

Taoist Tai-Chi: An Intersection of Western Spiritual Culture and Chinese Religion

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Abstract

This research paper explores and analyzes the relationship the Taoist Tai-Chi Society and the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism shares with contemporary spirituality in the Western context. Academic typologies regarding contemporary spiritualities from notable authors Jeremy Carrette, Richard King, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead are utilized as evaluative frameworks for addressing the TTCS and Fung Loy Kok. This reveals while these theories are adequate for understanding the organization's relationship with the economy and spiritual marketplace of the West, they do not fully account for the importance of the organizations' as a medium of cultural exchange with Chinese spirituality and religion. As an alternative, this paper concludes that Taoist Tai-Chi and Fung Loy Kok and the relationship it shares with Western contemporary spirituality can be understood as a post-Oriental dialogue between cultures, characterized by the creation of a hybrid religious practice.

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Introduction

New Age religion, private spirituality, and holistic practices have become commonplace within the spiritual ethos of the West, leading scholarship to question and explain the underlying reasons for the growth in spiritual culture.¹ This trend is indicative of a greater cultural shift towards “self-realization, personal autonomy, and self-expression” that is realized and cultivated within the personal life of those that identify as spiritual.² Of all the various influences within this modern spiritual culture, Chinese philosophy and teachings have become a pervasive force, evidenced by the popularization of various martial arts, Chinese medicine, self-cultivation techniques, such as meditation, and philosophies rooted in Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Subsequently, organizations like the Taoist Tai-Chi Society/Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism have become notable entities in their position as cultural agents within the context of Western society, highlighting a relationship between Western culture and Chinese spiritual/religious culture. The popularization of Chinese religion in the West has enabled scholars to attempt to typologize and analyze the emergence of these contemporary spiritualities and organizations by relating their popularization to wider cultural/social entities such as economics, psychology and popular culture.

This study will use Fung Loy Kok, an international organization that offers Taoist Tai-Chi® lessons and retreats as well as various other spiritual activities, will be the main subject within this research endeavour as the organization represents a cultural touchstone between Chinese and Western culture within the ethos of Western spirituality. The reason for this lies in FLK’s arguably unique position as a centre that exhibits and promotes both spiritual and

¹ Heelas, Paul, and Linda Woodhead. *The Spiritual Revolution*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.1.

² Woodhead, Linda, and Paul Heelas. *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2000. 449.

religious connections for its primarily Western practitioners through the use of Chinese philosophy and practices. Specifically, the Taoist Tai-Chi Society (TTCS) and the more religiously-rooted wing of the organization, the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism (FLK), are an international organization active in 26 countries. It offers a unique brand of *taijiquan* called Taoist Tai-Chi Moving Meditation®, which was created by their founder Moy Lin Shin who is credited with popularizing tai-chi within the West. FLK was originally founded in Hong Kong in 1968 and began to spread in the West during the 70s through the private teachings of Moy. The organization was not officially institutionalized until 1981 with the opening of their first temple in Toronto, Ontario. Subsequently, temples have been opened internationally including the Orangeville International Centre, which acts as the headquarters and training retreat for the organization. The Orangeville International Center will be an integral part of this observational research.³

This institute is particularly relevant in understanding the relationship Chinese spirituality shares with the West as it is open to any individuals interested in attempting Taoist Tai-Chi but also has roots and foundations in traditional Daoist teachings and internal alchemy as well, offering religious components that “observes the unified teachings of the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. [Their] mission is to deliver all from suffering, both the living and the dead, by pursuing the way of community service, rituals and ceremonies, and the cultivation of body and mind.”⁴ Therefore, this organization does not identify itself as one whose sole interest lies in offering a physical practice, but rather labels itself as an organization that has some form of authority in presenting and propagating Chinese philosophy/spirituality in the West. Furthermore, given the popularity of FLK among non-Chinese and Chinese individuals,

³ Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism. *Our History*. <http://www.taoist.org/about-us/our-history/>.

⁴ _____. *About Us*. <http://www.taoist.org/about-us/>.

coupled with the availability of research material, the organization can be an opportunity for analyzing a potential methodology in which Chinese spirituality is navigated and promulgated within the context of Western society.

Thus, this study intends to understand the importance of contemporary Chinese spirituality in the West through the case study of TTCS/FLK. It does so first by outlining key scholarly theories regarding the relationship between contemporary spirituality within the Western context, focusing on the macro economic theories of authors such as Richard King, Jeremy Carrette, Craig Martin, and the social/cultural theories of authors like Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead; these theories will then be used as evaluative frameworks for understanding the popularization and importance of TTCS/Fung Loy Kok in an attempt to understand the cultural relationship between the West and Chinese spirituality. Second, it argues that while these theories are useful in understanding the relationship FLK and similar institutions share with the Western milieu, they do not account for the global dialogue and exchange of Chinese cultural mores that are occurring through the popularization and propagation of said organizations' agendas. Instead, applying the work of Elijah Siegler and J.J. Clarke, it will be argued that the popularization of Chinese philosophy/spirituality in the context of the West is indicative of a larger post-Oriental dialogue between these two cultures which is occurring within the growing sphere of popular Western spirituality.

The first section of this study intends to review academic understandings regarding the relationship between contemporary spiritual practices/organizations and the wider society. Using the writings of Jeremy Carrette, Richard King (*The Selling of Spirituality*), Craig Martin (*Capitalizing Religion*), Francois Gauthier, and Tuomas Martikainen (*Religion in Consumer Society/ Religion in the Neoliberal Age*) I will explore how the modern ethos of consumerism

and individualism has transformed contemporary spiritual practices to be marketed and sold as a product within a wider consumer culture which has become concerned with crafting individual identities through the individual's participation in said spiritual marketplace. These theories will be contrasted with the writings of Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (*Spiritualities of Life, The Spiritual Revolution*), who conceptualize contemporary spirituality as contributing to a cultural holistic milieu wherein individuals who seek subjective wellness participate within spiritual communities that create a humanistic ethic. These theories will be the focus of study as they offer different lenses regarding the cultural importance of contemporary spirituality which will then be utilized as effective frameworks for understanding TTCS/FLK.

The second section of this study will consequently analyze the advertisement model, organization, and role of TTCS/FLK as a contemporary spiritual organization with the objective of evaluating the relevancy of the above theories when applied to this specific context. It will be argued that FLK in particular is a unique and pragmatic organization that, while utilizing the language of capitalism and popular health culture to market their "brand core concept" and popularize their vision of Chinese religion/spirituality, they offer a practice that falls under Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's holistic milieu which teaches individuals to move away from the consumptive practices associated with modern capitalism. However, it will be made clear that while these theories are adequate in explaining certain nuances regarding FLK's relationship with Western culture, they are limited as they do not account for the role FLK plays as a crucial cultural touchstone that actually bridges a potential barrier between Western and Chinese culture.

Instead, the theories of J.J. Clarke (*The Tao of the West*) combined with the writings of Elijah Siegler (*The Dao of America*) will be taken together and utilized as a framework for understanding FLK as an example of post-Orientalist cultural dialogue between Chinese culture

and that of the West within chapter three. This argument relies on understanding Taoist Tai-Chi as a “point of contact” between Western ideals of health and fitness and a deeper history of Chinese self-cultivation, internal alchemy, and Daoist philosophy. Furthermore, it will be evidenced that FLK represents a hybrid organization of Western and Chinese culture as it offers participants the chance to identify with a form of Daoist identity rooted in Chinese spirituality, but it also operates within the language and cultural norms of the West, including an ethos of individuality, capitalism, and globalization.

Thus, it will be concluded that FLK is an example of an organization which, through its amalgamated practice and promotion of both Chinese spirituality and Western culture, represents a larger post-Oriental and pluralistic dialogue between cultures which is occurring within the holistic milieu of the West as part of its spiritual ethos. This prompts a need for historical and contextual postmodern analysis of organizations which would complement existing understandings of contemporary spirituality.

Chapter One

Understanding Western Contemporary Spirituality

Introduction

Modern academic writing positions the study of contemporary spirituality as the result of the late 1980s rise of seminar spirituality and subjective-wellness following a longer evolution of individualism. This framework situates new-age spirituality as inherently related to business and economics as opposed to the spirituality of the 1960's which was counter-cultural and an expression of freedom. Paul Heelas refers to this paradigm shift in contemporary spirituality as *seminar spirituality*, characterised by spirituality being shifted away from “truths of subjective experience as their primary source of positive experience,” to an internalized spirituality that is characterized as the conflict between one's ego and ‘higher self’ rather than paying attention to socioeconomic roles that was characteristic of the previous decades.⁵ Essentially, this form of spirituality is better understood as being rooted in modern psychology wherein spiritual practices, rather than being perceived as transcendent in an ethereal or reality challenging sense, are a method towards the “deconditioning” of the mind and body which individuals accomplished through professional seminars. Heelas describes this trend as being a result of “ex-counter-culturists who have entered the mainstream as young professionals...[thus] it can hardly be doubted that numbers of the more individualistic, the more self-centered came to appreciate consumption in terms of their spiritual awakening.”⁶ Therefore, the contemporary study of spirituality is generally hinged on the acceptance that spiritual practices are taking place within a culture of “individualism” which is characterized by practitioners looking inwards for a

⁵ Heelas, Paul. *Spiritualities of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 51.

⁶ *Ibid*, 51.

definition of their self-worth and spiritual being.

