good to follow a Tai Chi instructor
9	Learning and doing Tai Chi to fulfill dreams or things wanted to do before retirement
10	Convenience regarding location and equipment for Tai Chi practice; age appropriate exercise; affordable
11	Women love physical exercise; women like group activities; men have different/more choices
12	Swimming can be a replacement for Tai Chi
13	Tai Chi versus yoga
14	Tai Chi increases memory
15	Tai Chi versus dance
16	Tai Chi versus Mahjong

¹⁹⁰Mahjong or Majiang 麻将 is a Chinese four-player board game. It consists of a total of 136 rectangular-shaped tiles.

7.2 FINDINGS

Four main themes were identified. These themes provide a concrete basis for better understanding and interpreting the perceptions of Tai Chi practice of participants in Jinan and Halifax. As might be expected, some of the findings from this study support findings published in the literature. These include the positive effect of Tai Chi on the health and wellbeing of its older practitioners as well as Tai Chi as an age-appropriate activity for older people.

The analysis also revealed several interesting and salient phenomena that have not been reported by other researchers. As will be shown, the most significant of these include Tai Chi as a social equalizer, the gender imbalance of Tai Chi practitioners, and Westerners' understanding of Tai Chi compared to how it is viewed by Chinese practitioners.

7.2.1 The four main themes

Four main themes (Figure 4) were gradually identified through the coding process. The four themes were interpreted from the categories outlined above. These themes represent participants' perceptions of their Tai Chi experience and are the most relevant to my research question. The four themes apply to both cultural groups:

- (1) The improvement of health and wellbeing;
- (2) The enjoyment of socializing in Tai Chi groups;
- (3) A sense of group identity; and
- (4) Presence/absence of national pride in Tai Chi among participants

Results: Conceptual Map

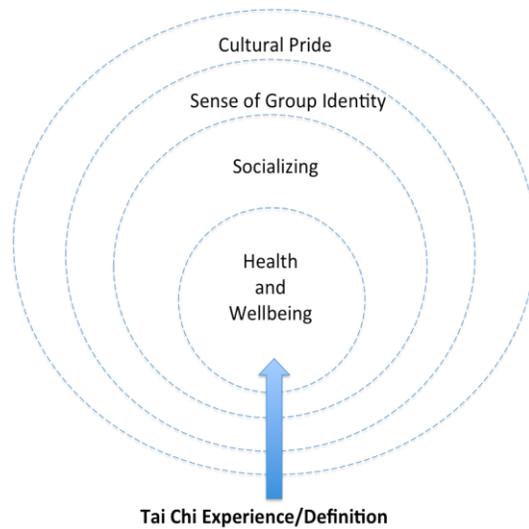


Figure 4: the Four Main Themes

All four main themes were closely intertwined with each other. Each main theme can be further broken down. For example, the benefit to physical health of Tai Chi was the most obviously recognized feature by my research participants. All Tai Chi's health benefits were related to physiological, mental, and psychological benefits. In return, Tai Chi's health benefits served as motivation for the participants' commitment to their Tai Chi practice. The enjoyment of socializing among Tai Chi group members motivated participants to continue with their group practice. Tai Chi groups provided a sense of group identity to overcome loneliness or fill the gap or void after retirement, building friendship and support among "Tai Chi friends." The socializing benefit of Tai Chi came as a surprise for those participants who had initially thought Tai Chi was only a physical activity. However, participants perceived the socializing feature differently. Participants in Jinan had lived their lives in a collective manner, given Chinese culture and Communist ideology, so that socializing with Tai Chi group members would be a natural practice. But the Jinan participants also were aware of the different kinds of social ties they experienced in their Tai Chi groups, as compared to the social ties they formed in other contexts. As for the Halifax participants, socializing was not anticipated by most of them when they began Tai Chi. There were also personality variations within each cultural group. Some individuals had stronger personal communication needs and skills

than others. Regardless of the personal and cultural differences, the majority of research participants viewed the opportunity for socializing in their Tai Chi group positively.

Theme 1: The improvement of health and wellbeing

Participants in both cities strongly expressed their interest in the improvement and maintenance of their overall wellbeing, as it is one of the major concerns for the older population in general. This concern was the driving force for many of them to begin their Tai Chi experience as well as a motivational factor for their commitment and sustainability in Tai Chi.

Participants joined Tai Chi groups mainly for health. The two most common reasons (see Table 20, p. 327) for participants to join a Tai Chi group were for their health and for something to do on a long-term basis after retirement. All research participants were older people who were concerned about the quality of their later life. Whether a participant joined a Tai Chi group intended to learn martial arts (e.g. Gary and Mr. Peng) or wanted to belong to a social group (e.g. David and Ms. Bai), they were all older people who felt that they had more time to do something meaningful to manage their wellbeing after having retired.

Participants in both Jinan and Halifax stated that their Tai Chi practice enabled them to strengthen muscles, increase confidence, feel less pain, and take less medication. Several Jinan participants even stopped taking some of the medications that they had been taking prior to starting Tai Chi. Several participants in both cities reported that they experienced improved quality of sleep. A number of participants talked about their arthritis and various age and job-related posture problems. They found that Tai Chi enabled them to maintain an upright posture. One participant in Halifax, for example, actually had “before and after” photographs of her posture, which she excitedly showed the new members in her Tai Chi class in order to encourage them to continue the class.

Several participants in both cities had started Tai Chi more than once. Regardless of the reasons for their previous Tai Chi practice, they restarted it as a meaningful activity for health in their later years. Reasons for having discontinued Tai Chi in the past include family obligations (Ms. Jia and Irene), conflict with employment schedule (Helen),

family relocation (Mr. Liu, May, and Cathy), inconvenient location for the Tai Chi class (Karen, Nick, and Helen), or the completion of a Tai Chi course (Victor and Andy).

Participants in both cities expressed how much they appreciated the improvement of their health and wellbeing in their own words (My translation is provided immediately after each Jinan participant's direct quote):

- “打太极拳改善了我的情绪、增强了我的体质。现在我吃的糖尿病的药减量了。我要再上三年太极拳课。”
“Practicing Tai Chi improved my mood and enhanced my physical fitness level. Now my diabetes medication has been reduced. I intend to take the Tai Chi courses for the next three years” (Mr. Meng).
- “打太极拳增强了我的体质。这一点很重要的，因为生命在于运动。”
“Practicing Tai Chi made me stronger physically and that is very important because longevity depends on physical exercise” (Mr. Liu).
- “I recently had my 50s reunion of my...class. And I just couldn't believe how fortunate I was when I looked around. There were so many of them who had cans and so on. And I just couldn't get over how fortunate I was that I have the health that I now have...I wonder what I would look like if I had never started Tai Chi. I think I would look like a little old woman. I really do” (Brenda)!
- “Overall, I just feel better. I guess because I feel better and I feel healthier and that DOES make a difference” (David).

Theme 2: The enjoyment of socializing in Tai Chi groups

Participants in both cities highly valued the friendly interactions between members of their group, including doing Tai Chi together and talking to one another during breaks. Participants all found the group a positive place in which to spend time outside the home whether they joined the group for health improvement or for socializing. All participants had a workplace before retirement so they were used to daily interaction with their coworkers, which disappeared after retirement. All of the research participants enjoyed practicing Tai Chi together. The majority of participants liked chatting with their group members regularly so much, so that being with their group became a significant motivating factor for their commitment to Tai Chi. In a few cases, the socializing was less important because the participants already had other social obligations or activities.

Some participants joined a Tai Chi group for more than one reason. Seven participants (four in Halifax and three in Jinan) actually stated that they initially joined a Tai Chi group looking for friendship in addition to looking for an appropriate and suitable activity for their health and wellbeing. Other participants did not start out looking for an opportunity to socialize, but discovered later that they liked the group effect and that as their Tai Chi skills improved, the bonds between the members of the group grew stronger.

Not surprisingly, the desire for friendship was expressed strongly and more frequently by the participants who lived alone or with only a spouse. David (84-year-old widower), for instance, stated that he joined his Tai Chi group to make new friends and to stay healthy. He found the people in his Tai Chi class very friendly and enjoyed being with them. Cathy (64-year-old widow) moved to Halifax knowing only two people in the city. The first day she stepped in the building where her Tai Chi class was held, she was greeted warmly by the first person she saw and that immediately made her “feel at home.” She appreciated the kindness the members of the group manifested towards her. The same phenomenon was experienced by participants in Jinan who were widows or widowers. Some of them even socialized with group members outside of their class, as in the case of Mr. Ou (74 years old in 2012) who was living alone after his wife died. Similarly, Mr. Liu (81 years old in 2012), who had been living alone for many years after his wife passed away, became a devoted member of his Tai Chi class and of an informal Tai Chi group in which most members were also in his Tai Chi class. Due to his advanced age, the other members in his class and his informal group respected him and he appreciated their friendship. In fact, the relationship with his Tai Chi friends constituted Mr. Liu’s closest human interactions because his family members lived in a different province in China.

The atmosphere in both formal and informal Tai Chi groups was very peaceful. The conversation between group members was pleasant and relaxed. During the actual practice time, an instructor or the group leader only spoke about Tai Chi techniques or provided tips about how to do a certain Tai Chi move. During class or group breaks, members had a tendency to talk about health-related issues or local news. No one in any of the Tai Chi groups talked about politics, despite the fact that some of them may have

had political affiliations or strong opinions on some current affairs. The instructor or the group leader participated in these casual discussions as an equal member of the group.

