

“Kung Fu is Inside the Body”: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Cultivating Martial Art  
Practices

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the meaning-making and cultivation of Kung Fu within a martial arts club. The inquiry focused specifically on the teachings of Grandmaster Qing Fu Pan, and how these teachings are cultivated and embodied by his students on their path toward transformation of being. Phenomenology was used as both a philosophical orientation and methodology, and Taoist teachings were integrated throughout to add a layer of interpretive understanding. In this dissertation, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to guide data collection and analysis, involving an abductive process through which analysis of semi-structured interviews and field observations informed the meaning construction process. Participants included Grandmaster Pan and his students.

Two core essences describe the depth of the path of the Iron and Silk martial arts of Grandmaster Pan. The first essence—*Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk*—speaks to the cultivation of Iron and Silk as the student engages in the practice of Chinese martial arts training. Within this essence, participants describe their understanding of the *Fluid Movement Between Iron and Silk* in both martial arts in life, while emphasizing the importance of situating or *Embedding Meaning in a Science of Self-Defence*. *Understanding Iron and Silk as Cultivating a Path of Transformation* presents a series of metaphors that describes the path of practice and “*Change to in your Body*”: *Embodying The Way of the Iron and Silk* speaks to the internalization of this martial arts practice as Grandmaster Pan uses his own embodied knowledge to strategically cultivate the potential of his students. The second essence—*Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship*—describes the importance of relationship in cultivating Iron and Silk. The depth of Grandmaster Pan’s roots in the martial arts added a rich narrative of lineage, history, and uses of the practices that was

central to the training, making it significantly different from other forms of sport and exercise. The essence begins with an exploration of *Cultivating a Kung Fu Lineage* and the importance of participants' experiences of their *Relationship to a Sifu*. Then, *Finding a Home: Continuation of Relationship in Physical and Social Space* describes the intersubjective space created by Grandmaster Pan and his students. The intimacy of relationship within the club is explored further in “*Doing business is easy, having a relationship is hard*”: *Relationships of Iron and Silk*, which describes the respect, cooperation, and humility that manifested in relationships among students and created a united family of practitioners. Consequently, *Openness of Learning in the Cultivation of Iron & Silk* describes the importance of engaging with openness when immersed in the martial arts.

As Taoism focuses on the relationship between individual and the universal, and phenomenology focuses on attempts to make sense of experience and subjective consciousness within an intersubjective world, this study evolved into an exploration of the relationship between intersubjective human experience and the movement toward living in alignment with the totality of universal reality as martial arts practices become abjectively embodied. The martial arts are presented as a cultivated-embodied-relational and intersubjective practice as the martial artist engages in the cauldron in approximation of the universal Tao. A conversation about embodiment, and specifically abjective embodiment, weaves together the interplay between the interdependent essences of cultivation, transformation, and relationship. The discussion is furthered as intersubjectivity and the Taoist concept of *Te*—moral power or virtue of a person who follows a correct course of conduct, connecting the individual with the cosmos—highlight interdependence on the path of transformation through the embodied practice of cultivating Iron and Silk Kung Fu.

Theoretical contributions of this study arise through the engagement of phenomenology and Taoism to develop a holistic understanding of the practice of the traditional martial art of Iron and Silk Kung Fu. As leisure studies expands and grows in its diversity and depth of cultural exploration, it will be essential to develop an broader theoretical and philosophical approach to understanding experience. Insights and reflections presented in this dissertation can be practically applied in three key ways. First, challenging notions of transactional exchange in understanding interpersonal connections, and presenting a relational understanding of intersubjective interaction. Second, the holistic understanding of leadership presented here might inform future generations of teachers and coaches in sport, training, education, and personal development. Third, this dissertation provides on fusion of phenomenology and Taoism that might guide future leisure studies scholars.

## Acknowledgements

To begin, I would like to acknowledge that this specific dissertation would not have been possible without the blessing of Grandmaster Pan. This dissertation is dedicated to you. In addition, I am honoured to have the opportunity to present these teachings and ideas with the support of his head assistant and club leader Dianne Naughton, who was an invaluable resource and inspirational support throughout the entire process. I would also like to thank all the participants in this study and to the club as a whole. We will work together as a family to maintain the legacy, and honour the memory, of Grandmaster Pan.

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Professionally, throughout the dissertation process I was employed full time as a professor at Conestoga College. My co-workers and managers were incredibly supportive throughout my studies and offered continual guidance and encouragement. Specifically, I would like to highlight the support I received from Dr. Goranka Vukelich, Cathy O'Toole, Norma McDonald Ewing, Dr. Debashis Dutta, and Carly Simpson. I would also like to thank my HSF students, past and current, for making me the professor and academic that I am today.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *“Kung Fu is inside your Body!” (Pan, 2013)*

While the martial arts have a rich history reaching back to ancient times (Henning, 1981), a more recent occurrence is current academic exploration of the ideas and practices of traditional martial arts<sup>1</sup>. As a traditional training practice, Chinese martial arts are one of the oldest and most cherished aspects of a Chinese culture that stretches back thousands of years, tracing their origins to China's earliest Dynasties (Minford, 1999). The Chinese martial arts, or *wushu* as they are called in China, “are a fascinating yet little understood and inadequately researched aspect of Chinese history” (Henning, 1981, p. 173 ); however, Kitchener, Ontario is home to a unique Grandmaster of Kung Fu (or Gung Fu)<sup>2</sup>, Grandmaster Pan Qing Fu<sup>3</sup>, and this phenomenological study provides rich insight into the essence of this practice.

Grandmaster Pan was born in Northern China, in the Shandong Province, where he began training with his father at age 6 in Shaolin long fist and the secret practice of Iron Fist. Early training sessions with his father sparked an interest in Pan for the Chinese martial arts practice that he continues today. Pan’s desire to absorb all knowledge related to the martial arts inspired him to train with 15 different grandmasters, while becoming an accomplished national tournament champion and later a highly respected professor at Shenyang Physical Education University (Edmunds, 1996). Prior to coming to Canada, Pan was highly regarded in China as a tournament competitor, martial arts instructor for province teams and police forces, and as a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the term *Traditional Martial Arts* (as opposed to *Chinese Martial Arts*) is an inclusive term referring still to the Chinese Martial Arts, but also including recognition of the Korean art of Taekwondo, and the Japanese arts of Ju-Jitsu, Karate, and Judo.

<sup>2</sup> *Gung Fu* is another word often used to define the Chinese martial art of Kung Fu. *Gung Fu* is the internalized embodiment of the Chinese Martial Arts one achieves through years of diligent practice.

<sup>3</sup> Pan is his family name, as in Chinese first and last names are reversed compared to English. Grandmaster Pan has given the author permission to use his real name in this study.

university professor in the field of physical education. These experiences created a holistic effect on young Pan's development.



*Figure 1: Video: Grand Master Pan performs a Long Fist Form: (Naughton, 2017)*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the cultivation and meaning-making of Kung Fu within a martial arts club. Grandmaster Pan taught the traditional Chinese martial art of Kung Fu in a way that hoped to cultivate in his students the development of what he referred to as “real Kung Fu” (Internalized and Embodied Chinese martial arts). This study was an attempt to articulate the essence of Grandmaster Pan's Chinese martial arts teachings, both physical and philosophical, and how these teachings are communicated and transmitted to his students. At the root of this is resolving a way for both phenomenology (social constructionism) and the Chinese philosophical system of Taoism to be explored as complimentary, yet distinct, theoretical frameworks for illuminating elements of what it means to

be a *martial artist* within Grandmaster Pan's system of Kung Fu. Methodologically, phenomenology enables us to explore the co-creation of meaning and the dynamic layers of human experience.

Since returning to conduct my graduate studies, I have been fascinated by questions related to the mind-body experience of training in the Chinese martial arts, and phenomenology offers a lens through which one can view the essential nature of meaning for individuals, and how that meaning is experienced and embodied within the context of the training club environment created by Grandmaster Pan and his teachings. Further, understanding Grandmaster Pan as a person, not just a martial artist, was essential to fully engaging with this study. From my earlier personal experience bouncing around from club to club trying to find a martial art system that simulated both my physical and philosophical interests, my experience was that Grandmaster Pan was unique and possessed knowledge that needed to be presented in a way that reflects the deep physical embodiment present in his martial arts teachings and philosophies. Since beginning my training with Grandmaster Pan, I have been fascinated by his Chinese wisdom and philosophies, and as I enrolled in graduate school, I did so with the goal of presenting Grandmaster Pan's teachings as a unique collection of insights to aid in our current understanding of the role of leisure practices in shaping personal experience and life philosophy of the individual practitioner.

The current study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore the underlying meanings of experience within the training system of Grandmaster Pan's Kung Fu. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is "a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences," and this philosophical approach to research is *phenomenological* "in that it is concerned with exploring *experience* in its own terms"

(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.1). A methodology was needed that would support the exploration of the complexity of Kung Fu. As Grandmaster Pan's head student, Sifu Dianne Naughton (2000) once suggested that "to be in martial arts is to belong to an art, sport, system of defense, and history as massive as it is whole" (p. 32). Further, Grandmaster Pan once said "the martial arts are very rich, and if you apply that richness to your daily life, you can achieve great things" (Naughton, 2001, p. 49). Martial arts legend Bruce Lee supported this teaching in his highly regarded short essay, written during his educational studies at the University of Washington, titled *The Tao of Gung Fu*:

Gung fu is more than just an excellent physical exercise or a highly scientific method of self-defense. To the Chinese, Gung Fu is a Way of training the mind as well as a Way of life. The spiritual side of Gung Fu cannot be learned by fact-finding or instruction in facts. It has to grow spontaneously, like a flower, in a mind free from desires and emotions. The core principle of Gung Fu is Tao - the spontaneity of the universe (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 116).

To explore the essence of Grandmaster Pan's teachings, the philosophical ideas and methodological framework of phenomenology were employed as a powerful tool uncovering the many dynamic aspects within the experience of Kung Fu. At a philosophical level, Kung Fu abstractly refers to the embodied understanding of a comprehensive system of martial arts philosophy and training practices, an understanding that becomes so internalized that it transforms the student. To begin to focus the purpose of the study we began with a focus on research question one: How does the cultivation of Kung Fu occur?

- a) What is the experience of Kung Fu?
- b) What meaning do individuals make of Kung Fu?

The interpretive approach to understanding the human condition “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67); ideas often linked back to a sociological philosophers Max Weber (1864-1920) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and the sociological concept of Verstehen (understanding). The interpretive perspective was presented as a challenge to positivist notions; positive notions based on an objective epistemology, as oppose to the constructionist perspective informing interpretive orientations. Crotty (1998) suggests this type of interpretivist perspective possesses deep historical roots as “what we understand today as the Verstehen or interpretivist approach to human inquiry has appeared historically in many guises” (p. 71). The interpretive perspective views the human being as being an active agent in the construction of meaning throughout their day-to-day experience; a process that is taken up directly in the methodology of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is a interpretative methodological approach to qualitative research that “seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 2001, p. 484). Simply put, phenomenology can most be easily defined as a philosophical approach to understanding human experience, and although there are diverse viewpoints among phenomenologists, “they have all tended to share a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is *like*, in all of its various aspect, but especially in terms of the things which matter to us, and which constitute our lived world” (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 9) as we “attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomenon*” (Moran, 2000, p. 4). Through phenomenology we seek to understand the lived experiences of individuals and how they make sense of their social engagement.

Phenomenologists like Van Manen suggest that “ultimately the project of phenomenological reflection and explication is to affect a more direct contact with the

experience as lived” as “meaning is multidimensional and multilayered” (van Manen, 1997, p. 78). We experience, while simultaneously interpreting those experiences. The human “consciousness constructs as much as it perceives the world” (Gudrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 487). Crotty (1998) suggests that what phenomenology has to offer qualitative research is “not only a beginning rooted to immediate social experience but also a methodology that requires a return to that experience at many points along the way” as if “it is both starting point and touchstone” (p. 85). Understanding the way phenomenological methodology, based on an interpretive theoretical perspective grounded in a constructionist epistemology, is put into actual practice in the field leads us to the research method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

### **Relevance of the Martial Arts to Leisure Scholarship**

Attempts to study the history of martial arts is often challenging, as Chinese history, mythology, philosophy, and folklore all exist in a poetic interrelationship that is frustrating to scholars looking for concrete facts<sup>4</sup>. Although the traditional martial arts most certainly developed from military practices (Lantz, 2002), the lifestyle training and philosophy components of the arts have been growing in popularity in the North America and Europe, where they are studied and practiced as “self-defence, mental discipline, harmony of body and mind, physical fitness, and sport” (Cox, 1993, p. 386). While the martial arts have a distinct and unique physical training component, the arts coming from China have a long history deeply interconnected with cultural and philosophical perspectives such as Taoism, dating back into

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<sup>4</sup> This difficulty is compounded by the challenge to historically distinguish between martial artists and common soldiers. The creation of the numerous forms of Chinese martial arts was heavily shaped by military knowledge and experience, which begs the questions: Were all Chinese Soldiers martial artists? Some historians link the transition from soldier to martial artist as being based on the arts teaching component focused on both individual development and the continuation of the traditions of the arts through club lineage (Judkins, 2012).

ancient times. It is interesting that although the Chinese martial arts have this unique and rich cultural history, investigation into the martial arts in academia has often focused entirely on the exercise element (Allen & Meires, 2011; Deschamps, Onifade, Decamps, & Bourdel-Marchasson, 2009; Field, 2011; Jahnke, Larkey, Rogers, Etnier, & Lin, 2010; Shen et al., 2012; Sprod et al., 2012; Taylor-Piliae et al., 2010).

Within some academic literature, the martial arts have entered the research world as a form of activity-based intervention for improving positive physical and psychological variables (i.e., cardiovascular health and self-esteem) and reducing negative variables such as pain or aggression. These types of studies focus on the activity dimension<sup>5</sup> of martial art participation and the measurable effect correlated with engagement in the art. For example, researchers Li, Hong, and Chan (2001), who in their meta-review of studies focused on the benefits of Tai Chi as discussed in academic literature, describe the Chinese martial art as a “moderate intensity exercise<sup>6</sup> that is beneficial to cardiorespiratory function, immune capacity, mental control, flexibility, and balance control: it improves muscle strength and reduces risk of fall in the elderly” (p. 148). Specifically, Tai Chi practice has been found to correlated with improvements in participant’s circulation (Figuroa, DeMeersman, & Manning, 2012; Irwin & Olmstead, 2012), glycaemic control (Liu, Miller, Burton, & Brown, 2009), blood pressure (Goon et al., 2009; Rogers, Larkey, & Keller, 2009), and overall cardiovascular health and muscular strength (Gyllensten, Hui-Chan, & Tsang, 2010; Lee, Lee, & Woo, 2009; Lu, Hui-Chan, & Tsang, 2012). Due to the popularity of the martial arts as a treatment intervention with older populations,

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<sup>5</sup> An *activity* (doing) focus is qualitatively different from a theoretical orientation exploring the meaning of *experience* (*being*).

<sup>6</sup> Note the focus on activity over experience.

several studies specifically highlight the ability of Tai Chi to function as an effective exercise system for prevention of decline in physical aspects such as: balance (Chen, Fu, Chan, & Tsang, 2012; Hakim, Kotroba, Cours, Teel, & Leininger, 2010; Lelard, Doutrelot, David, & Ahmaidi, 2010; Leung, Chan, Tsang, Tsang, & Jones, 2011) overall stability (Gyllensten et al., 2010), and hand-eye coordination (Kwok, Hui-Chan, & Tsang, 2010).

Other researchers have examined the ability of the traditional martial arts to create positive psychological effect on training participants. These studies focused on the ability of training to improve participants' ability to relax and successfully manage stress (Field, Diego, & Hernandez-Reif, 2010; Sandlund & Norlander, 2000). Some psychologists even hint at the mental health benefits of the martial arts in terms of energetic connections "within our bodies, psyches, interpersonal relationships, and the universe" (Seitz, Olson, Locke, & Quamwami, 1990, p. 495) which can foster "the practitioner's overall mental unification and enhance harmony" (Oulanova, 2009, p. 45).

Significant attention has also been giving to the ability of Tai Chi to offer relief from physical pain in a number of body areas including the knees (Ni, Song, Yu, Huang, & Lin, 2010; Wang et al., 2009) and lower back (Hall, Maher, Lam, Ferreira, & Latimer, 2011). In addition to reducing negative physical variables like pain, researchers have also been interested in using the martial arts as a form of intervention for reducing negative psychological variables. Most notably, the martial arts have been explored as a potential solution for reducing aggression, especially in children (Nosanchuk, 1981; Rosenberg & Sapochnik, 1981). Studies have focused specifically on the effectiveness of taekwondo (Trulson, 1986), judo (Nosanchuk, 1981), and karate (Nosanchuk & MacNeil, 2006) for decreasing aggression levels. It should be noted that these studies also treat the practice of the martial arts primarily as a form of exercised based

activity exploring the effect on the individual characteristics of the participant. Although these types of studies are important for establishing the therapeutic value of the martial arts, to fully explore the cultivation of this practice requires an approach focused more on the experiential aspects of this unique form of training.

Despite a primary focus on the activity (or *doing*<sup>7</sup>) aspect of martial arts participation, examples do exist within the literature of researchers trying to measure the experiential nature of the training for individuals overcoming injuries and dealing with illness. These studies focus on treatment and lifestyle. For example, researchers have explored Tai Chi as a health intervention contributing to treatment plans for individual's living with brain injuries (Gemmell & Leathem, 2006), Parkinson's disease (Li et al., 2012), breast cancer (Mansky et al., 2006; Sprod et al., 2012) and individuals living in the aftermath of suffering a stroke (Au-Yeung, Hui-Chan, & Tang, 2009). These studies looked at the positive physical benefits of practice, but also recognized the important experiential role a practice like the martial arts can play in the lives of individuals dealing with difficult life circumstances. In addition, several studies linked the practice of Tai Chi with the experience of developing a healthy aging lifestyle (Rogers et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2012; Yau & Packer, 2002).

While these studies explore the way training in the traditional Chinese martial art of Tai Chi helps participants recover from injuries and illness while cultivating healthy living habits, this emphasis misses experiential components and the cultural environmental context involved in the Kung Fu training system of Grandmaster Pan. However, exploring this environment was not as straightforward as it initially appears, as culture is a highly complex topic, and an individual's

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<sup>7</sup> Activity (*doing*) is being contrasted with Experience (*being*), as a core distinction when discussing the martial arts.

understanding of this topic is shaped by his or her own personal experiences and perspectives. How then, do we invite Taoist understandings into leisure scholarship? What can Taoist ideas add to our approach to research, practice, and teaching?

Taoism challenges us to be fluid and in-the-moment in our understandings of self, healing, and human experience. With an emphasis on direct experience, Taoist philosophy explores the Chinese martial arts as a vehicle for personal transformation through long-term training practices. Where the social psychological model places emphasis on the social mind of the practitioner, the Chinese martial arts focuses on the interrelatedness of physical and spiritual aspects of being with the unconscious. A Taoist physical-spiritual model focuses on the interplay created when spirit is embodied by an individual engaged in physical practices such as the Chinese martial art of Tai Chi. Connections between mind, body, and spirit in the training experience is expressed beautifully in the writings of Eugen Herrigel. In the introduction to Zen in the Art of Archery, Herrigel (1953) emphasizes attunement of mind to the unconscious. As he states:

One of the most significant features we notice in the practice of archery, and in fact of all the traditional martial arts, is that they are not intended for utilitarian purposes only or for purely aesthetic enjoyments, but are meant to train the mind; indeed, to bring it into contact with the ultimate reality<sup>8</sup>. Archery is, therefore, not practiced solely for hitting the target; the swordsman does not wield the sword just for the sake of outdoing his opponent; the dancer does not dance

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<sup>8</sup> Although Herrigel, and Japanese martial artists in general, are more likely to be situated within a Zen Buddhist system of philosophical and spiritual teachings, the connection between this notion of *ultimate reality* and the Taoist notion of *Tao* reflects a deep fundamental alignment as they attempt to understand the cosmos.

just to perform certain rhythmical movements of the body. The mind has first to be attuned to the unconscious. (p. v).

### **Chinese Martial Arts and Taoist Philosophy**

Bruce Lee introduced the world to a Chinese martial art practice rich in history and culture, with origins reaching back as far as the Shang time period in Chinese history, which spanned from the sixteenth (1556 B.C.) to eleventh century (1046 B.C.) B.C. (Green & Svinth, 2003). Lee's philosophical orientation was rooted in a system of Chinese martial arts teachings and the philosophy of Taoism. Several core Taoist ideas will be presented as a historical and cultural context for understanding the Chinese martial art philosophies, ideals, and principles that will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

Although relatively new to academic scholarship, Taoism inspired Chinese martial art practices like Tai Chi<sup>9</sup> are relevant to the growing international discipline of leisure. According to Stensrud (1979), "Taoism is a tradition which originated in China sometime between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C. and has exerted a strong influence on all subsequent Chinese religious, philosophical, and psychological thought" (p. 32). While presenting ideas related to the nature of human activity and the underlying nature of reality, Taoism presents a philosophical based life-long system of training that challenges our current paradigm regarding healthy aging and human longevity. Taoism also has a very different explanation for the nature of psychological self and

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that Tai Chi (also spelt Taiji or Tai Chi Chuan depending on the translation) is a style within the broader umbrella of the Chinese Martial Arts. While in the North America you can find instructors in every major city offering Tai Chi lessons, many are not situated within as comprehensive of a Chinese Martial Arts system when compared to what is taught by Grandmaster Pan. Tai Chi is one of three "internal systems" within the Chinese Martial Arts: Tai Chi, Ba Gua, and XI Ying. These can be contrasted with more "external styles" such as Tiger Claw, Long Fist, or Weapons forms. As a result, within this study the term Tai Chi is referring to a specific form of training within a broader system of Chinese Martial Arts practice.

ego. These explanations are based on central philosophical notions related to the universal energy that sustains us, and the nature of human consciousness. The following section explores some of the key philosophical notions of Taoism that have application to how we understand leisure and physical activity.

### **Use of symbolic teaching practices to teach Taoist philosophy.**

In Chinese, the Dao (Tao), like the Logos, or Plato's idea, is a constant and the invariable cosmic principle that controls the operations of the universe. (Gu, 2003, p. 200)

To fully understand Taoist practices and its central ideas, we needed to explore the central philosophical symbol of the *Tao*. Creel (1956) teaches that “in the kaleidoscope firmament of Taoism there is one relatively fixed star: the term Tao” (p.139). The philosophical and spiritual basis of Taoism comes from the writings of Lao Tzu in his book the Tao Te Ching (The Book of the Way). In this text, Lao Tzu outlines what would become the fundamental philosophical system of Taoism based on the *Tao* as an underlying universal life force that represents the source of all things in the material world (Lee & Little, 1997). However, presenting Taoism as a unified school of thought may be problematic<sup>10</sup>. While differences exist between different schools of Taoism, a central focus on the *Tao* as a universal life force and energy system is common throughout.

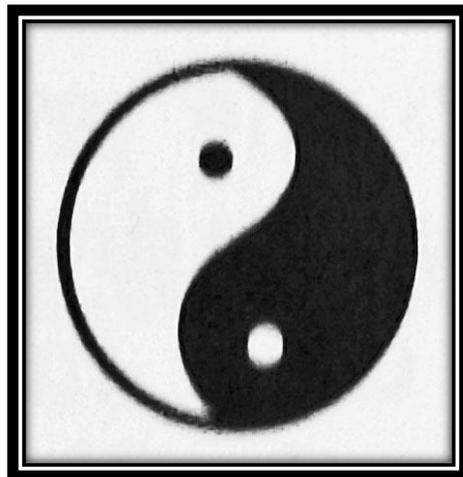
Since Chinese martial arts philosophy comes from an oral tradition of knowledge transmission, symbols presented powerful tools for representing and teaching complex ideas.

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<sup>10</sup> Creel (1956) notes that the more we attempt to study Taoism academically, the more we realize that Taoism refers less to a specific school and more to a selection of doctrines concerning Chinese ideas of spirituality, reality, mind, and human experience. Most of the differences between different branches of Taoism comes from their practical attempts to engage in human spiritual practices to align with this elemental force of the universe

The *Tao* is then associated with *Yin Yang* and *Taiji*<sup>11</sup>. While initially presenting as a seemingly simplistic description for opposing forces or opposites, when fully understood the symbol of Yin Yang presents a wealth of important knowledge. The Yin Yang symbol (see Figure 2) is a counterintuitive representation of the interplay of opposing universal forces that have fascinated Chinese intellect for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. This symbol stands in direct opposition to the idea of binaries. As Lee and Little (1997) describe:

Etymologically the characters of Yin and Yang mean darkness and light. The Ancient character of yin, the black part of the circle, is the drawing of clouds and hill (p. 28).