This inward-spirituality has led to debate regarding the nature of contemporary spirituality and its relationship to business, consumer culture and wellness within North America with scholars offering different interpretations of these key relations. This chapter intends to review key literature regarding contemporary spirituality and how it interacts with wider societal structures such as the economy and popular culture which will lay the theoretical foundations for the subsequent chapters.

Spirituality as Related to Consumer Culture and Capitalism

Notable scholars such as Carrette and King (*Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*) conceptualize contemporary spirituality as being primarily concerned with workplace and life efficiency rather than being particularly socially-transformative, being rooted in self-interested individualism and consumption practices.⁷ To Carrette and King, individualism is viewed as a method of mind-control that characterized late-capitalist society, “creating a form of subjectivity built on ideals of consumer freedom.”⁸ Therefore, the above scholarship and related writers such as Martikainen and Gauthier (*Religion in Consumer Society*) and Craig Martin (*Capitalizing Religion*) characterize contemporary spirituality in the West as being primarily influenced by consumer culture and branding.

Specifically, Gauthier and Martikainen argue that “consumer culture is the means of expression and actualisation of the modern project of the individualised self, as it ‘provides a very particular set of material circumstances in which individuals come to acquire a reflexive

⁷ Carrette, Jeremy, and Richard King. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. Routledge, 2005.5.

⁸ *Ibid*, 57.

relation to identity.”⁹ This theory of spirituality places individual choice as an ultimate illusion, wherein subjective individualism is crafted and molded by elites within the business and marketing sphere, taking advantage of a cultural niche that has grown in popularity since the 1980s. Leading economic analysis points to “post-Fordism,” referring to the post-war explosion of branding and mass consumption, as the historical link between consumer culture and society, claiming with the dematerialization of goods (referring to “concepts” such as religion, spirituality, and wellness are being presented as a commodity), communication networks begin to arbitrate social power, highlighting the ideological nature of neoliberalism as opposed to typical market capitalism.¹⁰ Essentially, the move towards neoliberalism from traditional market capitalism is characterized by brands and consumer forces being able to influence culture on a pervasive level where individuals create identities and social relations based on said consumption.¹¹ Therefore, marketing forces and corporate powers have direct influence regarding what spirituality means within the greater consumer culture of contemporary North America.

The acceptance of consumer culture capitalism as the heart of contemporary spirituality and an acceptance of the pervasive nature of neoliberal ideology led Carrette and King to create a typology of spiritualities in relationship to capitalism:¹²

- *Revolutionary or Anti-Capitalist Spiritualities*: Spiritual movements that reject capitalist/neoliberal models of society and is characterized as being in favour of social-justice and cultural transformation.

⁹ Gauthier, François, Linda Woodhead, and Tuomas Martikainen. "Consumerism as the Ethos of Consumer Society." In *Religion in Consumer Society*, edited by François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen, England: Ashgate, 2013.3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 195.

¹¹ Saad-Filho, Alfredo, and Deborah Johnson. "Introduction." In *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, edited by Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnson, London: Pluto Press, 2005. 1 -2.

¹² *Ibid*, 17-25.

- *Business-Ethics/Reformist Spiritualities*: Characterized as movements that lend primacy to the pursuit of profit as a life-affirming goal but do so as constrained by ethical principles derived from religious or spiritual conceptions.
- *Individualistic/Consumerist Spiritualities*: Also known as “prosperity religion,” which are religious movements that embrace capitalism and individuality and transfer these values into their spirituality.
- *Capitalist Spirituality*: The use of spiritual and religious symbols to facilitate profit and corporate endeavours.

The above typology of contemporary spirituality assumes an observable level of neoliberal/capitalist ideology,¹³ ultimately informing how North American and capitalist society integrates inner-spirituality into its cultural framework. This notion is based on the concept of neoliberalism as a Western ideology wherein consumption and consumerism has influence on all aspects of social and cultural life (in this case spirituality) to the point where dominant values (including wellbeing, hedonism, happiness, personal satisfaction, choice, sovereignty, etc.) are actualised through material circumstances which individuals use to form their identity.¹⁴ Within this ideology, spirituality functions as a brand that individuals use to present certain aspects and values of their persona to society. Mike Featherstone succinctly describes this relationship as “transvaluation” between activity and marketing forces wherein activities are sold as the “embodiment” of values where running and yoga are no longer simply activities but a medium that creates a personal identity representing (in the case of inner-spirituality practices such as yoga and Tai-Chi) harmony, sensuous experience, naturalness, etc.¹⁵ Thus, brands such as Lululemon are not simply sellers of yoga-accessories but provides a means through which individuals create their self-identity through the association of these brands with spiritual-wellness, naturalness, and health. Heelas and Woodhead define this as “subjective wellbeing

¹³ While the *Revolutionary/Anti-Capitalist Spiritualities* reject this ideology, this typology is still based on the acceptance of the primacy of said ideology. Thus, capitalism/neoliberal ideology ultimately informs how these spiritualities present themselves and operate relative to capitalism.

¹⁴ *Religion in consumer society*, 3.

¹⁵ Featherstone, Mike. “The body in consumer culture”, in M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth, and B.S. Turner (eds), *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, London: Sage. 1991. 185.

culture” wherein consumer culture and branding emphasises not the utility of a product but rather the experiential benefits, focusing on the value of personal uniqueness and “feeling good about oneself.”¹⁶

Carrette, King, and Martin all view the transvaluation of spirituality by market forces as inherently dangerous in terms of social and cultural transformation. Carrette and King specifically characterize most forms of modern spirituality as devaluating and subverting “embodied communities” due to the increased forces on individualised identity. Specifically, they claim that “these forms of spirituality are the result of a failure to recognise that individuality is born out of community and that ‘spirituality,’ as a psychological reality, is a hidden form of social manipulation,” which inherently contribute to the destruction of older and indigenous spiritual communities.¹⁷ Craig Martin describes the individual choice of engaging in contemporary spirituality as the result of an internalized late-capitalist ideology, characterized by individuals utilizing spirituality as a means of expressing the autonomous self without interfering with authoritative institutions such as the economy and the state.¹⁸ Therefore, to Martin, spirituality is a means of adapting to and accepting the status quo rather than the means of overcoming and dealing with oppressive life forces. Thus, the above authors conceptualize spirituality as a vehicle that corporate forces utilize in order to facilitate a profit motive and capitalize on a trend that has been growing since the 1980s rather than a means of personal or social transformation.

However, Carrette and King are not entirely convinced that the present and future of contemporary spirituality are entirely victim of neoliberal and capitalist machinations. The above authors conclude by arguing that there is potential for ‘spiritual atheisms’ which are

¹⁶ Heelas, Paul, and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*. 84-85.

¹⁷ Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*. 84-85.

¹⁸ Martin, Craig. *Capitalizing Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 122-124.

“engaged spirituality grounded in an awareness of our mutual interdependence, the need for social justice and economically sustainable lifestyles,” which, according to Carrette and King, may dismantle and resist the pervasive nature of neoliberalism.¹⁹ While the above notion of contemporary spirituality calls for almost a form of spiritual activism, other contemporary scholars, while accepting the notion that the economy and market are central to understanding contemporary spirituality, argue that spirituality is already contributing to a form of subjective and cultural wellness through the cultivation of humanistic ethics.

Subjective Wellness and Ethics

Paul Heelas in *Spiritualities of Life* challenges the notion of contemporary spirituality being primarily concerned with consumption by noting that characterizing spirituality with the language of consumption does not necessarily strip value away from the act. Rather, the focus on consumptive language only serves to guide scholarship away from other aspects of spirituality.²⁰ Instead, this school of literature focuses on the subjective nature of contemporary spirituality in order to discern if and how spirituality promotes inward growth that is then reflected by the practitioner outwardly into wider society and culture, potentially encouraging social and cultural transformation *away* from what can be described as over-consumption and capitalism.

At the heart of this argument is the idea that contemporary spirituality is largely defined and interpreted by the practitioners themselves regardless of the profit motive pursued by outside marketing and consumer forces. Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas succinctly describe this occurrence through the “subjectivization thesis.” Building upon the modern notion of individualization, the subjectivization thesis is a Taylorian notion of culture that Heelas and

¹⁹ Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*. 182.

²⁰ Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life*. 110.

Woodhead conceptualize as shift from individuals characterizing their life in relation to “object” obligations and life (such as monetary gain) towards “life lived by reference to one’s own subjective experiences,” experiences which are both relational and individualistic in nature.²¹ Within this cultural shift, people define themselves not in terms of an outside established order but rather through an understanding of their “inner self” which is pursued through action (and thought) that encourages a notion of personal/inner transcendence. The above scholars subsequently characterize the culture of subjective-ness as being concerned with “states of consciousness, states of mind, memories, emotions, passions, sensations, bodily experiences, dreams, feelings, inner conscience, and sentiments.”²² This body of literature contrasts with the writings of authors such as Carrette and King who are primarily concerned with the interaction between authoritative institutions (marketing, branding, and consumption) and the ethos of contemporary spirituality. Rather than claiming that participants in contemporary spirituality are simply being “thought controlled” (using the language of Carrette and King)²³, Heelas and Woodhead view forms of contemporary spirituality as a means of moving beyond transvaluation and the subjective wellbeing culture discussed in the subsequent section into the “holistic milieu,” which is characterized as individuals seeking to better their subjective wellness not by engaging with consumption and products but rather by engaging in a larger community of like-minded individuals.²⁴ The notion of holistic milieu being transformative lies in an understanding of how spiritual activities generally take place. Specifically, relationality is key in contemporary spirituality. This includes the relation that the participant has with the teacher/instructor in facilitating and encouraging a “spiritual path and the personal path,” as well as with fellow

²¹ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*. 2-5.