Tai Chi group members became friends because of their common interests and their shared commitment to Tai Chi. The strength of the bond depended on the frequency with which their groups met. This frequency ranged from one to four or five times a week. In the case of the Jinan participants who joined an informal Tai Chi group with the members of their Tai Chi class, the frequency was even greater.

Friendship with Tai Chi group members filled a need for participants as retirees. Many participants had had full-time jobs and they had worked at the same job for many years. Some had had good relationships with their co-workers, but they “did not see the co-workers any more” after retiring (Nick and Mr. Liu). So their daily encounters with their work friends or acquaintances had ended. Their daily commute between home and workplace stopped.

Emotional support seemed to be another significant feature of Tai Chi group membership. As one of the Halifax participants mentioned, the sincere support from her friends in her Tai Chi group was very important to her when her father was very ill and then dying. Another participant had also received a lot of encouragement from her Tai Chi group members while she was in hospital and when she first returned to her Tai Chi group’s regular practice. Another participant expressed similar feelings regarding the support from her Tai Chi group members when she had to deal with a difficult family situation. Participants often mentioned visiting some of their group members (who were not part of this research) who were ill and in a hospital. In both cities, some participants felt that the group support was as important as the Tai Chi practice itself. Whether a participant liked the group members was an important deciding factor in joining one Tai Chi group rather than another.

Participants in both cities expressed how much they enjoyed socializing in their respective Tai Chi groups.

- “我的太极拳班的成员都很好。我们在一起轻松愉快地聊天。跟一组人打拳比我自己练好。与大家一起聊天让我很高兴。”

“The members of my Tai Chi group are all very nice and we chat with each other in a relaxed and pleasant way. Practicing with a group is better than by myself. Chatting with the group members makes me happy” (Ms. Geng).

- *“我很高兴去上太极拳班。我的班每周只上一次课。我很高兴每周见一次同学们。我们都是很好的朋友。这种朋友关系与以前同事的关系很不一样。同事和邻居见面只打个招呼，而我的太极拳班除了上课之外还有别的活动。”*
- *“It makes me feel good to go to Tai Chi class. The Tai Chi class goes once a week only. I am happy to see the classmates every week. We all feel very close and friendly to one another. This relationship is very different from my former colleagues. Former colleagues and neighbors only say hello when we happen to pass each other. Unlike at my Tai Chi class, there are other social activities in addition to Tai Chi classes” (Mr. Liu).*
- *“[Tai Chi means] good health and good friends, because we’ve made REALLY REALLY good friends with this organization, and I think we ARE in good health because of it” (Lynn).*
- *“Personal health is important. Socializing is added. The group dynamic is a motivating factor to my individual practice.” (Earl).*
- *“I’d say that the social aspect of Tai Chi and Tai Chi itself are equally important” (Jeff).*

Theme 3: A sense of group identity

Participants in Jinan and Halifax all felt a strong sense of group identity, as was discussed in Theme 2. The group effect seemed to have had a great impact on all participants regardless of the length of time that they had been with the group or their living situations (living alone, with a spouse, or a spouse and an adult child or two adult children). The participants who had been with the same group for a long time were, of course, devoted members. They chose their own group and they felt comfortable and found it rewarding to spend time in the group to learn Tai Chi skills and to have a good time with their “Tai Chi friends.” The sense of belonging was another factor that enhanced their commitment to the group and to practicing Tai Chi.

Participants in Jinan and Halifax experienced increased good spirits and a better mood from participating in their Tai Chi groups. Their general perception was that being in a Tai Chi group was not only doing something meaningful and good for their physical

health, but that the regular chatting with group members also made them feel happier. The impact of feeling good to be with a group did not seem to be affected by the length of time the participant had been with the group. The long-term Tai Chi practitioners were very committed to their respective groups. The small number participants who had only practiced Tai Chi for one year or less still expressed the same positive feelings. Furthermore, participants stated that the interaction with members in their group was different than with their family members, friends, or other people because the Tai Chi group members shared a common goal and commitment. They were all older people who intended to improve their health and to enjoy one another's company.

Learning and mastering the Tai Chi techniques in their group contributed to participants' satisfaction. Helping each other master the moves contributed to the cohesiveness of the group. Most participants in both cities practiced Tai Chi on their own at home. However, they stated that practicing alone could not replace the group experience. The more participants felt bonded to the group, the more they were willing to commit to the group's practice. Even the several participants who socialized less with their respective Tai Chi groups indicated that they had a strong sense of belonging to the group. One Halifax participant, for example, still felt the sense of belonging even though the class he attended only met once a week. A Jinan participant who practiced Tai Chi daily with his wife at home and in the park still considered his Tai Chi group to be very important to him.

Almost all participants treated their Tai Chi group regular practices as mandatory tasks and they would willingly change other daily activities in order to accommodate the schedule of their Tai Chi group meetings. The regular practice in a Tai Chi group built on participants' commitment and encouraged them to continue with their Tai Chi practice. At the same time, the regular and structured Tai Chi group practice improved their Tai Chi techniques whether they were learning new Tai Chi moves in class or practicing the Tai Chi sets or parts of a set with their informal group. As many participants said, they had to repeat Tai Chi moves or the whole set countless times for months or even years before they could remember them perfectly.

All participants in both cities indicated clearly that they felt relaxed in their respective Tai Chi groups because of the non-competitive and non-judgmental

atmosphere. None of the participants in either city expressed or manifested any form of competitiveness with regard to their Tai Chi practice. In some cases, they stated that they did not care if they were “technically” the worst in the class. They said they preferred just to do their best and enjoy the experience and the friendship. In Jinan or Halifax none of the Tai Chi courses had exams, tests or competitions during and at the end of their Tai Chi course. Some Jinan Tai Chi courses put together a performance (all members practicing together) at the end of the course to show how much they had learned. Individuals who took a Tai Chi course knew from the beginning that there was no pass or fail. When they completed the beginners’ course, it was entirely their decision as to whether they repeated the course in order to become more proficient or whether they moved on to the intermediate level. This freedom of choice undoubtedly contributed to a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Some participants missed many classes or quit before the end of the beginners’ course the first time around, or even the second time around, for personal reasons. Some participants did complete the course the first time but could not remember the sequence of the Tai Chi set (e.g., the traditional Yang Tai Chi set consists of 108 moves) and decided to take it again to get a firmer foundation before taking the intermediate level Tai Chi course.

The informal Tai Chi groups tended to have a very loose and casual format. There were no fees involved. Unlike a Tai Chi course with a first class and a last class, an informal Tai Chi group was open all year round. As long as the group existed, participants could participate as frequently or infrequently as they wished.

Tai Chi group practice replaced the former work routine for most participants. In the case of the 35 retired participants (at the time of my fieldwork), the regular Tai Chi groups’ practices provided a new structure for their daily routine outside their homes. Their Tai Chi group gave them a place where they could go regularly. This was particularly important for those who had spent their career in the same workplace and whose work had constituted their daily routine. At the retirement stage of life, the grown children of most participants in both Jinan and Halifax had moved away. The regular in person contact with Tai Chi group members seems to have brought comfort to participants in both cities because it filled the void left after retirement. This new routine made them feel still active as retirees and not cut off from society. Many participants had

looked for an age-appropriate long-term activity when they were close to retiring or had just retired. They started taking a Tai Chi course at an older age, except for the few participants who had begun practicing Tai Chi earlier in their lives.

The main difference between participants' employment routine and Tai Chi group practice was that the Tai Chi groups in the two cities were much more flexible. Any member of the group could decide how many classes he or she would attend and/or change to a different Tai Chi group if he or she wanted to, while changing employment, especially for the Jinan participants' age cohort in China, had been much more difficult or just impossible.

Participants in both cities talked about the important role of their Tai Chi group:

- “我很高兴去上每周一次的太极拳课。很高兴每周见到同学们。我们都觉得互相之间很亲近。”
“It makes me feel good to go to Tai Chi class. The Tai Chi class goes once a week. I am happy to see the classmates every week. We all feel very close and friendly to one another.” (Mr. Liu).
- “去太极拳班上课能与别人交流。同学们建立亲密的关系而成为老朋友。”
“Going to Tai Chi group is good for interacting with people. Classmates can form friendships and become cordial friends” (Mr. Ou).
- “Everybody was all together we were doing it [Tai Chi] in unison. That was what it's supposed to be. So we were all equal we were all part of a unit. And nobody was left behind” (Nick).
- “We spend a lot of time together so we get very close to one another. And there is a wonderful support group. Like, I lost my dad a year and a half ago, and it was wonderful, the support that you felt from your ‘Tai Chi family.’ And that's what we say. We refer to them as our Tai Chi family” (Brenda).

Theme 4: Presence/absence of national pride in Tai Chi among participants

Participants in both Jinan and Halifax were all aware that Tai Chi originated in China. However, the perceptions of what Tai Chi means were different for the two cultural groups. The differences seem to emanate from cultural differences as well as individual opinions. Jinan participants, who were all born and brought up in China, have obviously been more exposed to Tai Chi because it has been practiced in public parks for centuries. There was less variety of opinions regarding the significance of Tai Chi

amongst the Jinan participants than the Halifax participants. This can be explained in part due to the fact that not all the Halifax participants were born in Canada, consequently their cultural, ethnic and educational background was not uniform, regardless of the number of years they had been living in Canada.