*Figure 2: Yin Yang Symbol (Xing-Han & Bracy, 1998, p.43)*

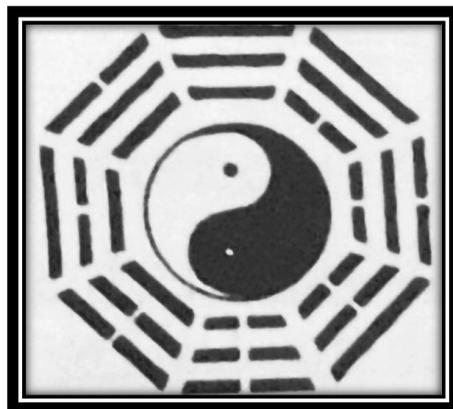
As shown in Figure 2, the Yin Yang symbol contains a white circle within the black side of the symbol, and a black circle within the white side. This symbolic illustration is done “to illustrate the balance in life, for nothing can survive long by going into either extreme, be it pure Yin or pure Yang” (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 29). The Yin and Yang symbol is best understood as

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<sup>11</sup> The philosophical idea of Taiji finds physical manifestation in the Chinese martial art of *Tai Chi*.

“two interlocking parts of one whole, each containing within its confines the qualities of complementaries” (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 28). Understanding the complementary nature of these two forces of nature is central in Taoist thought. According to Chinese martial artist and philosopher Bruce Lee, it is a mistake of philosophers to see this symbol as dualistic; “as long as this ‘oneness’ is viewed as two separate entities, realization of the Tao of Gung Fu won’t be achieved. In reality, things are ‘whole’ and cannot be separated into parts” (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 28); “this principle of Yin Yang, also known as Tai chi [Taiji], is the basic structure of Gung Fu” (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 119). Yin and Yang are underlying universal forces influence all aspects of life. Xing-Han & Bracey (1998) state “ according to ancient philosophical views of the law of the universe, nothing can be outside the law of Yin and Yang (Xing-Han & Bracy, 1998, p. 40). The notion of Yin and Yang as underlying forces that combine in the manifestation of Taiji, is foundational within Chinese philosophical and cosmological thought.

The simplicity of this Yin Yang symbol, combined with its power to communicate very complicated and philosophically deep ideas, make it a strong communicative tool for an orally based teaching tradition such as Taoism. Building on the ideas represented in the *Yin Yang* symbol, *Taiji* represents the union of Yin with Yang and the resulting production of the material world (see Figure 3 depicting the Tai Chi symbol encircled by the 8 trigrams from the *I Ching*).



*Figure 3: Taiji Diagram (LuTang, 1993, p. 80)*

To the ancient Chinese, the Taiji symbols communicated complicated cosmological ideas relating to the nature of reality and existence. As Gu (2003) states:

Since it is capable of generating new ideas and concepts, the Taiji Diagram may be viewed as a meta-sign born out of the human efforts to come to terms with the difficulties in thought, language, and representation. As such, it is a meta-sign of the universal significance, endowed with transcultural appeal (p. 215).

The center of this symbol shows the elemental interplay of opposite yet interconnected forces of Yin and Yang. This Yin and Yang relationship creates the *Taiji* and the *Taiji* creates Yin Yang. This Yin Yang symbol is then surrounded by the eight trigrams representing the fundamental principles of reality (*heaven/sky, lake/marsh, fire, thunder, wind, water, mountain, and earth*). The lines of the trigrams represent the broken lines of Yin and the unbroken line of Yang that underlie all things (Gu, 2003). These fundamental principles interact with this Yin Yang universal energy force to produce our reality and existence. Yin and Yang interact through the unconscious and conscious layers of mind and are connected to Taiji:

Just as the unconscious can be made conscious, so Yin can be turned into Yang.

Conversely, just as the Yang can be turned into the Yin, so conscious perception may be repressed into the unconscious. Everything is related to everything else; all are related to the One, the Dao or Taiji. It is natural for a mode of interrelated thinking to give rise to a monistic, self generating model of the universe. (Gu, 2003, p.210)

Early Taoists often used symbolic teaching practices to communicate difficult

philosophical and metaphysical ideas. For Examples, visual representations of *Yin Yang* and *Taiji* have become foundational symbols within Taoism and central learning tools for passing on philosophical teachings. Perhaps these advanced teaching symbols get closer to the actual nature of reality than we can with theory alone. Stensrud (1979) stresses this idea by teaching that, “[a]ny description of the Tao misses the essence of what it really is. The best descriptions are poetic descriptions; and the worst descriptions are rational ones” (p.32).

With this in mind, research question one then also involves the addition of the following question (research question 1c): How do symbolic teaching practices such as calligraphy, metaphor, and storytelling cultivate Kung Fu?

**Living in alignment with the Tao: Understanding Te (virtuous living) and Wu Wei (non-activity).**

Within Taoist teachings, *Te* is understood as “a moral power or virtue characteristic of a person who follows a correct course of conduct” (Watson, 1993, p. xxvii). *Te* connects the individual with the cosmos and must be understood in relation to Taoist ideas of a fluid and transformative self (discussed further in the section below). The human internalization of, or internal personal alignment of, the universal Tao with *Te* develops through careful cultivation and training (Lin, 2007). *Te* refers to the act of the individual living in alignment with the natural fluidity of the Tao. Attaining this direct connection with the Tao represents the highest goal of human development. The value of *Te* comes from the way it acts as “the other half of the binary” with the Tao, to shape the interplay between the human (endeavour) and the universal (Watson, 1993, p. 19). The Taoist understanding of reality values proper living as a primary way of attaining alignment with the Tao; hence *Te* is often compared to the philosophical notion of

developing virtue. However, this understanding of Te as virtue may be overly simplistic, as Kitching (2010) warns:

Although the Chinese word “Te” is generally translated as virtue, we should not overlook the fact that it has nothing to do with the conventional term for virtue, as we commonly understand it. Consequently, for the Taoist, veritable “true virtue” originates from innermost, spiritual fulfilment and is not imposed externally. Te is not the virtue of moral rectitude, which by clinging to external moral codes degenerates into a virtue-conscious mentality (p. 1).

The idea of Te refers less to external activities of the individual, like traditional moral ideas of virtue, and more to the inner experiential alignment between the individual and the universal. Kaltenmark (1969) comments on how the Taoist, “holy man has no virtue other than superior Te; he has no virtue, hence no merit, particularly to himself” (p. 51). Fowler (2005) discusses Te as representing human experience of the Tao, by suggesting, “it is by means of Te/De that Tao can be experienced”, as “Te/De is the function of Tao” (p. 116).

Similarly, the idea of endeavour and activity take on a nuanced and dynamic meaning within Taoist thought. Rather than an emphasis on doing, achievement or competition, one of the greatest paradoxes of Taoism is the idea of non-doing or non-activity, traditionally referred to as *Wu Wei*. As Erlich (1986) describes:

The philosophy of Lao Tsu [Tzu] is simple. Accept what is in front of you without wanting the situation to be other than it is. Study the natural order of things and work with it rather than against it, for to try to change what is only sets up resistance (p. 27).

Wu Wei is often misunderstood as a type of passive approach to human activity, with *Wu Wei* translating into "non-doing" in English; however, this surface understanding can miss the greater underlying meaning (Lee & Little, 1997). When individuals find harmony with the *Tao*,

actions no longer have to be forced as human behaviour and conduct becomes more natural and harmonious. *Wu Wei* is like a principle of no principle, a style without style, or an art of artlessness (Lee & Little, 1997). The idea of *Wu Wei* is illustrated when a human being experiences total and complete immersion in activity such that the actor and activity become one; that is, the act becomes "effortless" or "intentionless." Feelings of effortless result from achieving an in-the-moment, harmonious balance with underlying energies of the universe. In the martial arts, the practitioner can become so immersed in their training that the distinction between self and practice blurs. Taoism researcher Milton Erlich (1986) makes the point clearly when he suggests: "[i]f we watch carefully, we will see that work proceeds more quickly and easily if we stop 'trying,' if we stop putting in so much extra effort, if we stop looking for results" (p. 27).

To Taoists, achieving harmony with the universal *Tao* through the practice of *Wu Wei* represented a core goal of their philosophical and spiritual practices. As described by Stensrud (2003), "Wu-Wei is a state of non-differentiation in which there is an interfusion of subject and object" (p. 39). The central idea focuses on the connection between daily practices and the Taoist's philosophical and spiritual views of self, reality, and the cosmos. Stensrud (2003), writing on the topic of Taoism, stated "personal power is the ability to blend appropriately with *Tao*, to recognize what action is necessary" (p.39). Stensrud (2003) highlights a central notion—alignment with the *Tao* is not only a spiritual practice but it is also an energetic practice. Aligning with the *Tao* creates an energetic effect on the individual. Without the development of self and spiritual engagement this level of harmony with the *Tao* is often unreachable. Thus, the Taoist student is constantly searching for these moments of union with the universal energy of the *Tao*. The pursuit of the *Tao* naturally transforms into practices of daily living. According to

Taoist scholar Bruce Lee (1975), "masters in all branches of arts must first be masters of living, for the soul creates everything" (p. 10). In Taoism then, there is not the separation between activity and being that is found in the social psychological perspective of leisure. Nor is there the separation of spiritual practices as compartmentalized aspects of human experience. As such, scholars have noted how *Wu Wei* can be even harder to describe than the vast notion of the *Tao* itself (Loy, 1985). When an individual aligns with the universal there is a sense of completion and a sense of fulfillment. The central idea is to "follow the natural course" or "attune yourself to the rhythm of the season" (Creel, 1956, p. 140). Bruce Lee fascinated the martial arts community with his discussions of Taoism as found in his personal essays on *Wu Wei*:

A Gung Fu man promotes the spontaneous development of his opponent and does not venture to interfere by his own action. He loses himself by giving up all subjective feelings and individuality, and becomes one with his opponent. Inside his mind oppositions have become mutually cooperative instead of mutually exclusive. When his private ego and conscious efforts yield to a power not his own he then achieves the supreme action, non-action (*Wu Wei*) (cited in Lee & Little, 1997, pp. 125-126).

**Wu Hsin: Direct experience through no-mind or non-attachment.**

The idea of no mind (*Wu Hsin*) refers to a time of peak engagement with one's immediate surroundings. It is "[a] subtle art of matching the essence of the mind to that of the medium in which it works" (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 140). The mind is turned quiet, and the body is set to respond. It is the pre-combat state of the martial artist or the pre-performance state of the musician. *Wu Hsin* does not refer to mental emptiness but to a lack of attachment to any one point of reference and therefore a more flexible and adaptable position is established. According to Lee (1997c), *Wu Hsin* is "not being without emotion or feeling, but being one in whom feeling

is not sticky or blocked...it is a mind immune to emotional influences" (p. 124). Controlling one's emotions, in the heat of the moment, is core to *Wu Hsin*. Direct experience of the moment allows actor and the act to become part of the same process. *Wu Hsin* suggests that "we exist here, we exist in the present, and we are intimately interconnected with our world; our being-in-the-world is immediate and direct" (Stensrud, 1979, p. 32). In a way, it is about getting the mind out of the way so the body can perform. *Wu Hsin* is not a blank slate mind nor is it simply a quietness of mind (Lee & Little, 1997). *Wu Hsin* occurs when the ego self is transcended and in the moment awareness of right now replaces active thought. Bruce Lee explains this notion beautifully by giving the following advice to students of the martial arts:

[d]uring sparring, a Gung Fu man learns to forget about himself and follow the movement of his opponent, leaving his mind free to make its own countermovement without any interfering deliberation. He frees himself from all mental suggestions of resistance, and adopts a supple attitude. His actions are all performed without self-assertion; he lets his mind remain spontaneous and ungrasped. As soon as he stops to think, his full movement will be disturbed and he is immediately struck by his opponent. Every action, therefore, has to be done "unintentionally" without ever trying (cited in Lee & Little, 1997, p. 127).

For *Wu Hsin* to occur, the training needs to have already prepared the student. By the time a real fight occurs, there is no time for complex thought. However, this does not mean the Kung Fu student's mind goes blank, without cognitive activity; rather mind and body are in such a heightened state the separation between them becomes blurred. The mind-body must respond, as "all movements come out of emptiness and the mind is the name given to this dynamic aspect of emptiness" (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 202). Lee and Little (1997) capture this notion of *Wu Hsin* as:

[w]hen the ultimate perfection is attained, the body and limbs performed by themselves

what is assigned to them to do with no interference from the mind. The technical skill is so automatized is completely divorced from conscious effort. (p. 131)

When harmony is achieved between individual and the *Tao*, we gain a creative power and regenerative energies from this harmonization (Stensrud, 1979). Through alignment with universal energies of creation, we become the Tao. My own Kung Fu instructor, Grandmaster Qing Fu Pan often uses the phrase “study hard...learn more...train hard...change to you.” The philosophical merit of this simple statement is very deep. The ultimate goal of martial arts training is to very literally become the martial artist who has attained mastery to a level at which they become a walking manifestation of that lifestyle and training practice.

#### **Self as a manifestation of the Tao.**

It is also important to note that Chinese intellectual traditions present a vision of self that is very different from social psychological conceptualization. Ho (1995) writes:

Taoism disavows a hierarchical view of the self, society, or cosmos. Unlike Confucianism, Taoism does not regard the self as an extension of, and defined by, social relationships. Rather, the self is but one of the countless manifestations of the Tao. It is an extension of the cosmos (p. 120).

Taoist scholars would argue with sociologists who suggest the self is a social product; whereas “a Taoist true self is a self that is totally with the Dao” (Chen, 2004, p. 33). As the above quote mentions, the self is but another of the countless manifestation of the Tao. Within Taoist thought, “the idea of Tao manifesting itself in everything paves the way for the belief in the correspondence between what is happening in the universe and what is happening in the human world” (Allen & Hu, 2005, p. 28).

In the Taoist model of thought, there is much less emphasis on individual role and group

identity-based notions of self as a collection of identities common to the psychological conceptualization. In many ways self is viewed as an obstacle to spiritual development as over-engagement with the self can lead to mistaken desires and loss of perspective. The primary aim of Taoism is to transcend limitations of individual selfhood and achieve harmony with the universal Tao. From the Taoist perspective, "when selflessness is attained, the distinction between "I" and "other" disappears" and when this occurs "one may then act with complete spontaneity" (Ho, 1995, p. 121). The idea is not to devalue the individual, but to shift focus from development of self to align the self with the universal principle that is inherently perfect and ever changing. Ho (1995) states "the Sage [Taoist master/teacher] has no fixed personal ideas" (p. 120), which does not simply imply the sage is without thought or ability to conceptualize. The Sage is not basing identity and sense of self on his social engagements; rather, he/she is aiming for harmonization with the *Tao*. To explore the Taoist self in greater depth, it is important to understand the Taoist view of ego identity and emptiness. Taoism asserts that we are a living manifestation of all that there is. Taoists believe that:

[i]f we can experience ourselves as a mere ecological part of the cosmos, recognizing our "self" as a condition state of consciousness, we can become freer to let go of these habitual patterns of thought. We can then exist less self-consciously, with the greater sense of freedom and liberation. To the extent that we can actually experience ourselves as nothing more than a bag of skin encompassing a mass of pulsating protoplasm we may feel less isolated from the world at large (Erlich, 1986, p. 27).

Expanding on this release of self, Bruce Lee writes, "The less promise and potency in the self, the more imperative is the need for pride. One is proud when he identifies himself with an imaginary self; the core of pride his self rejection" (cited in Lee & Little, 1997, p. 130).

Transcending self in the moment, and completely immersing and engaging the environmental situation reflects this loss of individuality centered consciousness and movement toward a universal or collective consciousness. Separation between agent and objective action is blurred as they are dynamically interconnected. Very little value is given to ego identity or the development of personal and social identity. The primary objective is to focus on the development of the spiritual, emotional, and psychological maturity necessary to transcend the limitations of the human ego and reach for higher levels of alignment with the universal Tao. The Taoist views the true self as being a type of meaningful existential emptiness, an emptiness that holds a value and importance that is unacknowledged in most social psychological scholarship focused on psychological identity. Meaningful emptiness is expanding and deepened in *Wu Wei* (non-doing) and *Wu Hsin* (no-mindedness).

It is important then to differentiate how this Taoist approach to understanding emptiness contrasts to the social psychological conceptualization of optimal performance, such as the idea of flow. Csikszentmihalyi teaches that flow, or optimal performance through total immersion in the current situation, “tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals that require appropriate responses” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29). To the Taoist, flow does not provide the complete picture of in-the-moment engagement in activity. For the Taoist, this is a much more spiritually charged moment, a moment inspired by its ability to connect the individual with the universal energies of the *Tao* or universal life force. In the blurring of subject and object, Taoism is presented as a unified physical, psychological, spiritual and energetic form of training practice. The martial artist`s mind is:

[p]resent everywhere because it is nowhere attached to any particular object. And it can remain present because even when related to this or that object, it does not cling to it. The

flow of thought is like water filling the pond, which is always ready to flow off again. It worked its inexhaustible power because it is free, and be open to everything because it is empty (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 125).

As outlined in the previous sections, an exploration of the cultivation of Kung Fu necessitates consideration of ideas of the Tao. Research question one then also involves the following question (Question 1d): How are Taoist ideas of Taiji, Yin Yang, Wu Wei, Wu Hsin and self reflected in the cultivation Kung Fu?

### ***A Taoist challenge to social constructionism?***

A difference in the understandings of self highlights a challenge to a phenomenological study rooted in Taoism. An inherent problem arises from the differing understanding of self expressed by Taoist understandings and the traditional views of constructionism, and specifically social constructionism, which underlie the phenomenological philosophy being implemented in the current study.

A constructionist epistemology claims meaningful reality “is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” as “meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). From a constructionist perspective, we do not create meaning in a sense of it coming solely from us, but rather we construct it as “we have something to work with” and “what we have to work with is the world and objects in the world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). The constructionist epistemology is highly related to the idea of *intentionality*; a notion that is raised again in discussions of Martin Heidegger’s contribution to the theoretical foundations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. When considering intentionality, “subject and object, distinguishable as they are, are always united” (Crotty, 1998, p. 45). We are

constructing our experience and “the image evoked is that of humans engaging with their human world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 45). This brief discussion of constructionism is intended to present the idea of a world that is engaged by the human being in a process of meaning construction.

However, to fully understand how this construction occurs, we need to understand the relationship between the individual and their social world and how that shapes our experiences and interpretations.

Where the Taoists view self as a spiritual essence representing our personalized manifestation of the universal Tao, the social constructionist perspective has a much more social view of self. Throughout the current study, it will be interesting to explore if these two ideas are theoretically compatible or if a new idea is needed to bridge the gap between Taoist and Phenomenological philosophical foundation. Here, opportunity arises to explore a new research question (question 2): What emerges at the tension between Taoism and phenomenology around the different understandings of self?

### **Exploring Experiences of the Martial Artists through a Leisure Studies Lens**

While Taoism offers an interesting insight into martial art training practices, theoretical frameworks also exist in leisure research that enable us to consider different aspects of this practice with a different lens. Both Taoist philosophy and leisure research theories offer valuable contributions to deepening our understanding of the experience of engaging in martial art practice. In leisure research, serious leisure has been used to examine intense participation behaviours within the leisure-activity domain of human experience. Some leisure scholars consider serious leisure to be “one of the most significant concepts shaping leisure research over the last 30 years” (Gallant, Arai, & Smale, 2013). The concept was originated by sociologist Robert Stebbins, and examines the way individual leisure pursuits begins to take on deep

personal meaning and significance in the life of that individual (Stebbins, 2007). Despite the popularity of the concept of serious leisure, the conceptualization has been challenged in recent years for its primary focus on the activity dimension of leisure engagement.

In alignment with the case presented in Kivel, Johnson, and Scratton's (2009) paper, which called for a more *experience* based understanding of leisure, Gallant et al. (2013), suggest "envisioning serious leisure as an experience draws attention to the quality and nature of serious leisure and to the process through which it is experienced" (p. 5). The shift suggested is from a primary goal of understanding *leisure activity* to a central focus on understanding the depths and nuances of *leisure experience*. A re-envisioned conceptualization of *serious leisure* has been presented by Gallant et al., (2013) which defines serious leisure as:

[t]he committed pursuit of a core leisure experience that is substantial, interesting, and fulfilling, and where engagement is characterized by unique identities and leads to a variety of outcomes for the person, social world, and communities within which the person is immersed (p. 14).

The re-envisioned definition of serious leisure presents a primary focus on leisure as experience, rather than as activity, which is in direct alignment with the phenomenological orientation of the current study. Elkington (2010) used the concept of serious leisure within a phenomenological framework, however his study was informed by a conceptualization of serious leisure centered on activity type rather than subjective psychological experience, which assumed an activity to be serious leisure based on the type of the activity pursued rather than exploring the experiential nature of engagement. In contrast, this phenomenological study of the cultivation of martial arts practice utilizes an orientation to serious leisure as an experiential concept that can help us understand the depths of martial arts training within the Kung Fu system of Grandmaster

Pan. The ability of serious leisure to act as a concept for understanding leisure pursuits like the Chinese martial arts deepens with an increased emphasis on experience. Gallant et. al. (2013) suggest, “there is much opportunity to extend and perhaps re-envision serious leisure as a foundation of community building, celebration, and transformation” (p. 13). This experience-focused understanding of leisure provides an interesting vantage point for the current phenomenological study into the martial arts teachings and practices of Grandmaster Pan. A third, a final research question then arises: How does Kung Fu inform an experiential understanding of leisure?

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter One has introduced Grand Master Pan and my reflexive positioning in relation to the martial arts Club. To contextualize this interpretive phenomenological study, an overview of key ideas from Taoism was provided and the study was situated within the leisure studies literature. The Chapter also provides insight into the purpose of the study—**to explore the cultivation and meaning-making of Kung Fu within a martial arts club**—and the following research questions:

**Research Question #1:** How does the cultivation of Kung Fu occur?

- a) What is the experience of Kung Fu?
- b) What meaning do individuals make of Kung Fu?
- c) How do symbolic teaching practices such as calligraphy, metaphor, and storytelling cultivate Kung Fu?
- d) How are Taoist ideas like Taiji, Yin Yang, Wu Wei, and Wu Hsin reflected in the cultivation of Kung Fu?

**Research Question #2:** What emerges at the tension between Taoism and phenomenology around the different understandings of self?

**Research Question #3:** How does Kung Fu inform an experiential understanding of leisure?

Chapter Two provides insight into the philosophy of phenomenology with a focus on the essential, or underlying meaning, of human experience exploring the foundational writings of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger who unknowingly became the fathers of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Rather than following one individual phenomenological writer completely, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach also attempts to locate the essence of the phenomenological message presented by writers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre in a way that constructs a strategic framework for the researcher.

Chapter Three then provides an overview of the three methods of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach (phenomenology, hermeneutics, idiography) through an exploration of the core philosophers responsible for laying the groundwork for the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis orientation. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach applies hermeneutic ideas from philosophers like Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Finally, there is a recognition within the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach of the unique value of an idiographic approach to research design.

Chapter Four provides an exploration of the interpretations and experiences of both Grandmaster Pan and his students. The focus of the chapter is centered on understanding transformation through the cultivation and embodiment of Iron and Silk. The transformation experienced and engaged intersubjectively by students is presented as being foundationally

linked to the idea of becoming a martial artist in an embodied lived way. Two central essences outline this chapter. The first foundational essence is titled *Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk*. Within this essence there are five sub-essences: (1) Fluid Movement between Iron and Silk; (2) Embedded Meaning in a Science of Self-Defence; (3) Understanding Iron and Silk as Cultivating a Path of Transformation; (4) “Every Day from Zero”: An Applied Philosophy of Embodiment; and (5) “Change to in your Body”: Embodying the Way of Iron and Silk. The second foundational essence is titled *Relationship Cultivates Gung Fu, Gung Fu Cultivates Relationship*. Within this essence there are also five sub-essences: (1) Cultivating a Gung Fu Lineage; (2) Relationship to a Sifu; (3) Finding a Home: Continuation of Relationship in Physical and Social Space; (4) “Doing Business is Easy, Having a Relationship is Hard”: Relationships of Iron and Silk; and (5) Openness of Leaning in the cultivation of Iron and Silk. As a totality, these essences and their associated sub-essences represent Iron and Silk as taught and embodied by Grandmaster Pan.

Chapter five is titled “martial arts as embodied knowledge” as a Taoist-inspired phenomenological lens is utilized to interpret and represent the findings of this study. The chapter begins by discussing the phenomenological concept of embodiment and how it represents a theoretical cornerstone for interpreting lived experience. Embodiment is then presented along with Taoist teachings as a theoretical synthesis used to develop a nuanced understanding of what it means to be immersed in a practice like the Chinese martial arts of Grandmaster Pan. When applying the idea of embodiment within the context of a Kung Fu practice, the Taoist story of the cauldron and the teaching of approximation are presented. The chapter ends by finding synthesis between phenomenology and Taoism through an exploration of

the phenomenological concept of intersubjectivity and the Taoist teaching of TE (Virtuous Character).

## CHAPTER TWO: PHENOMENOLOGY AS PHILOSOPHY

Phenomenology, with its focus on meaning and being, seems to compliment the philosophical position of the Chinese martial arts. Other scholars have noted this potential link between the philosophies of Taoism and Zen with phenomenology, suggesting that phenomenology as a research approach "appears to offer the Westerner a point of entry towards understanding the martial arts" (Columbus & Rice, 1991, p. 127). In addition, researchers have commented that phenomenological philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty have the potential to help the researcher understand the essence of what can be both a philosophical and "athletic embodiment" of a sport or training practice such as the martial arts (Hogeveen, 2011, p. 245). Phenomenology, as philosophy (the focus of this chapter) and methodology (the focus of Chapter Three), possesses a rich intellectual history.