²² *Ibid*, 3.

²³ Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*. 6.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 82-88.

participants who are engaging in a similar “journey.”²⁵ Thus, authority is not entirely subverted by forces of individualistic culture and consumption within spiritual practices, but is instead negotiated by the relationship the participant shares with the instructor/teacher and peers, especially in the case of community-based spiritual activities such as Tai-Chi or yoga.

This characterization of spirituality then moves away from the individual as being controlled by outside branding forces (not to suggest that they do not influence how spirituality is popularized and propagated within culture), to being empowered to seek validation and happiness from a spiritual understanding of the self. Therefore, in regard to understanding scholarship regarding contemporary spirituality, Woodhead and Heelas put a greater emphasis on the personal experiences of individual participants and practitioners of spirituality who, while engaging in spiritual activity in the wider culture and society of consumer culture and capitalism, potentially nurture and establish values which reject or are in opposition with said status quo.

Thus, in their view contemporary spirituality is not simply engagement with an activity in order to craft a unique individual identity, but rather a transformative concept that engages participants with what it means to experience life. However, on the surface, the description of subjective wellbeing culture and holistic milieu still suggests an inherently individualistic and self-centered idea of spirituality wherein the participant is only attempting to address their inner-life rather than working at transforming greater culture and society (reinforcing Carrette and King’s claims).

Heelas, while acknowledging the individual nature of contemporary spirituality, argues that it contributes and facilitates a general human ethic through an adaptation of Taylorian “horizons” in which “[o]ur normal understanding of self-realization presupposes that some things are more important beyond the self ... [N]othing would count as a fulfilment in a world in

²⁵ *Ibid*, 23-28.

which literally nothing was important but self-fulfilment.”²⁶ Heelas contends that while in some cases (perhaps the more “consumer-driven” spiritual practices), participants learn to deal with their relatively “narrow” horizons which is the objective-driven modern lifestyle. However, Heelas argues that participants seek a spiritual “horizon” through their respective spiritual or holistic milieu, leading to expanded consciousness and the will to “experience challenges, opportunities,” similar to how counter-culturalists in the 1960s experienced and engaged in transformative and experiential lifestyles.²⁷ Essentially, while acts like yoga and Tai-Chi promote inwards reflection and personal physical betterment, it consequently also transforms wider society by prompting these participants to engage in culturally and social transformative endeavours. This contributes to the understanding of contemporary spirituality as this theory suggests that outside institutional forces do not completely devalue spiritual practices when discussing the pervasive nature of capitalism and consumer culture.

The notion of a transformative ethic of spirituality, according to Heelas, builds upon the notion of “horizons,” combined with the Durkheim’s “Religion of Humanity,” to contend that inner wellbeing (found through contemporary spiritual activity) creates an emotionally-based ethics system within inner-life circles.²⁸ This ethics system, after being internalized by those involved in inner-life circles, create a situation wherein “many participants (citing the Kendal Project in *The Spiritual Revolution*) report experiencing the values — the ‘timeless’ truths — of the ethic of humanity as emanating for the sacrality of the interior life. The values are experienced in expressive mode.”²⁹ In reference to the contemporary understanding of spirituality, Heelas suggests that the findings from The Kendal Project are evidence of this

²⁶ Charles Taylor as quoted by Paul Heelas. Heelas, Paul. *Spiritualities of life*. 120.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 121.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 127.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 128.

humanistic ethic, regardless of the consumer-driven nature of contemporary capitalism. This notion may appear overly idealistic to those that argue for the authoritative ideology of neoliberal capitalism on the realm of religion/spirituality. However, Heelas argues that the individualistic nature of modernity does not lead to a consumptive version of spirituality in totality, but instead argues the binary distinction between individual and community is invalid given the transcendent nature of spirituality. Instead, as Heelas succinctly summarizes: “ultimately, mind-body spirituality is not about personal contentment that is, the satisfaction of those subjectivities stimulated or aroused by the more capitalistic aspects of everyday life. By definition, expressivists are looking to express themselves by broadening their creative horizons...hence the importance of spiritual direction for the best route to the horizon and beyond.”³⁰ Thus, the theory of contemporary spirituality according to Heelas and similar scholars should not be rooted in the language of consumption entirely but factor in the personal impact of spiritual activities on the participants and the effect these participants subsequently have on greater culture and society.

Conclusions

The exploration of the above scholars in the field of contemporary spirituality intended to yield two main points regarding how to situate spirituality in the wider ethos of modern, capitalistic society. First, scholarship, albeit to varying degrees, accepts an influence of consumer culture and corporatization on the realm of spirituality, influencing how spiritual movements/institutions project themselves into the wider culture, a foundation that will be utilized to explore the Taoist Tai-Chi Society and FLK in the subsequent chapter. Second, there is the potential for contemporary spirituality to have a transformative capacity both on the individual level according to the writing of Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead through their

³⁰ *Ibid*, 135.

conception of a spiritual ethic and holistic milieu. The importance of this capacity will be explored through an analysis regarding how spiritual institutions, in this case TTCS/FLK, appeal to notions of subjective wellness and inner-life as well as create an environment in which Chinese culture interacts with wider Western culture in a transformative and dialogue-based manner.

Chapter Two

Fung Loy Kok and Daoism as a Western Spiritual Organization

Introduction

As the frameworks of Carrette and King, and Heelas and Woodhead have been outlined, this section intends to apply their writing and theories to the organization and management of Fung Loy Kok. The objective is to evaluate these theories in regards to creating a thorough understanding of Fung Loy Kok in the context of contemporary spirituality and the culture they operate within. Specifically, Carrette and King's notions of consumerism will be applied to the marketing and "brand core concept" of FLK to potentially discern the interaction between the organization and consumer culture. Subsequently, Fung Loy Kok will be approached as existing within a holistic milieu as argued by Woodhead and Heelas, focusing on how the practice of Moy Lin Shin's tai-chi relates to the understanding of spirituality as a route to social transformation. The limits of the above theories will also be explored, prompting the need for Fung Loy Kok to not be analyzed solely as an institution of contemporary spirituality but rather one that is rooted in Chinese culture and history which is operating within the wider culture of Western modernity.

The Western Appropriation of Daoism

According to Carrette and King in *Selling Spirituality*, modern new-age and spiritual movements are marked and characterized as borrowing or appropriating motifs and ideas from Asian traditions, privatizing them to cater to notions of individuality and Western modernity. Specifically, the authors suggest that the appropriation of Asian traditions by Western culture leads to a "flattening out" of those traditions, and to "the ultimate in the commodification of other people's cultures available for selective appropriation, repackaging and selling." In the case of Stephen Russell, author of multiple holistic self-help books and owner/operator of *Barefoot Doctor*, a UK based health therapy shop, Russell "even justifies such cultural appropriation on

the grounds that he has paid good money to ‘purchase’ such cultural rights by studying them.”³¹ Thus the question arises, is Fung Loy Kok/TTCS part of this pick and choose notion of spirituality? Arguably, based on the unique history of the organization coupled with the Chinese religious dimension of the organization, this theory is inadequate for understanding Fung Loy Kok/TTCS.

Fung Loy Kok/TTCS notably occupies a space within Western culture not only as an institution of tai-chi and spirituality but of a cultural exchange between China and the West. Specifically, Moy Lin Shin founded the TTCS and specifically Fung Loy Kok as an extension of Hong Kong Quanzhen Daoism which can be considered “ethnic” Chinese Daoism.³² Moy Lin Shin believed in propagating and spreading this form of Daoism (alongside elements of Confucianism and Buddhism) through his brand and practice of tai chi which he claims draws upon influences from Zhang Sanfeng, a mythical Daoist monk, and the Yijing, a philosophical text part of the Confucian canon.³³ On an ethical level, the TTCS and Fung Loy Kok adhere to and teach the *Eight Virtues* sourced from Sage Emperor Guan’s *Book of Enlightenment*. The virtues of filial piety, sibling harmony, dedication, trustworthiness, propriety, sacrifice, and sense of shame are the foundation of their volunteerism model.³⁴ This model is referred to by Moy as “Cultivating Health Through Virtue,” channeling traditional Chinese thought on the link between virtues and internal organs/health, stating how “improving your Tai Chi and improving your health doesn’t just involve doing Don-yus and Tor-yus. You have to cultivate your virtue in your everyday life before you can really be considered to be cultivating your internals.”³⁵ This

³¹ Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*. 89-90.

³² Siegler, Elijah. *The Dao of America: The History and Practice of American Daoism*. University of California Press, 2003. 202.

³³ *Ibid*, 205.

³⁴ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *The Eight Virtues*. <http://www.taoist.org/8virtues/>.

³⁵ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet*. 2007.

traditionally Chinese form of tai-chi and self-cultivation points away from Carrette/King's notion of a "flattening out" of Eastern philosophy and instead suggests that Fung Loy Kok/TTCL is propagating traditional notions of Chinese philosophy/culture.