Participants in Jinan and Halifax expressed their perceived meanings of Tai Chi:

- “我对太极拳十分有兴趣，因为太极拳是中国的国粹。我们的老祖宗传给了我们。不能让它遗失了。学习太极拳应该从娃娃抓起。”
“I have very strong interest in Tai Chi because it is China’s treasure. We inherited Tai Chi from our ancestors. It can’t be lost. Learning Tai Chi should start from a very young age” (Ms. Bai).
- “太极拳是中国人发明的，但是它属于全世界。打太极拳就是传播中国文化。”
“Tai Chi was created in China, but it belongs to the world. Practicing Tai Chi is to promote Chinese culture” (Ms. Wang).
- *“It’s a martial art or that’s associated with Asian culture. And the roots of Tai Chi, of course, are Chinese” (Earl).*
- *“Three aspects of Tai Chi: the exercise aspect is very important. Tai Chi is a pain reliever, stress reliever. I also like the meditation aspect of Tai Chi. I’m fascinated with Chinese culture, fascinated by Eastern cultures, religions” (Jeff).*

7.2.2 Salient phenomena

In addition to the four main themes, there were several salient phenomena discovered through the data analysis process.

7.2.2.1 Tai Chi as a social equalizer in both Jinan and Halifax

Feeling equal with members of one’s Tai Chi group is a sentiment commonly shared by participants in Jinan and Halifax. As Jinan participant Mr. Meng stated eloquently, “classmates came to learn Tai Chi searching for happiness and health. There is no concern about competing or taking advantage of each other. We are learning and practicing Tai Chi together in a relaxed environment. In Chinese culture, doing things collectively is always considered better!” Another Jinan participant, Mr. Cai, explained that, “We are here to practice Tai Chi and no one talks about what kind of job they did before. We are all equal members.” A Halifax participant, David, said, “When we are

here doing Tai Chi, we are all the same. You can be a doctor and the person standing next to you can be a janitor. That is what I like about my Tai Chi group!”

The Tai Chi group members in this study did not seem to have any particular interest in what other members of their group did for a living prior to taking up Tai Chi. Some participants had some knowledge regarding the former employment category or the position or job title of another member in their Tai Chi group. Some might have learned from a neighbor or a common friend. In Jinan, for example, some class members knew that Mr. Meng had been in charge of a provincial government department. His former job title, together with his salary or pension, was probably the highest among the classmates in his Tai Chi course. Sometimes they joked about it during class break, but Mr. Meng’s attitude and behavior toward his classmates and vice versa were mutually respectful and friendly. On the other hand, Irene was one of the few Halifax participants who had had mostly part-time jobs. All the members in her Tai Chi class treated her as an equal in spite of her personal circumstances, and she appeared to be very comfortable interacting with her Tai Chi classmates. These feelings were shared by all participants irrespective of their circumstances. The education level, financial circumstances, and family situation, along with state of health, varied from one participant to another. However, these aspects of life were secondary in the Tai Chi group environment in both cities. In spite of this sense of equality being especially consistent with Chinese culture (possibly as affected by the egalitarian ideology of Communism), both the Halifax and Jinan participants frequently remarked on it.

One notable difference between the two cities was that Halifax participants were more used to the North American cultural norm of respecting one another’s privacy. For example, in Halifax a participant who had been married for many years talked about her or his own spouse, whereas another participant who had always been single was not questioned regarding his or her marital status. Whether a participant had retired with a substantial pension or with no private pension, participants treated each other with the same level of respect. The North American socio-cultural standard regarding privacy is quite different from the Chinese. What constitutes private information is not the same. “Personal” information such as marital status, income, or pensions is private or sensitive topics for Halifax participants. On the other hand, those topics constitute public

knowledge among most of the Jinan participants and people in China generally (at least for the participants' generation). It was considered normal to share the amount of one's salary among coworkers. For instance, the people in a section or unit who worked in the same office or factory would send one individual to the payroll office to pick up their monthly pay (in cash) on a payday. This individual would return to the work unit and distribute the cash to each coworker. That was a common practice for the Jinan participants' cohort in China.

It is important to keep in mind that my research involved older people rather than younger people. In recent years, as a result of modernization, globalization, and new official policies, there have been dramatic changes in many aspects of Chinese society. During these societal transformations, Western influence and ideologies have come to China along with new technologies. The younger generation in China has grown up with value changes (Wang, 2006b).¹⁹¹ Younger people's attitudes are very different from those of their parents (Moore and College, 2005). Two Australian researchers (Sima and Pugsley, 2010) used the term "Me Culture" to refer to the attitude of Chinese youth living in post-socialist China today. Their research focused on China's "Generation Y"¹⁹² who used Internet blogging and Instant Messaging to express their individualism and self-identity in a way that "is generally exclusive of older generations" (p. 301). Consequently, younger people tend to be less open regarding their personal lives. In addition, new technology has also impacted on the management and operation of companies and institutions. Nowadays, the common practice regarding payroll is simply electronic transfers to the employee's bank account. Regardless of the electronic payment method, older generations like the Jinan participants still take money out from their bank and shop with cash, in daily life. Although it was not necessarily the original intent, this computerized method of payment conveniently keeps employees' income information private.

¹⁹¹I have been teaching an *Introduction to Chinese Culture* course for more than 10 years at a university in Halifax, Canada. One of my course chapters is "Life of youth in China and the changing values." Over the years, I have conducted research in this area through Novanet (an online search engine shared by 28 libraries from 11 universities in Atlantic Canada, online search sources to which the university subscribes such as World Cat, and I have ordered many journal articles and books from other regions or outside Canada through the library service. I also intensively searched for academic journal articles in the Chinese language from CNKI (China Knowledge Resource Databases) during my Jinan field research.

¹⁹²Born between 1978 and 2000.

At least for its older practitioners, Tai Chi is apparently somewhat similar to Japanese nude bathing in that both can function as social equalizers. The Canadian medical anthropologist, Margaret Lock, believes that Japanese nude communal bathing is an equalizer because the marks of social status go away with the clothing. She writes:¹⁹³

Historically, in daily life, the Japanese affirmed their hierarchical social structure by making class distinctions in modes of dress, language, and nonverbal behavior. Today these distinctions can still be made to a large extent. The public bath, or the hot-springs resort, provides an interval of escape from the restrictions of society – one enters what is known as *hadaka no kankei* (nude relationships). The sexual element is completely muted under these conditions, and nudity gives one a chance to relax completely by shedding, along with one's clothes, social responsibility, class distinctions, and the burden of maintaining face with the world. It is the most traditional method used to restore balance to the body, and East Asian medical clinics can apparently assume a very similar function. Under these circumstances the therapeutic setting itself can lead to a reduction in stress.

While Tai Chi does not involve nudity, it may in similar fashion remove class and status markers, especially in Jinan.

Comparing their previous workplace and the Tai Chi group, participants in both cities felt that going to their Tai Chi group's practice regularly made them get out of their homes and do something positive for their wellbeing. The interaction with coworkers or with Tai Chi group members provided human contact on a regular basis. However, the workplace was not egalitarian. Some people were in management roles while others worked at ordinary positions. The Tai Chi group, on the other hand, is completely non-hierarchical. As was pointed out in Chapter 5 (p. 109), the Tai Chi class instructors, group leaders, and the corners are not accorded high status. They interact with other group members in an egalitarian manner.

Another notable point is the different attitude towards fellow workers as opposed to Tai Chi group members. Halifax participant Cathy explains this difference: "Tai Chi people are relaxed. We enjoy each other socially. The level of relaxation is high while practicing Tai Chi. At Tai Chi you can be yourself. But at your workplace you have to maintain your professionalism." Another difference between the situation of former coworkers and Tai Chi group members is that Tai Chi is experienced as a social activity.

¹⁹³P. 191, Chapter 11: Massage: Shiatsu and Amma

7.2.2.2 The gender imbalance of Tai Chi practitioners

With the exception of *Group I* (in Jinan) with 16 males and 14 females, there were more female Tai Chi practitioners in all the observed courses and informal groups in both Jinan and Halifax (see Table 4, p. 94 and Table 6, p. 99). Despite the gender imbalance in the groups, an effort was made to choose an almost equal number of women and men for this research project. A number of Tai Chi classes or informal groups in both cities that were visited but not included in the research also had more women than men.

The fact that more women participate in Tai Chi does not mean that they are more devoted to it than are men. Both male and female participants in the two cities stated that it was hard for men to get involved in Tai Chi, but once they saw the benefits and built a routine, they would “stick with it” (Andy, Lynn, Ms. Ning, and Mr. Kang). It is interesting to note that there were more male Tai Chi instructors or group leaders among the long-term Tai Chi participants in both Jinan and Halifax. There are possible explanations regarding this phenomenon. The male-dominated cultures of both China and Canada and the socially assumed gendered activities may have some impact on male Tai Chi involvement. Despite the fact that Tai Chi was created by a monk and originally practiced by monks as martial art in a Chinese Buddhist temple, some participants in Jinan and Halifax viewed Tai Chi as a dance that did not appear muscular enough for men to do. For example, Halifax participant Cathy began taking a Tai Chi course after having seen a Tai Chi demonstration and having really liked it because she had participated in a dance group in High School. When she encouraged her husband to join her Tai Chi class, he thought it was a soft dance and did not join. Another Halifax participant, Lynn, began a beginners’ Tai Chi course with her husband in order to support him in fulfilling his dream of learning a martial art. Both Cathy and Lynn said that it could be the male ego that blocked some men’s willingness to participate in Tai Chi. Lynn said that her husband’s Tai Chi skills were better than hers because he spent more time practicing at home while she did the housework. There was another married couple participating in this research, Fiona and Earl. Fiona started Tai Chi first. When her husband saw her health improvement he joined her Tai Chi class. Soon after, his Tai Chi skills became better than hers. Fiona’s situation was the same as Lynn’s. Fiona’s husband also spent more time practicing Tai Chi at home while she took care of the household

chores. Some Jinan participants also saw Tai Chi as a soft activity, but they knew it was a form of martial art. It seems that some but not all men perceived Tai Chi as gendered female.