Phenomenology "seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of a phenomenon for a person or group of people" (Patton, 2001, p. 484). Simply put, phenomenology is a philosophical approach to understanding human experience. Although there are diverse viewpoints among phenomenologists, "they have all tended to share a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is *like*, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things which matter to us, and which constitute our lived world" (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 9) as we "attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomenon*" (Moran, 2000, p. 4). Phenomenology is a philosophical way of understanding the lived experience of the individual and how that individual makes sense of their social engagement. Phenomenologists like Van Manen (1997) suggest "ultimately the project of phenomenological reflection and explication is to affect a more direct contact with the experience as lived" as "meaning is multidimensional and multilayered" (p. 78). We experience,

while simultaneously interpreting those experiences. In keeping with a phenomenological view of the human mind it is thought that, “consciousness constructs as much as it perceives the world” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 487).

The theoretical depth and reach of phenomenological philosophy can feel overwhelming and overly complicate the fact that at the core, phenomenology is about the study of everyday experience and “while philosophy has made an enormous contribution to understanding the process of examining experience it is important to realize that philosophy does not own phenomenology” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32). This reminder is meant to encourage those researchers interested in the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to honour and explore the philosophical roots of the tradition, while simultaneously exploring new and creative ways of methodologically applying these theoretical ideas in diverse research contexts. Rather than following one individual phenomenological writer completely, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach attempts to locate the essence of the phenomenological message presented by writers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre in a way that constructs a strategic framework for the researcher. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach also applies hermeneutic ideas from philosophers like Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer. It is important to always remember that “the philosophical account can be insightful and illuminating but it should be there to serve the stuff of lived experience rather than the other way round” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). Smith et al. (2009) in their comprehensive research design manual, *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*, repeatedly emphasize that “we, as researchers and readers, should feel inspired by the philosophical writers to take the project on, and to keep phenomenology alive in our research studies” as “phenomenology is a live dynamic activity, not just a scholarly collection of ideas”

(p. 33). Philosophy provides the theoretical framing, but the phenomenological data is constructed when this theoretical framework is applied within a qualitative research context.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis presents a conception of the human being as being intentionally involved, at a psychological level, in making sense of lived experience. In Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the individual is viewed as a *sense making creature*, “the meaning which is bestowed by the participant on experience, as it becomes experience, can be said to represent the experience itself” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). Within this approach to inquiry, researchers are “concerned with examining subjective experience, but that is always the subjective experience of ‘something’” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). To understand the phenomenon under investigation, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis explores both experience, and the subjective ‘experience’ of experiences, through the application of a *phenomenological attitude* with a central focus on *reflection*.

### **Phenomenological Attitude and Valuing Reflection**

To begin a discussion of how phenomenology shapes the research process, it is important to understand what is meant by a phenomenological attitude fostered through reflection. German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) originally presented the concept of the *phenomenological attitude* in contrast to our everyday or natural attitude; where “adopting a *phenomenological attitude* involves and requires a reflexive move” as the researcher turns their gaze from the “objects in the world, and directs it inwards, towards our perception of those objects” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). Husserl highlighted the importance of a central focus on reflection as a core element in the attempt to gain deeper understandings of phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). A focus on reflexivity challenges the researcher to look deeper into the phenomena they are observing to find layers of meaning that are more complex than simple surface level

observations would reveal. Husserl shaped the theoretical foundation of phenomenology by emphasizing the importance of an “attentive and systematic examination of the content of consciousness, our lived experience, the very stuff of life” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16).

Phenomenology seeks to explore the underlying essence of conscious human experience through reflection on five core phenomenological notions: *lifeworld*, *intentionality*, *intersubjectivity*, *embodiment*, and the phenomenological notion of *existence before essence*.

### **Lifeworld.**

From a historical and conceptual perspective, “the lifeworld has become the most influential and absorbing enterprise of post-Husserlian phenomenology” (Jung, 2011, p. 39). *Lifeworld* describes the “taken-for-granted, everyday life that we lead” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 15), or in other words “the concept of the life-world calls attention to the original, taken-for-granted horizon of lived meanings” (Gadamer, 1977, p. xliv). Within the current study, the lifeworld under investigation will be the martial arts club of Grandmaster Pan. In exploring this social aspect of cognitive engagement with the world, Husserl’s effort to “recover the dynamics and vitalistic intentionality of experience” can be seen (Schrag, 1991, p. 133). To Husserl, the development of a “rigorous phenomenological account of the world as it is experienced” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 15) is crucial. It is in this way that we can uncover the layers and depths of the phenomenological experience of the individual. It is interesting to consider what this concept means in relation to the idea of subjectivity. Husserl seems to appreciate the psychologically subjective experience of the individual while simultaneously presenting a view of that individual existing within an objective world or reality inhabited by other conscious human beings. Therefore, the connection to the concept of subjectivity is not at an epistemological level. From an experiential perspective, the lifeworld is inter-subjective as it is “a world in which a subject

lives interactively with others who are also recognized as subjects” (Buckley, 1992, p. 94). The external social world is one “full of meaning, but a meaning which is taken for granted in its familiarity and immediacy” (Buckley, 1992, p. 94). The phenomenological notion of the lifeworld is an attempt to gain a clear look at the contextualized phenomenon that we are interpreting. Husserl recommends “resolving the crisis of Western civilization (struggle between philosophy and science in Renaissance Europe) by returning to the hidden foundation of any objectivity, that is, the world of immediate experience and intuition” (Dorfman, 2009, p. 294).

### **Lifeworld existentials.**

While the phenomenological notion of the lifeworld represents “the context of our immediate and everyday experience” (Brockelman, 1980, p. 47), it manifests in four interconnected yet distinct dimensions. These four dimensions, or *lifeworld existentials*, are: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality/embodiment), *lived time* (temporality) and *lived human relation* (relationality) (van Manen, 1997, p. 101). These four inter-related dimensions combine to shape our subjective experience of our lifeworld.

*Lived space* reflects the idea that we engage in dynamically charged social environments. Van Manen (1997) writes “there are cultural and social conventions associated with space that give the experience of space certain qualitative dimensions” (p. 103). When studying the cultivation of Kung Fu within the Chinese martial arts of Grandmaster Pan, the influence of the training environment needs to be valued as a key source of phenomenological data. Grandmaster Pan often states that when he is immersed in training at the club he “feels like [he is in] a different world” (Pan, 2007). To understand the phenomenological experience of being a *martial artist* within Grandmaster Pan’s system, it is important to understand the physical and social environment in which the martial arts exists. Van Manen (1997) suggests the idea of spatiality

can “help us uncover more fundamental meaning dimensions of lived life” (p. 103), adding yet another layer to our phenomenological inquiry.

*Lived body*, relates to ideas of *corporeality* and embodiment that underlie the title of this study: *Kung Fu is inside your Body*. This position suggests a process of internalization occurs throughout the training experience as the student begins to *live* the teachings in an embodied way. It also connects to the manner of instruction within the martial arts club. When discussing his instructional philosophy, Grandmaster Pan states “I teach with body language” (Pan, 2007). Long before Grandmaster Pan developed his English to a highly functional conversational level, he was instructing Canadian-English speaking students in his arts through a combination of simple English and complex non-verbal embodied teaching methods. Van Manen (1997) writes about how corporeality “refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world. When we meet another person in his or her landscape or world we meet that person first of all through his or her body” (van Manen, 1997, p. 103). Living the martial arts practices he teaches is fundamental to Grandmaster Pan’s approach to training, as he views embodying his art as a foundational aspect influencing his ability to cultivate the internalization of Kung Fu in each individual student.

The training experience in the club can be contextualized not only spatially but also *temporally*, by giving attention to the *lived time* component of the phenomenon. *Lived time* is “subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time” (van Manen, 1997, p. 104). Our experience of time is shaped by our engagement with our physical and social environment. Grandmaster Pan often reminds his students of the ancient Chinese teaching: “When drinking with friends...a thousand drinks is never enough; but when drinking with one you dislike...one sip is too much” (Pan, 2007). Similarly, a fascinating and engaging class seems to fly by, even

though it is the exact same length as every other class. Temporality refers to our in the moment experience of time. It also speaks to time from a long-term perspective in how it relates to our changing understanding of who we are and how we see ourselves. van Manen (1997) writes, “when we want to get to know a person we ask about his or her personal life history and where they feel they are going – what is their project in life?” (p. 104). An understanding of time is dynamically linked to our understanding of social situations. Where we came from, where we see ourselves now, and where we see ourselves going in the future are all time or temporally embedded reflections.

*Relationality*, or *lived other*, is “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (van Manen, 1997, p. 104). My being a *martial artist* is intimately situated within my personal relationship to Grandmaster Pan as my sifu (teacher) and to my other training partners (students) within the club. Grandmaster Pan always talks about how he cannot follow us all around and protect us, so part of him (his teachings and lessons) must always live deep inside us (Pan, 2007). The teachings of Grandmaster Pan, both physical techniques and philosophical understandings, must be cultivated and internalized so Grandmaster Pan can “travel” with each individual student through their daily life. This is embodied teaching and lived practice.

Although these lifeworld existentials refer to distinct aspects of experience, they are dynamically interconnected and combined to create a more holistic understanding of the phenomenological lifeworlds we engage throughout our human experience.

Van Manen (1997) suggests “spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality are productive categories for the process of phenomenological question posing, reflecting, and writing.” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 102). These four dimensions combine to form the lifeworld.

According to Van Manen, “these four existentials of lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation to the other can be differentiated but not separated. They all form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld – our lived world” (p. 105).

**Intentionality of awareness and intention and intersubjectivity.**

The phenomenological perspective is not only focused on observing experience, but also observing how experience is understood and given meaning by a conscious human mind. Husserl uses the term *intentionality* to describe “the relationship between the process occurring in consciousness, and the object of attention for that process” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Through human consciousness we are not passively observing beings, we are actively making sense of situations through the application of attention and other psychological processes. To Husserl, “experience or consciousness is always conscious of something, judging is judging something” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Intentionality underlies the phenomenological understanding of human engagement with the world, as we are not passive observers, but actively engaged in a constructive - intersubjective - process of meaning making as we engage our social world as conscious beings.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a direct student of Husserl yet “his approach to phenomenology is often taken to mark the move away from the transcendental project, and to set out the beginnings of the hermeneutic and existential emphasis in phenomenological philosophy” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16). According to Heidegger, individual experience always needs to be understood within the social and interpersonal context in which it occurs. *Intersubjectivity* “refers to the shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement with the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). Although we all play a creative role in interpretation of our life experience, we are not doing this alone or in isolation. From a Heideggerian perspective, “we are

mistaken if we believe that we can occasionally choose to move outwards from some inner world to take up a relationship with the various somatic and semantic objects that make up our world, because relatedness-to-the-world is a fundamental part of our constitution” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). Intersubjectivity speaks to the idea that we are all engaging the world in an interpretive process that influences the experiences and understandings of others. Heidegger imports that our understanding of human experience needs to acknowledge how “the world we are engaged in is not a private world, but a public and communal one” (Zahavi, 2001, p. 154). Heidegger suggests that by appealing to the essential “being” of the individual (*Dasein*), “the intersubjectivity of a common shared lifeworld and the intersubjectivity of a linguistically shared meaning can be made understandable” (Tietz, 2009, p. 176). The Heideggerian approach to interpretation, including concept of *dasein* (being), is examined further in the section on hermeneutics. Heidegger views this intersubjective nature of social experience to be one of the truly fascinating aspects of being human. To Heidegger, intersubjectivity is a “foundational or constitutive aspect of our selfhood” (Zahavi, 2001, p. 198).

### **Embodiment.**

I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological, or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. ix)

The philosophical writings of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty challenged the writings of his time accepted mechanistic understandings of the human body as a behavioural machine. Merleau-Ponty emphasized the embodied nature of human existence and the intimate connection between experience and the experiencer. While Merleau-Ponty acknowledged his

“intellectual debt” to the ideas of Husserl, he “echoes some of Heidegger’s wish for a more contextualized phenomenology” and one that “emphasized the situated and interpretative quality of our knowledge about the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). The three major academic works of Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*, *The Primacy of Perception*, and *The Visible and the Invisible*) called for a shift in how the human body is conceptualized in academia “when he raised the fundamental philosophical problem of the body’s role (or lack thereof) in constituting experience” (Zarrilli, 2004, p. 654). However, where Heidegger was fascinated with the intersubjective nature of social reality, Merleau-Ponty focused on “the *embodied* nature of our relationship to that world and how that led to the primacy of our own individual situated perspective on the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). We are all individual physical bodies intersubjectively engaging a social lifeworld. Our individualized body shapes and shades our experience of daily reality in an embodied and personalized manner.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes “all my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless” (p. ix). A focus solely on psychological and emotional experiences downplays physical engagement in our social world. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, we need to focus on the *embodied subject*, “for the embodied subject is flesh incarnated in the body as the relation between interior and exterior” (Olkowski & Morley, 1998, p. 15). No matter how intersubjectively connected I become with my social world, there is always that which is subjectively internal and personalized experience for me, and that which is not me, or thus, external. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological exploration attempted “to grasp the immediacy of our unreflective experience and tried to give voice to it in conscious reflection” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p. 19).

In practice, even reflection carries some theoretical concerns, as it is something that always happens after-the-fact and thus there is a degree of separation from the specific experience or phenomenon. It is this concern that lead to Merleau-Ponty saying that theoretically his phenomenological task was infinite, as “precisely by being a theoretical activity after the fact, it could not recapture the richness of experience; it could only be a discourse about that experience” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p. 19). Merleau-Ponty is not arguing against the value of phenomenological reflection, he was emphasizing that how we must understand experience is not only something remembered after the fact – it is something *lived* in the moment in an *embodied* way. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued for a view of the body “no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communicating with it” (p. 106). To Merleau-Ponty, human behaviour is a result of embodied subjectivity playing out in a social world (Matthews, 2006). We are never alone in this intersubjective process. Writing on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, Zahavi (2001) describes that “subjectivity is not hermetically sealed up within itself, remote from the world and inaccessible to the other” (p. 163). In fact, “an openness toward other is secured the moment that I define myself and the other as co-existing relations to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 114). While phenomenological philosophers differ in how they position the body theoretically, the role of the body “as a central element in experience must be considered” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19).

### **Existence before essence: being and nothingness.**

French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous expression of “*existence before essence*” “indicates that we are always becoming ourselves, and that the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project to be unfurled” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). This point is fascinating in its conceptualization of self especially when considering some of the

Taoist and Chinese martial arts understandings of self as fluid and ever changing. We exist before we make meaning, and “all consciousness is consciousness of something” (Sartre, 2004, p.11). Identity and self are not seen as static, but rather as existing in a state of flux and “while we have self-consciousness and seek after meaning, that is an action-oriented, meaning-making, self-consciousness which engages with the world we inhabit” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). To explore Sartre’s influence on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis theoretical foundation, it is important to look closely at this idea of *nothingness* and what it means conceptually to the phenomenological study of lived experience. To Sartre “things that are absent are as important as those that are present in defining who we are and how we see the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). Conceptually this idea extends to contextualize “the existence of a nothingness between myself and my past, myself and my future and even, one might say, between myself and my self means that I live under the obligation of constantly remaking myself” (Macann, 1993, p. 121). This phenomenological idea of constantly remaking self is in line with the Taoist notion of an ever-developing fluid self. Although the individual is on a path of constantly re-establishing, maintaining, and challenging self as we move along the river of life, this is not done in social isolation. Sartre’s writings imply, “the world is not mine alone and furthermore my perception of the world is shaped largely by the presence of others and others have their own projects they are engaged in (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). While challenging the notion of *being* with the concept of *nothingness*, the individual is still viewed as participating in an intersubjective social world.

## CHAPTER THREE: PHENOMENOLOGY AS METHODOLOGY

Crotty (1998) suggests that phenomenology offers qualitative research “not only a beginning rooted to immediate social experience but also a methodology that requires a return to that experience at many points along the way” as if “it is both starting point and touchstone” (p. 85). The five phenomenological notions presented in Chapter Two—*life worlds*, *intentionality*, *intersubjectivity*, *embodiment*, and *existence before essence (being and nothingness)*—are used to give phenomenological inquiry structure and achieve the *phenomenological attitude*. According to Smith et al. (2009), “Husserl developed a *phenomenological method* intended to identify the core structures and features of human experience” (p. 13). Exploring the *phenomenological method* of inquiry calls for the introduction of two additional phenomenological ideas—*bracketing* and *reduction*—to explore experience.

### Exploring Experience

Husserl presented the idea of *bracketing* suggesting, “we need to ‘bracket’, or put to one side, the taken-for-granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Bracketing allows the researcher an opportunity to look deeper than visible activity, to explore the experiential level of engagement within the philosophically situated training practices of the Chinese martial arts of Grandmaster Pan. Smith (2013) speaks of the Husserlian concept of bracketing as “the method or technique of turning our attention from the objects of our consciousness to our consciousness of those objects, thereby engaging in phenomenological reflection; Husserl’s proposed method for the practice of phenomenology; also called *epoche*” (Smith, 2013, p. 441). In the original writings of Husserl (1973), published later as a collected works, he speaks of the role of bracketing within phenomenological reduction by saying:

[t]hus to each psychic lived process there corresponds through the device of phenomenological reduction a pure phenomenon, which exhibits its intrinsic (immanent) essence as an absolute datum. Every postulation of a “non-immanent actuality,” of anything which is not contained in the phenomenon, even if intended by the phenomenon, and which is therefore not given in the second sense, is bracketed, i.e., suspended. (Husserl, 1973, p. 35)

Dorfman (2009) presents Husserl’s term *epoche*, as a potential answer for how we can attempt to see by suggesting:

Husserl ultimately tries to resolve this problem by assigning a double process of *epoche*<sup>12</sup> that is a suspension of elements of the lifeworld. In the first *epoche* we move from the scientific, objectivist and naturalistic lifeworld to a direct and natural one. This procedure is not necessarily philosophical, and Husserl affirms that a cobbler can effect it as well as a phenomenologist. The second *epoche* goes further and makes the transcendental move, as it is described in Husserl’s earlier texts. It suspends all our engagement in the lifeworld in order to arrive at its a priori<sup>13</sup> structures. Whereas first *epoche* arrives at a lifeworld which is still relative and multiple, the second, transcendental *epoche* is absolute and universal (p. 296).

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<sup>12</sup> “Husserl’s basic method or technique for the practice of phenomenology; I bracket, or make no use of, the thesis of the existence of the world around me, and thereby I turn my regard or attention from objects in the world to my consciousness of objects in the world around me; adapting the Greek word “epoch,” meaning “to abstain”, also called bracketing” (Smith, 2013, p. 443).

<sup>13</sup> *A priori*: “A proposition is *a priori* if its truth can be known, or judged with evidence, prior to empirical observation or sensory perception: for Husserl, propositions in logic, in mathematics, and also in phenomenology are a priori” (Smith, 2013, p. 441).

A directly interrelated Husserlian influence on the art of phenomenological research is the notion of *reduction*. Reduction speaks to an ancient philosophical notion: to understand the parts you must understand the whole and to understand the whole you must understand the parts. Within a phenomenological approach, “each reduction offers a different lens or prism, a different way of thinking and reasoning about the phenomenon at hand” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). The idea is not to break an experience down into separate compartments, but rather to understand that within the overall mosaic of experience there are several layers existing in holistic interplay. This idea of reduction connects nicely with Taoist ideas of understanding the whole by understanding the part, and vice versa, discussed in Chapter One on the martial arts. Once phenomenological reductions have been conceptually made, the researcher can attempt to understand the underlying essences that construct an experience. Taken together, “the sequence of reductions is intended to lead the inquirer away from the distraction and misdirection of their own assumptions and preconceptions, and back towards the essence of their experience of a given phenomenon” (Smith et al., 2009, p.14). To reflect deeply, “we need to disengage from the activity and attend to the taken-for-granted experiences of it” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Reduction is intended to connect the researcher with the inner essence of the phenomenological experience under study.

### **Hermeneutics**

Smith et al. (2009) describe that, “[w]ithout the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen" (p. 37). The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach represents a phenomenological approach to hermeneutics aimed at “attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, but recognizes that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavour for both the participant and researcher” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 37). This approach to interpretation is centered

on a belief that “there is a phenomenon ready to shine forth, but detective work is required to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). An important distinction of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach is that it emphasizes “the importance of the positive process of engaging with the participant more than the process of bracketing prior concerns, in the sense the skillful attention to the former inevitably facilitates the later” (Smith et al., 2009, p.35). The focus is finding the essence and the meaning of experience for participants in the study, in an interactive process referred to as a *double hermeneutic*. The double hermeneutic refers to the notion that “the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35).” It is important to keep this double process of interpretation in mind; I am interpreting, as a researcher, someone else’s interpretation. The notion of a double hermeneutic exists within each different case or interview participant, and we then can carry that idea further by discussing how researcher interpretation of a participant’s interpretation is then used to inform and shape future interviews with participants through a process known as the hermeneutic circle.

### **The hermeneutic circle.**

For Kockelmans (1985), “the hermeneutic circle is an inherent element of any attempt to interpretatively understand human phenomena” (p. 105), and it refers to “the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). This involves a taking up of the process of reduction; that the whole of a message needs to be understood through an examination of the individual elements of that message, and in the same way, individual elements need to be contextualized within the context of the whole message. The term circle refers “to the fact that in interpreting a text one must move back and forth between an overall interpretation and the details that a given reading let stand out as significant” (Dreyfus,

1991, p. 36). In contrast to linear approaches to data collection and analysis, the hermeneutic approach uses interpretative insights from data to shape future interpretative processes. The hermeneutic approach deepens and strengthens the level of inquiry, as new interpretative insights “can modify the overall interpretation, which can in turn reveal new details as significant, the circle” and thus “the circle is supposed to lead to a richer and richer understanding of the text” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 36). Therefore, “to understand any given part, you look to the whole: to understand the whole, you look to the parts” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). The idea of the hermeneutic circle suggests a fluid process between the interpretation and the introduction of new data or sources.

### **Hermeneutic interpretation.**

Hermeneutics emerges from attempts in Biblical scholarship to uncover deeper levels of meanings underlying religious texts (Smith et al., 2009). In a broader sense, hermeneutics “focuses on interpreting something of interest, traditionally a text or work of art, but in the larger context of qualitative inquiry, it has also come to include interpreting interviews and observed actions” (Patton, 2001, p. 497). Hermeneutic scholars are interested in questions related to the methods and purposes of interpretation within research, whether it is possible to seek the true meaning of an author, and perhaps most importantly what is the relationship between the interpreter and that which is being interpreted (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22). In the current study a hermeneutic approach will be applied to the interpretation of interview transcripts as text.

A text needs to be contextualized and understood in relation to the writer. According to Schleiermacher, “a text is not only shaped by the conventions and expectations of a writer’s own linguistic community, but also by the individual work that she does with that language” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22). Language exists within a social context, yet that socially contextualized

language is still being used by the author to present a certain meaning or idea. Therefore, interpretation is not a straightforward mechanical process; it is more accurately depicted as a *craft* or *art* “involving the combination of a range of skills, including intuition” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). Interpreting text is a skill that one must develop as they feel out their data. Interpretation involves understanding both writer and that writer’s text, and Schleiermacher “believes that if one has engaged in a detailed, comprehensive and holistic analysis, one can end up with ‘an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself’ ” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). Through deep engagement with the text, a researcher may be able to uncover meanings below the surface level of analysis. Being able to engage in this type of analysis demands a certain ability to achieve an intersubjective common ground with the person being interpreted. The analytic potential of this type of reflective interpretation offers the researcher an “added value” which “will come from connections which emerge through having oversight of a larger data set, and some of it may come from dialogue with psychological theory (Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). Through detailed and systematic interpretation of text, new ideas related to underlying concepts and themes begin to come to the surface and add to our understanding of a phenomenon. In the following section, four core notions that shape the hermeneutic approach—dasein, appearance, logos, micro-analysis, fore-structure—are further explored.

**Elaborations on hermeneutics: Dasein, appearance, logos, micro-analysis, fore-structure.**

In discussing the hermeneutic approach to phenomenological inquiry, Heidegger presents us with the term *Dasein* (*being there*). Heidegger “used the term to refer to the human capacity to comprehend our own existence” (Cohen, 2000, p. 5). Watanabe (2003) argues that Heidegger’s approach to inquiry can be called *hermeneutic phenomenology* because “Heidegger’s

phenomenology is in fact interpretation, that is, a hermeneutic of Dasein which is essentially an analytic of existence” (p. 246). We are human beings engaging in meaningful experiences that involve psychological and intersubjective engagement with others in our lifeworld. Therefore, “lived time and engagement with the world” are primary components of Heidegger’s concept of Dasein, as he stresses we can only ever understand this aspect of reality through interpretation (Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). What does it mean to be engaged in a lived experience or to intersubjectively exist within a social situation? For Heidegger, the process of hermeneutics has three attempted goals, to: “(1) understand ‘the phenomena of the world as they are presented to us’, (2) understand how it is we go about understanding the world that is presented to us, and (3) understand being itself” (Cohen, 2000, p. 5). Essentially these goals lead to the following three questions: What is it that we are seeing? How are we seeing it that way? Who are we as seers? Dasein speaks to a recognition of human cognition as shaping how we experience meaning.