Furthermore, these values and ideals are reflected in the construction and the physical space of the Orangeville International Centre. The centre, in addition to space dedicated to tai-chi and various other Taoist activities, contains numerous buildings and shrines dedicated to Chinese religious functions, such as weddings and funerals. The Fung Loy Kok Three Religions Temple honour the deities Wong Tai Sin, Lü Dongbin, Confucius, Laozi, Avalokiteśvara, and Lin Moniang, with publications of the *Goon Yam Gau Foo Ging*, *Daai Bei Jau*, *The Great Learning*, *The Heart Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom*, and *The Scripture of Clarity and Wisdom* available to visitors. Alongside the Three Religions Temple the Orangeville grounds include a Hall of Original Constellations, Columbarium and cemetery, and the original temple (The Early Temple) which now acts as both a temple and a memorial to Moy Lin Shin.³⁶ Regular rituals take place within these installations, typically led by a visiting Daoist monk. Furthermore, the Chinese cultural elements and religious aspects of Fung Loy Kok are a direct result of the history and beliefs of Moy Lin Shin who is (according to members of the organization) an ordained Daoist monk, who likely made the transition to becoming a monk during his education in Hong Kong.³⁷ Specifically, Moy is referred to as a "Taoist missionary" by members of Fung Loy Kok.³⁸

Thus, it is apparent that Fung Loy Kok and TTCS as a "flattened" out adaption of Asian spirituality/culture is a superficial analysis given the Chinese roots of the organization coupled with the multi-faceted elements of the Orangeville International Centre, which includes both the physical and fitness aspects of tai-chi as well as the religious functionality of the institution

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Sieglar, *The Dao of America*. 203.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

which offers traditional Chinese rites that deal with the marking of all phases of life. These observations therefore demonstrate the limits of Carrette and King's theories regarding Chinese spirituality being appropriated by Western market forces.

Limits of the Language of Consumption

Additionally, the economic-centric models of contemporary spirituality forwarded by Carrette and King are inapplicable to the organization of TTCS and Fung Loy Kok. Specifically, while Fung Loy Kok/TTCS is a non-profit organization and donation-based, they still have a notably active advertising and web presence in order to facilitate public knowledge regarding their organization. Their website also allows the centre to present their aims and objectives to the general populace. Given the nature of contemporary spirituality as being, according to the prominent theories explored in the previous chapter, directly related to varying degrees of consumer culture, analyzing how Fung Loy Kok brands and advertises their unique form of Daoism and tai-chi ("Taoist Tai-Chi") assists in understanding how their organizations propagates their values in a Western context. This analysis hinges on the assumption that on different levels, modern contemporary spirituality operates as a brand or business in the sense that it presents itself to the mainstream public through mediatisation (such as websites, print advertisements, etc.) and seeks to garner followers/believers (capital) in order to continue functioning within society.

Arguably, a salient method of understanding Fung Loy Kok in relation to contemporary spirituality or other tai-chi organizations is analyzing its "brand core concept." A brand's core concept is essentially "the essence, soul or DNA of a brand...it tells the consumer precisely what the brand stands for...it sums up the core concept and expresses the values that guide the

company's business operations."³⁹ Thus, the image and ideals that Fung Loy Kok presents through its main advertising source (their website) is primarily one of physical fitness and growth highlighted by claims of health recovery and the simplicity of tai-chi accompanied by images of seniors happily engaging in activity accompanied by an introductory video of Master Moy's "108 Move Set" of Taoist Tai Chi® Arts.⁴⁰ This webpage acts as the front-page for both the TTCS and FLK. Only on the specific pages dedicated to FLK and print-pamphlets (gathered on-site) mention the more spiritual elements of the organization.

On the front page of their website, Fung Loy Kok and the wider Taoist Tai Chi Society advertises their "brand core concept" in a similar manner to privately run tai-chi studios such as QiBelly, a Toronto-based studio marked by a focus on fitness and convenience offering not only tai-chi, but also any activities that follow under the category of "Eastern practices" including yoga, kung fu, reiki, etc.⁴¹ QiBelly would be categorically sorted into Carrette and King's typology of contemporary spirituality as an "individualistic/consumerist spirituality" characterized by activities that accept the primacy of the economy and capitalism and view spirituality as a means of facilitating capital growth and/or dealing/coping with the modern lifestyle.⁴² This is evidenced by their "About" page wherein it states: "In our fast-paced, distractive culture, QiBelly is the Yin to this city's excessive Yang lifestyle,"⁴³ combined with their mission statement of teaching practisers how to "adapt to their environment" of Toronto - the business hub of Canada.

Through the perspective of Carrette and King, a possible reason that Fung Loy Kok and the Taoist Tai Chi society advertises a "brand core concept" of physicality and fitness similar to

³⁹ Franzen, Giep, and Sandra Moriarty. *The Science and Art of Branding*. London: M.E. Sharpe, 2009. 88-89.

⁴⁰ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. "Taoist Tai Chi Arts Moving Meditation." <http://www.taoist.org/>.

⁴¹ QiBelly Toronto. "A No-Nonsense Approach to Health and Wellness." <http://www.qibelly.com/>.

⁴² Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*. 17-25.

⁴³ QiBelly Toronto. "About" <http://www.qibelly.com/about/>.

for-profit studios regardless of the fact, the organization is rooted in historically Chinese Taoist/religious practices propagated by the teachings of Moy Lin Shin, lies in the concept of “healthism,” which is defined as “the pursuit of being healthy, [and illustrating] the impact of health promotion in the defining of moral values. Health promotion strategies provide social agents with information regarding what constitutes healthy behaviour.”⁴⁴ Healthism is a core component of modern consumer culture and is one of the contributing factors in the growth of new-age religion and contemporary spirituality, evidenced by the popularity of practices such as yoga, meditation, tai-chi, and other activities that Heelas and Woodhead refer to as being part of subjective wellbeing culture.⁴⁵ The important observation to be made in relation to understanding Fung Loy Kok and the Taoist Tai Chi Society is how the prevalence of consumer culture and branding trends influence how new age religions/spirituality present themselves to the public, regardless of the historical and cultural roots of the practice, thus fitting into the mold of the overall culture of healthism and fitness.

In addition to considering the focus placed on “healthism,” a potential explanation for appealing to a “brand core concept” of fitness and physicality may lie in a general hesitancy in the Western context to regard all things labelled or presented as religious with an eye of scrutiny. Heelas and Woodhead also explore this notion, arguing that through their study of Kendal “religious capital,” both in terms of membership and cultural importance, there is a favour towards “cultural renderings of holistic themes” and the emergence of “spiritual capital,” including language/imagery associated with nature, inwards-looking thought, and holistic terminology.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Shaw, Ian, and Alan Aldridge. "Consumerism, Health and Social Order." *Social Policy & Society* 2, no. 1 (2003).41.

⁴⁵ Heelas, Paul, and Linda Woodhead. *The Spiritual Revolution*. 83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

This is certainly observable in the advertising methods of Fung Loy Kok, who regularly utilize holistic language that emphasises the importance of the mind/body rather than other religious concepts such as transience, the afterlife, scriptures, etc.

To promote the Taoist Concept of Health through practice of the Taoist ... the Taoist arts cultivate good health as understood by Taoism. Our efforts are directed at making these benefits better known and understood, in order to promote physical, mental and spiritual well-being in the community.⁴⁷

Notably, while the “About Us” mentions in detail both the spiritual and physical benefits of their unique brand of tai chi, they do not mention that the Fung Loy Kok centre in Orangeville also performs rites and activities authentically religious in nature such as the Ching Mei Lai Dau Foh and funeral services, which include the availability of an on-site cemetery and columbarium for families to use “built in accordance with the principles of feng shui.”⁴⁸ In relation to the theoretic understanding of new age religion/spirituality in the first section of this study, the idea of individualism and capitalism (as argued by Carrette and King, Martin, and Martikainen) existing as the core of these practices provides, at least in the case of Fung Loy Kok/TTCS, a superficial understanding of how and why they present themselves to the general public as a fairly secular health-oriented organization, rather than the actuality of the practice, which is heavily rooted in community-driven Taoist religious and spiritual practice and thought. However, the fact still remains that the TTCS and Fung Loy Kok still engage with modern consumer culture, possibly unconsciously, lending credit to Carrette and King’s notion that contemporary spirituality is shaped by market forces, albeit to a lesser degree than has been suggested by the above-mentioned scholars.

The “Holistic Milieu” Spiritual Environment

⁴⁷ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. "Our Aims and Objectives." <http://www.taoist.org/about-us/our-aims-and-objectives/>

⁴⁸ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. 10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet. 2007.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one method for understanding contemporary spirituality is through the notion of subjective wellbeing culture or the “subjectivization thesis,” wherein contemporary spirituality plays a transformative role both culturally and individually in transforming values of superficiality, i.e. viewing life in relation to external goals such as money and power, in contrast to values of the inner self, i.e. viewing life in relation to intrinsic goals such as happiness and self-worth. This subjective life is characterized by individuals defining themselves based on ideas of consciousness, sentiments and emotion instead of ideas that are reflected outwardly in actions. Thus, given that Carrette and King’s economic-based analysis of contemporary spirituality is generally superficial when applied to the case of Fung Loy Kok, this section intends to analyze Fung Loy Kok through the paradigm of subjective wellness and the ethics of contemporary spirituality in an attempt to further the understanding of how Western tai-chi and the TTCS/Fung Loy Kok conform to academic understandings of spirituality.

The notion of subjective life and “holistic milieu” is heavily dependent on the relationship between the practitioner and participant in creating an inner-life circle aimed at both transforming the individual self and society as a whole by focusing on elements of the “subjective life.” Specifically, this notion of spirituality has to “acknowledge the authority of personal experience” and the value of the uniqueness of the individual.⁴⁹ Given this understanding of spiritual activities, TTCS/Fung Loy Kok tai-chi places emphasis on the transformation of an “inner-self” which is based on Taoist understandings of the link between the dual self-cultivation of the mind/body drawing upon teachings from Taoist texts as well as traditional Chinese medicine, such as the link between organs and virtue.⁵⁰ Thus, given that both Woodhead and Heelas argue that Western culture in general has shifted towards a subjective

⁴⁹ Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritualities of Life*. 84.