Table 24: Gender distribution of the Tai Chi groups involved in this research – Jinan

	Formal Tai Chi classes					Informal Tai Chi groups								
	Organization A				B	Group								
Section	4 th ,3*	2 nd ,2	4 th , 1	1 st , 1	1 st ,2 nd	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Total	26	30	26	28	60	25	7	15	40	6	8	5	15	30
Male	2	3	4	3	15	1	1	4	12	2	2	1	1	16
Female	24	27	22	25	45	24	6	11	28	4	6	4	14	14

* The 3rd section of the 4th year. There is more than one section per level (year).

Table 25: Gender distribution of the Tai Chi groups involved in this research – Halifax

	Formal Tai Chi classes						Informal groups	
	Organization C		D		E	F	Group	
Section	2 nd , 1*	2 nd , 2	2 nd , 1	1 st , 1	1 st , 1	1 st , 1	K	L
Total	35	35	40	10	6	9	14	8
Male	6	5	6	1	1	2	5	2
Female	29	30	34	9	5	7	9	6

* The 1st section of the 2nd year. There is more than one section per level (year).

7.2.2.3 The role of music in Tai Chi practice (in a group or by oneself)

Although Tai Chi’s health benefits have been widely studied internationally, there has been very little research regarding the use of music or the selection of music when practicing Tai Chi (Du, Roberts, and Xu, 2016; Hu, 2008). In China, practicing Tai Chi with background music is common, whereas music appears to be rarely used in the West. Perhaps the background music has been taken for granted by China’s practitioners of Tai Chi in the present day because practicing Tai Chi with background music is universal in China. Originally, Tai Chi was practiced silently in China. Practicing Tai Chi with background music started after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. There are two types of Tai Chi background music used in China today. Both types

are played with Chinese traditional musical instruments such as Er Hu or Gu Zheng.¹⁹⁴ Tai Chi music was designed to match the rhythm of the physical movements and the sequence of the Tai Chi set.

Practicing Tai Chi with music is perceived differently by participants in Jinan and Halifax. Music was used in Jinan in all groups involved in this research and in the other nine groups that I visited. When they practiced the Simplified set or the Competition set, Jinan participants used one of the two specifically composed pieces of “Tai Chi music.” When they practiced other sets of Tai Chi, they used the Chinese folk music chosen by their group. Usually either the “class leader” of a Tai Chi course or the “group leader” or, less frequently, a group member of an informal group would bring the Tai Chi music to class or to their practice location. In both cases, the individual also brought a portable CD player.

The original creator of the Canadian Style Tai Chi did not provide or recommend any music, perhaps because he felt Western practitioners would find Chinese music too strange or too foreign. It is not surprising, therefore, that except for one informal group all Tai Chi classes and informal groups in Halifax practiced in silence. The members of the Halifax groups where no music was used told me that music would break their concentration on body moves. The one exception in Halifax used exactly the same music as Jinan participants when they practiced the Simplified set. The leader of that group had obtained a CD of the music from his Tai Chi instructor who had brought it to Canada from China. The members of the group seemed very familiar with this music and had been using it satisfactorily for many years. They also used other Chinese folk music when they practiced other Tai Chi sets (e.g., the Yang Tai Chi set with 108 moves).

Individual participants in both cities who integrated music in their private practice felt that it helped them. They said it motivated them and made the practice more enjoyable. Participants in both cities who practiced Tai Chi on their own did so with or without music depending on their personal preference. Most Jinan participants used music without lyrics when practicing at home because it served as a guide for the rhythm of the Tai Chi set sequence. The only time that a Jinan participant did not use any music

¹⁹⁴Er hu 二胡 and Gu zheng 古筝 are both stringed instruments that are associated with traditional Chinese music.

was when she or he wanted to focus on one particular Tai Chi move and repeated the same move over and over again. The Jinan participants liked to use the music because it reminded them of the flow of the Tai Chi set and of their class environment since the same music (without lyrics) was played in class. Although some Halifax participants used music for their own home practice, they did not all use the same type of Chinese Tai Chi music. A few Halifax participants used Chinese folk music (not the “Tai Chi music” because most of them did not practice the Simplified set or the Competition set) when practicing on their own. One Halifax participant stated that he used soft, slow Western music as a serene background while practicing at home. Another Halifax participant used Chinese folk songs when she practiced at home. When asked why she chose Chinese folk songs as opposed to the “Tai Chi music,” she said that she just wanted to have a nice background sound that, in her opinion, was suitable for a particular Tai Chi set for her self-practice.

Tai Chi is a Chinese activity, but most Western practitioners practice a version in which the physical portion has been adapted and in which both the spiritual dimension and the background music are omitted. The Simplified Tai Chi set was designed with a philosophical and physical unity that included standard background music. The entirety of the 24 moves consists of the core of all Tai Chi styles in China as it was created from a selection of moves from all Tai Chi schools. The background music, played by traditional Chinese stringed instruments, was added to provide a soothing atmosphere for the rhythm of the set (see Tai Chi music, p. 27). Therefore, according to the Chinese perspective, Tai Chi music helps guide the rhythm for a large group of practitioners,¹⁹⁵ helps calm the practitioners’ mind, increases the artistic beauty of Tai Chi, and stimulates practitioners’ interest. One Chinese survey (Hu, 2008), with more than 300 participants (half male and half female) studied the different types of Tai Chi music chosen. Their results showed that 87.4% of the participants liked Tai Chi music in preference to no music or other randomly selected music. Three percent did not like it and about ten percent had no opinion. Unfortunately, no comparable study of similar design or scale using Western Tai Chi practitioners has been conducted thus far.

¹⁹⁵2008 practitioners at the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games Opening Ceremony performed a Tai Chi demonstration with background music.

7.2.2.4 Married couples often take the same Tai Chi class in Halifax but not in Jinan

During my field research, I learned that it was common for husband and wife to take the same Tai Chi course in Halifax. For example, some participants encouraged me to also interview their spouse who was in the same Tai Chi class or group. Some Halifax participants joined Tai Chi to support their spouse. None of the Jinan participants was taking the same Tai Chi course with their spouse. Most Jinan participants' spouses were retired, but they were not involved in Tai Chi. Five Jinan participants' spouses were not retired yet, but all of them were busy with their employment and did not show interest in Tai Chi.

7.3 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of this study in three parts: 1) A comparison of aspects of this study's findings with what had been anticipated; 2) Aspects of the unexpected findings; and 3) A comparison between this study's findings with of previous Tai Chi research.

7.3.1 Anticipated findings¹⁹⁶

As anticipated, the research participants in both cities focused more on the health benefits that they received from Tai Chi and put less emphasis on what Tai Chi means, philosophically.

7.3.1.1 Participants in the two cities all reported Tai Chi's health benefits

Participants in Jinan and Halifax reported that their overall health and wellbeing had been improved by their Tai Chi practice. The health benefits gained from Tai Chi was one of the key perceptions that participants in both cities articulated clearly when speaking with me. Tai Chi's health benefits have been extensively studied and documented by scholars worldwide and therefore are apparently real. Consequently, I

¹⁹⁶Some would argue that all qualitative research is subjective and therefore untrustworthy. The detailed description of my methodology and methods was intended to allay such fears with regard to the present research.

anticipated that my participants would perceive their Tai Chi practice as improving their health. The research data collected in Jinan and Halifax confirmed this expectation.

As discussed in Chapter 5, research participants in both cities reported how various aspects of their health had improved since beginning Tai Chi. Furthermore, the perceived Tai Chi health benefits were reported not only by the participants who had various illnesses or health concerns, but also by the participants who self-identified as having had good health at the time they began Tai Chi. These perceived health benefits increased participants' commitment to Tai Chi. In the case of participants who began Tai Chi with health problems and discovered improved health, that confirmed to them that they had made a wise decision to join Tai Chi. The participants who started with self-identified good health felt that their mood improved and that they felt more relaxed. They perceived these changes as unexpected positive outcomes from Tai Chi. (Presumably, practitioners who did not perceive Tai Chi as having improved their health ceased practicing it and so could not be interviewed.).

Tai Chi's health benefits were not just self-perceived according to my research participants, but also recognized by others (not necessarily with biomedical measurements, perhaps with the exception of measured blood pressure). Participants received positive feedback from various sources. Their family members and friends commented on their improved overall health such as their cheerful attitude and higher mobility in carrying out daily activities. Their neighbors noticed their positive wellbeing-related changes. Some participants' health improvements were recognized by healthcare professionals (e.g., a physiotherapist or a surgeon who had been treating those participants). Thus, the lived experience of the research participants is in accordance with health research (reviewed in Chapter 3) on Tai Chi.