*Appearance* refers to how an object or person appears, or is witnessed by, the observer. To Heidegger, “things have certain visible meanings for us (which may or may not be deceptive), but they can also have concealed or hidden meanings” (Smith et al., 2009, p.24). There is the observable experience, but there are also other psychological layers deeply involved in creating meaningful experience. Heidegger viewed this as central to phenomenology as it is “a discipline which is concerned with understanding the things as it shows itself, as it is brought to light” (Smith et al., 2009, p.24). While there is something being observed or experienced, there is also an unobservable layer of engagement that is private and personalized to the individual. The purpose of hermeneutics is therefore transformed into “a manifestation or announcing of being prior to interpretation” (Gonzalez, 2009, p. 282) or trying to get at the *essence* of a phenomena. However, there is an understanding that even in doing this, we are engaging in an interpretive

process. Interpretation demands knowledge of what is being interpreted, the phenomena, and until the both levels (*manifest* and *latent*) of appearance are explored we have not reached a complete understanding of the phenomenon.

The term *logos* has Greek roots as it was “intimately connected with the reason or essence of things” (Wachterhauser, 1986, p. 28). Logos is the intellectual effort applied to find underlying meaning, and it is the root of the commonly used word *logic*. It would be fair to say that “while phenomenon is primarily perceptual, Logos is primarily analytical” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24). Logos is the activity of the mind that allows for interpretation of what we observe. Within the human mind, logos “discloses what was previously undisclosed or concealed” (Zaborowski, 2011, p. 22) and thus Heidegger attempts to “connect the hermeneutic function of language with the traditional notion of logos” (Wachterhauser, 1986, p. 28) as he understood language to be “a principle source of our pre-understandings” (Kisiel, 1992, p. 160). The application of logos is connected to the understanding and sharing of human language. Within the current study, this shared language and understanding is related to the cultivation of Grandmaster Pan’s Chinese martial arts training philosophy. To the ancient Greeks, logos had almost a divine nature, the reason of the gods, or some higher connection to pure thought. In the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach, the concept of logos is viewed as a historical link to the current focus on interpretation based on a belief in the value of seeking hidden or uncovered meanings in human text and speech.

Interpretations of individual elements of each case begin to tell a phenomenological story that shapes interpretation of future information. *Micro-analysis* is related to the notion of *fore-conception*, or the ideas a person brings to the interpretative process (Smith et al., 2009). To fully engage in a micro-analysis of a phenomenon, the research must be aware of how their previous

knowledge of a topic may be shaping their interpretation. Previous knowledge is not a negative, but the researcher needs to remain conscious of it and its role in shaping our interpretations as we strive to reveal the underlying essence of the phenomenon under analysis. This demands a reflexive approach for myself, the researcher who is also a long-term student of Grandmaster Pan. Throughout the study it will be essential to remain consciously reflexive to ensure I am reflecting interpretations expressed by Grandmaster Pan and his students, and not just seeking confirmation for ideas I had coming into this study based on years of compiling detailed training notes. The need for this reflexive stance is further described in the hermeneutic concept of fore-structure.

*Fore-structure* is shaped by knowledge about a phenomenon the interpreter brings to the situation, and “the noting of fore-structure in the understanding of text immediately entails the structure of historicity” (Seeborn, 2004, p. 166). Gadamer addressed this historical shaping on our understanding of the world suggesting “the phenomenon, the thing itself, influences the interpretation which in turn can influence the fore-structure, which can then itself influence the interpretation” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 26). This is not problematic, when understood it becomes a strength of the hermeneutic approach as “one can hold a number of conception and these are compared, contrasted and modified as part of the sense-making process” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 26). The text and interpreter are engaged in a process of meaning creation. Kinneavy (1994) presents this concept nicely by suggesting:

[a]ll interpretation must begin with the mental structure which the interpreter brings to the object being interpreted. Indeed, the interpreter has no other alternative but to interpret everything with the knowledge that he or she has. This is so obvious that it hardly seems revolutionary. Yet it does have revolutionary consequences. It means, for instance, that every

interpretation must be unique, since every interpretation, even by the same person, is made from a somewhat different perspective (p. 9).

It is essential for the researcher to remain conscious of the role of past knowledge of a phenomenon shaping current interpretations being constructed in the moment. The concept of fore-structures “points to that which we understand prereflectively but makes possible more reflective noetic [cognitive] forms” (Lawn, 2005, p. 47) as we engage in psychological interpretation of the text under study. Once the text exists, the primary relation becomes that between the text and its interpreter, as “the interpretation will focus on the meaning of the text and that meaning will be strongly influenced by the moment the interpretation is made (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). The in-the-moment subjective mood, previous experiences, and depth of knowledge in the topic area all contextualize the way the interpreter engages a text.

### **Idiography**

Having discussed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’s phenomenological focus on personal experience, and the hermeneutic process of interpretation, the third pillar of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach is *idiography* or *idiographic research*. Idiographic research “is concerned with the particular” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). In Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, research can be limited to one specific individual in a case study form or can include a small number of participants engaged in either a single or multiple interview sessions. The current study will include multiple interviews with six purposefully selected participants.

Working ideographically, analysis starts with a comprehensive examination of each individual interview, “but then cautiously moves to an examination of similarities and differences across the cases, so producing fine-grained accounts of patterns of meaning for

participants reflecting upon a shared experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 38). Analysis is an ongoing process and occurs at multiple stages of the process including after each individual interview. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach offers a way to perform “detailed, nuanced analyses of particular instances of lived experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 38).

Idiographic approaches to conducting research have interested researchers in the field of phenomenology, as well as those involved in psychodynamic and cognitive learning theory, as “there seems to be a persistent interest in the underlying issue of the in-depth understanding of particular individuals” (Ruryan, 2006, p. 414). Idiography is often contrasted with nomothetic approaches to research which can be simply defined as “looking for generalisations that apply to everyone” (Brain, 2002, p. 87). In their search to generalizable ideas and laws of psychology, behavioural researchers often used a nomothetic approach, whereas “the psychoanalysts and humanistic psychologists were (and are) mainly concerned with the clinical treatment of individuals, and thus tend to be closer to the idiographic approach” (Eysenck, 1994, p. 118). Eysenck (1994), when discussing this debate between idiographic and nomothetic, suggests “the idiographic approach of the psychoanalysts and humanistic psychologists may be of particular value with respect to the scientific goal of understanding” (p. 119). A core focus on understanding makes it an ideal approach to phenomenological analysis in the current study.

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach adopts idiography as a cornerstone of the approach’s theoretical foundation as “there is a commitment to the particular, in the sense of detail, and therefore depth of analysis” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). There are fewer people in the sample, but the depth of engagement is much greater than in nomothetic studies with larger sample sizes. Not only is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach

concerned with particular experiential phenomenon, it is also focused on understanding those perspectives “from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29).

Instead of studying the martial arts experience of all those participating in training in a geographic region (Mainland, 2010), the current study adopted an idiographic look at the specific training practices and principles within the Chinese martial arts club of Grandmaster Pan Qing Fu. Because of this specific theoretical approach to data collection, “Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis utilizes small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated samples, and may often make very effective use of a single case analysis” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). The idea is that depending on the topic, the goals of the study might be best met by focusing energy and attention on those most relevant to the specific topic. The idiographic approach believes “a given person *can* offer us a personally unique perspective on their relationship to, or involvement in, various phenomena of interest” as experience is always “embodied, situated and perspectival” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29).

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the cultivation of Kung Fu and meaning-making within a martial arts club. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to inform data collection as well as how data is then analyzed. Data collection and analysis involved an abductive process of using the analysis of one interview or collection of field observations using video capture to inform the approach and subsequent analysis of data in a meaning construction process in alignment with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Within this approach, there is no clear distinction, linear time wise, between data collection and analysis. Each case is processed fully – a cyclical process of interview,

transcription, analysis, synthesis, and exploring field observations – before moving on to the next case. The idiographic approach is characterized by a focus “on specific elements, individuals, events, entities and situations, documents and works of culture or of art and concentrates on what is particular to these” (Wharton, 2006, p. 143). The abductive approach had an important role in this study as the meaning was constructed in a processual way as data collection/analysis moved from one case to the next.

### **Analytic induction.**

Following from abduction, whereby meaning of insights gained from early interviews informed how the next interview was approached and so on in a reciprocal interplay between data and theory, the process of analytic induction then:

[i]nvolves proposing an initial tentative hypothesis which is then tested against each of one’s cases in turn. With each case, one revises the hypothesis to fit the case. Thus analytic induction is an iterative procedure allowing one to reflect on and modify one’s thinking in light of the next piece of evidence assessed (Smith et al., 2009, p. 30).

The core idea in analytic induction is that each case (or interview transcript) “has essential characteristics and that it functions as a pattern by which future cases can be defined” (Jones, 2004, p. 36). All data aids in building a comprehensive phenomenological interpretation. Jones (2004) states this directly by saying “the emphasis in analytic induction is on *the whole*, even though elements and the relationships between elements are analysed” (p. 36). In this study, several club members were interviewed, with the goal of finding the underlying essence of what they experienced rather than telling each of their unique stories. The essence of the data was prioritized over the maintenance of distinct voices of each individual as we built towards a

comprehensive phenomenological depiction of the cultivation of Kung Fu within the martial arts teachings and practices of Grandmaster Pan.

### **Participants and data collection.**

Purposeful sampling, based on level of engagement in the Kung Fu practices of Grandmaster Pan, led to the inclusion of six participants to partake in semi-structured phenomenological interviews. These six individuals included: Grandmaster Pan, his head student Dianne Naughton, and four students at different stages in their engagement in training with the club (e.g., less than 3 years, 5-9 years, 10+ years) to respect the diversity of experience.

The sample in this study was purposely selected to represent a diversity in training experiences by selecting participants who differed in their time spent training in the martial arts teachings of Grandmaster Pan. Students who had trained with Grandmaster Pan for upwards of twenty years were included as well as students who had only been with the club for a few years. The Iron and Silk martial arts club is a private training group with twelve active members - three occasional members from out of town, plus nine regulars. Due to the small size of the club, this specific sample had some unique characteristics. For instance, everyone involved in this study was a student who has established a commitment to the teachings of Grandmaster Pan and had been accepted as students.

As the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the meaning-making and cultivation of Kung Fu within a martial arts club, the study did not seek out past students who did not stay with the club as participants. A decision was made to focus on key insiders actively engaged in the practice. An idiographic approach was used to identify key insiders to help develop insights into the nature of the experience, the cultivation of Kung Fu, under investigation. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, a continual attempt was

made to create opportunities for participants to express their thoughts with their own unique language and voice, without rushing in to add my own interpretative insights. In this study, it was important to allow room for participants to express a diversity of perspectives and ideas throughout the research process.

Interviews began with a focus on Grandmaster Pan to guide and inspire the direction of the interviews with his students. Grandmaster Pan was the leader and head instructor of the club and the main focus of the study is to understand his teachings, how he embodies those teachings, and how those teachings and practices are then cultivated and embodied in his students. Therefore, the study was initiated by interviewing Grandmaster Pan Qing Fu. Insights and interpretations gained from these interviews provided the probes and angle of conversation for later interviews with his students. In alignment with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach, a core subject like Grandmaster Pan was the focus at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the interview process due to his unique position within the sample. In addition to initial interviews with Grandmaster Pan, his head student Dianne Naughton was also interviewed both after the first round with Grandmaster Pan and again later in the data collection/analysis process. Dianne presented a bridge between GMP and his students and thus represented a fascinating perspective. Four additional students of Grandmaster Pan added insight into the layers of practice and relationships within the club. The plan for data collection has been outlined in Table 1 and further described in the sections that follow. I engaged in conversations with Grand Master Pan and Dianne McNaughton and they have consented to having their names used in conjunction with the study. Permission to use real names was sought with all participants due to the specific nature of the topic and the use of video which would make concealing people's identities difficult to ensure. All participants agreed to the use of their real names within this study.

### **Data collection: use of video and phenomenological interviews.**

Within qualitative forms of research, phenomenology has a very specific approach to data collection. In phenomenology, “questions and observations are aimed at drawing out individual experiences and perceptions” (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 8). The drawing out of individual experience is typically accomplished through the telling of stories, by participants, facilitated by well-timed probes by the interviewer.

Video data was collected to capture the lifeworld of the club, as well as to reflect the embodied perspective of the researcher and participants in the early phases of the data collection process. In addition, Grandmaster Pan comes alive on screen in a way that is impossible to capture without video representation. To begin to capture insight into the embodied nature of Chinese martial arts training practices, data collection began with the author participating in a martial arts class using a helmet GoPro<sup>14</sup> digital video camera. Video segments were utilized to assist the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis interview process by providing meaning units to be used as jump off points for conversations with respondents.

Interviews with individual participants followed, as “semi-structured, one-to-one interviews have tended to be the preferred means for collecting such data” (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 57). These one-to-one interviews allowed the author a chance to deeply engage participants in conversations about topics of interest to the research subject. Within the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach, “an interviewer will likely start with one broad question and some affiliated follow-up topics, but must follow the participant’s lead to a greater extent, focusing on the details of an experience that are most important to the individual” (Guest et al., 2013, p. 119). It is this focus on the important elements of the individual’s

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<sup>14</sup> <http://gopro.com/cameras/hd-hero3-black-edition>

subjective experience that makes phenomenological interviewing an effective research methodology when one is attempting exploratory or descriptive research (Guest et al., 2013). All interviews were also recorded with digital audio and HD video. The audio and video content recorded throughout these interviews will be used throughout the presentation of the findings, and thus it was important to capture these recordings in high level digital quality. In addition to a primary digital audio recorder, multiple backup recording devices were utilized.

Details of the schedule for collection of video data from training practices and interviews with participants are provided in Table 1.

Table 1:

Data Collection and Analysis Process using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Data Collection	Description	Reflexivity
<b>Video #1</b> shot from the researcher’s position	Video capturing training within the Iron and Silk Kung Fu club.	Personal reflexive journaling on both my thoughts/reflections and on the initial data collection process recorded as memos.
Data management and analysis		
<b>Interview #1</b> with Grandmaster Pan (VIDEO RECORDED)	Initial GMP interview as the investigator based on meaning units outlined from video #1.	Personal reflexive journaling on both my thoughts/reflections on interview #1 process recorded as memos.
Data management and analysis – Interview Schedule Updated SUPERVISION MEETING TO REVIEW INTREVIEW GUIDE		
<b>Interview # 2</b> with Dianne Naughton (Head Student)	Interview to bridge between Grandmaster Pan and student participants being interviewed. Going over meaning units found in video #1 and interview #1 with Grandmaster Pan.	Personal reflexive journaling on both my thoughts/reflections on interview #2 recorded as memos.
Data management and analysis - Interview Schedule Updated		
<b>Interview #3, 4, 5, and 6</b> , with four students	Focused on meaning units, reflections since interview #1, and the interview schedule that had	Personal reflexive journaling on both my thoughts/reflections on

from the Iron and Silk martial arts club	developed abductively throughout the data collection process.	interviews #3-7 process recorded as memos.
Data management and analysis – Interview Schedule Updated		
<b>Interview #7</b> with Grandmaster Pan (VIDEO RECORDED)	Second Interview with Grandmaster Pan, focused on exploring ideas that students touched on in round one of interviews, and also focused on meaning units from video sessions.	Personal reflexive journaling on my thoughts/reflections on interview #8 recorded as memos.
Data management and analysis - Interview Schedule Updated		
Data management and final analysis total– 7 In-Depth QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS and TRAINING VIDEO SEGMENTS		

***Interview questions.***

The *interview schedules* utilized in this study focused on exploring emerging meaning units from captured video and participant interviews. In addition, interviews with Grand Master Pan also engaged passages and calligraphic images taken from the author’s training notes collected from 1996 – 2013. Key passages were selected to be discussed with Grandmaster Pan due to their philosophical nature and richness in relation to the current study. When discussing the importance of an interview schedule, Smith et al., (2009) state:

[t]he aim of developing a schedule is to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant which will, in turn, enable them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation. Questions should be prepared so that they are open and expansive; the participant should be encouraged to talk at length. Verbal input from the interviewer can be minimal. Interviews typically move between sequences which are primarily narrative or descriptive, and those where the participant is more analytic or evaluative. It is a good idea to aim for the interview to start with a question which allows the participant to recount a fairly descriptive episode or experience (p. 59).

Within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis questions tend to be descriptive, narrative, and structural; focusing on asking the participant to contrast, evaluate and compare

through the skilful use of prompts and probes (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 60). An example of each of these types of questions can be found in the Appendix A. As Smith et al. (2009) describe:

[t]he plan for IPA interviews is an attempt to come at the research question ‘**sideways**’.

Often, research questions are pitched at the abstract level and so it is not usually helpful or effective to ask them directly of the participant. Instead, we aim to set up the interview as an event which facilitates the discussion of relevant topics, and which will allow the research question to be answered subsequently, via analysis (p. 58).

Within the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach, interviews tend to avoid lines of questioning that are over-empathic, manipulative, leading, or close-ended (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 60). There is a strong focus on facilitating storytelling in participants. In the initial stages, “the interviewer typically repeatedly asks for more detail and further information regarding what has been said” (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 60); and it is this skilful use of well-timed prompts that can make a participant feel comfortable to open up and share deeper reflections. When interviewing adult participants, a schedule “with between six and ten open questions, along with possible prompts, will tend to occupy between 45 and 90 minutes of conversations” (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 60); and it is always recommended to bring extra questions just in case you get through the main ones quickly. During the interview, the researcher is constantly asking respondents: Why, How, can you tell me more, and how did that make you feel? Smith et al. (2009), provide five guidelines for researchers constructing an interpretive phenomenological analysis interview schedule (p. 61):

1. Do not simply ask your participants your research questions. Often times you need to approach abstract research questions *sideways* in a way that makes sense to participants.
2. Having determined the overall area to be tackled in the interview, think about the range of topic areas that you want your interview to cover.
3. Put the topics in the most appropriate sequence
4. Think about how you might phrase appropriate, open questions relating to each topic.
5. Discuss the list of questions with someone else – a potential participant, co-researcher or supervisor – and re-draft them as appropriate.

All of the interviews conducted in this study utilized semi-structured to focus on core idea while allowing flexibility to explore with the participant. Due to Grandmaster Pan's way of storytelling and responding in English, it was helpful to engage him on several occasions as opposed to one longer standalone interview. Grandmaster Pan verbally communicated to his students primarily through an oral storytelling approach. Due to language related difficulties, and Grandmaster Pan's preference to reflect on questions posed to him, the idea of a single one-hour interview would have been challenging and insufficient. Grandmaster Pan's participation demanded creativity and flexibility on the part of the researcher. To begin the interview process, Grandmaster Pan was asked to explain and discuss some of his central philosophical ideas (for example, his phrases about "eating bitter" or that "Kung Fu is inside your body") to try to get at the phenomenological essence of his teachings. The idea in this study was to explore Grandmaster Pan's three main approaches to oral teaching through: common sayings, storytelling, and his life and training-related advice. Grandmaster Pan's common phrases and

teachings were then explored with the other study participants. Interviews were digitally recorded in multiple audio and video formats.

### ***Data management.***

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into an Nvivo 10 project file. Transcripts texts were then qualitatively coded (with video tags added). In alignment with the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, data analysis evolved on a case-by-case basis following each interview. According to Smith et al. (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis, “requires a semantic record of the interview; that means a transcript showing all the words that are spoken by everyone who is present” (p. 74). It should also be noted that video analysis was conducted using Nvivo 10, and that digital editing and mastering was assisted through the use of Sony Acid Pro 7<sup>15</sup> and Adobe Premiere Elements 11<sup>16</sup>, in addition to other data capturing and analyzing technologies (such as Phillips Voice Recorder) as needed.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Steps of Analysis**

Within the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to iterative data collection and analysis, five steps are recommended as guides to the research analysis process. It is through these five steps that the researcher practically engages in both phenomenological reduction and the process of hermeneutic interpretation. The steps presented below describe how the hermeneutic circle is actualized as a research approach within data collection and analysis as a way to move closer to the essence of the phenomena under study. The suggested steps to analyzing data are as follows<sup>17</sup>:

#### **STEP #1: Reading and re-reading.**

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sonycreativesoftware.com/acidpro>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.adobe.com/products/premiere-elements/features.html>

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed breakdown of the phenomenological method components please see appendix

**STEP #2:** Initial noting: descriptive<sup>18</sup>, linguistic<sup>19</sup>, conceptual<sup>20</sup>, deconstruction<sup>21</sup>,  
overview of initial notes.

**STEP #3:** Developing emerging themes and meaning units.

**STEP #4:** Searching for connections across emerging themes and meaning units.

**STEP #5:** Moving to the next case.

**STEP #6:** Looking for pattern across cases.

When discussing this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to both data collection and analysis, it is essential to remember Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (2009) advice that:

[i]n reality, analysis is an iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation. Overall, the analytic process is multi-directional; there is a constant shift between different analytic processes. As such, analysis is open to change, and it is only 'fixed' through the act of writing up. This dynamism is at the heart of good qualitative analysis and is what makes it both exhilarating but also demanding. It is also

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<sup>18</sup> "This level of initial notes is very much about taking things at face value, about highlighting the objects which structure the participant's thoughts and experiences." (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 84)

<sup>19</sup> "Another key element of exploring nothing is concerned with language use. The analyst focuses upon how the transcript reflects the ways in which the content and meaning were presented" (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 88).

<sup>20</sup> "This is particularly the case during the earlier stages of analysis, when one does not yet have a detailed overview of the data, and where each interesting feature of a participant's account may prompt further questions" (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 88)

<sup>21</sup> "It may be helpful, occasionally, to employ strategies of de-contextualization to bring into detailed focus the participant's words and meanings. For example, one possibility is to fracture the narrative flow of the interview by taking a paragraph and reading it backwards, a sentence at a time, to get a feel for the use of particular words. In this way, you are attempting to avoid focusing upon simplistic readings of what you think the participant is saying, of following traditional explanatory scripts, and so getting closer to what the participant is actually saying." (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 90)

what allows for the possibility of a creative insightful and novel outcome (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 81).

Within the methodological approach of phenomenological research, the goal is to highlight and reveal the underlying essence(s) of a phenomenon. An essence is so essentially core to a phenomenon that the phenomenon would not exist as it without it. To the phenomenological researcher, “an essence could be understood as a structure of essential meanings that explicates a phenomenon of interest. The essence or structure is what makes the phenomenon to be that very phenomenon” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11). Essences are made of core themes, and those themes are made up of individual units of meaning that link back to the original coding of each participant’s interview transcript. Individual participant transcripts were coded and then those codes were organized and grouped into larger meaning units. The structure of the core essences presented in this dissertation changed many times before landing on their final construction. Throughout the analysis process it was essential to continually reshape and restructure these essences as understandings shifted and deepened. Within this study, the interpretive process began from an analytical position heavily informed by Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and social psychological thinking. However, as the study progressed an intentional effort was made to step back to allow meaning to emerge from within the data itself. Paying attention to the meaning emerging from the data lead to the original creation of twenty original meaning units, based on language that emerged from the interviews with Grandmaster Pan and the following commentary by his students. The twenty original meaning units were as follows: Iron & Silk; Kung Fu is Inside the Body; Everyday from Zero; Climb Mountain; Eat More Bitter; Relationship #1; Never Enough & Enough; Change to You; Kung Fu Higher, Person More Humble; Feels like Different World; Next Generation; Age Getting Older, Body Getting Younger; Responsibility to Each

Other; Never Plateau; Must Know Meaning; Fight Everything; Action; Role Model for you; and Never Leaves You. Throughout the data analysis process, these meaning units were analyzed and grouped into five core themes. The graphic below shows how meaning units were grouped and organized based on thematic unity. The meaning units presented below were grouped into five main themes: (1) cultivating Kung Fu, (2) the paradox of cultivation, (3) foundational relationships, (4) self as fluid, and (5) embodying the martial arts.