⁵⁰ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet*. 2007.

wellbeing, Fung Loy Kok and the TTCS occupy a place within society in which they provide a method of cultivating “inner life,” assisting in explaining the success and spread of these two organizations in the last three decades. Furthermore, one of the characteristics of the holistic milieu, a subsection of subjective wellbeing culture which focuses on spirituality, is the inclination to favour person-to-person relational teaching and sharing of experiences of spirituality.⁵¹ Considering this characterization, Fung Loy Kok could be regarded as being part of the Western holistic milieu given the community-based nature of Fung Loy Kok/TTCS which emphasises the teacher-student relation which was fundamental to the form of tai-chi taught by Moy Lin Shin. This is further reflected in how Fung Loy Kok organizes their institution which is primarily through offering “healing retreats” to their Orangeville Quiet Cultivation Centre and organizing public demonstrations of the practice of tai-chi in locations like Dundas Square, Toronto.

Accepting that Fung Loy Kok to a certain degree occupies a position within the holistic milieu of Western society, the theories of Woodhead and Heelas assist in explaining the advertising and branding methods of the organization discussed in the previous section. Specifically, surveys done for The Kendal Project suggest that the two most common reasons that individuals enter organizations within the holistic milieu is firstly due to previous contact with the activities which were originally undertaken to improve health and fitness (23.3%) and secondly due to individuals looking for spiritual growth (19.4%).⁵² Essentially, The Kendal Project suggests that the overall subjective culture of Western society facilitates individuals eventually becoming part of a holistic milieu by joining organizations such as Fung Loy Kok which offers both health/fitness through their activities as well as religious and spiritual

⁵¹ Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritualities of Life*. 88-89.

⁵² *Ibid*, 91.

components, creating a more thorough and complete experience of self-cultivation that leaves the individual practitioner with ideally a greater sense of fulfilment in both physical and emotional aspects. This analysis of branding and advertising suggests that rather than the “brand core concept” of Fung Loy Kok conforming to the consumer culture of capitalism as conceptualized by Carrette and King, the objective of Fung Loy Kok in advertising the fitness and health benefits of tai-chi is to encourage the gradual development of individuals moving from subjective wellbeing (tai-chi) into the realm of holistic milieu (the more religious/spiritual aspects of the organisation).

This gradual development from fitness to spirituality characterizes not only the advertising methods of the organization, but is also representative of the organization as a whole. Tai-chi constitutes the base activity where through the process of becoming more involved with the organization, individuals are then introduced to Chinese religion and culture in an inter-related manner. Evidence for this objective exists within their information packages for the Orangeville Quiet Cultivation Centre where, in answer to the question “in what ways do the teachings of the temple relate to what we learn in our Tai Chi practice hall?” explains that Daoism allows for both the “dual cultivation of body and original nature,” and the practice of cultivating both leads to health and virtue together in the individual. Outlining how tai-chi is but one element to one constitutes Taoist spirituality.⁵³ Thus, within the paradigm of subjective culture argued by Woodhead and Heelas, Fung Loy Kok does not (in regard to advertising and branding) solely conform to notions of consumer culture and capitalism but also seeks to promote the transition between subjective wellness and the holistic milieu of the Western world.

Spiritual Humanism

⁵³ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet*. 2007.

One of the primary assertions argued by Heelas is that subjective wellness and contemporary spiritual practices have the potential to be inherently transformative in nature rather than purely consumptive.⁵⁴ By moving away from the language of consumption and towards that of transformation in the study of Fung Loy Kok provides evidence for this paradigm of contemporary spirituality. Fung Loy Kok, specifically the center in Orangeville, are engaged in a myriad of ecological and humanitarian-based efforts. Specifically, the organization is almost entirely volunteer run with 13% of monetary expenditure reserved for salaries, the majority of which is for maintenance and speciality jobs which the volunteers are unable to assist.⁵⁵ The majority of their revenue comes from member donations as well as fund-raising activities such as the selling of organization t-shirts. Furthermore, the organization engages in multiple ecological-based endeavours including utilizing a portion of their unused land at their Orangeville location for solar panels and sustainable farming for produce used within their facility. A recent project undertaken by FLK is the building of a bee-farm in order to address the issue of the declining bee population. The above considerations suggests that while FLK advertises as being primarily concerned with tai-chi, there is an element that suggests a degree of dedication to social and transformative endeavours. In addition to their ecological philosophy, their Orangeville center hosts “Health Recovery Programs” that are aimed towards individuals with physical impairments and offer specialized rooms and facilities at their retreat to properly host individuals with such needs as well as offering personalized tai-chi regimes that account for said impairments.⁵⁶

In regard to applying the framework of Heelas and Woodhead to the philosophy and

⁵⁴ Heelas, Paul, *Spiritualities of Life*. 121.

⁵⁵ Information in the section has been primarily gained through a visit to the Orangeville International Center as well as personal communications from Marsha Eberhardt (President) Judy Millen (Director) Andrew Hung (Executive Director) Chris Farano (Manager Greater Toronto Branches) Joé Thibault (President Eastern Region) Louis Blaquiére (Treasurer Eastern Region).

⁵⁶ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet*. 2007.

objectives of Fung Loy Kok, this element of ecological and social responsibility points to the notion of “horizons” discussed previous in Chapter One. According to the theory of Heelas, the significance of Taylorian “horizons” is the idea of participants of spiritual activities, through an internalization of said practices, and discipline to the activity, leave the realm of objective pleasures (consumption of purchasable goods, for example) to that of the subjective pleasure gained from the relationship the practioner shares with the outside world.⁵⁷ This conception seems relevant in the analysis of Fung Loy Kok given how numerous volunteers dedicate their time beyond the performance of tai-chi and engage in activities aimed at improving the organization by engaging in the social and ecological pursuits listed above rather than doing so through the typical for-profit model of expansion through generated wealth.

At the core of this idea is, in an addition to the downplaying of “consumptive language,” the “authority of practices” that Heelas adapts from Alasdair MacIntyre, which essentially outlines that activity, in this case tai-chi:

Are MacIntyrian ‘practices.’ Internal *goods* are in evidence, for example, spiritually informed health. Internal goods are *realized* by way of appropriate activity which in turn develops virtues. And human conceptions of ends and goods are systemically extended – for example by being inspired by new horizons of experiential-cum-existential significance to come to experience what it is to be ‘truly’ wise in one’s relationship.⁵⁸

The growth of these virtues stems from the cooperative nature of holistic spirituality and the ability for these practices, when engaged within a community setting, to foster a level of identity revolved around self-betterment.⁵⁹ In regard to the TTCS and Fung Loy Kok, this likely occurs due to the community-based perspective of Moy Lin Shin who focused on propriety or “public relations” as an element of his tai-chi, claiming it is possible to train “all the five viscera

⁵⁷ Heelas, Paul, *Spiritualities of Life*. 121.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 124.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 124-125.

in [the] body” by talking to people.⁶⁰ While this analysis does not extend the scope of these “virtues” outside of the operation and management of Fung Loy Kok, as such a study which require research regarding the activity of Fung Loy Kok members outside of the organization itself, the above endeavours of Fung Loy Kok on ecological and social grounds does lend credit to the framework set forth by Heelas. Furthermore, given the nature of organizations such as *QiBelly* which, do not appear to be actively engaged in such social and ecological pursuits, suggests that this characterization does not extend to tai-chi organizations in general but rather ones that could be described as being part of the holistic milieu.

Thus, the frameworks and theories authored by Woodhead and Heelas, when applied to the organization and philosophy of TTCS/FLK, suggests that it is possible to understand the organization not simply as a physical activity grounded in religious/spiritual history but rather one that operates within the cultural holistic milieu of the West. The nature of organizations which are part of said holistic milieu, according to Woodhead and Heelas, engage in culturally transformative endeavours through adherence to spiritual conceptions, which, in the case of Fung Loy Kok, is the form of Daoism propagated by Moy.

Conclusion

In summation, how are we to understand this pragmatic institution which is grounded in Chinese heritage and culture, while advertising and operating within the framework of Western capitalism/consumer culture? According to an evaluation of the above theories, Fung Loy Kok could be potentially characterized as an organization that operates within a society and culture marked by language and consumption while simultaneously being part of a cultural holistic

⁶⁰ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet*. 2007.

milieu which seeks to challenge the nature of consumptive practices by transforming individuals engaged in Taoist Tai-Chi to be aware of the relationship they share with their broader environment. However, the above theories, while useful for conceptualizing Fung Loy Kok in relation to the academic understanding of contemporary spirituality, is limited as it does not account for the inter-cultural nature of the TTCS/FLK which will be built upon using the concepts of post-orientalism and dialogue through the theories of J.J. Clarke.