7.3.1.2 Participants in the two cities perceived the meaning of Tai Chi differently

I anticipated that Jinan participants would perceive the meanings of Tai Chi differently from Halifax participants because of the great differences in the Chinese and Canadian socio-cultural contexts. Although there are three Halifax participants who were born in other countries (other than China or Canada), all three had lived their adult life in Halifax. Therefore, one could assume that their perspectives would be similar to those of

the other 16 Canadian-born Halifax participants. Historically, participants in Jinan and in Halifax have experienced very different political and societal changes that may have influenced their perception and understanding of their Tai Chi experience. Jinan participants undoubtedly went through more social upheaval than the Halifax participants, during the last half of the 20th century. The decision to practice Tai Chi and when to start or stop was, in general, a personal choice for participants in both cities. However, sometimes the political context restricted the Jinan participants' Tai Chi practice and their choices. The most extreme case was Ms. Shen, who practiced Tai Chi for 42 years with a ten-year gap in the middle that coincided with the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During that time, she was ordered to stop Tai Chi by her employer. She then saw Tai Chi as "trouble" (as she told me during the interview). Her perception regarding Tai Chi changed after that time, when she began Tai Chi again in 1977. She saw Tai Chi as a positive activity before and after the gap. In contrast, Halifax participants' personal decisions about Tai Chi were never influenced by major societal transformations.

Participants in the two cities had their own personal expectations or goals at the starting point of their Tai Chi journey. These may have been greatly influenced by their socio-cultural background. For Jinan participants, Tai Chi was seen as a treasure of their Chinese heritage. This motivated them to practice and made them feel that was their duty to carry on in order to preserve their Chinese culture. Obviously, Halifax participants did not share this strong desire to promote a Chinese heritage. Halifax participants were well aware that Tai Chi was brought to Canada from China and they respected and appreciated this fact. Some of them also had heard or read about Tai Chi's health benefits, but Tai Chi was relatively foreign to most of them when they first started.

Although the Jinan participants differed from one another, they all had lived their entire lives within Chinese culture. It would be natural that Chinese cultural values and beliefs formed their philosophical or spiritual guidelines, regardless of whether they were aware of this. Since the Jinan participants had been practitioners of Tai Chi for a while, they had learned about different aspects of Tai Chi including its history, philosophical roots, and the techniques of various styles. The role of Yin-Yang theory in Tai Chi was actually taught in the beginners' Tai Chi courses that I observed in Jinan. The Jinan

practitioners also shared their understandings of Tai Chi with members in their informal practice groups. At different times in China, the general public has gained knowledge about Tai Chi through government promotions in the media. There is no doubt that the Jinan participants, and their fellow Tai Chi practitioners, are well aware that Tai Chi is part of Chinese culture. Throughout my individual face-to-face interviews and interactions during my participant observation with Jinan participants, they emphasized their pride in being Chinese as well as Tai Chi practitioners carrying on a Chinese tradition. Conversely, Halifax participants did not have the first-hand experience or exposure to Chinese culture. To most Halifax participants, Tai Chi was very unfamiliar to them in the beginning. When they took their first Tai Chi course, the focus of the instruction in their class was about how to make body movements and memorize each move and the sequence of all the moves in a Tai Chi set. What Tai Chi represented was not part of the curriculum in their Tai Chi courses. A few Halifax participants had learned about Tai Chi beyond the physical moves through their own readings or learning from an instructor who came from China and who actually talked in class about the philosophical or spiritual dimension of Tai Chi beyond the physical moves.

7.3.2 Unexpected findings

The three main unexpected results were: 1) The perspectives of the participants in the two cities are more similar than different; 2) Participants in both cities drink Chinese tea; and 3) Married couples often take the same Tai Chi class in Halifax but not in Jinan.

7.3.2.1 The perspectives of the participants in the two cities are more similar than different

Participants in the two cities seemed to value the physical aspect of Tai Chi more than any other aspect. The philosophical aspect of Tai Chi appeared to have been simply overlooked. Taking into consideration all the differences between these two cultural groups of participants in Jinan and Halifax, they seemed to have much in common. The most obvious commonality is that the majority joined Tai Chi for improving or maintaining their health, for making friends and for socializing. Through their regular practice, participants gained self-confidence and felt more content in life. Some

participants might have started Tai Chi to improve their health or learn a martial art. Soon, however, they realized that they liked not only their health improvement but also the socializing component of their Tai Chi group. As a result of this combined effect of physical exercise and a friendly environment, participants in both cities developed or strengthened their commitment to their respective Tai Chi groups.

Participants in the two cities belong to the same demographic cohort because the age range of participants was set by my research design in order to focus on my study theme of aging. Jinan and Halifax participants all felt that Tai Chi is an age-appropriate activity. They liked the fact that Tai Chi course fees are affordable and no equipment was required. They also enjoyed the convenient location of their chosen groups. They felt that the Tai Chi group regular practice filled a gap in their daily schedule after retirement. They all wanted to continue their Tai Chi practice as a long-term activity. Participants in both cities integrated Tai Chi into their daily life to a greater or lesser degree depending on the individual.

That the perspectives of my participants in Jinan and Halifax are more similar than different accords with the recent work of Fung, Ho, Zhang, Zhang, Noels, and Tam (2016). They found that age could be a better predictor of values than simply being Chinese or Canadian: “Age differences in personal values are largely universal” (p. 283). Age may trump culture, in some instances. Their cross-cultural investigation regarding changes in personal values among elders in China and Canada found that as people grow older, they tend increasingly to emphasize their communal values more strongly than the agentic values (cf. Barkow, 1989, p. 266; Guttman, 1987), regardless of the cultural importance of individualism versus collectivism.

7.3.2.2 Participants in both cities drink Chinese tea

It is interesting that except for the two Halifax informal groups, all members in the observed Tai Chi groups spent their break drinking Chinese tea while conversing. Jinan participants had drunk tea for many years; Halifax participants stated that drinking Chinese tea showed respect for Chinese culture. All Tai Chi courses in both cities were held indoors. It was convenient for members in the six Halifax Tai Chi courses to make their tea in the classroom. Their teas, purchased from local shops, included various types

of Chinese green tea and Oolong tea (see Chinese tea culture, p. 39). It always seemed to be the same class members who volunteered to make the tea in Chinese-style teapots and clean up afterwards. It would seem that it was a way of expressing their commitment to their group. Although Jinan participants also drank various types of Chinese tea, they made their tea at home and brought it to class in a portable cup or bottle. The institute for older people where they took their Tai Chi courses did not provide equipment for making tea, but there was a large boiler of hot water located on each floor of the school building that people could use.¹⁹⁷ Except for one Halifax informal group, all informal groups in both cities were held outdoors. Some members brought their own water bottles, but there was no facility to make tea for those outdoor groups. My field research in Jinan was during the hot summer time, and all participants and members of their Tai Chi class or group always brought their own portable bottles or cups with water or tea. When I conducted the Halifax portion of field research it was during the fall and winter seasons. The participants and others in the only outdoor informal group did not bring tea or water bottles. They drove home immediately after each group practice. As for the only indoor Halifax informal group, most members lived in the same apartment building. After their weekly group practice in the basement, they would immediately return to their own apartments upstairs.

7.3.2.3 Married couples often take the same Tai Chi class in Halifax but not in Jinan

It seems that there are various reasons for why a married couple take or do not take a Tai Chi class together. In Halifax, some female participants first joined a Tai Chi class to support their husbands. For example, Halifax participant Lynn told me that she wanted to support her husband's long-term wish to learn a martial art, so she took a Tai Chi course with him. She also said that she would support her husband even if he were starting a different activity. It appears that it is customary for retirees in Jinan to each go their own way and do activities separately. This social phenomenon may be influenced by biased gendered activities in China. For example, if a male individual viewed Tai Chi as a dance, he would not participate in a Tai Chi class whether his wife was part of the class

¹⁹⁷Traditionally Chinese people drank hot water or pre-boiled warm water, not cold water from the tap, which is considered to be unhealthful.

or not. Sometimes it may be the pride of an individual. For example, the wife of a Jinan Tai Chi instructor took a beginners' Tai Chi course from a different instructor in a different organization. This particular instructor commented, "She might have too much pride to take a Tai Chi course from me, as her husband."¹⁹⁸

Halifax participants seemed to have more options for active activities. For example, participants in both cities talked about swimming when they were asked whether they felt there were any substitute activities for Tai Chi. But Jinan participants did not have access to affordable in-door swimming pools. The few swimming facilities in Jinan would be too expensive for individuals belonging to the working class. The only time Jinan participants could go swimming would be in a lake or river or when visiting relatives in coastal areas during the summer.^{199 200}

7.3.3 A comparison between this study's findings with of previous Tai Chi research

This section discusses those aspects of the study's findings that coincide with the results of other Tai Chi studies but have not yet been discussed.