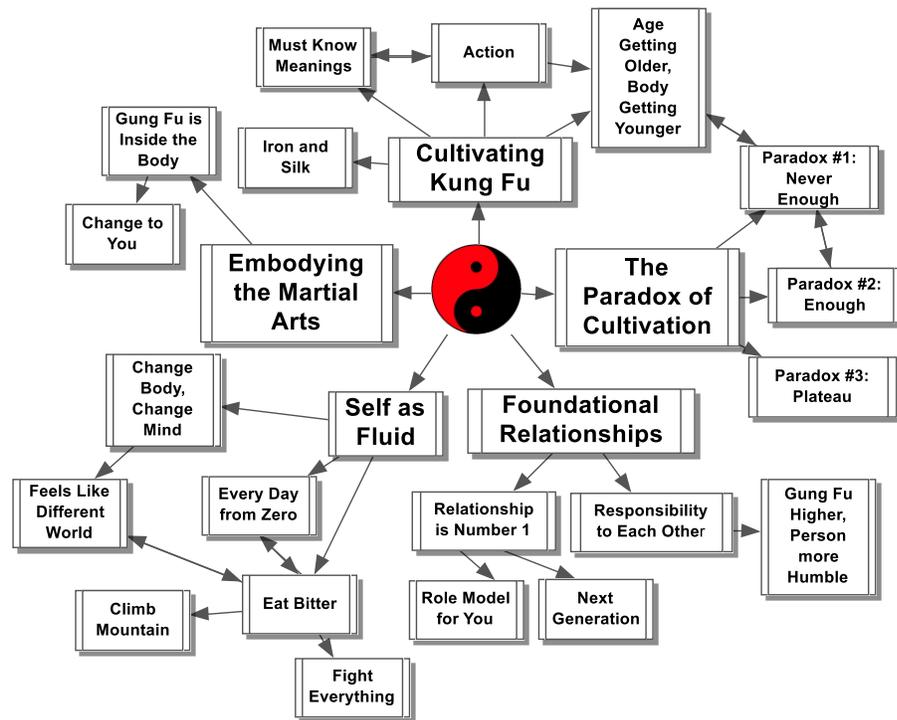


Figure 4: Five Underlying Themes, Mainland 2018

The five themes depicted in Figure 4 led to the construction of the two core essences presented in this study: (1) Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk, and (2) Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu: Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship. Each of these two core essences are made up of a number of sub-essences

Throughout the data analysis process, meaning units and themes were revealed within the data leading to the creation of core essences. The initial essences underlying in this study were

grouped in two core essences, each including a number of sub-essences. The first core essence was titled “layers of knowing: metaphors for cultivation and embodying Iron and Silk”. Within this core essence, five unique yet interrelated sub-essences emerged: (1) fluid movement between Iron and Silk; (2) embedded meaning in a science of self-defence; (3) understanding Iron and Silk as cultivating a path of transformation; (4) “every day from zero”: an applied philosophy of embodiment; and (5) “change to in your body”: embodying the way of Iron and Silk. The second core essence was titled “relationship cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu cultivates relationship.” Within this core essence, there are also five unique yet interconnected sub-essences that emerged: (1) cultivating a Kung Fu lineage; (2) relationship to a sifu; (3) finding a home: continuation of relationship in physical and social space; (4) “doing business is easy, having relationship is hard”: relationships of Iron and Silk; and (5) openness of learning in the cultivation of Iron and Silk. Collectively, these two core essences represent the way in which the Kung Fu practices of Grandmaster Pan engaged the student in an active practice of cultivation, embodiment, intersubjective relationality, and transformation.

### **Reflections on the research process**

When reflecting on the data collection and analysis process, one insight that was overwhelmingly apparent was the dramatic depth of personal relationships amongst study participants. The phenomenological interviews in this study were conducted in a semi-structure qualitative format, where each individual participant’s responses shaped the questions presented in later interviews. The interviews began with Grandmaster Pan and focused on ideas centered on his teachings, martial practices, and the importance of relationships within the club. In subsequent interviews with his students, they talked about their introduction to Grandmaster Pan and their relationship to him, in addition to discussing their views on training and personal

development. One interesting insight I noticed throughout the interviews was the interconnection between participants reflections on their training experiences and their reflections specifically tied to their intimate personal relationship with Grandmaster Pan as a teacher, father-figure, and personal mentor. The experiences and related meanings of students were situated within highly meaningful interpersonal relationships. Often, there was no separation between their personal relationship with Grandmaster Pan and their experience more generally with the martial arts; this became obvious as students reflected on what being a martial artist, and a martial artist training under Grandmaster Pan specifically, meant to them as individuals.

One of the main challenges in the data collection process was the inclusion of video recordings. While capturing video added a high level of qualitative value, it made data collection less intimate at times. I found the effect on Grandmaster Pan to be different than the effect on the other student participants. While most of the students needed some time to establish a comfort level with the camera rolling, Grandmaster Pan was excited by it. With Grandmaster Pan's recent passing, the value of the recordings of him talking about his life practice, his students, and his art form, have become invaluable to me personally. However, capturing these recordings added a layer of complexity when attempting to construct a traditional text-based thesis while integrating digital content throughout the process.

An important area to consider when reflecting on data collection and analysis relates to role of power dynamics within the interpretive process. The idea of the hermeneutic circle reminds us that we are asking participants to reflect on their interpretations of an experience, and then we as researchers interpret that interpretation. There is an inherent power at play within this interpretive relationship, as the researcher is applying an interpretive lens to the words of

participants. Also, when using a methodological approach like analytic induction, the researcher has a responsibility to reflect on the impact of changing the approach to future interviews, based on insights from completed interviews. Mainly in the possibility of leading the direction of the data collection process if there is not a quality of open exploration in the dialogue.

A second relationship of power existed between participants who were being asked to speak about the highly respected leader of their martial arts club. As a researcher, I needed to remain reflective to ensure my admiration for Grandmaster Pan as both a teacher and as a person did not lead me to underestimate interpersonal power relationships that influence the interpretive process. A third power relationship centered on Grandmaster Pan's involvement in a study conducted in English, his fourth language and not his native tongue. It is interesting to ponder on how his responses may have differed if the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.

Overall, the process of data collection and analysis was highly rewarding and offered meaningful insights into the experiences and understandings of both Grandmaster Pan and his students. In reflection, if I had a chance to do it all over, I would have spent additional time asking Grandmaster Pan about the stories and life experiences that led to the creation of specific elements of his philosophical orientation. The interviews respected his credentials within the martial arts world, but spent little time highlighting and illustrating them. The life experiences of the man behind the philosophies are critical to understanding their embodied meanings, and in hindsight I wish I had spent more time exploring the evolutionary roots of these insights to a greater historical depth. However, in the end, I feel blessed to have spent so much quality time with Grandmaster Pan and for his willingness to open up and invite me into his personal world as both a student and as a researcher.

## CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE CULTIVATION OF IRON AND SILK: BECOMING A MARTIAL ARTIST

One day after class, Grandmaster Pan asked us all a question: “How can you put many years, into one year?” He has asked this rhetorical question to us before. He is not really looking for us to respond; rather, it is meant as a way to convey the fluid nature of self and the path to transformation. When discussing the path of transformation for the student, it is important to consider how over time the individual starts to see both their experience and their self differently as a result of their immersive practice.

Van Manen (1997) describes the complexity of meaning infused lived reality noting, “*the immense complexity of the lifeworld*’ and “*the multiple and different lifeworlds that belong to different human existences and realities*” (p. 101). This applies to the teachings of the Chinese martial arts which are both precise and highly detailed at a nuanced level, and fluidly cultivating through the act of striving to perfect movements through disciplined and determined training brings the student closer to the experience of internalizing Kung Fu.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the cultivation and meaning-making of Kung Fu within a martial arts club. Chapter Four provides insight into research question one: How does the cultivation of Kung Fu occur? In this chapter, participants describe their experience of Kung Fu (research question 1a) and the meaning they derive from these experiences (research question 1b). Throughout this chapter participants describe how symbolic teaching practices such as calligraphy, metaphor, and storytelling are used in the cultivation of Kung Fu practice (research question 1c).

As Forrester (2010) describes, “Phenomenology’s basic aim is to describe and interpret people’s perspectives and perceptions and examine how they are related to their experience of

the world around them” (p. 31). For Edmund Husserl (1973), “phenomenology proceeds by seeing, clarifying, and determining meaning, and by distinguishing meanings. It compares, it distinguishes, it forms connections, it puts into relation, divides into parts, or distinguishes abstract aspects” (p. 46). This chapter (Chapter Four) presents six distinct, yet deeply and fluidly interconnected, core essences that represent manifestations of a deeper underlying totality of understanding and meaning making. Through the practice of phenomenological reduction, there is an applied belief in the value of breaking down the whole, exploring the distinct nuances of specific essences of a phenomenon, while simultaneously remembering the contextual totality that allows that essence to exist and that infuses that essence with meaning. In a phenomenological approach, “each reduction offers a different lens or prism, a different way of thinking and reasoning about the phenomenon at hand” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13).

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the cultivation and meaning-making of Kung Fu within a martial arts club. Within this exploration, there are two core essences that manifested which represent full engagement in the Iron and Silk martial arts of Grandmaster Pan: (1) Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk, and (2) Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship. The first essence (Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk as a Path of Transformation) speaks to the cultivation of iron and silk as the student engages the practice of Chinese martial arts training. Grandmaster Pan would often talk about how “action” is the most important habit of the martial artist. Transformation is focused on how the individual self of the student is changed through the training process, and how this change shapes the daily experiences and habits of the practitioner. Within this essence, participants describe their understanding of the *Fluid Movement Between Iron and Silk in both martial and lifestyle based*, while

emphasizing the importance of situating or *Embedding meaning in a science of self-defence*. *Understanding Iron and Silk as Cultivating a Path of Transformation* describes a series of metaphors {e.g., eat bitter, climb mountain) that describes the path of practice and *“Change to in your Body”*: *Embodying The Way of the Iron and Silk* speaks to the internalization of this martial arts practice as Grandmaster Pan uses his own embodied knowledge to strategically cultivate the potential of his students.

The second essence (**Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship**) describes the fostering power of relationship. To understand his training process, requires linking back to Grandmaster Pan’s time as a martial arts competitor and professional coach while in China. Pan is always valued and stressed the practical and pragmatic aspects of his teachings and warned students against engaging in mere exercise. The embedded meaning within Grandmaster Pan’s martial arts add a level of rich lineage, history, and practical utility which makes training in this type of practice significantly different from more traditional forms of sport and exercise. For sure, to become a martial artist requires hard work, determination, and commitment. To accomplish this standard of practice day in day out for years, and even decades, requires a deep connection between the student and their practice, and the student within layers of relationship including with the grandmaster, the lineage, and the club. The essence begins with an exploration of *Cultivating a Kung Fu Lineage* and the importance of participants’ experiences of their *Relationship to a Sifu*. Reflected in all student’s interviews was Grandmaster Pan’s central focus on personal relationship as a vehicle for intentionally directed, and individually customized, martial arts cultivation. It was difficult for students to separate their experience of Grandmaster Pan from their martial arts training in general. *Finding a Home: Continuation of Relationship in Physical and Social Space* describes the intersubjective space

that the martial arts club represented to both Grandmaster Pan and his students. The intimacy of relationship within the club is explored further in *“Doing business is easy, having a relationship is hard”*: *Relationships of Iron and Silk*. This describes how Grandmaster Pan modelled and created a social environment that demanded respect, cooperation, and humility that manifest in relationships among students and created a united family of practitioners. Consequently, *Openness of Learning in the Cultivation of Iron & Silk* describes the importance of being open to cultivation through immersion in the martial arts.

Like the Chinese notion of the five elements that make up the material universe (wood, fire, water, etc), while distinct the elements are also deeply interconnected. Similarly, in their fluid interconnection the two main essences described here are the full engagement in the Iron and Silk martial arts of Grandmaster Pan. Collectively, as a lived totality, these two essences speak to the rich depth of the path of Iron and Silk martial arts of Grandmaster Pan; however, discussing these essences as distinct allows for a depth of phenomenological reflection that can help reveal the underlying meaning of this lived experience.

### **Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk**



*Figure 5: Calligraphy by Grandmaster Pan (Author's Collection)*

*Iron and silk* is the underlying foundation for any specific movement or style being practiced within the club. The term *Iron & Silk* was used to describe the martial arts system of Grandmaster Pan in the acclaimed novel and film by Mark Salzman<sup>22</sup>. Marlene described this concept concisely in our conversation when talking of how “you can be strong one minute but then be like silk, soft, another minute.” In our conversation, Dianne and I describe Iron and Silk in relation to the writings of Salzman:

*Dianne: Yeah well that one, well the way he explains it is with Mark Salzman he took a look at his body, like you, he's mimicking his body you know you have this body that is just so incredibly strong and powerful but at the same time it is so, what, there's the yin side. So there's the internal side.*

*Mike (Interviewer): Yeah like the Yin Yang idea?*

*Dianne: Yeah, the Yin Yang idea exactly. Yeah Iron and Silk. So yeah, that also reflects in your personality and sometimes you have to have an extremely strong personality, other times you've got to pull back.*

Within the club, Iron and Silk is spoken of as both a philosophical idea and as a way of understanding the martial arts practices and principles of Grandmaster Pan. The idea is used as a teaching tool to present the complementary nature of the seemingly opposite aspects of the training experience. Alex discusses the practical application of this teaching by highlighting the connection between the principles of Iron and Silk:

*There's no separation. You know I can approach things in a very hard fashion and that might work maybe 50% of the time. But force against force sooner or later you're going to lose out, because strength against strength. Sooner I'm going to get stronger than you. When you look at GMP he's a paradox. He's got to be 30 years older than me, who knows. He can still beat me up, he can still move faster than me, he can still hit harder than me but that doesn't compute. How can he beat me? I am younger and stronger than him. But I'm not. So, he combines not only strength, but he also combines skill which I look at as the silk part of it is, skill, movement, balance, those soft skills. You can translate that to anything. It's like I can approach any situation, I can be strong, I can be balanced and try to move through it-same in fighting, same in life. And I see it in the corporate world greatly. I can*

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<sup>22</sup>In Salzman’s story, the main character travelled to China to teach English and learn martial arts. This led to his training with Grandmaster Pan which becomes a focal point in the story.

*come into a situation in the boardroom and attack it massively aggressive or I can manoeuvre in a very delicate way and still get to the same objective.*

Dianne's thoughts about Iron and Silk are rooted in a historically contextualized perspective based on her own travels and first-hand experiences within a martial arts community.

When asked directly, Dianne responded:

*Yeah, it's a behaviour, yeah. It's definitely a behaviour, it's everything. It's physical, because you've got hard martial arts. You've got the softer styles, and then your behaviour sometimes you've got to be forceful, you've got to be aggressive, you've got to be strong but then other times you've got to be more gentle and you have to know what situation is going to benefit you the most. How is your personality going to benefit in this situation? If you're aggressive, or if you're more laid back.*

In our discussions, students would often begin by talking about how Grandmaster Pan embodied his martial arts practice. Many participants reflected on their first meeting with Pan and on how this shaped both their introduction as a student and their latter participation as members of the club. Some students were introduced to Pan through martial arts demonstrations or events, where they were deeply impressed by his skill level and approach to the art. Dianne, a long time martial arts practitioner, even before meeting Grandmaster Pan, reflected, "My first experience with him was, he did a seminar and I took a look at him and I realized that he actually was the epitome of martial arts." In addition, Marlene talked about a time when he came into her old club to give a seminar, saying "we just didn't know much about him, but he just came with a presence." Other students had heard of Pan, either through friends or other martial arts, and intentionally sought out a chance to meet with him and to request acceptance as a new student. His head assistant, Dianne, spoke of how this deep living of his art initially spoke to her and inspired her to become his dedicated student. Dianne shared her reflection on her first meeting with Pan,

*His body was perfect. His movements, there was no, what do you call it? No telegraphing, no movements that weren't needed. Everything was exactly perfect. And so, I took a look at him and thought, ok this is where I need to go. And so I started training with him and that*

*was the first thing, it was like yes there's details. At the other clubs you can learn like half a form or a full form in a night. Here, you're going to learn a couple movements, but you're going to get them right. And that's a huge difference.*

Meeting a martial artist who embodies his training to such a deep level made an impression on his other students, especially on those coming from other clubs or other forms of martial arts instruction. For instance, Alex commented on how,

*In my years of being with him and going to tournaments and stuff like that is the opposite of someone who says they're a martial artist and then when they move you're like no, you're not. You haven't become that. You think you are but you're not a martial artist. If it hasn't become part of you, hasn't become engrained.*

When asked whether or not he thought that Grandmaster Pan had a specific philosophy behind his martial arts training practices, Alex responded:

*They would add up. Like if everyone wrote down everything about him, it would add up to a philosophy I think. Sometimes you get confused with saying ohh, he's following this kind of philosophy, especially in Eastern religions, there are so many. I don't think something like that, like he's not Confucius. He's not Tao. But he has an idea of how people should live their lives, and a code to live by.*

“Make you stronger, give you lots of confidence, enrich your life, make your life better” are Grandmaster Pan’s words describing how training effects the path of the student. Marlene comments on how these teachings can be understood as a way of life:

*Well I think that it's a combination of the martial arts which gives you strength right? And it gives you strength in your body, but also what he has said himself about his experiences. So, when you combine what he says or what he has done, his example, his respect for all his other masters. The strength that he has gotten and where he is today, like you know what I mean, or when he speaks to us...when you put all that together it's not just, he's talking. You know what I mean? He's just...I say, he developed a way of life.*

Marlene links this “way of life” to the difficult upbringing Grandmaster Pan experienced. His early life experience<sup>23</sup> is intimately embedded in Grandmaster Pan’s training style, teaching approach, and lifestyle philosophy. Marlene reflects,

*Well it's important to him because coming from what he had-he didn't have anything- he just made himself be something like a force. Like I am good, I am strong, I can protect my family, I can teach my students. And when he sees all that just made him a more powerful being. And the strength, I think having the strength is a part of that, so he knows his energy, that's what I think it comes from, that energy you develop in your body.*

### **Fluid movement between iron and silk.**

Within Iron and Silk, development of self is as important the development of physical attributes and skill sets. While physical training and discipline can be seen as representing iron, the development of the emotional and social self can be interpreted as representing silk. Khaleel spoke about this development of character in relation to compassion, by saying:

*You have to be able to show some compassion too as well. Physically strong but also compassionate. It doesn't mean that you're never bending-iron is never bending. You're not at that point, you have to have softness to be able to...to be thoughtful and compassionate, that's the silk side of the martial arts itself. What it should embody is when I'm better, and I don't have to say I'm better than you. I know myself. All I need to feel as good as I feel for myself, and then I have to be able to be compassionate as well, to be able to teach that as well. You cannot be unbending. If you're unbending, you will break.*

Later in the interview, Khaleel shared how sometimes grandmaster Pan becomes highly emotional when discussing stories or teachings passed on to by his own teachers (sifus) who were loved like family. Khaleel links this directly to the idea of Iron and Silk,

*Yeah, the silk is the compassionate side, the softer side and the one way he-it's like you said, when he remembers his teachers and his school it's hard for him to keep his emotions, in and that softer side gets you too as well. So, he is physically strong and has this presence, and that's the human part.*

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<sup>23</sup> documented in a powerful way in the discovery channel documentary *secrets of the warrior's power* (starting around 15:30 mark)

The way Grandmaster Pan embodies Iron and Silk helps him create deep and meaningful relationships with his students; in addition to his teachings and training practices he truly shared himself. Marlene also talked about these instances where Pan becomes overwhelmed emotionally due to powerful memories, and related this compassion and emotional depth to silk, commenting that “everybody can be strong but then you don’t have to be compassionate you know? But that embodiment of the two, Iron and Silk.” Alex talked about how this understanding of Silk has transformed how he understands and controls his own emotional experience,

*Yeah, I think maybe, I don't know, I went and I started martial arts because I was a very angry person. And I would get angry and lose my temper, lose control and I loved it, I thought it was cool. But as I got into it, the ability to control myself was the overreaching reason I went, and still is today.*

Alex discussed how “I always think of it [Iron and Silk] as being able to be... to face the hard things in life, but being soft enough to change over time.” This comment highlights the cultivation of self as fluid; as the student immerses in the training practices, they begin to challenge themselves in deep and meaningful ways that foster the development of character and the actualization of self-potential through a process of transformation of being. Alex reflects:

*I'm seeking to be in between that Iron and Silk. I'm trying to be both or whatever I need at the moment. But I'm never trying to be more one or the other. I'm not trying to be hyper aggressive but I'm not trying to be completely passive. I'm trying to be a good person, but I don't want anyone to push me around. I'm trying to control my temper, but also not just be a wilted flower. It's always this constant evolution and balance that I'm seeking out. Same thing in martial arts, I'm seeking the ability to be incredibly fast and violent, and completely still at the next moment.*

Dianne, the head Assistant at the club, suggests that this philosophy or approach to training would perhaps be better understood as a science rather than as an artistic form, by saying “here we’ve got a science instead of an art.” In our interview, I asked her to explain more fully what she means by this and if she could talk about the difference between viewing our practice as an art or as a science. Dianne responded to this question by reflecting,

*If you think of the forms, a lot of people can learn forms and, but they don't know any names. And they can make them look really good, especially if you've got someone that can jump really high or something like that. They can make forms look beautiful if they're super flexible, go down in those low stances. But if you watch and they're doing a block and they don't know that it's a block; that's the science part of it.*

**Embedded meaning in a science of self-defence.**

*Chinese Martial Arts, \*<sup>24</sup> Complicated.*

*So many details you try better, you must use your mind.*

*Just physical training, Not enough! Use your mind!*

*And Chinese Martial Arts, why it's called best sport, Because it has self-defence!*

*Self Defence, Different than all sports!*

*Yeah. After you learn Martial Arts, you know how to defend yourself!*

*You know how to protect country, how to help good people.*

*Give you, lots of Confidence!*

*You know how to use. [GMP does punching move]*

*You know how to use weapon yeah, barehanded,*

*Use self-defence, training your body too. Same Time!*

*Make you stronger, give you lots of confidence!*

*Enrich your life, make your life better!*

*(Grandmaster Pan)*

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<sup>24</sup> Throughout the entire chapter, when Grandmaster Pan is quoted, these extra-large spaces will be utilized to reflect his specific speaking pattern. Although technically incomplete sentences at times, they are infused with phenomenologically valuable meanings.

Dianne discusses this importance of understanding the science behind the movements when commenting on how,

*He's not doing martial arts for the art. He's doing it BECAUSE [Capitalized to show emphasis] it's a martial art. Ok so he had his teams in China and his goal over there was to win the tournaments, which he did. But in order to do that, he had to make sure the kids knew all the martial arts meanings and when he would choreograph fighting it had to make sense. Now [at current day tournaments] if you look at choreographed fighting, none of it makes sense. They're just like swinging, swinging, ok let's this- there's nothing that makes sense. Whereas if you look at the forms that he choreographs they were all self-defence reasons behind them.*

Grandmaster Pan embodies this practice of meaning infused training through functional perfection as an artist. Alex captures the artistic element of this training practice when talking about Pan's level of Kung Fu,

*Anyone can throw a punch, very few people can throw a punch at full strength and stop it half an inch before your face. Perfect control, perfect balance, perfect symmetry, that is art. Perfect power, that is a really difficult thing to accomplish and he has accomplished that. And that is an artist. Every medium has its masters- he's taking the medium of fighting and made it an art form. Anyone can throw a punch, but he can throw a punch anyhow, anyway, he wants.*

Within the martial arts system taught by Grandmaster Pan, the full potential of martial arts training can only be achieved when the technical movements and practices are embedded with meaning rooted in aspects of defence and philosophy. Rather than being a mere form of athletic exercise, training becomes a process of engaging in functional perfection within a meaning infused practice which merges form and function in stories of self-defence.

The cultivation of a deep connection between the individual and their training practice; the marriage of philosophy, art, and science; and the full potential of martial arts training can only be achieved when the technical movements and practices are embedded with meaning.

### **Understanding iron and silk as cultivating a path of transformation.**

Within his training club. Grandmaster Pan will often refer to phrases like “eat bitter,” “fight everything,” and “climb mountain”, “enough” as motivational and inspirational phrases,

encouraging his students to train harder and to sacrifice comfort in the present moment to put oneself on a path towards future development and transformation of self.

***“To live better than other people, you must eat more bitter.”***

This idea of embodying a practice through long-term training efforts is reflective of Grandmaster Pan’s most common saying. He suggests that if you want to improve and get better you must learn to *eat bitter*, “to taste sweat, one must first eat bitter” (Pan, 2007) which represents a core component of Grandmaster Pan’s teaching philosophy and view of reality. Grandmaster Pan also says that if one wants to accomplish great things they must “sweat more than anybody else” (Naughton, 1996, p. 24).

In one of my old training notebooks, I had the following sentence written and highlighted: “the Good days take care of themselves. Eating Bitter gets you through the bad days.” While reflecting on this passage, I was drawn to the simple, and yet profound, nature of that comment. It is easy to be positive, energetic, and motivated when things are going well and when life seems to be working out. Yet, we all experience struggles and the idea of “Eating Bitter” is both a recognition of this central characteristic of human experience and a strategy for cultivating a thriving existence within that struggle.



*Figure 6: Video: Grandmaster Pan Explains "Eat Bitter": Author's Archive (Mainland, 2017)*

When Grandmaster Pan refers to eating bitter, he is talking about training hard in the moment, but also being conscious of engaging in a transformational process based on hard work and focus. Grandmaster Pan would also make comments about how it's important to train during the cold of winter or through the hottest days of the summer, because it is training in those times that are uncomfortable and difficult that your sword is sharpened, and your practice is deepened. It is inching to know that after all these years of training and studying his teachings and his practices, I could really sum it all up with that one two-word phrase: "Eat Bitter."

Whether discussing his difficult childhood, his rise to martial arts excellence, his decision to move to from China, or dealing with health and mortality; Grandmaster Pan represented the embodied essence of the philosophy of Eating Bitter. I have never known someone so committed to the generative powers of hard work and perseverance. Nothing illustrated this embodied practice more than Grandmaster Pan's fascination with Elastic Kicks (refer to video below).

Elastic kicks are both physically and mentally challenging, developing both physical capability and a focused determination. Grandmaster Pan did these kicks every day, in addition to other training methods, and it represented a cornerstone in his own personal practice.