Chapter Three

Towards a Post-Orientalist and Hybrid Understanding of Taoist Tai-Chi

Introduction

Understanding Fung Loy Kok through the framework of the holistic milieu theorized by Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas paves the way for a discussion regarding the relationship between tai-chi and the spiritual/religious components of the organization and the popularization of the organization as a whole. Arguably, while tai-chi is a relatively young practice, the historical and cultural links between tai-chi and Daoist self-cultivation techniques explains how the rise of the holistic milieu in the context of the West created an environment for a new paradigm of Chinese spirituality (one with tai-chi as the “point of contact”) to establish itself within the context of the Western spiritual marketplace. Specifically, Heelas and Woodhead cite the 1980s seminar spirituality as the period in which subjective wellbeing culture (leading to the creation of the holistic milieu) has become popularized within the Western context.⁶¹ That is why Fung Loy Kok and the TTCS share a unique relationship to the spiritual culture of the West. I don’t understand this. Therefore, the vocabulary and theory associated with the holistic milieu both explains the popularity of tai-chi as it has been adapted by Fung Loy Kok, but also narrows the discussion regarding the organization to one that has arisen and become relevant only recently.

Tai-chi, in the context of its adaptation and practice in the West, shares historical connections to traditional Daoist self-cultivation and inward practices and spirituality regardless of its secular presentation. This section intends to first outline the historical connection between tai-chi and Daoist spirituality before subsequently arguing that Fung Loy Kok relates to the

⁶¹ Heelas, Paul, and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 82.

holistic milieu in the sense that it is advertised as a place that offers health exercise with the possibility for religious development. On the surface, they offer a health and longevity practice that conforms to said holistic milieu, but it also offers members a deeper religious and spiritual connection with Daoism and Chinese religion, ultimately leading to the assertion that tai-chi acts a point of contact between Chinese and Western culture and is an example of modern cultural dialogue and exchange.

Historical Significance of Tai-Chi in the Western Context

The philosophical foundations of tai-chi can be located within sections of the *Daode jing* (4th century BCE) and can also be located within texts such as the *Taiping jing* (1st century CE).⁶² Elements of *taijiquan* found in the *Tao Te Ching* include the concepts of *qi* and *wuwei*, as well as multiple references to the body as being a key component of one's relationship to the spiritual realm.⁶³ The *Taiping jing* refined some of these concepts into a philosophy that was more physical in nature, discussing Daoist "behavioural issues" such as those surrounding sexual hygiene and other physical longevity practices.⁶⁴ Specifically, the *Taiping jing* conceptualized *qi* as a form of "life vapours" which permeated all forms and aspects of life, both on the physical human plane as well as on the cosmological level. *Qi* also became associated with practices such as *heqi* (controlling the flow of energy during sexual intercourse), as well as meditation, which is one of the basic principles of *taijiquan* and modern tai-chi.⁶⁵ Meditation, in this particular text, became directly associated to overall health through the visualization and creation of "body gods" and the instructed imagination of colours with the ultimate goal of "alleviating any faults

⁶² Yoshinobu, Sakade. "Divination as Daoist Practice." In *Daoism Handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn, Leiden: Brill, 2000. 561.

⁶³ de Bary, Theodore, and Irene Bloom, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. 79-94.

⁶⁴ Penny, Benjamin. "Immortality and Transcendence." In *Daoism Handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn, Leiden: Brill, 2000. 146.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 147 – 151.

committed, and thus was an essential step towards producing a confession that would recover health.”⁶⁶ It is also important to note that these *qi* practices were not simply for the overall goal of health but were also intended to outline key social parameters of the time period through the self-cultivation of “virtues” through aspirations towards and eventual adherence to the qualities of “flexibility, softness, mobility as well as pervasiveness and penetrability.”⁶⁷ Thus, within this text, the clear historical and philosophical connections between the virtue-based moving meditation of tai-chi and Chinese spiritual and social history can be drawn wherein Daoist cultivation techniques served both spiritual and social purposes.

The origins of what is now called tai-chi is related to the legendary mythology of Zhang Sanfeng (approximately mid-13th century CE). Zhang is said to have been a master of sexual self-cultivation, meditation, wealth, and to have created *taijiquan* (“boxing of the supreme ultimate”) within the Wudang Mountains (now a UNESCO Heritage Site). His collection of texts found in the *Daozang jiyao* deals with numerous topics including martial arts and cultivation. Mythological tales depict his life as a traveling teacher; and following his transcendence into immortality, he was adopted into the *Quanzhen* pantheon of gods and is worshiped in the Baiyun guan Temple in Beijing.⁶⁸ This martial art form was also defensive in nature due to the fact that health and defense of the body, both from toxins and other human beings, were viewed as important steps in pursuing the path to harmony and inner meditation, which was part of the Daoist and Chinese culture of internal alchemy.⁶⁹ Zhang Sanfeng also serves a spiritual purpose at Fung Loy Kok’s Orangeville Centre, commemorated and honoured in their older temple facility alongside Moy Lin Shin.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 151.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 149.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 119.

⁶⁹ Clarke, J.J.. *The Tao of the West*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 137.

However, given that Zhang Sanfeng's history is one of mythology, a complete and more historical understanding of *taijiquan* understands the practice as being rooted in Daoist philosophy combined with healing gymnastics and martial arts that gained traction in the 17th century.⁷⁰ Specifically, the gymnastic elements of the practice combined managing *qi* flow in a similar manner to *qigong* with a philosophical understanding of the Great Ultimate (*taiji*), “a name for the universe at the time of creation, when yin and yang are present but not yet differentiated into the five phases. Its symbol is the commonly known yin-yang diagram.”⁷¹ This philosophy is rooted in understanding one's relationship with the primordial essence of the world. As Livia Kohn explains:

In concrete practice, this means that adepts identify the flow of the five phases in their bodies, then sublimate them into yin and yang and from there unify all into a flow of pure primordial *qi*. The philosophy of the Great Ultimate provides the rationale for Taiji quan as a moving meditation, whose ultimate goal is a return to the origins, accompanied by the creation of inner, cosmic harmony.⁷²

Thus, this philosophy combined with the martial element which arose from self-defence training of Chinese communities as well as a long history of lineage-based evolutions of the practice⁷³ presents *taijiquan* as a practice that originated fairly recently (17th century) but has rich philosophical roots found in Chinese spirituality and history.

The form of tai-chi practices (“Taoist Tai Chi”) taught by TTCS/Fung Loy Kok and created by Moy is separate from the martial arts-based *taijiquan*, and instead strictly adheres to the notion that “The *Taoist Tai Chi*® arts are not to be practiced as a martial art technique or in a

⁷⁰ Kohn, Livia. *Health and Long Life: The Chinese Way*. N.p.: Three Pines Press, 2005. 222.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 222-223.

⁷² *Ibid*, 223.

⁷³ See Livia Khon's *Health and Long Life: the Chinese Way* (2005) for more information regarding the specific schools and lineages of *taijiquan*.

competitive spirit, but rather as a means to cultivate every aspect of health.”⁷⁴ Moy’s school of tai-chi appears to be based on the Wu-Style of *taijiquan* and shares the same number of moves and certain characteristics. The absence of the martial arts element of Moy’s Taoist Tai Chi has led to individuals, such as the notable martial artist Ian Sinclair, criticising his set and claiming he appears to have no actual relation or lineage to the Wu-school. Specific complaints have been based around the stretching and twisting-based routines that can lead to potential physical issues, partially caused by the notably short period of time it takes one to be certified as an instructor in Moy’s move-set.⁷⁵ Perhaps the non-martial arts characteristics of Moy’s style, as well as the stretch-based approach, is the reason his organization is popular among seniors, giving them a health practice that is not as intense and likely to result in injury while still allowing them the opportunity for exercise and a spiritual experience. Thus, on the surface, Taoist Tai Chi can be characterized as being fairly meditative in nature, focusing on the inward components of the practice rather than the combative external elements, possibly suggesting that this practice shares more in common with textual Daoist philosophy rather than any lineage of *taijiquan*. However, information regarding the specific lineage of Moy is unclear but he claims to be a Daoist monk who was taught by “respected teachers” in China and Hong Kong about the non-violent aspects of tai-chi.⁷⁶

Here it can be seen that on the surface, there appears to be a tension between Taoist Tai-Chi, which is presented as being primarily health and fitness-based, and the more religious and spiritual components of the organization. The concept of the holistic milieu potentially explains this tension as being rooted in the idea of “horizons” discussed in the second chapter of this

⁷⁴ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. Our *Unique approach to tai chi*, <http://www.taoist.org/about-us/a-unique-approach-to-tai-chi/>.

⁷⁵ Sinclair, Ian. *Styles of Tai Chi*. Cloud Mountain Martial Arts. 2007

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080330150404/http://www.taichicanada.com/page5/page5.html>

⁷⁶ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *Our Founder Master Moy Lin Shin*, <http://www.taoist.org/about-us/our-founder/>.

study in which participants' interest in subjective wellbeing eventually evolves into an emergence into the holistic and spiritual area.

It is my assertion that this notion of a holistic milieu, while serving to describe the environment within which Fung Loy Kok and similar organizations are propagated, does not account for the fact that Chinese traditions, particularly Daoism, have a long-standing history of subjective wellness and inward practices which are rooted in spiritual ideas of internal alchemy. Based on this historical approach, tai-chi in the Western context is not adapted in such a way as to appear more secular in order to gain followers, but rather, the rise of the holistic milieu has allowed a practice, which has always been health-based, to act as a “cultural gateway” into some form of Chinese philosophy and religion. Thus, the idea of the holistic milieu is useful in explaining the sociological reasoning behind the recent popularization of tai-chi, specifically the Taoist Tai-Chi of TTCS/Fung Loy Kok, but is limited in understanding the relationship between tai-chi/Chinese culture and the Western audience that practices it and the role it serves within wider Western culture.