7.3.3.1 Tai Chi's overall health benefits are significantly perceived by participants in both cities

As did the vast majority of participants in all other Tai Chi studies (reviewed in Chapter 3, section 3.3 The benefits of Tai Chi, p. 45) my research participants in Halifax and Jinan used Tai Chi for its practical application – for health. Participants in both cities reported improved health in various areas of their overall wellbeing. The perceived health benefits included muscle strength and confidence in balance; improved joint condition with reduced pain and increased flexibility; improved sleep quality; reduced dosage or elimination of medication; and better control of hypertension. Their self-reported

¹⁹⁸The wife of this instructor was well educated with an attitude of high pride (based on my observation of the couple's interaction at home and my conversations with her and her husband both together and separately). He said, "She would rather take a Tai Chi course from someone else because she did not want to appear to be less skillful compared to me."

¹⁹⁹Although Shandong Province is a peninsula, Jinan is an inland city. Regardless of Jinan's nickname as "City of Springs (Quan Cheng 泉城)," most springs or lakes in Jinan are not feasible for swimming.

²⁰⁰Although several participants in Jinan and Halifax said that swimming could be a good exercise for their joints, they stated that there were some negative aspects regarding swimming such as the cost, limited number of swimming pools, and lack of the socializing aspect in swimming.

psychological health benefits included better mood and higher spirits; reduced stress; a more positive attitude; and a more relaxed and calmer mental state in general. All participants in both cities, regardless of their cultural, philosophical or demographic differences, viewed Tai Chi as a natural way of healing and a fitness exercise or a leisure activity that they have integrated into their daily routine in order to get long-term benefits.

Tai Chi's health benefits were not just self-perceived according to my research participants, but also recognized by others (not necessarily with biomedical measurements, with the exception of measured blood pressure). Participants received positive feedback from various sources. Their family members and friends commented on their improved overall health such as their cheerful attitude and higher mobility enabling them carrying on daily activities. Their neighbors noticed their positive wellbeing-related changes. Some participants' health improvements were recognized by healthcare professionals (e.g., a physiotherapist or a surgeon who had been treating those participants). Thus, the lived experience of the research participants is in accordance with health research (reviewed in Chapter 3) on Tai Chi.

7.3.3.2 Social support and health are keys for successful aging

Age is particularly important with respect to Tai Chi. Taking into consideration the Chinese collectivist and North American individualist differences, the aging experience has historically been viewed very differently in China and in the United States (Streib, 1987). However, Chappell (2003) challenged these cross-cultural stereotypes in a study comparing aging of the elders in Shanghai and in Canada. This study discovered that the important factors determining quality of life in Shanghai and Canada were "strikingly similar" (Chappell, 2003, p. 145). The similarity involved finding the same two significant predictors of life satisfaction in both countries: social support and health. Chappell's study found that the social support for its Shanghai participants depended on their sons, while the spouse was a more important source of support for its Canadian participants. In other words, social support and health are universal predictors for subjective quality of life. It is evident that this study result helps to explain why my

participants in China and Canada all significantly valued the health benefits of their Tai Chi experience as well as the social support from their Tai Chi group.

Why are most Tai Chi practitioners in Jinan and Halifax older people? Fung (2013) concluded that older people in both North America and Hong Kong make decisions and prioritize what is meaningful in their later life by emphasizing their health. Perhaps this means that, when today's young people in both China and Canada have grown older, they will be more concerned with their health and therefore with Tai Chi, despite a lack of apparent interest currently. Certainly, younger people, concerned with careers and children, usually have less time to focus on personal health and Tai Chi than do older people. Thus, young people may always tend to see Tai Chi as more relevant for older people than themselves.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The two-culture nature of this study permitted me to learn that the participants in Halifax and in Jinan shared more similarities than differences regarding their perceptions of their Tai Chi experience, despite the known differences in philosophy, history, societal norms and behavior between the two cities. The four main themes developed through content analysis show this. Participants in both Jinan and Halifax believed in and appreciated Tai Chi's health benefits; they much enjoyed socializing with the members of their Tai Chi group; and they developed a sense of group identity. However, participants in the two cities had different perspectives regarding the cultural content of Tai Chi. Tai Chi's identity as a part of Chinese culture was greatly prized by Jinan participants. This had little emotional significance for Halifax participants. However, participants in neither city thought that there was a religious component to Tai Chi.

8.1 The significance of the research findings

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study of older Tai Chi practitioners in Canada and in China. Future researchers now can use this study's results to generate hypotheses to test about the role of Tai Chi in the lives of its practitioners, especially practitioners in different cultures. Future survey research, using representative samples, will be needed to see if my results (the four main themes in particular) are applicable to larger populations, say, all of North American and of China.

Aspects of the findings of this research are broadly consistent with those of previous researchers. Tai Chi's health and wellbeing benefits, as one of the four main themes of the research findings are in accord with most of the existing Tai Chi literature (reviewed in Chapter 3). My research participants in Jinan and Halifax expressed how much they felt that their physical health had improved due to their Tai Chi practice. The participants in the two cities also shared this perception regarding their mental health and wellbeing. Similarly, as the RCT studies reviewed (see Chapter 3) would seem to imply, practicing Tai Chi in the opinion of the research participants, reduced anxiety and stress level and further resulted in feeling better in everyday life.

Tai Chi may serve a similar role for people in very different societies. In spite of obvious cultural differences between the two research sites, the participants of this

research have a great deal in common, in fact, more so than I initially expected. It suggests that while culture can never be ignored, retired people in very different societies (e.g. Jinan, China and Halifax, Canada) may share much. It seems that older people value socializing, and appreciate forming communities and friendships that replace those they leave behind when they retire. They are concerned about their health. It may be possible to overemphasize cultural differences, when in fact, issues of age and health are shared cross-culturally. My study shows that Tai Chi serves as a common response to these issues in societies that are otherwise very different.

Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000; Frank, 2006) framed the questions for this dissertation. The questions posed in the literature were: “Would the Chinese identity aspect of Tai Chi become overpowered by the popularity of its health benefits? Would Tai Chi’s Chinese identity be continued by the younger Chinese Tai Chi practitioners in China or by Western Tai Chi practitioners like Frank (Frank, 2006)?” These questions can now be answered. In Jinan, at least, the Chinese identity component of Tai Chi remains powerful, but the health aspects are equally or possibly more important for its practitioners. In Halifax the identity component, of course, is not relevant.

8.2 Research limitations

We cannot generalize, on the basis of an ethnographic study of 38 people, to all of Canada and China. The sample only came from several areas of Jinan and Halifax and the individuals are not necessarily representative of a defined larger population (as they would be in a quantitative study). Furthermore, unlike the shared Chinese ethnic and cultural roots of all Jinan participants, the Halifax participants were from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, participants were recruited by using an opportunity sampling technique in both Jinan and Halifax. This technique’s limitation was to recruit participants by their availability (their time and the location) and then their willingness to participate.

This doctoral research was conducted within the constraints of a set timeframe and limited funding. The time designated for field research had to fit the requirements of the university and the available funding. The research sample (38 participants) had to be manageable within the limited fieldwork time. And the two-culture approach of

conducting field research in Jinan and in Halifax necessitated twice as much time compared to one-site ethnographic research. In both cities, I could not interview people who had tried Tai Chi and dropped out before my field research. Due to the nature of this aging-focused study, I had to refuse several enthusiastic Tai Chi practitioners who were younger than my research age range. The two groups (19 participants in Jinan and 19 in Halifax) are biased in favor of people deeply committed to Tai Chi. Therefore, my research conclusions may apply primarily to similar people.

8.3 Suggestions for future work

Survey studies may further address the issues, further examine the potential hypotheses drawn from my findings, and determine the generalizability of my conclusions.

Survey research can involve a large sample, and computerized surveys nowadays can be very time-efficient. A survey's purpose is to describe, compare, and explain the collected information (Fink, 1995; Leeuw, Hox, and Dillman, 2008). Survey methodology produces statistical descriptions of a defined population (Groves et al., 2004, p. 39). It may be used to test the generalizability of findings from studies with a small number of participants to larger populations. The present research may aid future Tai Chi survey researchers in designing their questionnaires.

A survey study can also act as the second phase of a mixed methods research (Andrew and Halcomb, 2009). In mixed methods research, one study can be conducted in two phases, one of which is qualitative and the other quantitative. For instance, my ethnographic approach study can be seen as a pilot study from the perspective of a future study. The hypotheses generated from my research findings can contribute to a longitudinal survey study to discover how the meanings of Tai Chi for its practitioners over time.

The following topics or areas surfaced during my research and can be addressed in future projects.

- 1) Why do some Tai Chi practitioners quit the practice (some of my research participants quit in the past, but restarted)?

- 2) Is age at times more important to the human experience than culture? Is it possible that as we grow older we grow more similar to one another, across cultures?
- 3) A follow-up study using the same research participants in the near future might reveal more about their Tai Chi experience.
- 4) A comparative study regarding practitioners involved in similar activities such as yoga and Tai Chi might reveal interesting differences or similarities.
- 5) Tai Chi is practiced worldwide, would it be the same, in terms of the research findings, if this research were replicated with a different national group, for example, in Germany or another country?
- 6) A comparison of the ways in which yoga is practiced in India and Canada with how Tai Chi is practiced in China and Canada might provide new insight.

Had I begun with a survey research design, I would not have known what questions to ask. Future research based on my findings, however, could involve surveys to test the extent to which my findings can be generalized to other parts of China and North America. Similarly, I could not have done experimental work because I would not have had pertinent hypotheses to test, but future researchers will be able to test some of my findings about, for example, the usefulness of Tai Chi background music. Experimentalists could investigate the impact of the original Tai Chi background music as compared to other types of music (which vary according to participants' cultural background), or no music at all. Regarding my finding that Tai Chi's philosophical or religious aspects have largely been stripped away during its Canadianization, perhaps future researchers will compare this process with other, similar, imported holistic Asian activities, yoga in particular.