*Figure 7: Grand Master Pan's Winter Training (2001): Owned by Dianne Naughton (Naughton, 2017)*

The philosophy of “Eating Bitter” is one that recognizes the interconnection between seemingly opposite experiences, and it can be linked to the Taoist notion of Yin Yang. Grandmaster Pan would often say that “To taste sweet, you must eat bitter.” The wisdom contained in that statement is both simple and complex. It makes sense at a surface level when we realize that we need to experience struggle and pain to help us appreciate the good in our lives; but how does it play out as a training philosophy. A fellow student once said that if he waited until he felt perfect, had no injuries, had a great night sleep, was stress-free, and was feeling completely motivated...he would hardly ever make it in to the club. The secret to fully engaging in a long-term training practice like the martial arts is training through the days you would rather sleep in

and skip practice. “The good days take care of themselves. Eating bitter gets you through the bad days”; embodying this core teaching is central to the lifestyle training philosophy of Iron and Silk Kung Fu. The idea of complimentary truths, manifesting as seeming opposites, is represented in Taoist teachings by the well-known Yin Yang symbol where an element of each seemingly opposing duality lives in the opposing side. In the words of Bruce Lee, when speaking of Yin Yang, “as long as this ‘oneness’ is viewed as two separate entities, realization of the Tao of Gung Fu won’t be achieved. In reality, things are whole and cannot be separated into parts” (Lee & Little, 1997, p. 28). Eating bitter and tasting sweet are two sides of the same coin.

It is interesting to reflect on how the teaching of “eating bitter” rings as true in my life today, as it did during our initial meeting. Recently, in class, Grandmaster Pan referred to this idea saying, “to live better than other people, you must eat more bitter.” During this lesson, Grandmaster Pan was talking about our own lives, marriages, and jobs. If you want to be successful and happy, you must be willing to work hard and put in more effort than the next person. This lesson is more than just advice on productivity, I now see it is actually an applied philosophical practice for understanding human existence. Existence is not easy, and we are constantly being presented with major issues to deal with and make sense of. These issues can be financial struggles, illness to self or loved ones, or a new child (something I am currently experiencing). The idea is that although life has an unpredictable and ever-changing nature or dynamic, we need to intentionally engage and work hard to shape the reality we experience.

When the philosophy of eating bitter is applied as a daily discipline, even during tough times, the transformation of self becomes possible. Daily engagement with the practice, when done with the correct methods, can lead to the cultivation and embodiment of that practice, which can then inspire a transformation of self.

***“Every day from zero”: an applied philosophy of embodiment.***



*Figure 8: Video: “Every Day from Zero” Author’s Collection (Mainland, 2017)*

One of Grandmaster Pan’s common lessons focused of the need for constant engagement with your martial arts practice. Your training needs to be consistent, disciplined, and dedicated. You can never rest on your laurels. Every day from zero refers to the need to approach each day as if it is a new chance to push through obstacles and re-dedicate yourself to your training.

***“Fight everything”: the cultivation of intention and commitment.***

Grandmaster Pan will often say to his students “Fight Everything” as a response to the difficulties in our individual experiences. He is speaking about the tremendous value in resiliency and in meeting our problems head on as we face the more difficult aspects of our experience and our own personal transformation. Long term commitment at its core implies struggling through the tough parts, the injuries, the business, the personal life stressors, and all other factors that lower the spirit and make training more of an obligation than a passion. In the

end, it comes down to understanding a practice as a lifestyle. Within the martial art literature, when people talk about a martial art lifestyle they often talk about a “lifestyle” as a philosophical or psychological orientation to daily experience. Grandmaster Pan’s approach to relationship cultivation contains *Iron* and *Silk* within it, as he strives to build character by highlighting progress while also confronting students on their individual hindrances to growth: overcoming obstacles, fighting through pain and injuries, and avoiding personal plateaus.

Pan’s teaching approach has been influenced heavily by his own upbringing, which shaped his view of training and hard work as keys to personal development. Pan grew up living in poverty in China, and through martial arts he was able to make a living and provide for his family. David reflected on how Pan’s early experiences shape his current approach to teaching and managing students by saying,

*He’s been through really tough times, right from being a kid. His whole life has been adversity, so I don't think he likes it when people kind of huff and puff and get pissed off that either they're not doing something right or they're maybe not getting attention from him or they're not learning what they want. None of that stuff really goes down well with him at all. He wants people that are interested in being there to soak up whatever he has to teach on that day and to throw yourself into it and try as hard as you can and kind of value every second of it. When he sees that commitment from somebody then he feels satisfied and then he's kind of happy.*

Grandmaster Pan worked hard to develop his practice, and this determined work ethic is something he tries to encourage among students in the club. Dianne reflects on the hard work and commitment shown continually by Pan, and how this example has helped her develop a higher level of determination in her martial arts practices as well as in her work life. Dianne talks about how Grandmaster Pan’s difficult life journey has become a motivating inspiration to his students:

*To get his mastery, his level of, yeah mastery, it has taken so much commitment on his part and that's what I think the students can learn is that commitment. And if it isn't a commitment to this [martial arts training] but that commitment also goes into other things.*

*So like, you go to work, you can commit yourself better to work because you understand how to work hard and the benefits that you're going to get from it.*

Students of Pan have learned from his example, and his encouragement pushes his students to challenge their own perceived limitations, both as a martial artist and as a human being with high standards of character. Alex shared an example of how Grandmaster Pan worked with his son Quin to become a better martial artist while also teaching him important life lessons:

*I think it's always pushing to be better than you are today. But I think he leaves it to you to define what that means. Maybe watching with Quin is, he is always giving Quin lessons on life just as much as he is in martial arts. He tells him things; you know: be respectful to your parents, you don't know how good you have it. Look at what they do for you, what do you do for them? When Quin doesn't do something to what Grandmaster Pan knows he can pass, he actually is disappointed in him. But worse, Quin's disappointed in himself. He'll beat himself up for days afterwards. He'll go and train until he can get back and he doesn't regain that peace until he's back in the club and he can show it.*

The teachings of Grandmaster Pan are centred on a philosophy of cultivation through intentional training practices. While containing elements of both art and a science, the Chinese martial arts of Pan have a dramatic influence of his students within the club and in their daily lives. David, when discussing how he interprets these ideas in relation to his own life experience, reflected on how he focuses on

*Really just following his philosophy of don't give up, just keep trying. Keep working through-you know we've done stuff that's really painful and especially when we're doing break falls and stuff like that which we're not doing as much anymore but those were tough classes. And some of the training for some of the demonstrations, or when we did training for that documentary and stuff we were in, it was pretty intensive and everything.*

“Fight everything” is not suggesting an aggressive confrontational approach to life, but rather that one must “Fight” against things like sickness, laziness, bad moods, rough days at work, personal stressors, and other things that rob us of our passions and energies but physically and psychologically. While discussing this topic in our interview, Khaleel commented on both physical and emotional or social aspects of this motivational teaching. Khaleel began by reflecting on the physical benefits of developing perseverance and resiliency,

*I felt it, I mean physically I could do a lot more. Really for the last convocation [an event at his work] we were at I don't think I could have made it through without the training. The training we were doing, it was physically-up and down, back and forth. Running through everything that you go through that whole weekend, I kept thinking "wow this is so great! Them doing all of this." because it prepared me physically to do the job. But during just the regular day to day, the strength that you have, the internal strength that you build up just from Grand Master's teaching and just from him, just all his messages: "you stretch an inch longer [your tendon an inch longer], you're going to live ten years longer. It just pushes you beyond trying to be more than you can be. And Grand Master Pan always says, "climb mountain". It's always that aspect of being better and working towards this goal that's probably unattainable but you work towards it and strive and want to be better. But just for yourself.*

David briefly talked about how grandmaster Pan taught philosophy that in that inspired students to "don't give up, just keep trying." I asked David to explain what he meant by this and how it acts as a lived philosophical position. A segment of our exchange is presented below,

*DAVID: One of the best things is the way he describes a sort of philosophy of life from action-actually a couple things he says a lot that I think are important to his way of thinking is he basically says every day you have to have action and I think he's meaning that you have to move your body to have good health and if you're always moving your body then you're always building up strength, stamina and flexibility and that will create longevity for you so I think that's a huge thing. Another thing he says a lot too is that everything is a fight and him studying martial arts and focusing his whole life on it is focusing around the area of fighting, but it's molded his way of thinking and how to deal with life in general, so he says it's not only fighting people, but you also have to fight lazy, you have to fight sick. He sees everything that he wants to achieve as a struggle and so he's overcoming that, taking it as an opponent. He learned English that way by treating English as a series of martial arts forms that he could study and master.*

*MIKE (Interviewer): Oh, that's interesting, no one has said it that way. It's almost a life philosophy that is similar to being in a fight.*

*DAVID: And it's true. Like the human condition in general in one of adversity, struggle, suffering, pain, stuff like that. So, if you can overcome that struggle you can find happiness, serenity and acceptance of things like that.*

*MIKE (Interviewer): Cool*

*DAVID: So, I think he feels that you can't submit to the things that are facing you in life and in gaining happiness you have to face them head on, overcome them, treat it as a fight and then you become satisfied and happy and healthy.*

***“Climb mountain”*: when one is already tired, look for a mountain to climb.**

Khaleel continued in discussing the physical side of this teaching, linking this process of physical perseverance and determination, with the establishment of a resilience in attitude by referring to a term Grandmaster often uses “climb mountain.” Simply put, to Grandmaster Pan, the metaphorical teaching is that when one is already tired, then they should look for a mountain to climb. While sounding counter intuitive on the surface, the idea is deep in meaning from a transformation perspective. It is about understanding the growth comes from working through fatigue and showing perseverance in situations where it would be easier to fold. Khaleel reflects,

*The amount of energy that we exert feels like, I feel more powerful when I do this stuff. I feel more strength in everything that I do. And it's because of Grand Masters teachings and understanding the meanings of everything and the extent of you know, basically how much you kick and how much you punch and how far you reach, and you go beyond anything. And you hear about this term “climb mountain.”*

Khaleel talked about how this teaching philosophy shapes how he approaches his daily life and deals with things like stress and conflict at work. Khaleel reflected on these experiences in relations to Grandmaster Pan’s teachings when saying,

*The starting from zero and the climb mountain is not only a physical thing because when I am at work and when I feel sometimes, so bummed out like I can't go anymore, I hear Grand Master say, “climb mountain” you know. It affects you in your regular world, because it helps me push forward. I say you know what? I'm at a block here. But if I was in Grand Master's class he would say push beyond that you know? To go beyond that, and don't stop there. When we're doing three kicks in class and I feel I cannot do any more and Grand Master starts to say climb mountain, do some more you know? Then I think, why did I stop? I could go beyond this. Grand Master says. You know? Climb mountain, try harder, try another, try learning. Every day I learn something new, I meet new people!*

Other students reflected on this same idea, but from different situational perspectives based on the current life conditions. For example, Marlene spoke of her own recent battle with illness, and how this philosophy of fighting through and overcoming provided both a framework for understanding her situation and inspiration to actively work towards bettering her situation.

Marlene when reflecting on this time in her life recalls,

*So that is something, that Grand Master works hands in hand with the Kung Fu and I think, it is, I could see how they talk about Gung Fu is an internalized Chinese martial art. It is that! I could see that now. After being with him, right? Because when he saw me, and I was sick he said, "Where is your Kung Fu?" He did. He said, "Marlene you have Kung Fu in you." and I said, "Yes I do." you know? Then all of a sudden you realize oh my god I do have it in me! Why am I not being stronger? Right? And he calls me, and he says "Remember, want you to be strong" right? And you listen to him, and you have to be strong. And I said you know what? I have to be strong, because I'm so so sick. The stuff [medication] just took everything out of me. But then hearing him telling me you have it in you, rise above it. And that is what the knowledge of Grandmaster Pan is like, and what he's working towards.*

Marlene, through her own fight against illness, experienced the transformative potential of training practices such as the Chinese martial arts of Grandmaster Pan. Providing great insight into the interconnected nature of this dynamic, when talking initially about the confidence she feels from her developing inner strength, Marlene reflects,

*Yes, that's confidence comes with that internal strength that he's teaching you. Right? So, it becomes, my way like you know, with all his teachings and stuff like that, I do impart, you know when I talk to myself I say, "Grand Master thinks..." but the other thing is that he would say how he has so much concern and they listen. And I impart some of his knowledge, his teachings to myself so that we will all be better in what we do. Not by putting each other down, right? But, by being strong for each other. I think that is Grand Master's way. I mean he has just given us so much, from him. It's just like you, like Mike he called you out and he said, "ok Mike you do that." So, when he calls you out to do it, you know that you're going to be giving 100% even if you are feeling tired at that point. When he calls you out you just do it right? And that's what he imparts on us. The strength! His teaching and the way of this whole, energy. Of Kung Fu, Gung Fu, whatever. It's something that we just rise to the occasion. We have it in us, and he knows that. But it's, just you know, he says "don't be lazy!" Right? And it's like, yeah. I'd come to class and be tired and all of a sudden, he talks, and it's like you get it. And then when you leave it's like whooa, what happened there? You come out feeling so mentally, you know what I mean? So that is something that Grand Master works hands in hand with the Kung Fu and I think, it is, I could see how they talk about Gung Fu is an internalized Chinese martial art, it is that. I could see that now. After being with him, right? Because when he saw me, and I was sick he said, "Where is your Kung Fu?" He did. He said, "Marlene you have Kung Fu in you." and I said, "Yes I do." you know? Then all of a sudden you realize oh my god I do have it in me! Why am I not being stronger? Right? And he calls me, and he says "Remember, want you to be strong" right? And you listen to him...and you have to be strong. And I said you know what? I have to be strong and he did, and you know it was like yeah, because I'm so so sick. The stuff just took everything out of me. But then hearing him telling me you have it in you, rise above it. And that is where the knowledge of Grandmaster Pan is like, and what he's working towards, all these other grand masters right?*

A “Climb Mountain” approach to daily life practices, combined with an accompanying attitudinal perspective for making sense of some of the stresses and pressures of life, create a type of perseverance through determination narrative that can have significantly transformative effects on the experience of the individual student.

***Change mind, change body: “he introduces you to yourself.”***

Martial arts training demands a level of total body engagement and concentration that requires an ability to shift out of a place of being stuck in limiting thoughts and the stresses and burdens of daily life. Grandmaster Pan addresses this concept by providing an example,

*For example, everyone have job. After your work, you training Martial Arts...*

*From work tired, training Martial Arts            Tired gone!*

*Change Mind,            Change Body,            So, this natural massage.*

*Yeah.            Very good, you concentrate on Martial Arts you forget you're tired.*

*Have something bother you            You forgot.            Yeah*

*Because Chinese Martial Arts complicated,            You try good remember!*

*Try better, better, better            Yeah.            Always never enough!*

*(Grandmaster Pan)*

Training is a deeply personal and reflective experience at times. In the martial arts, transformation comes as a result of tireless work and intense involvement, and an ability to keep moving toward a destination that will never be arrived at. At times, one can feel like they are on the path to getting better and can get overconfident. In the martial arts, overconfidence can be misleading, and you may be on the path towards a humbling experience that can assist re-balancing your self-view. Alex talks about this candidly saying,

*Yeah, you're like, I'm the shit. I'm a great martial artist. And then he does something and you're like, I suck. But if I keep training I might be that good someday. I'm not that good today but I could be because if he can do than I can do it.*

Understanding these humbling experiences in the context of the path of transformation, it becomes evident that we are all striving towards some sort of unattainable goal and that the benefit may actually come from the process itself. The role of humble self-reflection mixed with highlighted examples of areas for personal improvement, when conducted within a relationship based supportive learning environment, can provide a powerful motivator and source of inspiration for personal growth and transformation. In our interview, Alex talked about the power of belief saying, “I don’t think it’s possible until I can believe it’s possible.” He continued by saying, “You are what you think you are... I always say in martial arts I can’t do a move until I can see it in my head.” Once a narrative that positions struggle and obstacles as essential characteristics in the learning process has been established, a transformation focused narrative can be used to inspire student growth by challenging their view of self.

Grandmaster Pan’s ability to cultivate a practice among a diverse group of students, while balancing a focus on the cultivation of Kung Fu within each individual is deeply appreciated by his students. Alex reflects on this aspect of Grandmaster Pan’s approach to teaching what you need to know:

*He does do specific lessons for specific people. He trains you, I know that he picks-when you start to train with him and as you advance-he picks the forms that you need to learn the most whether for physical reasons or complexity reasons or whatever. And then I think sometimes with the class he'll read the class and change his mind and teach what you need to know for that day, for whatever reason. If we're all low energy ok we're going to go hard. Or if you can tell we're angry then he does Tai Chi! The total opposite of what you want to get into, just to force you onto another plane.*

The rich depth of Grandmaster Pan’s teachings allows them to be adapted to the specific needs and training level of his individual students and of the group of students as a collective. Alex talked about how it seems like Grandmaster Pan would create “specific questions for specific people” based on where they are in their learning process and what he feels their needs are in that moment on that specific day.

Grandmaster Pan encourages his students to push their own boundaries and to gain confidence in their skill level without losing perspective. Grandmaster Pan does not allow his students to become arrogant and content with their achievements, but rather is continually pushing a high standard paired with deep humility. While Grandmaster Pan is continually supporting individual growth, and pushing you to go further, he is also “balancing that with brutal honesty about where you’re at.” Pan has been training martial artist for so long that he has an intimate understanding of where each individual is at, their strengths and weaknesses, and what steps they need to take to reach higher levels of Kung Fu.

Learning how to embody the martial arts is not always a process that is fun or enjoyable for the student, as the process demands considerable level of hard work and an ability to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of student’s pathway. Alex talked about how Grandmaster Pan will “take you to your breaking point” and that within his club “you can’t hide from yourself.” Alex deepened this point by describing an example of how at times grandmaster Pan takes a tough love approach,

*He's not trying to comfort you, he's one of those few personalities, he's not telling you what you want to hear, he's telling you what you need to. And because he's brutally honest and you also get on the other side, when he tells you something else and you're like wow he's like a hard teacher. I remember when I used to train with him when I was younger I would know I did something right when he didn't look disgusted or he didn't yell at me. Like if he walked away and said next, I was like “wow I did really well there.” I can remember doing stuff with him going “stop doing that you're upsetting my stomach it's so ugly.” and you're like “whoaaa.” But at the same time, it does kind of build character because you're like I gotta get better at this you know? I have to leave or evolve.*

The utility of humbling feedback as a growth promoting learning tool is something that warrants additional attention. One does not develop into a high level martial artist by surrounding themselves by people telling them how good they are. The central goal of martial arts training, is to be accurate in your self-reflections on your strengths and weaknesses so that

you can strategically focus on what needs improvement to continue down the path of transformation.

Alex continues to highlight how this act of confronting the students on their areas needing growth creates effect due to the relationship that exists between Grandmaster Pan and his students. When talking about practicing or demonstrating a technique, Alex reflects on how sometimes Grandmaster Pan will say “Oh that’s pitiful”,

*You look at him and you do something... and you kind of stop and look back and go uuggghhh [frustrated grunt]. And he'd just kind of walks away. But then that translates to life, you know, it's a strange thing. He introduces you to yourself.*

“He introduces you to yourself”, I found this to be a powerful comment directly linked to this idea of personal transformation. Before you can determine your end goal, you need to accurately and humbly assess your current position and then move forward. Alex continues,

*Yeah! All those things you know? And you just kind of constantly have to go, yeah, it's that reflection back on yourself. Wow, like he's not holding back. And worse, he's right! What does that mean and how am I going to handle that? And I've seen students over time who couldn't handle that, [and they] would just leave. Because they can't handle that, they don't want to deal with that reality. And the students that stay embrace it and learn to love it because it's like ok. But then I can translate that little part to my life where someone can say something and I'm like “well, I know who I am.” A long time ago when I was younger I went to a club and it was like “do you fight a lot?” and I was like no, I never fight, I only fight for self-defence. And he goes but you know all these moves, why wouldn't you want to use them? And I go “because I know exactly how tough I am I don't have to go out and prove it.” I know and every week I get to prove exactly how tough I am. There is no denying that I know that about myself so why do I need to fight you? The only reason I would fight you is if I have to defend myself. And I don't need to prove anything. Because every week I go in and get taught how tough I am, and every week Grandmaster Pan takes you to that breaking point and some weeks you can walk out of class and be like yeah I did it! And other weeks it's like I did not make it this week. And you can't hide from yourself.*

### ***The happiness of knowing “enough.”***

While Grandmaster Pan pushes his students to strive for higher levels of physical and martial art development, he also teaches about being conscious to balance this intensity with an emotional calm and social appreciation of “enough.” While he often talks about overcoming

obstacles, fighting through pain and injuries, and avoiding personal plateaus, he also teaches that this intensity needs to be paired with an appreciative perspective. While the student is constantly trying to recognize, and then move through their own personal growth obstacles and plateaus, they are also encouraged to adopt a wide view for understanding their training practice.

Grandmaster Pan often refers to a Chinese saying that translates into “if you know when you have enough, you will always be happy.” At times this teaching can appear to contradict some of the perseverance and determination focused teachings, yet with time students begin to understand that the striving for what seems like an unattainable goal needs to be paired with emotional experiences of happiness and appreciation in the moment. In the words of Grandmaster Pan:

*I'm training myself.                      I'm training my Canadian students better!*  
*I think its enough.                      Chinese said, “Gee Zu Chung Luw”!*  
*Gee means Know, Zu means Enough, Chung means Always, Luw means Happy!*  
*If you feel you have enough, you're always happy!*  
*If you feel you always too much, want too much, you cannot get too much.*  
*You always get sick.                      You get older so fast.*  
*I'm not!                      I'm thinking 'ENOUGH'.                      So, I'm always happy!*

While it is important that the student continually pushes forward physically, there is tremendous value to understanding this concept of “enough” at an emotional and relational level of experience.

**“Change to in your body”: embodying the way of the iron and silk.**

*Chinese Martial Arts are so rich*  
*Many different styles, Many different weapons*  
*Has fighting technique, and has Iron & Silk*

*Many Different Styles!*

*You should study hard, you can learn more*

*But you learn more, never learn finished (Never finish learning)*

*Your whole life, never learn finished.*

*So, must study hard*

*But study hard            Not enough*

*After you study hard, you learn, you should be training hard,*

*Training hard, training hard, change to You*

*Training hard. Change to in your body. Remember!*

(Grandmaster Pan)

Grandmaster Pan would often talk about how he cannot walk around with us and be our bodyguard, as he would say “you must have me in you”; a beautiful metaphor for relational embodiment. The Chinese martial arts represent a rich lineage of knowledge, and the true essence of this knowledge begins to be experienced by the student as they internalize the teachings and integrate them with their daily experience. Grandmaster Pan talks about how “studying hard” is not enough. And in fact, the entire training process is focused on learning and drilling’s teachings to such a point that they become internalized and in the words of grandmaster Pan “change to in your body.”

Marlene described Pan’s deep embodiment of the art and his own training lineage. She described the relationship between his teaching method and how he embodies this as a person:

*He has provided us, he has provided me, with the way to see, the way of martial arts, how it embodies you. So, he has brought that to us and has given us that, but while he's given us that the training that he's giving, the training that he's teaching us, is like, it works hand in hand! You cannot separate his way of teaching to what his actual martial art is, the actual physical, because if you're doing a punch kick or whatever, you're still hearing him, you know that you have to be doing the best for him because he has come from so long, the*

*lineage of the skills right? The lineage, right? You're doing that, you now know how to do it. You internalize that martial arts concept but it's a whole thing together. And Grand Master is part of that!*

Marlene described how this came from his early life experiences which his understanding of the martial arts and his approach to teaching the next generation of students,

*Well it's important to him because coming from what he had...he didn't have anything- he just made himself be something like a force. Like I am good, I am strong, I can protect my family, I can teach my students. And when he sees all that it just made him a more powerful being. And the strength, I think having the strength is a part of that, so he knows his energy, that's what I think it comes from, that energy you develop in your body.*

Embodying the practices of the martial arts is a natural process that comes through the difficult cultivation methods characteristic of Chinese Kung Fu. For example, Grandmaster Pan developed a fantastically high level of not only power but also physical flexibility. Student would try to imitate Pan, and as their imitation got better, so did their martial arts. Students are not mimicking Grandmaster Pan but rather following his path. The path, not the destination, is the secret. Students attempted to imitate Grandmaster Pan in the same way, and with the same level of respectful reverence, that they tried to imitate the characteristic attributes of the praying mantis, the dragon, or the tiger when performing their martial arts techniques. Engaging intentionally, and training relentlessly, gave students a glimpse into Grandmaster Pan's inner world of lived experience and life history.

Embodiment is an idea that is easy to understand, but more difficult to achieve in practice. From a certain perspective, that is a truth relative to the martial arts in general. One can be taught how to kick or how to block a punch, but you will only fully grasp embodiment of the technique once you drill those moves for hours, reflect on your training, and then fine tune your movements through additional future training repeatedly engaged in a disciplined fashion. One of Grandmaster Pan's most common quotes in relation to learning his Iron and Silk martial arts techniques is "*it must change to you.*" That comment is one of the simplest and yet profoundly

beautiful definitions of embodiment I have found throughout my research. It is one thing to train, but quite another to train to a level of cultivation and transformation that your training practice becomes you.