Taoist Tai-Chi as the Context for Cultural Exchange

Considering that while TTCS and Fung Loy Kok's tai-chi style present itself as being notably un-religious and health-oriented on a topical level, it arguably serves as a “point of contact” between Western health and wellbeing culture and Chinese religion and spirituality. Elijah Siegler, in *The Dao of America: The History and Practice of American Daoism*, succinctly sums up the role of tai-chi within TTCS by explaining: “Moy's organization combined different forms of expertise and institutions into something less than Daoist and more than eclectic.”⁷⁷ Siegler further observes how the TTCS's focus on their tai-chi program represents a point of

⁷⁷ Siegler, Elijah. *The Dao of America*. 206.

contact in which they integrate members into the broader scope of the organization through initial contact with tai-chi, likening the tactic to that of the Scientologists who offer free personality tests.⁷⁸ Siegler essentially claims that Daoism within America is characterized by different organizations claiming some sort of “authenticity” in regard to what it means to be Daoist. The difficulty, of course, is deciding what constitutes spiritual authority. Siegler argues that there has been little momentum in understanding what exactly Daoist identity within America actually implies as many academics have the tendency to frame arguments regarding Daoism through a perspective of “authentic Daoism” versus “false Daoism,” a perspective that offers little regarding the nuances related to individuals who identify as Daoist within America.⁷⁹ There are certain individuals (such as Michael Saso, one of the few non-Chinese individuals to be formally ordained as a Daoist priest) who studies orthodox Daoism, that claims within orthodox Daoist sects the title “Daoist” is reserved for organizations that use registers (*lu*), including US organizations such as Da Yuen Circle (formerly Orthodox Daoism in America) and the Daoist Restoration Society.⁸⁰

Understanding the role of Fung Loy Kok in relation to other Daoist organizations is difficult. However, it is clear that the organization as well as members to a certain degree follow and adhere to Daoist teachings, making them at some level “Daoist.” While members of the above organizations would likely be in conflict with the idea, as Siegler’s work demonstrates, attempting to understand American Western Daoist identity is one of frustration and controversy but important as Daoist identity and the maintaining of such an identity is tied closely with a

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 207.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 256.

⁸⁰ Komjathy, Louis. "Tracing the Contours of Daoism in North America." *The Journal of Alternate and Emerging Religions* 8, no. 2 (2004).18 – 19

sense of legitimization.⁸¹ Therefore, I intend to focus the scope of this section on how participants of Taoist Tai-Chi within the framework of Fung Loy Kok encounter and interact with notions of Chinese spirituality, drawing observations regarding the legitimization of Daoist identity rather than focusing on any form of authenticity claim regarding the religious nature of FLK.

Certainly, one who decides to move on from participating in Taoist Tai-Chi at a centre as a fitness routine and instead decide to participate in their more religious offerings is immediately bombarded with Daoist and Chinese religious imagery and iconography when attending events at FLK's numerous temples or at the Orangeville International Centre, lending evidence to the formation of a legitimate Daoist identity in the eyes of the participants. As discussed in Chapter Two, the organization also engages in a range of religious practices and rites. That being said, it is also important to note that the organization is run primarily by non-Chinese individuals and does not appear to have any affiliation with any other established Daoist religious organizations.⁸² Furthermore, participants as well as organizers at Fung Loy Kok share a patriarchal and hierarchical relationship with Moy Lin Shin (who has yet to be replaced by another form of charismatic figurehead) which is a common characteristic of American Daoist organizations as a whole.⁸³ It is important to note, therefore, that the organization's conception of Chinese religion and Daoism is based heavily on the teachings of Moy Lin Shin, who was focused on "introducing Daoism to the West" as an objective "to deliver all from suffering, both the living and the dead, through community service, rituals and ceremonies, and the cultivation

⁸¹ Sieglar, Elijah. "Back to the Pristine: Identity Formation and Legitimation in Contemporary American Daoism." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 1 (2010). 54.

⁸² However, for some of their on-site rituals they employ the services of ordained Daoist monks.

⁸³ Komjathy, Louis. "Tracing the Contours of Daoism in North America." *The Journal of Alternate and Emerging Religions* 8, no. 2 (2004). 19.

of body and mind.”⁸⁴ The organization claims that Moy Lin Shin had an active role in popularizing Daoism in the West by leading a delegation to attend the 1993 Parliament of World Religions conference in Chicago.⁸⁵ Given the international spread of the organization as well as the general popularity of tai-chi lends credit to this assertion as well as the existence of a Daoist identity shared by members of FLK.

Therefore, Fung Loy Kok represents what could be considered a hybrid organization of Western and Chinese traditions that are propagated through the spread of Taoist Tai-Chi and the formulation of a Daoist identity through adherence to some form of Daoist spirituality /religiosity. The unique brand of Daoism offered by the organization does seemingly share historic characteristics with the general spread of Daoism into North America, spread by a charismatic missionary figure or teachers who placed an emphasis on lineage. Furthermore, the organization shares characteristics with what Livia Kohn describes as the self-cultivation school of Daoism in the United States, characterised by “groups that place much less emphasis on ritual practice and do not serve as community centres. Their main focus is the practice of longevity practices, Qigong, and inner alchemy with the goal of finding personal realization.”⁸⁶ With the exception of the Orangeville International Centre, which is built around notions of community-based healing, the TTCS and Fung Loy Kok generally fall within this paradigm of American Daoism. However, ideas of inner alchemy are usually presented through the language of the West rather than with references to traditional Chinese cosmology,⁸⁷ further evidencing an argument for a hybrid model of Daoism as it has been adapted, promulgated, and understood in

⁸⁴ Fung Loy Kok Taoism. *10th Anniversary of the Health Recovery Program Pamphlet*. 2007. 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

⁸⁶ Robinet, Isabelle. "Shangqing - Highest Clarity." In *Daosim Handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn, Leiden:Brill.2000. 199.

⁸⁷ By language of the West in opposition to language of inner alchemy, I am referring explicitly to the fact that Fung Loy Kok does not claim Taoist Tai Chi or their ritual practices will lead to any form of immortality which characterized traditional Han-dynasty self-cultivation sects of Daoism and similar modern institutions such as The Healing Tao Centre.

the West and at FLK specifically. This mixed exchange of culture may be the reason that scholars such as Elijah Siegler claim that while TTCS/Fung Loy Kok is not consumerist in its objectives like the schools run by other notable tai-chi masters Hua Ching Ni and Mantak Chia, they still do away with an observable level of tradition and community in their method of organization.⁸⁸

It is also important to note that the notion of Fung Loy Kok as being a cultural hybrid model of contemporary spiritual practices assists in explaining the marketing and advertising tactics of the organization discussed in previous chapters. Therefore, merging this idea with the concept of the holistic milieu, Fung Loy Kok seemingly exemplifies an interesting relationship to the broader Western culture. Specifically, they exist within the wider marketplace of neoliberal capitalism but also simultaneously within the growing holistic milieu, characterized by individuals seeking refuge from an objective identity and instead turning to ideas of subjective wellness and healing. If anything, this points to a contemporary spiritual marketplace marked by pragmatic identities in a constant flux.

Thus, accepting that Taoist Tai Chi acts as a “point of contact” for a conception of Chinese philosophy and culture, what relationship does this culture share with people who engage in Fung Loy Kok’s version of Taoist Tai-Chi? Given the above considerations and the analysis in the previous chapters combined with on-sight observations, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, both Taoist Tai-Chi instruction texts and religious spiritual texts provided by FLK are bilingual, offered in both the host language as well as Chinese and presented in a way that is accessible to individuals not particularly familiar with Chinese religious tradition (see the *Eight Virtues* document). The Orangeville International Centre offers a unique example of this point of contact relationship as the architecture and space of the facility has been completed in

⁸⁸ Siegler, Elijah. *The Dao of America*. 366.

the style of a Chinese temple, but also features allusions to their multicultural scope, including the explicit inclusion of numerous international flags outside of their head office, as well as through décor choices observed around the compound including hanging sombreros or other cultural artifacts next to framed lines from the *Daedejing*. Essentially, there is an observable mixture between Eastern and Western culture in the context of Fung Loy Kok and the TTCS. Therefore, while individuals who participate in Taoist Tai-Chi likely do not self-identify as Daoist, they are engaging to a certain degree with Chinese philosophy, imagery and motifs in a context which blends said motifs with Western language. The Orangeville centre has proved to be a particularly interesting case study due to the abundance of multicultural themes, perhaps as a result of their situation within Canada or the reason they chose in the first place to situate their International Centre here..

While the majority of casual participants of Taoist Tai-Chi are uninvolved (at least upon entering) in the more religious activities of the FLK organization, they are, nevertheless, practicing self-cultivation, rooted in Daoist history and tradition, within a space that also hosts religious activities for people who either identify as religious, or are Chinese community members (evidenced by the numerous religious services the centre offers, such as funerals, marriages, the Ching Mei Lai Dau Foh, etc.). The Ching Mei Lai Dau Foh is a particularly important ritual for the organization as it is overtly religious in nature and focuses on chanting and worship rather than Taoist Tai Chi. Specifically, the ritual intends “to cultivate harmony with the star deities that govern the internal and external universes both outside and outside the body...it most commonly takes place on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month.”⁸⁹ Their

⁸⁹ Nitoslawski, Stefan. DVD. Directed by Marsha Eberhardt and Sean Dennison. Ching Mei Lai Dau Foh: Pure and Refined Ceremony Honouring the Dippers. Canada: Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism, 2015.

organization employs the use of chanting, prayer and traditional Daoist robes and aesthetics.⁹⁰

This exchange that occurs between participants and the organization certainly provides evidence for the argument that Taoist Tai-Chi operates as a point of contact for a deeper range of cultural mores rooted in Chinese religious and spiritual tradition.