This study provided insights into how participants identified the characteristics of their Tai Chi experience. The main themes that emerged in the study were: 1) Health and wellbeing; 2) Socializing; 3) A sense of group identity; and 4) Cultural pride. These themes provide a potential framework for future researchers to use in exploring the meaning of involvement in an activity. Shaw (1986, 1992) found the following to be aspects of the term of "leisure": fun, enjoyment, relaxation and freely chosen (activity). Scholars may want to expand on the meaning of the leisure experience in order to

understand why individuals become involved and stay involved in activities such as Tai Chi. This study found that the complexities of the meanings for its practitioners interacted with one another, something missed by researchers who focused more narrowly on the “health benefits” of Tai Chi. The study found that health concerns were only one of the reasons individuals became involved and continued to be involved in Tai Chi.

Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000) and the Yin Yang Theory (Wang, 2012) provided a framework for this study. The themes that emerged included: 1) Health and wellbeing; 2) Socializing; 3) A sense of group identity; and 4) Cultural pride reflect the interaction of these two theories within the cultural lens of the participants. Future scholars may want to consider using these theories interactively within their investigations. Adding Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991) to the weave of Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000) and the Yin Yang Theory (Wang, 2012) may also assist future scholars in understanding the meaning of an experience from China for participants in a changing global society.

The sample of this study was older people. Future studies may wish to examine the meaning of the Tai Chi experience for younger cohorts to better understand the complexities of the meaning to the participants involved in the activity.

Though this doctoral study has now ended it could easily lead to much new research.

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APPENDIX A (1) Research Introductory Letter

Title of Study

Tai Chi: A New and Ancient Reality: The Socio-Cultural Context of Elder Tai Chi Practitioners in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China

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Introduction

We invite you to take part in this research. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. You do not have to answer any question that you are not completely comfortable with. The study description in this letter tells you about the potential risks or inconvenience. Your participation in this study might not benefit you directly. But from the information you share through your participation in this study, we may learn things that can be helpful to others in the society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research is to understand how older Tai Chi practitioners in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China, feel about their Tai Chi experience and what/if this Tai Chi experience has contributed to their life in any way. The findings of this cross-cultural study can contribute to improving the quality of life of elders as well as to promoting Tai Chi, as a health and wellbeing preventive and maintenance tool for all of us. There is no conflict of interest between the researcher and the potential participant.

Study Design

This study consists of research fieldwork and data analysis. I will conduct fieldwork in Jinan, China (five months), Halifax, Canada (four months) and including approximately 12-16 participants at each site. The collected first-hand data through interviews and observations in participants' Tai Chi groups will be brought back to Dalhousie University for analysis in order to generate research findings.

Who can participate in the study

This study invites people (men or women) who are at least 55 years old; practicing Tai Chi for any length of time with a Tai Chi group; with adequate health condition that ensure their regular Tai Chi participation within their own Tai Chi group; with any level of education; retired or still working; and from any ethnic background.

What you will be asked to do

As a study participant, you will be asked to allow me to interview you about your Tai Chi experience. The interview will take approximately an hour to two hours, at a location of your choice.

Possible Risks

There is no risk for participation in this study. As a participant, your identity will not be explicitly revealed during the course of this study or in my research related publications. If it is necessary to refer to you as a participant for explaining a concept, with your permission to use that information, you will be referred to with a pseudonym (e.g., Ms. Li or John).

Possible Benefits

There are no direct benefits for you from this study. However, the information regarding your Tai Chi experience will be great contribution to this study. All contribution from each of the study participants including you enables achieving the study goals. The study findings will enlighten public awareness of Tai Chi's contribution to elders' health and wellbeing that may indirectly benefit you in the future.

Compensation

Although your participation is greatly appreciated, there is no compensation for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality

The interview recording and notes will be kept in a password-protected computer and all paper notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet both in Halifax and in Jinan. All collected information will be kept at Dalhousie University for five years from the time it was collected and then deleted (electronic) and shredded (paper).

Feedback opportunity

If a participant wishes to review the transcripts of his/her interview, he or she will receive the requested information within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., three months after the completion of the fieldwork at each site). A summary of the research (including a Chinese version) will be available at the completion of my PhD program. Participants' consent for their names to be used in the acknowledgements of my thesis or future publications will be sought beforehand.

Problems or Concerns

If you have any questions, please contact Ping Lu or Professor Jerome H. Barkow at the above contacts. This Research Introduction Letter is for your information. It is your choice either to keep it with you or destroy it for any reasons.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Dalhousie University Research and Ethics Board. If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, ethics@dal.ca. It is acceptable to call collect if you live at a distance from Halifax, Canada.

APPENDIX A (2) Research Introductory Letter (Simplified Chinese version)

参与者须知

研究课题：太极拳：一个古老又新颖的现实：对加拿大哈利法克斯市和中国济南市老年太极拳练习者在加拿大及中国社会文化背景下的太极拳经历之探讨

研究单位：加拿大达尔豪斯大学（及山东大学）

导师：加拿大达尔豪斯大学人类学系教授 Jerome Barkow 博士及山东大学教授、主任医师、齐鲁医院业务副院长、心脏病专家高海青教授(济南社会调研期间)

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研究者：加拿大达尔豪斯大学跨学科博士系、博士候选人吕平

联系方式：电话：152xxxxxxx，电子邮件：ping.lu@dal.ca

研究简介

我们邀请您参加本研究。您的参与完全自愿。您可以在研究项目的任何阶段退出。您不必回答您不想回答的问题。本须知说明潜在的风险或可能对您引起的不便。您的参与可能对您没有直收益。但您提供的信息可能会对我们的社会作出贡献。

研究目的

本研究旨在调研在加拿大哈利法克斯市和中国济南市练太极拳的老年人的练拳经历以及该经历对他们生活各方面的影响。在两种文化对比基础上的研究成果可以用于提高老年人的生活质量、推广太极拳运动以助力于大众防病健身。研究者与参与者之间没有任何利益冲突。

研究方案

本研究包括社会调研和资料分析。我将在中国济南市做为期五个月、加拿大哈利法克斯市做为期四个月的社会调研。在每个城市我预计访谈 12 至 16 名参与者。社会调研过程中我与参与者交谈及参加他们的太极拳小组练习活动所收集到的第一手资料将被带回达尔豪斯大学做进一步分析以总结归纳出研究结果。

参与者资格

本研究邀请 55 岁及以上的男性或女性、正在参加任何太极拳班或小组的人。参与者打太极拳的年限长短不限，健康情况应能保证参加自己小组的日常太极拳练习，学历不限，退休与否均可，种族背景不限。

资料收集

参与者将接受我对您的打太极拳经历的访谈。整个访谈过程大约需一到两个小时，访谈可以在您选择的地点进行。

参与风险

本研究没有风险。在调研期间以及相关的发表文献中，参与者的个人信息将受到保护，本调研绝不用您的真实姓名。如果有必要提到您作为一个参与者以用来解释某一个概念，在您同意的前提下，您的名字将被用匿名代替（比如：李女士）。

受益的可能性

作为本调研的参与者虽然您目前没有直接受益，但是，包括您在内的每一位参与者练太极拳的个人经历对于顺利完成本研究都十分重要。本研究的成果将会启发公众更深刻地了解太极拳对于老年保健的重要作用，从而有可能将来间接地对您有益。

经济补偿

参与本研究对您没有经济补偿。十分感谢您的参与。

信息保密

在哈利法克斯市和济南市，访谈录音将被保存在需密码开启的计算机内，笔记保存在有锁的文件柜内。社会调研资料从收集之日起的五年后将被销毁（电子形式的被删除，笔记被碎纸机销毁）。

信息反馈

如果参与者提出要看自己的访谈记录，将在社会调研结束三个月内收到一个副本。在我获得博士学位时，会准备一份本研究的结果概要（包括汉语的）以供参与者索取。在此之前，我会征求相关参与者的意见，如果参与者同意，他们的真实姓名将会只出现在我的论文及之后发表的文献中“鸣谢参与者”的部分。

联系方式

如您有任何问题，可以用本须知提供的方式与吕平或 Jerome Barkow 教授联系。本须知的目的是为您提供信息。您看完后可以随意保存或销毁。

本研究项目已被达尔豪斯大学研究伦理委员会审查批准。如果您在本研究的任何方面遇到困难或有顾虑，可以与达尔豪斯大学研究伦理部的 Catherine Connors 主任通过电话(902)494-1462 或电子邮件 ethics@dal.ca 联系。如果您住在远离加拿大哈利法克斯市的地方，您可以打对方付款的长途电话。

APPENDIX B (1) Consent Form

Title of Study

Tai Chi: A New and Ancient Reality: The Socio-Cultural Context of Elder Tai Chi Practitioners in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China

I (the undersigned study participant) agree to be referred to with a pseudonym (e.g., *Ms. Li or John*) in this study to protect my identity.

Yes No

Audio recording
(If no, written notes will be taken by the researcher.)