Internalizing the martial arts represents a much deeper committed pursuit than just learning specific techniques. Alex describes that his goal “is to be the best that I can be...in art... Fighting is easy... Being a martial artist is really hard.” When talking about how his training influences his life away from the club, Alex talked about how “it’s not like I stop being a martial artist and all... I am a martial artist in my whole life.” Alex reflected on the sense of presence a person has when the martial art is deeply embodied and lived on a daily basis, as it is with grandmaster Pan:

*Sometimes you can go into a room of martial artists and you go that guy's really good before you've done anything, and you can just feel that presence. Like Pan always talks about “a tiger walks into the forest.” Well why? Other animals walk in but the tiger, it's watching and it's very relaxed. But that essence, that presence, is felt. And you can feel that in true martial artists, when they walk in. Other martial artists feel it too, they can go THAT guy, you know?*

This level of lived engagement is deepened when training practices are tied directly to philosophical teachings and stories from Pan’s lineage.

Grandmaster Pan teaches Kung Fu to his students in a variety of ways, but all these ways reflect a deep interconnection between Pan’s view of martial arts practice and his understanding of his own leadership role within the club. Sometime Grandmaster Pan would organize what he terms a “lecture class”, where the entire time period is spent discussing ideas with a reduced focus on physical training for that session. During these sessions, Pan would often times reflect on important stories from his own life, or on stories told to him by his own teachers as a youth in China. David reflected on how Pan uses this type of communication as a teacher tools, saying

*Sometimes you know, he brings out a story and they're stories from his life or sort of Chinese mythology to illustrate or drive home points, but then also he's trying to give general life lessons to people as well –from your commitment to training after class, being ready for the next class. He's trying to motivate people to do that. Motivate people to just*

*have a better general fitness level as well so they'll live a long and happy life. I can tell he's trying to motivate us to try harder in class or to look at a certain technique a certain way, to help us to be able to perform it.*

Reflecting, Khaleel describes how the spoken philosophy or as it is conveyed in an embodied story requires the student to dig deep within to continue to practice:

*The embodiment thing makes a lot of sense because the ideas that he teaches you and the philosophy behind them. You have the physical because you have to have the Yin and Yang, the internal and external part of it. So, we learn the external and we stretch beyond, and Grand Master does the amazing stuff that he does every day and then he comes into class and you get that internal feeling by just, those little bits of stuff he gives us. Or, sometimes we're doing these classes and he stops us for like five [minutes] and he knows, I'm sure that he knows we've reached the end. So, he comes over and he reminds us about his training, about his teacher, what he used to do back then and then you go back, and line and he says ok I want more, I want more. I want you to kick higher, I want you to punch further. And for some reason you're able to do it after that, the philosophical part mixes really well with that. And he understands it, and he understands us. And when we need that kind of push and he stops and gives us that...*

Other students reflected on how grandmaster Pan represented this internalization of martial art practices in his approach to living life.

*He wants to be fit. So, he's strong now for Dianne. Do you know what I mean? For all of us. So, he wants to impart, he wants to tell you to be strong, get that Kung Fu in you, that Kung Fu. Be strong. But at the same time all the things how he was so loyal to people and he taught them, like all the people he met. He taught them, but he didn't expect anything in return, he just wanted to give them that strength that he got.*

***Reflecting on my own path of transformation.***

In the winter of 2007, I almost went blind. Doctors found a large, golf ball sized tumor behind my left eye. The tumour was large, it impaired my vision, it was growing, and it needed to be removed immediately. I was scared, lost, and beside myself with anxiety. I was afraid that I would never be able to play sports or read again. Up until that point I had always viewed myself as an athlete and as a scholar. The entire process was terrifying. Upon initial diagnosis, I was rushed to an eye care specialist who immediately declared that I was way more serious than he could handle and that I had to go directly to one of the top eye doctors in Canada. My operation

was a long shot, and I had over 50% chance of losing vision in at least one eye, with no idea of the potential to lose sight in both from complications. The chances of regaining perfect vision were almost zero. I woke up from my surgery in tremendous pain. I think it took almost a year after the surgery to realize how much I was really hurting at the beginning. I healed my eye through the training practices of the traditional Chinese martial art of Tai Chi. Grandmaster Pan pushed me to keep training and not to accept any of the advice I was hearing regarding the potential limitations of my eye. Although I felt like a completely different person after the surgery, in the eyes of Grandmaster Pan I was the same; just in a temporary rebuilding period. I truly think that viewing the injury as a rebuilding period was the only thing that got me through the rehabilitative process. GMP had me back training with long staff, and walking through forms, when I could hardly stand without feeling sick. I would keep a puke bucket nearby at all times as double vision and motion sickness were constant unwanted companions for almost a year. Slowly things started to improve. I truly credit the literal rebuilding of my eye to Tai Chi. What I mean by this is that Tai Chi forced me to involve my eyes in my training. For example, I would follow my arms movement when performing an arm technique. This sounds simple and straightforward...unless of course you just had your skull opened, had all the upper face muscles recently cut and sown back together, and felt nauseous due to your eyes poor tracking. While this discomfort, this eating bitter, would likely have inspired other teachers to find something easier and less trying for me – GMP pushed on. He taught me that the only way to get through such difficult times is to stand with resolve and to stubbornly set your own goals regarding what is possible and how high you can reach. Through hundreds of hours of practice and drilling, I was able to eventually regenerate my vision.

Kung Fu saved my eye, and in the process, became a central part of my life. Kung Fu is who I am. To me, Kung Fu is not one set technique or philosophical principle. Kung Fu is what gets you up in the morning when every muscle aches and every thought is telling you to give up and quit. Kung Fu is when I would train my eye tracking exercises until I would throw up from the vertigo. Kung Fu was the puke bucket I brought to classes when I was learning to re-control my balance. Kung Fu is what transformed the energy behind that pain experienced in solitude into an unstoppable resolve. My injury, and my use of Kung Fu to work through my injury and rediscover who I was, and am, is perhaps the most important story of my life. My injury taught me fear, anxiety, doubt, and hopelessness yet somehow in the midst of all of this I found Kung Fu.

At a certain point, my own personal story cannot be removed from who I am as a researcher and from how I engaged this topic. My greatest challenge to “Eat Bitter,” in combination with “Every Day from Zero” came through the surgery recovery process discussed above. ‘Eating Bitter’, or ‘Fighting Everything’, is really a manifestation of a philosophy of overcoming adversity through persistence and determination; especially on the bad days, and especially when all hope appears to be lost. My eye surgery presented the closest thing to an existential crisis that I have dealt with in my own experience. My identity as a young healthy man, as an athlete and martial artist, and as an academic felt under threat. Processing those emotions, fighting through the desire to give up, and rebuilding myself, taught me the tremendous value and power in the martial arts as a lifestyle training practice. My rehabilitation needed patience and time.

From day one, Grandmaster Pan was completely optimistic in my ability to recover completely. He did not coddle me at all. He pushed hard, not allowing me to accept limitations or

to make predictable excuses. Reflecting on this rehabilitative time reminds me why I was so passionate to begin this study in the first place and why I believe it is an important contribution to our understanding of some of the dynamics associated with immersive leisure experience. My experience also can be used to illustrate how personal transformation can come from an embodied training practice, but that practice needs to be engaged with intentionality in a manner characterized by discipline, commitment, and frequency.

### **Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship**

To Grandmaster Pan, his martial arts practice emerges from the collection of his life experiences, and his teachings are personal and intimate. He has been selective of who he decides to teach. Participants in this study discussed their relationship with Grandmaster Pan as being core to their training experience, and the establishment of this relationship seems to set the stage for cohesive and supportive interactions between students. Alex reflects on this deep desire in Grandmaster Pan to find students to honour his art,

*Well you know, he's spent his whole life perfecting his art and he's chosen us as the people that will continue that on. So, like his understanding of the art, his understanding of not only the moves, the forms, but his knowledge base being passed on to a few people. And that's like a life's work. And he only wants to give it to people who are going to treat it with the same reverence that he did.*

Being a student within our club begins in personal relationship with Grandmaster Pan. When you ask someone about their relationship to Grandmaster Pan, they often begin reflecting on their pivotal first meeting. These face-to-face meetings with Grandmaster Pan are highly unique experiences for students and the relational underpinning of them is qualitatively different from a transactional approach to teaching. Grandmaster Pan wants to understand who you are as a person, and about why the martial arts are something you are attracted to. However, more centrally, he is intuitively and instinctively making a judgment about the individual's ability to become a martial arts student. Grandmaster Pan sums up this judgment in his classic question:

Can you eat bitter? What was Grandmaster Pan really asking: Can you train hard? Are you teachable? Are you a person of character? And are you the type of person that Grandmaster Pan wants to invite into his family of dedicated students? In the end, it comes down to whether Grandmaster Pan believes that the person is one he is willing to share his embodied teachings with, through a relationally based cultivation of martial arts practice.

The essence of *cultivating relationship* explores how relationships are cultivated and fostered within the club and begins with a discussion of how students have developed foundational relationships with Grandmaster Pan. These direct personal relationships with Grandmaster Pan encouraged and set the stage for the creation of a united learning environment within the club. Alex provides us with insight into his first meeting with Grandmaster Pan saying,

*Yeah it was like a 3-hour interview and he talked about, you know, what I had done previously. We talked less about martial arts and more about philosophies on life and what I was doing. And then from that he seemed to like me so then we had another interview where we actually trained.*

Alex's reflection is similar to my own first experience meeting Grandmaster Pan in 1996. We talked for hours, but we didn't begin training that first day. That first day he wanted to know about my family, what I was doing in school? Was I working? Could I train hard? Was I interested in engaging fully in his training system? David talked about his first meeting with Pan, which began with a long journey to reach the apartment he lived in at the time,

*His English wasn't as good as it is now, so it was kind of tricky for me to figure out. You know I got the address, but I couldn't really quite get the directions and stuff like that and there's no Google maps or anything like that so I just kind of got to Kitchener and it took me forever because the snow so I was already really late and I was stressing out and everything like that and I'm driving around Kitchener trying to figure out where he is and my car didn't have winter tires so I'm slipping and sliding trying to go up hills and stuff like that. Finally, I found it, I was probably two hours late maybe, so I buzzed his apartment door and he let me up. So, I get to the apartment door and I knock on the door and he opens the door and he has his tiger-eyes and he sort of stared right through me and I was like whoa! And then he burst into this big smile and shook my hand and said come in.*

*I explained you know, sorry I'm late, the weather. And he's like... ok! And then he made me tea, he made me, something to eat and we sat down for a long time. I think we sat and talked there for a least an hour, maybe more. Maybe an hour and a half or two hours. Talking about all kinds of stuff. Telling him about the Tai Chi I was studying and what I thought of Iron and Silk [Grandmaster Pan's movie] and near the end he was saying I don't usually take students on right away, I usually let them get ready and get used to each other for about 6 months kind of a thing, but I think you're honest, I'll take you as a student right now. So, you can come on Saturday for your first class. So, we started taking classes right in his apartment living room. That was basic kicks and stances and stuff like that, and the rest is history.*

Students seemed to confirm each other's' interpretations that there was something *different* about meeting Grandmaster Pan. When you meet Pan, there is a sense that you are interacting with a true master who embodies the traditional martial arts. In addition to his strong presence as a martial artist, it was also his focus on relationship as a core and essential element within the training experience that suggested to the student the depth of this training engagement.

#### **Cultivating a Kung Fu lineage.**

*"I'm trying to pass on these methods to everyone else to make sure that this style, or HIS concepts aren't lost" (Dianne)*

Within the Iron and Silk martial arts club, teachings become transmitted and translated through relationship. While Grandmaster Pan represents the complete embodiment of our school's principles, his lead assistant Dianne is presented by Grandmaster Pan as his "book", or as a roadmap to assist student learning. Marlene beautifully reflected on the relationship between Grandmaster Pan and Dianne by saying:

*I think GMP is imparting a lot of his techniques, his inner Kung Fu to Dianne right? So, I think that is where he's teaching her like his grand masters taught him. And he is teaching her exactly the same way. The concern, the Iron and Silk...but he's teaching her that as much he remembers-because sometimes she'll say oh he didn't teach me that, but it was something, he didn't think about it. He didn't think about that one particular style. But that is what he is trying to give her. Impart all of his Kung Fu, his techniques, his way of life.*

Within the Iron and Silk martial arts club, the actual instruction process is led by both Grandmaster Pan and his head assistant Dianne. Grandmaster Pan often refers to Dianne as "his

book.” Exploring what he means by “his book” is revealing of the phenomenological concept of embodiment. The idea is as if Dianne has reached such a high level of internalizing grandmaster Pan’s teachings that she has completely embodied them, or lives them to such a degree, grandmaster Pan uses her as the closest representation of the essence of this martial teaching practices. Oftentimes grandmaster Pan teach a movement or technique, and then Dianne will spend time with individual students, or the group, breaking down and drilling the details associated with the specific martial arts movement. Dianne speaks of the dynamics of this teaching relationship by saying,

*Yeah that's always the way I've figured the role to be because he is fantastic at showing and certain concepts and things- the self-defence- I always like to leave that type of stuff to him. But I like to give the details as to ok, your foot is here, your “this” is here. Those are the details that I don't think he expresses as well, so that's why I go into that. I kind of teach like, detail type of stuff and he teaches more the martial arts type of things, like what is the self-defence and how do you get more power in this situation. Like I teach a lot of that stuff too, but he does it more in the hand-to-hand combat type of thing.*

Dianne, began as a regular student, but through hard work and commitment became grandmaster Pan’s top student and the lead assistant. Dianne talked about how this teaching relationship developed over years, a result of her demonstrated loyalty and competency,

*Oh. It's been years. Yeah, but it's changed so much because the more I learn- and that was a thing is I found I don't know whether he actually really wanted me in this type of position, at the beginning and I kept training and training and I tried to make myself a use to him, and so then I think he kind of took me on and realized that, you know, I could help him out. I don't know whether he thought I could in the beginning. So, it's been really good, so I just keep trying to practice really hard and then the more he sees that I improve then the more he trusts me to teach other people. So, it's really expanded over the years. It started off as a very, very minor role. I used to like, give him tea-that's how it started. Then he would trust me to do certain things and it just grew from there.*

For Dianne, it would appear that the goal is to attempt to embody the teachings of Grandmaster Pan at such a deep level that it becomes a real part of her, so that she can then help cultivate these teachings in the other students of the club. Dianne spoke on the challenge of trying to train and live in a way that honours her role within our club, and her relationship to

Grandmaster Pan. In a joking voice, Dianne commented on how being Grandmaster Pan's book "is a pretty darn hard thing to be." In addition, Dianne talked candidly about the challenge in trying to keep up with a true martial artist Grandmaster like Pan,

*I want to train every day and work hard every day, he just DOES... and it's for hours that he will train. And he always does. And it's, there's such a drive that I just haven't seen anywhere. So that's what really makes him, and I guess that's why he got as good as he did but some people have the drive, but they weren't as detailed, they're not as detailed and he has tried to do everything perfectly for so many years.*

For someone with the level of martial arts accomplishment of Grandmaster Pan, both as a competitor and as a teacher, he teaches from a place of humility. Pan understands that there is sometimes a gap between what he's trying to teach and student's current level of ability to imitate. It is in these situations that Dianne often acts as an *interpreter* or as a middle person between Pan and his students. Khaleel speaks to this relationship between Grandmaster Pan's teachings and Dianne's engagement in the meaning making process for students when commenting,

*Yeah, she is the one that he goes to, to try to interpret what he's doing for us. To kind of break it down for us so we understand it better. He imparts the knowledge on to her and then she's, like the book itself. And we are able to use her to try to understand what he's trying to teach us. So it's great to have Dianne.*

Grandmaster Pan and Dianne have a complementary approach to teaching. While Grandmaster Pan will often introduce it, and then later come back to explain deeper meanings, they will often work with individual students to break down the technique and learn minute details. Khaleel illustrates this complementary relationship beautifully when reflecting on how Grandmaster Pan is teaching high-level concepts and then Dianne helps interpret those ideas to the students, so they can be internalized:

*And he's at such a high level beyond us sometimes that he is thinking ten moves in advance of what, and we have no concept of the ten moves that he's thinking and she's able to break that down because he shows her and she breaks it down for us so she really does do the interpretation. And from that it's like ok I've seen what grand master does, I'm just in awe*

*of what he does here. And I have to go to Dianne and say ok can you break that down for me now because, I mean his level is just...it's difficult. He's just so high, the stuff that he does, we need Dianne in there...*

The complementary teaching relationship established between Grandmaster Pan and Dianne influences how specific techniques are taught as well as the overall flow and structure of the club. Grandmaster Pan spent his early adult life teaching professional martial art teams in China, so at times Dianne plays an important role in communicating his ideas within a very different cultural context. Marlene reflected on this by suggesting that it is as if Dianne is the *silk* to Grandmaster Pan's *iron*:

*What I wanted to say was that Grand Master has like 200 years of experience. How could he impart it? It's so huge right? So, he has all that and then he's trying to impart bits and pieces. But his wealth of knowledge is exponential! And then you're trying to impart, break it down. So, when he sees us practicing and stuff like that he does not-at that moment he's just thinking 20 moves ahead, the strength, the body. He knows that our bodies are much more capable of what we do now. But Dianne reminds him that the culture is different. We're tired, we need tea and reminds him oh yeah. But he is at that level so way beyond.*

Grandmaster Pan and Dianne work together to create an environment where the martial arts can be taught and cultivated, a social environment that fosters teamwork alongside personal development of individual students. Creating an environment like this is something that both Grandmaster Pan and Dianne take very seriously. Dianne commented:

*The one thing that I think is really interesting is, because I've been so many places and I've seen so many different teaching styles and so many teachers that claim to be the best or you know, the best martial artist and the fact that I am training under the best martial artist, learning how to teach HIS methods that's what makes, I think, that's why I take my job very seriously is because I'm trying to pass on these methods to everyone else to make sure that this style, or HIS concepts aren't lost.*

Dianne continued to reflect, weaving together the body with movement, meanings, and power:

*See that's the thing, the more correct everything is done, the more precise you have your arm movements, the more you understand the meanings, that's when you can add power, that's when you get the most out of your body. When you're using your body correctly and there's only basically him [GMP]...*

## **Relationship to a Sifu.**

Khaleel talked about how this personal relationship with Grandmaster Pan differs from his past training experiences saying, “in other clubs, there was not that connectivity with the teacher.” Khaleel further reflects:

*He's a teacher, he's a father figure because of what he imparts on to us and the principles that he has, and because they're good principles we follow it, along with strengthening our bodies, strengthening our mind, and it becomes, what his teaching is, or what it seems to me myself- even though he has all of us in class, it's like a one on one with each of us in class.*

Alex described their relationship and how at times Pan uses the training environment as a vessel for the discussion of philosophical principles or codes of living:

*He's given me philosophies on life, he's given me talks when things have been bad, he's been there through good times and bad times in my life. Yeah. He's just, a lot more happens outside of the club than in the club.*

Through a deep engagement in the cultivation Marlene, continues and deepens this idea of Pan as a father figure within our club and how this trickles through the club creating a cohesive unit:

*I think he becomes our father, he feels that, and he gives the love to everybody. I think we in turn see that with each other in the club because we all feel it in the club itself, for each other. It's a family away from a family right? It doesn't have to be blood relation to be a family and he bonds, it's kind of like he's the bonding part of us together.*

Other students confirmed this idea of Grandmaster Pan being interpreted as a father figure within the club environment. Alex talked about how “he becomes more of a father figure than a martial arts teacher. I think he’s a life teacher *and then* he’s a martial arts teacher.” Part of his connection to his students is based on how much of an intentional effort Pan makes to show concern for the whole life of the student. When asked about how Pan creates this deep level of relationship with his students, Alex replied

*You know, the family aspect of it, he came to my wedding. If I'm sick, he'll come and see me. He'll call me if I'm having a bad day. You know, he knows my children. I used to bring*

*my children as babies to class, they see him more as like a grandfather than they view him as this guy that teaches me martial arts.*

### **Finding a home: continuation of relationship in physical and social space.**

The physical space of the club—a church and recreation center facility—has become a long-term home to our club after moving through several temporary locations. The club’s relationship to this space has both a physical and social aspect. Dianne spoke on how this solid relationship with the church has influenced Grandmaster Pan’s comfort level when saying,

*He is very comfortable teaching here. I think that's a really good way to put it. Because other places that we had been, yeah if you're nervous it's harder to teach. If you're always thinking someone's looking over, you know, over your shoulder and making sure you're not touching things, we've never had that here. The second we started here it was just “here you go, here's the key, you do whatever you want.”*

Not only does having a home club make Grandmaster Pan feel more comfortable and at home, the increase in comfort has a positive influence on relationships within the club. Alex talked about how it directly influences the training experience, in contrast to times when the club was in other locations, saying

*If he's comfortable and he's not being rushed, I think he trains a lot better and he trains you a lot better because he can have that time. Because sometimes it is just about, you know, you've got to train, he wants that to happen. But it's those moments in between, or little moments afterwards, or those moments before where you're sitting and talking, where those other tidbits about life come out and you can't have those unless you're in a space that's comfortable and not like “ok, we gotta get outta here.”*

Part of the comfort experienced within the current club location relates to the mutually supportive relationship that has been established between the martial arts club and the church facility where we train. This relationship has been established over years. Dianne expanded on the establishment of this relationship:

*Right from the beginning I always tried to make this place appreciate us. That was the main goal, so that we weren't a hindrance to them, we were actually going to help them, and they would look at us as, not members, but just people that were going to assist them. So that's why I always insisted we set up tables and that's why the very first thing we did when we got in was I cleaned the carpet. Because the karate people that were here before*

*they didn't do a thing and the carpet was stunk and they hated it. So, the very first thing I did was clean that. And we've done that ever since and like I said, set up the tables because, you know, they're all older and it just made more sense because we can run down and do it in 15 minutes and it would take them a long time. Like anything that we could do to help, I tried to initiate that just so that we weren't just paying them rent but we were actually good for them.*

Having a comfortable relationship with the location of the club helps to establish a warm and welcoming atmosphere for students.

**“Doing business is easy, having a relationship is hard”: relationships of iron and silk.**

This art is a deeply personal and intimate exchange, and mutual care and concern are embedded within codes of respect and acknowledgment to create a learning environment in which martial arts are practiced and embodied. Within the Iron & Silk martial arts club, cultivating relationships based on respect is a conscious focus, worked into the structure of class, and the structure of interactions between students. Respect is shown in how we acknowledge and respond to Grandmaster Pan, how we work together as students, and how we come together as a united group of martial artists. To Grandmaster Pan, relationships of mutual care and concern create a learning environment in which martial arts can be practiced and embodied. Grandmaster Pan discusses this relationship between relationship and running a martial arts club directly by saying,

*How to teach martial arts*

*Very important you must know!*

*Relationship #1! Not business #1.*

*My students*

*Just like family*

*Everybody concern for each other. I must think about everybody!*

*Concern everybody. Yeah, not just technique!*

*I concern each person. Because I'm*

*very concerned everybody, so everybody imitates me so everyone, knows to concern for each other.*

Through the development of meaningful personal relationships with each student and between students, Grandmaster Pan has been able to create an environment in which students

feel empowered enough to help each other and yet humble enough to receive assistance themselves. The understanding and cohesion experienced among students in the club is based on a foundational level of respect inspired by Grandmaster Pan and Dianne's approach to leadership.

Grandmaster Pan views respect to be core to the generation of relationships within the club, and this respect exists in both formal ritualized ways and through informal expectations within the relationship. It begins each class when we one by one approach Grandmaster Pan as we arrive at the club to say hello and to show respect. It also extends to social events like remembering people's birthdays and celebrating Chinese New Years. The importance of respect, and demonstrating respect, is highlighted by examples of students making mistakes in this. As an example, Alex talked about when he forgot to acknowledge Grandmaster Pan's birthday. He mentioned about how Pan was angry with him for not recognizing it. It was not that Pan was expecting presents or a huge celebration, but to Grandmaster Pan, recognizing significant life events is a way of demonstrating respect and represents a sign of concern for your relationship with that person. I asked Alex why he thought demonstrating respect like that is so important for Grandmaster Pan. Alex's response really highlights the deep level of embodiment between Grandmaster Pan and his Chinese martial arts, "I think when he's training it is more than just training. Like he's giving a part of himself to us." Since Grandmaster Pan is such a living embodiment of his art, sharing this art is a deeply personal and intimate exchange that needs to be based on mutual trust and respect.

Numerous students have commented to me over the years on how their relationship within the club differs from other training experiences in which they have been engaged. Training partner relationships within the club were described as an indispensable aspect of the training.