Post Orientalism as an Understanding of Fung Loy Kok

Accepting that Fung Loy Kok/TTCS represents a form of dialogue between Chinese and Western culture through the practice of tai-chi, one has to explore the nature of this dialogue from a perspective of appropriation in order to discern whether, as JJ Clarke describes, the shift in popularity of Daoist philosophies is “yet another form of exploitation, a continuation of colonial habits of mind long after the lowering of the flags of empire.”⁹¹ While this statement may certainly be valid for organizations looked at in previous sections such as *QiBelly* or *The Barefoot Doctor* and numerous other organizations that fall into the Carrette and King spectrum of consumerism, this is arguably untrue for the case of TTCS/Fung Loy Kok. Instead, this organization may be understood as what Clarke describes as post-orientalist, characterized by a plural and contextual postmodern relationship. Specifically, Clarke assumes that Daoism as a “cultural” package is unrealistic as an export able to be popularized in and by the West due to the roots of Daoism being based largely in agrarian culture and ancient rites/rituals.⁹² Instead, Clarke argues that the future of Daoism in the West is as a philosophy that encourages a “holistic attitude of the mind,” and the dissolvent of dualism “within the wider context of intellectual currents” which seek to address the nihilism and symptoms of modernism.⁹³ This section intends to evaluate the perceptive and far-sighted claims of Clarke given the previous analysis of

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ JJ Clark, *The Tao of the West*. 199.

⁹² *Ibid*, 204.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 206–208.

contemporary spirituality and the popularization of TTCS/Fung Loy Kok.

Arguably, the rise of the holistic milieu as an environment in which inward spirituality has begun to be popularized and spread within the Western context is evidence of a general shift in intellectual thought within the mainstream population in the West. Specifically, the last three decades in which Heelas and Woodhead have observed a marked increase in the vocabulary and have argued that associated with holistic themes (of which Daoism is also inclined to employ), lends credit to Clarke's assertion that Daoism will not play a role in the Western context as an appropriated cultural artifact; but rather as one involved in a general intellectual and philosophical shift in the West as a response to modernity.

The activity of Taoist Tai-Chi in the specific case of Fung Loy Kok, from a theoretical perspective, is observably evident of this relationship. Specifically, accepting that healthism and a cultural shift towards subjective thinking has occurred, tai-chi offers a logical vehicle into the wider philosophy of Daoism as it both appeals to the above notions, while also combining aspects of Eastern philosophy such as the ideas of non-dualism and a rejection of objective-based thinking (which characterizes post-Enlightenment modernity). This theoretical framework also aptly explains the marketing methods of Fung Loy Kok as being primarily fitness or health-based regardless of deeper spiritual and religious values due to the fact that it represents the wider dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures, or in what Clarke describes as “a challenge to the West's over-valuation of Enlightenment-style rationalism, to its dependence on technology, to a certain philosophical over-simplification.”⁹⁴ In relation to the conception of the holistic milieu, there appears to be an interplay between changing philosophical and intellectual ideas in the West and the subsequent rise of organizations such as Fung Loy Kok, who are interfacing with said cultural shifts, providing a service that appeals to postmodern attitudes through the use

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 206.

of adapted Chinese spirituality.

Clarke also attempts to predict the relationship Daoism will share with Western culture in the not-so-distant future by claiming that Daoism:

Is likely to take a different, albeit related, path from that of Buddhism. It is likely that the direction of this pathway will lie in its potential as an attitude of mind, rather than as a complete philosophy. It will probably appeal as a set of loosely related insights and practices which will be subject to considerable variation and transformation as they become absorbed into Western ways of thinking and global preoccupations.⁹⁵

Given that Fung Loy Kok is based on the completely volunteer and non-profit involvement of members, and furthermore, given their tendency to avoid any form of written or commercialized products, the organization now active in 26 countries arguably embodies the above conception of modern Daoism in the West. While, given the controversial heritage and lineage of Moy Lin Shin and the fact that the exact form and history of their conception of Daoist philosophy is difficult to ascertain, there is an obvious merger of Eastern philosophy embodied in the globalized culture of the West. Specifically, the objectives of Fung Loy Kok, including healing, ecological accountability, and community, suggest a type of philosophy that is “a spirituality which reconnects us with the need, expressed in many quarters, for a spirituality which reconnects us with the earth and with the living world.”⁹⁶ Given the wide variation of Daoist organizations in the West, ranging from the more consumerist *Qibelly* to more orthodox sects, Fung Loy Kok appears to operate within a hybrid model which mirrors the writings of J.J. Clarke who imagines Daoism in the West as being a philosophy adapted through an exchange of cultures rather than of traditional ideas of orientalism or cultural transplantation.

Conclusion

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 205.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 207.

This section has challenged understanding Fung Loy Kok entirely within the framework of Western spiritual culture/the holistic milieu, demonstrating that there is key historic agency which has influenced understanding Taoist Tai-Chi in the context of the West. In the above chapter, it has become evident that Fung Loy Kok and tai-chi in the West did not necessarily originate out of the conception of a holistic milieu, but rather, the holistic milieu has acted as an environment in which Daoism could reframe and adapt philosophical teachings in an interaction with wider intellectual shifts of Western modernity, as manifested in post-orientalism. These teachings themselves were demonstrated to have a longstanding historical and intellectual grounding in self-cultivation and healing, suggesting that Daoism, while adapted and transformed within the context of the West, still retains elements of what can be considered Chinese religious and cultural heritage. This can be seen in the observation that the Western culture of healthism and fitness allowed for physical self-cultivation such as *taijiquan* and more recently Taoist-Tai Chi's practices to become the "point of contact" between these cultures. From a historical perspective, an analysis of Fung Loy Kok/TTCS lends credit to J.J. Clarke's conception of modern Daoism in *The Tao of the West* as being part of a larger post-oriental and pluralistic dialogue, characterized as a spirituality which has been amalgamated into Western culture in a symbiotic relationship of cultural exchange.

Conclusions

This study has aimed to demonstrate the ways in which Western spiritual practices and Chinese Daoist religion has intersected in the modern world, utilizing the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism as a case study. Understanding Fung Loy Kok through existing academic typologies regarding Western contemporary spirituality is limiting as they do not account for or assist in

understanding the unique position organizations such as FLK occupy within the Western spiritual ethos, which is that of a post-Oriental dialogue between Western culture and Chinese spirituality and philosophy. Specifically, the economically-grounded theories of Carrette and King assist in understanding the marketing paradigms and methods of organizations such as FLK. They also aid in showing their relationship with wider capitalist systems, including the relationship between spirituality and identity formation within consumer culture. These theories are limited, however, as they do not account for the transformative relationship spiritual organizations share within their spiritual community and wider culture. Heelas and Woodhead supplement this missing scope regarding the understanding of contemporary spiritual practices by describing how the gradual growth of spirituality has led to the creation of a “holistic milieu:” an environment wherein individuals, through the pursuit of individualistic and subjective understandings of the self and their lives, are able to create themselves as citizens more engaged in social and cultural activities. In relation to Fung Loy Kok, this study has shown how the organization can be demonstrated to exist, through its adherence to ecological and social activism practices, within the notion of this “holistic milieu” as an organization that encourages self-cultivation rooted in Chinese philosophy which, mirroring Daoist philosophy, translates into society as a whole.

Moreover, the study has built upon the above understandings of contemporary spirituality outlined by Heelas and Woodhead by studying Taoist-Tai Chi as a specific “point of contact” for the transmission and fusing of Western culture to Chinese philosophy and spirituality. Specifically, it can be seen how Taoist Tai-Chi acts as a vehicle for cultural immersion into the deeper Daoist roots of the practice that span centuries, and has presented itself in an organization that blends Daoist self-cultivation techniques of inner alchemy with the language and individual-

centric nature of the Western holistic milieu. This is seen to be happening in Fung Loy Kok while the organization is simultaneously interfacing its philosophical and spiritual values with Western consumer culture through the creation of its fitness-based “brand core concept.” Thus, this organization represents what J.J. Clarke would describe as a postmodern dialogue between cultures that has been allowed through the popularization of contemporary spirituality coupled with the forces of global capitalism and communication technology.

While the scope of this research has been specifically focused on Fung Loy Kok, given the size of the organization as well as the availability of materials, this study has intended to add to the discussion further work concerning the importance of Chinese spirituality and culture as it exists and is being propagated in the context of the West. Theoretically, the post-Oriental framework could be applied to additional spiritual organizations in order to discern the existence of a cultural dialogue occurring through the practice of various spiritual activities, and this study has aimed to provide a framework for that kind of application to be made in the future.

In conclusion, Fung Loy Kok demonstrates the existence of a spiritual agenda which, through the utilization of fitness and physical teachings such as Taoist Tai-Chi, has created a dialogue between the Western normativity of individualism and consumer-culture and the community and self-cultivation-based teachings of Chinese philosophy and religion through the adaptation of Daoist, Confucianism and Buddhist teachings. This dialogue is able to be produced due to the growing trend of self-realization and subjective-based thinking which has created the holistic milieu wherein organizations such as Fung Loy Kok have gained prominence. This lends credit to Clarke’s assumption that “the growing popularity of Daoism in the West, then, is not just about nostalgia or a romantic retreat, but speaks directly to our contemporary condition.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Clarke, *The Tao of the West*. 206.

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