Yes No

Use of substantial direct quotations without personal identification, in Ping Lu's PhD thesis or related research presentations

Yes No

I (Ping Lu) may ask to take photograph of you (research participant) in your Tai Chi practice for the use in my PhD thesis or research presentations. I will ask you again for your permission each time prior to taking your photo.

Yes No

Re-contacting you (research participant) for follow-up questions regarding interview information for this research, if necessary.

I (the undersigned research participant) have been given the opportunity to learn and discuss about this study and fully understand the above information in this Research Introductory Letter that I have been given a copy to keep. I hereby consent to take part in this study. Signing this Consent Form indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher (Ping Lu): _____ Date: _____

Please note: to protect participant's identities, this Consent Form will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately.

APPENDIX B (2) Consent Form (Simplified Chinese version)

知情同意书

签字页

研究课题：太极拳：一个古老又新颖的现实：对加拿大哈利法克斯市和中国济南市老年太极拳练习者在加拿大及中国社会文化背景下的太极拳经历之探讨

我（本研究的参与者）同意在本研究项目中用一个匿名（例如：李女士）以对我的个人身份保密。

是 否 访谈时录音
(如果参与者不同意此项，研究者将在访谈中做笔记)

是 否 在吕平的博士论文以及相关的演讲中、在不暴露您的个人信息的前提下使用大量直接引语。

是 否 我（吕平）可能需拍摄您（参与者）打太极拳时的照片以用于我的博士论文及演讲中。在每次拍照前我将再次征求您同意。

是 否 如有必要，您（参与者）可能被再次联系、问一些关于调研中了解到信息的后续问题。

我（在本页签名的参与者）已阅读了“参与者须知”并已经与研究者讨论了有关本研究项目的内容，充分了解了以上信息。我收到了一份参与者须知的副本。我在此承诺参与本研究。我在本页的书面签名代表了该承诺。

参与者姓名(请用正楷书写): _____

参与者签名: _____ 日期: _____

研究者签名(吕平): _____ 日期: _____

备注：为保护参与者的个人信息，本文件将被密封在信封内单独保存。

APPENDIX C (1) Oral Consent Script

Title of Study

Tai Chi: A New and Ancient Reality: The Socio-Cultural Context of Elder Tai Chi Practitioners in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China

[I will read the following paragraph aloud to all participants.]

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statement: *This study has been clearly explained to you. Your questions regarding this study have been discussed and answered to your satisfaction. You agree to take part in the study and you are aware that your participation is voluntary and you can leave the study at any time without penalty.*

I (the study participant) agree to be referred to with a pseudonym (e.g., Ms. Li or John) in this study to protect my identity.

Participant has verbal consented the following (put a check mark at each appropriate box):

- Yes No Audio recording
(If no, written notes will be taken by the researcher.)
- Yes No Use of substantial direct quotations without personal identification, in Ping Lu's PhD thesis or related research presentations.
- Yes No I (Ping Lu) may ask to take photograph of you (research participant) in your Tai Chi practice for the use in my PhD thesis or research presentations. I will ask you again for your permission each time prior to taking your photo.
- Yes No Re-contacting you (research participant) for follow-up questions regarding interview information for this research, if necessary.

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please note: to protect participant's identities, this Consent Script will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately.

APPENDIX C (2) Oral Consent Script (Simplified Chinese version)

口头同意书

研究课题：太极拳：一个古老又新颖的现实：对加拿大哈利法克斯市和中国济南市老年太极拳练习者在加拿大及中国社会文化背景下的太极拳经历之探讨

[我将为参与者阅读以下段落]

请口头告诉我您是否同意以下陈述：您已经十分清楚地被告知本研究项目的内容。对于您对本研究可能存在的任何问题，也已经被解释清楚并给予了您满意的答复。您同意并自愿参加本研究。您可以在任何时间退出本研究而且不被追究任何后果。

我（本研究的参与者）同意在本研究项目中用一个匿名（例如：李女士）以对我的个人身份保密。

参与者已经口头承诺了以下各项（在每项前面相应的方格内打勾）：

- 是 否 访谈时录音
(如果参与者不同意此项，研究者将在访谈中做笔记)
- 是 否 在吕平的博士论文以及相关的演讲中、在不暴露您的个人信息的前提下使用大量直接引语。
- 是 否 我（吕平）可能需拍摄您（参与者）打太极拳时的照片以用于我的博士论文及演讲中。在每次拍照前我将再次征求您的同意。
- 是 否 如有必要，您（参与者）可能被再次联系、被问一些关于调研中了解到信息的后续问题。

研究者签名 (吕平): _____ 日期: _____

备注：为保护参与者的个人信息，本文件将被密封在信封内单独保存。

APPENDIX D (1) Interview Guide

1. How did you happen to start practicing Tai Chi? What influenced you to try it? Which style of Tai Chi and why that style?
2. When did you start practicing Tai Chi? (Approximately how many years/months ago?) Where did you start practicing Tai Chi? Has the location of your practice affected your practice?
3. What group did you start Tai Chi with? Have you always practiced Tai Chi with this group? If so, why? If other groups, which ones, why did you switch groups? What are the differences among the groups to you?
4. What did you hope to get from practicing Tai Chi? So far, what have you got according to your expectations?
5. What are the disadvantages/negative side of practicing Tai Chi to you, if there is any?
6. Do you think that practicing Tai Chi has affected your health (emotional or physical) in any way? If so, can you explain or give me some examples?
7. Has your Tai Chi practice affected the way you think about your age? If so, in what way?
8. What do your friends and relatives or neighbors think about you practicing Tai Chi? Would you say that their feelings or attitudes influence your decision to continue with Tai Chi?
9. What does Tai Chi mean or represent to you?
10. Does your practice of Tai Chi make any difference in how you conduct your daily life? In what ways?
11. What expectations do you bring to the Tai Chi groups you participate (teach/take)?
12. What reasons have motivated you to continue practicing Tai Chi? In your opinion, are there any other activities that could be a substitute for Tai Chi? Could they be a substitute for you?
13. What particular age group would you think that Tai Chi is best for? In your experience, what age group tends to practice it?
14. Have you always been physically active? Can you give me some examples of your activities over the years? For example, are/were you involved with other organized activities such as dance or yoga? Does/did your work (paid job) require any such activities? Does/did your regular routine involve lots of activity? How do/did you get to work (paid job)/your Tai Chi class/group?

APPENDIX D (2) Interview Guide (Simplified Chinese version)

访谈提纲

- 1) 您为什么开始练太极拳？是受什么因素影响？哪一种太极拳？为什么？
- 2) 您何时开始练太极拳（大约多少年 / 月前）？开始练拳在什么地点？该练拳地点对您练拳有影响吗？
- 3) 开始练拳时参加了哪个太极拳组？您一直参加该组吗？为什么总是同一个组？如果您曾换过组，为什么换？这些组的不同之处是什么？
- 4) 您对练太极拳报有什么希望？迄今为止您在打拳中收获到了哪些您所希望的？
- 5) 如果有的话，练太极拳对您的负面影响或带来不便的方面是什么？
- 6) 您觉得练拳的经历影响到了您的心理和生理健康的任何方面吗？如有，您能解释一下或举例说明吗？
- 7) 练拳影响到了您对自己年龄（变老）的想法吗？如果有，在哪些方面？
- 8) 您的家人、亲戚、朋友们支持您练拳吗？他们的看法影响您继续练拳吗？
- 9) 太极拳对您来说代表着什么？打太极拳的意义对您是什么？
- 10) 练拳对您的日常生活有影响吗？有什么影响？
- 11) 您对您参加（教或学）的太极拳组报有什么期望？
- 12) 使您对太极拳保持兴趣的因素都有哪些？您认为有别的活动能代替太极拳吗？您本人能接受这些别的活动代替您练拳吗？
- 13) 您认为哪个年龄段的人最适合练太极拳？根据您的个人经历，实际上正在练拳的人是哪个年龄段的？
- 14) 您总是很爱运动吗？能举几个您多年来参加运动的例子吗？例如，您正在（或曾经）参加像跳舞或瑜伽那样的有组织的集体活动吗？类似的这些活动与您退休前的或现在的工作有直接关系吗？您的日常生活中包括很多活动吗？您用什么交通工具上班或去您的太极拳组？

APPENDIX E The Public School System in China

Elementary School:

Children begin elementary school at the age 6. Elementary schools consist of six years from Grade 1 to Grade 6.

Junior High School:

Junior High School is three years including the first year, second year, and third year.

High School:

High School is also three years including the first year, second year, and the third year.

Technical School:

Technical Schools admit graduates of junior high schools or of high schools. The lengths of technical schools vary, ranging from one year to three years. In some high schools, students have a choice before the last year, whether they want to go to a technical school or taking the national entrain examinations for university. The focuses of the curriculum for the two choices are different accordingly. Some community colleges exist in China as well.

College and University:

College and university both admit high school graduates. The lengths vary. Normally students take three years to complete a college degree or four years to get a bachelor's degree from a university. After the completion of a bachelor's degree, students can continue going to graduate studies, including a Master's degree (normally takes two to three years) and a doctoral degree (four or more years).

Notes:

- 1) The Chinese government offers 9-year compulsory education, which includes the 6 years in elementary school and 3 years in junior high school.
- 2) The curriculum for all institutions is standardized by the central government. Textbooks are designed and produced by the committee in Beijing and distributed nationwide.
- 3) All teachers, faculty members, and staff are government employees.