David talked about this special sense of relationship within the club and how it shaped his training practice:

*You know, I guess one of the things I noticed is the difference between the club I was at and this one was that this is more of a family atmosphere, more of a, you belong to something greater than yourself even if it's just showing up for class. It kind of affected all aspects of your life.*

The family atmosphere in Grandmaster Pan's club attracts, and also pushes away, individuals interested in training in the martial arts. David, who is a long-time student of Grandmaster Pan described a conversation he had with Grandmaster Pan:

*He said to me, David, I can have anybody as a student, there's lots of people phoning and coming over, but that's not really what I want. I want a family of students I don't want students who just see this as a business transaction basically. What he said in his words was "Doing business is easy, having a relationship is hard." and so he said you know, he wants his students to have an actual relationship with him. I think, for one, the picking and choosing who's staying long term, in one way. But also, he's trying to get one on one time with everybody. He's always kind of interested in what's going on with you.*

My first meeting with Grandmaster Pan was in 1996, over twenty years before the time of this documents completion. I still remember that first time we meet at his apartment. He did not really seem to care about my physical skill level or my potential for athletic development, but rather he wanted to know who I was as a person. He had such a vast knowledge base to share, and I can now see that he was sizing up whether I was someone with an internal seed to become a martial artist within his system. Could I be someone he would want to spend time with, share with, and put trust in? Looking back, I now realize that our initial meeting had less to do with martial arts, and everything to do with intersubjective relationship.

Grandmaster Pan often said that to him relationship was the most important thing. During a teaching moment in class, Grandmaster Pan would talk about how to him "relationship is number one." Grandmaster Pan often talked about how he cared more about developing a connected united family of students than he does about running a business. To Grandmaster Pan it is about

cultivating relationship and using this relationship to transform the experience of his students. A big part of creating the culture of the club, is the process of deciding who joins the club as well as who stays in the club as a long-term student. When talking with Dianne, she talked about how the process is “extremely intentional” and “in fact some people have been told to leave.” However, people are not told to leave due to physical limitations, everyone that has been turned away or discontinued has been for reasons related to larger questions of fit. Of course, some people have left due to financial necessity or relocating geographically, but the main point is no one has been discontinued for not being talented enough; to Grandmaster Pan it is about creating a family of martial artists.

### **Openness of learning in the cultivation of Iron & Silk**

Dianne presents this as a highly intentional teaching approach, based in how Grandmaster Pan values team cohesion and the ability of students to motivate and encourage one another.

Dianne reflected further on this saying,

*No one has ever had to leave because of lack of ability. That doesn't even occur to us. Because, a good teacher should be able to take a student and bring things, bring their ability up. And of course, you can't bring everyone up to the same level, some people just naturally just have better quality. But you take a person and you try and give them as much as you possibly can. So, no, physically it doesn't matter!*

Within the club, there effort to include everyone in the teaching and learning process in a manner that reflects a deep respect and high levels of cooperation and encouragement. Dianne describes the absence of horizontal forms of direct competition and how relationships of cooperation and mutual encouragement are established in an environment:

*I don't see horizontal competition, what I see is everybody looking at everyone else, trying to find, ok, so how come he's doing that better, ok he's moving his foot here. . . So, you're watching everybody else trying to learn from them, but you're trying to be better than them. You're trying to be better than yourself and trying to reach that goal. Which everyone realizes is almost unattainable.*

Grandmaster Pan and Dianne also encourage peer inspired forms of learning and friendly competition to inspire student development. As Dianne describes, this requires understanding differences between a student's unique learning styles and how this changes from moment to moment, and how these can come together in a collaborative learning environment. When speaking on this idea, Dianne commented:

*Everybody has a different way of learning so yes, no everyone has a different way of learning, so I have to try to figure out how a certain person is going to learn best. And sometimes people switch as well, so like sometimes they'll learn something this way really well, but then they'll learn something else differently, so you have to always be on top of it and figure out, ok, so what aren't they getting in this situation? What do I need to say in order to get them to do this? Do I have to show them? Do I have to verbalize it? Some people I've taught can only learn verbally and that was really hard for me because I get my right and left mixed up, so trying to verbalize that for them was a real learning experience for me, it was great. I thought it was fantastic, because I had to try to do something out of my element. I usually teach more like, uh, showing. Like I just demonstration I find easier. But if a person can't learn that way, then you have to try and get into their style of learning.*

A respectful social environment plays a key role in the transformative experience of individual students. This is fostered through a peer learning principled approach to teaching and student development. Dianne talked about this approach to teaching the martial arts and how it a strategic approach used by Grandmaster Pan to create relationship and respect among students:

*One thing that he uses a lot in the way he teaches is the peer. Almost like peer pressure but he doesn't consider it pressure, he doesn't try and make it pressure. What he tries to do is highlight the things that people do well and then say well look at this person, see how that person's doing it? He's training at home! So, trying to bring people in that way, not saying you're not training at home! You're not doing it! But he's trying to say well look at what you can achieve look at what this guy achieved. You should be able to do that. So, that's the way he uses a peer type of environment. And I think it makes people really respect each other more! So, like you respect your elders, yeah ok, everybody says that, but when you watch someone who you know has problems like breathing or has problems moving and then you see them work really hard and achieve something, yeah you have a lot of respect for that person.*

Other students also commented on this process of fostering peer cooperation and leadership among the members of the club. Marlene talked about how Grandmaster Pan engages this process in a way that cultivates and embodies mutual respect:

*His first students, the students that have been here the longest he calls them first. Has them sit on a chair or come forward and so that shows you alone the respect he has for his students. Right? So, nobody feels belittled and nobody must feel, anyhow. He is treating everybody equally and that's what he wants to impart. He wants to teach you, he wants-if you're not up to par, he's going to encourage you right? To be, to be stronger, and that is the inspiration from him, because that, he puts-he gives the students that respect, in order of the respect that he has passed, that you have joined the club. Right? And that alone is something that people wouldn't do today right? And that is a principle of his life, how he has lived his life and will do with all his students and everything to this point. And when you see that you have to realize that his inspiration and his love and everything is the embodiment of Kung Fu.*

David also reflected on how this respect is demonstrated among students in the club. As a student who has been with Grandmaster Pan for decades, he had similar reflections on how this process of mutual respect and student development influences all members of the club, regardless of age or current skill level. David humbly commented on how even as an experienced student he still finds times where he learns things from relatively new or less experienced students:

*Yeah like even what I've been doing forever, maybe there's somebody there who's only been there a month would just innately do better than me or on that particular day, their technique, they do it fantastic. So rather than always getting me to show, or get Dianne to show something, you know come in front of the class and show that particular part and then he tells everybody ok you do it like that. Even me, he points at me. You do it like this. So, I think that's good. It humbles the people that are being shown that person's point where they excel, and it boosts the person who's showing that thing as well and I think they probably feel proud and satisfied at what they're doing. They feel like they're accomplishing something, and they're actually truly open in class.*

Alex elaborated on this notion of the openness of learning within the club:

*Completely open. You're learning from everything. You're learning from what not to do by maybe watching someone do it incorrectly. You're learning from Grandmaster Pan who's going to do it perfect. But then you're also-as you're teaching- you're learning at the same time. And someone is learning off you. You know, you become really aware of what you're doing because you're showing someone so that puts a kind of pressure on you to perform it*

*perfect. But then you also see things where you can look at someone that's not maybe at the same level of that form but something they're doing is much better than you. Maybe they're more aggressive, maybe they're got more power, maybe there's that movement and you're like wow! That's better than what I do and because you're watching them and you're really intense and you're going wow I need to do that, I need to capture that somehow and bring it in to my form.*

Dianne describes how having this atmosphere of respect and support influences the students of the club:

*Well for one, it respects everybody. And it gives the other person that's able to show a lot more confidence. They can walk out of here and say "ok I actually got that" you know, even if you're ten, and your dad is in the class and you're trying to prove to your dad that you can do something, well then you know, here look dad! I got this!*

One way that he accomplishes this is by including everyone in the teaching and learning process; however, he does this in a way that is respectful and through inspiration and love as

Marlene highlights:

*Nobody feels belittled. He is treating everybody equally, and that's what he wants to impart. He wants to teach you. If you're not up to par, he's going to encourage you right? To be stronger. And that is the inspiration from him. He gives the students that respect. And that is a principle of his life, how he has lived his life and will do with all his students and everything to this point. And when you see that, you have to realize that his inspiration and his love and everything is the embodiment of Kung Fu.*

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION – MARTIAL ARTS AS EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

The initial focus of this dissertation centered on the presentation of the Chinese martial arts as a vehicle for the transformation of self. As the study progressed, I began to understand that what was being discussed was more than the transformation of a psychological self; we were discussing the transformation of holistic being. Additionally, as I developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of both phenomenology and Taoism, I began to understand that they are significantly more complementary in nature than I originally posited. Due to this emergent understanding, the wording of research question two was updated to reflect a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the interplay between Taoism and phenomenology, and how these knowledge systems aid interpretations of the essences underlying the transformation of being through Kung Fu practice. A second word change evolved from knowing these two systems of knowledge do not exist in tension, but rather offer differing angles for interpreting manifestations of the universal. As a result of these developments, the current study evolved and transformed into an exploration of the dynamic complimentary interplay between these two philosophical traditions when utilized as tools for understandings the essence of Kung Fu.

**Original Research Question #2:** *What emerges at the tension between Taoism and phenomenology around the different understandings of self?*

**Updated Research Question #2:** *What emerges at the **interplay** between Taoism and phenomenology around the different understandings of the **Kung Fu**?*

Although Taoism developed in ancient China, and phenomenology developed through the philosophical and psychological explorations of European scholars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they can be engaged in a complementary manner when used as tools for understanding experience. The orientation helped in finding a language to attempt to approximate the lived experience of

being a student training under the guidance of Grandmaster Pan. Combined, a Taoist inspired phenomenological lens looks at how the intersubjective nature of reality and experience relates to the individual's engagement with the universal. Self is relationally shaped, but not only by other human actors, but also through connection to the extraordinary. The intersubjectively embedded relationship between individual and universal is experienced in the moment as conscious human experience. As one becomes intentional and disciplined in actions, as this becomes embodied, his or her connection to the universal becomes a means for personal transformation.

### **Exploration of Embodiment**

The theoretical discussion of the term embodiment, links back to earlier writings of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, discussed earlier in this dissertation, who spoke of embodiment as being an essential framework for understanding human experience. Tymieniecka (2009) writes on how in following in the line of thought of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty presented embodiment as,

[a]n essential element of human existence, which is defined by what he calls the symbolic function. Only through an understanding of existential behavior can we comprehend the specificity of human embodiment, and eventually explain it properly. This entails that naturalistic explanations will have to be integrated in an existential approach (p. 93).

Phenomenology is interested in both what is observable, and how that observable phenomena is being engaged, produced, internalized, transformed, and understood. For Merleau-Ponty, due to our shared embodiment, “everything we do has immediately intersubjective signification”, as people see us, interpret us, and then also engage in a way that shows an understanding of those interpretations (Tymieniecka, 2009, p. 103). Merleau-Ponty also

commented on how we understand each other as “situated subjects,” and this term that has relevance to this specific study (Tymieniecka, 2009, p. 103). How Grandmaster Pan is understood by his students is conditioned by who and how he is in the moment, who we know him to be, and how we understand his relationship to us as our Grandmaster, and how he is reflected on, and reflected in, the other students. These dynamics need to be considered when trying to make sense of how his teachings and practices are embodied in a process of student transformation.

Embodiment is presented as a contextualizing essence to incorporate the interplay between the highly interconnected and interdependent essences of cultivation, transformation, and relationship. We engage our world intersubjectively as “we relate to each other as social beings through our embodied being, and the fact of our social interrelationships shapes the way we constitute our embodied being” (Cregan, 2006, p. 5). Husserl spoke of the social world as an “intersubjective accomplishment” created by “embedded intelligent agents” (Jensen & Moran, 2013, p. xvi). We play a part in shaping each other’s’ interpretations and in the creation of meaningful intersubjective experience. To further deepen this exploration, the notion of *abjective embodiment* is useful in this conversation. Cregan (2006) distinguishes between three forms of embodiment. *Objective embodiment*, involves “a body that is being shaped to conformity to external rules and regimes” and *subjective embodiment* in which the body as subject is presented as “a body that is very much invested in the individual and in individual experience” (p. 7). Applied to the martial arts, the objective body is engaged with a specific training practice, doing a variety of movements and expressions, while simultaneously being observable, and at times a target of critical analysis, by the other beings in the room. At the same time, the individual student or instructor is having their own subjective lived experience of the situation. *Abjective*

*embodiment* involves a transcendence of boundaries and borders and represents a *dual* action in which, “the human body is the symbolic expression of a society and the means by which a society maintains itself” (Cregan, 2006, p. 101). Both objective and subjective are engaged and the distinction is shown to be entirely theoretical as the true being is something more, something charged by our psychology, our spirit, and our process of a constant and fluid becoming through transformation. At one level, the idea of abjective embodiment shows a pathway to understanding the dynamic interaction between subjective and objective understandings of being. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes,

Probably the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality (p. xxii).

In his presentation of the concept of abjective embodiment, Cregan (2006) writes, “the codes that regulate the abject body are spiritually, emotionally, and morally value-laden” (p.12). Cregan (2006) writes, “The abject body, while it is within the tradition that privileges a controlling mind over the material form of a person, exceeds the status of objectified entity” (pp.11-12). We still respect our physical reality and our subjective experience, but realize they are both dimensional aspects of a larger understanding of being, especially when understood within a Taoist inspired framework. Abjective embodiment has been presented as a way to talk about this highly-nuanced process of becoming something new, or embodying something like a martial arts practice to a core essential level of being.

Exploring the fluid process of abjective embodiment demands paying close attention to the manifestation of personal transformation, the practice of cultivating a martial arts practice, and exploring how this transformation and cultivation is realized within a relational context. Within the growing sub-field of martial arts literature, researchers like Farrer & Whalen-Bridge (2011)

have explored the nature of embodiment for the martial artist. Their writings stress the importance of understanding the situated context of the embodiment process. These researchers suggest that “martial arts enable, externalize, construct, and manifest social being through the individual body of the practitioner” (p. 204), making these practices interesting case examples for exploring how bodies of knowledge can become intentionally embodied. Farrer & Whalen-Bridge (2011) write,

A focus on the acts or processes of embodiment not only directs our attention to the centrality of the acts and the quotidian condition of their practice, over and above their ideal forms, but also to the significance of the context – or habitus – within which such activities take place. A contextual understanding of embodiment demands a consideration of how situatedness is both formative of embodiment and is in turn informed by it (p. 161).

The statement by Farrer and Whalen-Bridge speaks to how it can be difficult to separate and compartmentalize aspects of experience from context. It is difficult to talk about my experience of the Chinese martial arts without discussing my relationship to Grandmaster Pan specifically, and this is a perspective mirrored in the responses of those students interviewed throughout this dissertation. Further, a rich historical lineage, both Grandmaster Pan’s own history and the history of those he learned from, are echoed in this experience. There is also our history as a club, and our individual history in regard to our relationships to Grandmaster Pan. All of these layers of teachings are interpreted by Grandmaster Pan and his students as a type of “embodied knowledge.” Pan’s stories become vehicles for transmitting lessons from embodied experiences and for intersubjective sharing of experiential knowledge. Farrer & Whalen-Bridge (2011) write,

Considering knowledge as “embodied,” where “embodiment is an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience,” means understanding martial arts through cultural and historical experience; these are forms of knowledge characterized as “being-in-the-world” as opposed to abstract conceptions that are somehow supposedly transcendental (p. 1).

The martial arts become embodied when we live it, and we live it in a world full of interrelated dynamics, nuance, and a deeply essential intersubjectivity between individuals sharing intimate aspects of their experience with others, such as those engaged in a collective training practice like the martial arts. In *The Intuitive Body: Discovering the Wisdom of Conscious Embodiment and Aikido*, Palmer (2008) writes that the embodiment process takes time and needs to be understood as a process of longevity:

I encourage the acceptance of longevity with this kind of practice and training. There is nothing instantaneous about it. The insights might be instant, but there is a difference between having an insight and living an insight. If insight were enough, then all the people who take hallucinogenic drugs or write books on personal development would be happy, together, and enlightened. They are not. Having insight does not lead to an embodied experience. In fact, it can be incredibly painful to gain an insight and then have our body react in a different way. We need to recognize that conscious embodiment is a long-term process that is integrated into our daily lives (p. 42).

As I explored the ways this engagement is understood by both teachers (Pan and his lead assistant Dianne) and by students, it became clear that embodiment is an abjective process with tremendous depth that intertwines the cultivation of physical and value-guided practice, transformation of being, and relationship. Throughout this dissertation, two foundational

essences emerged as theoretical cornerstones: (1) *Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivation and Embodying Iron and Silk*, and (2) *Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship*. These foundational essences are centered on the interplay between embodiment, cultivation, and transformation; while simultaneously highlighting the essential relational element of Kung Fu. Cregan (2006) defines embodiment as “the physical and mental experience of existence” and as “the condition of possibility for our relating to other people and to the world” (p. 3). What does it really mean to internalize a teaching, and engage a self-defence practice of Kung Fu, to such a degree that the practice “becomes you”? And what does “becomes you” mean? Understanding embodiment, phenomenologically, “also involves close attention to the manner in which the self or ego experiences itself” (Jensen & Moran, 2013, p. x) and the importance of embodied social relations in this process (Cregan, 2006). As one takes in movements, philosophy, a feeling of connection in social space, an engagement with a lineage and historically contextualized teaching, they become intertwined in deeply personal layers of embodiment, deep personal connections, changing views of self, and meaning to the individual and the collective within the club. Cregan (2006) writes about this deep inter social nature of embodiment saying, “embodied social relations exist both as the context (the prior circumstance) and as an outcome (a consequence) of given social formations, given systems through which we create and gain social meaning” (p. 3).

### **A Path to Transformation: Embodiment and Tao**

Taoist teachings focus on the totality of reality and the relationship between being and the cosmos. Taoism is not as focused on philosophical reductionism as many philosophical schools of thought. The individual can only be separated from the cosmos in a theoretical way, as the self is seen as a manifestation of a larger universal totality. Within Taoism, “the self is but one of the

countless manifestations of the Tao. It is an extension of the cosmos” (Ho, 1995, p. 120). Taoism is concerned with the interplay between subjective engagement in reality (human experience) and the universal (Tao). Self is something that is seen as fluid and in direct connection with the ever-changing universal Tao. In Taoism, the goal is to align our seemingly different manifestations of self with the universal Tao. In this section, I return to *Research Question 1d—How are Taoist ideas like taiji, yin yang, wu wei, and wu hsin reflected in the cultivation of Kung Fu?*—as the emergent essences are discussed in relation to Taoist teachings and phenomenological exploration.

The Taoist teaching of *wu wei*—non-doing aligned with total immersion in which actor and activity become one in an effortless or intentionless way—aids in understanding the importance of living a life in line with the universal energy of nature. Non-action is differentiated from inaction, in that the focus is on not forcing things but rather aligning with the universal life force of the Tao. The term *wu hsin*—no-mind or the subtle art of matching the essence of the mind to that of the medium in which it works—speaks to the importance of engagement and immersion in the ever-present current moment. The mind is quiet to allow the body to engage and reach the highest levels of potential; however, achieving a state of *wu wei* and *wu hsin* is far from easy. We are constantly overwhelmed with personal hardships, stresses, and obstacles. The discipline and intentionality to stay on the path and to actively engage life connects directly to aspects of essences presented in Chapter Four, such as *Eat Bitter, Fight Everything, and Climb Mountain*. Together, the four concepts (Taiji, Yin Yang, Wu Wei, and Wu Hsin), when combined with other Taoist concepts like *Te*, and phenomenological concepts like intersubjectivity and embodiment, provide useful language for exploring the experience of training in the Chinese

martial arts system of Grandmaster Pan. Exploring this more deeply, is the focus of the following sections.

Wu wei (non-doing) and Wu hsin (no-mind) are ideas pointing to both daily practice and attitudinal mind states as the practitioner develops a strategy towards achieving higher levels of alignment and immersion through Iron and Silk. The philosophical essence of Grandmaster Pan's teachings on Iron and Silk Kung Fu have a natural alignment with the Taoist notions of both Yin Yang and Taiji. In Taoism, Taiji (also spelt Tai Chi) is the term for the dynamic interplay of Yin and Yang, seemingly opposite by ultimately complimentary dimensions of reality. Iron and Silk present as seemingly opposite dimensions, yet they represent two sides of the same coin. Iron and Silk, like the Taoist conception of Yin Yang, can be used to describe martial techniques (like the relationship between Tiger Style and Tai Chi) or states of being (like discipline and compassion). Dynamic power comes from their complimentary interplay. The yin yang relationship creates taiji, and taiji creates the yin yang relationship. When Iron and Silk manifest as one, Kung Fu is embodied and manifested. Within Taoist thought, Taiji is a term that represents the interplay between the Yin and the Yang. One of the underlying essences that represent a cornerstone of this study is titled, *Layers of Knowing: metaphors for cultivating and embodying Iron and Silk*. Part of the foundation for this underlying essence was titled *the fluid movement between Iron and Silk*. The importance of the term Iron and Silk comes from both its value in relation to the martial arts, and to its value as a concept for exploring human experience as a metaphor for congruence.

A core practice in this manifestation of Iron and Silk Kung Fu is reflected in the principle of "eating bitter, to taste sweet." As discussed in the Chapter Four, "eat bitter" was often used by Grandmaster Pan to teach the necessity of a daily commitment and engagement with the training

practice. The practice demands immersion across time—the ability to stay present with eating bitter without emotional reactivity (non-doing) creates the conditions for divisions between mind and medium to dissolve (no-mind). The long-term immersion, within the context of an elite practice, is what leads to transformation; or “tasting sweet.” Throughout the study, several students talked about “eating bitter” in specific reference to their personal struggles with serious illnesses, such as cancer. Maintaining discipline, focus, and continued immersion is the practice of the martial arts became acknowledged therapeutic tools of transformation. Eating bitter asks us to look at the moments when we are angry or jealous and act from within those emotions; when we are not in alignment with our universal nature. In other words, we are not in alignment with wu wei. While being is not static, it is always in contact with the universal Tao. The core goal of an embodied Taoist inspired lifestyle is centered on bringing our emotions, thoughts, behaviours, motivations, and relationships into a state of congruence, so that one can be in alignment with the universal nature of reality.

In Taoism, the universe and all its manifestations are understood as being completely indivisible. We are at one with the cosmos, with each other, and with the natural world. When we are not in alignment with wu hsin, separation is a human construct informed by our perception of experience. Our life feels separate and independent, much of this do to the subjectively interpretive nature of our immediate experience. The notion of life as indivisible is helpful when trying to make sense of two additional phenomenological essences presented in Chapter Four: (1) *Layers of Knowing: Metaphors for Cultivating and Embodying Iron and Silk*; and (2) *Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship*. These two essences are interconnected so intimately that separating them is merely a conceptual exercise and not a reflection of actual experience. The underlying essences, and aspects of these essences, come

together in a holistic, fluid, and nuanced way that aims at a lived and practiced approximation of the universal Tao.

As Taoism focuses on the relationship between individual and the universal, and phenomenology focuses on attempts to make sense of experience and subjective consciousness within an intersubjective world, this study evolved into an exploration of the relationship between intersubjective human experience and the movement toward living in alignment with the totality of universal reality as martial arts practices become abjectively embodied. The Intersubjectivity and the Taoist concept of *Te*—moral power or virtue of a person who follows a correct course of conduct, connecting the individual with the cosmos—highlight interdependence on path of transformation through the embodied practice of cultivating Iron and Silk Kung Fu. This conversation is deepened in the following sections discussing the cauldron and approximation.

### **The embodiment of Kung Fu: the cauldron and approximation.**

In Taoism, there is the commonly used metaphor of the Cauldron (Cleary<sup>25</sup>, 2003). The cauldron is a hot melting pot filled with distinct yet interconnected ingredients, often associated with the alchemical practices of early chemists. When discussing transformation, “the furnace and the cauldron are the body and mind” (Cleary, 2003, p. 513). Within the Taoism literary tradition, symbols like the Cauldron are often presented as “representations, speaking of one thing to allude to something else” (Cleary, 2003, p. 266). The Cauldron is often used to depict the multi-faceted path to spiritual development; but the essential idea is that all the distinct

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Cleary is a highly regarded English translator of Classical Taoist philosophy

ingredients find meaning and expression in a totality far greater than the sum of the parts. When speaking of transformation within a Taoist understanding,

The outer medicine is perfecting life, the inner medicine is perfecting essence. When the two medicines are complete, one is physically and mentally sublimated (Cleary, 2003, p. 368).

In this analogy, the martial arts practice of Grandmaster Pan's Iron and Silk Kung Fu is the outer medicine, and the resulting embodiment and transformation of being is the inner medicine. Iron and Silk (the teachings, the lineage from which the teachings emerge, relationships within the club etcetera) presents a cauldron for transformation. The cauldron represents the body as an energy system (Cleary, 2003). Everything is contained within the whole. All manifestations, represent an approximation of the universal Tao. By bring together the cauldron and approximation, we may explore the approximation of the universal happening within the cauldron; in other words, how practice leads us in to the cauldron with the elements of Iron and Silk and an approximation of the universal becomes possible.

For instance, in this dissertation I focus on the philosophy of "eating bitter to taste sweet", as if the two states of experience are divisible, when they are really one in the same. When you go through an experience that may have felt hurtful, or received a comment that felt like it had an critical edge to it, or negative feedback about your performance, you can take it in and see that there is something for you in that knowledge, and that is when you begin the transformation. In this way, embodiment of a practice as a method of cultivation is how transformation of self occurs within the martial arts. **The practice is the cauldron.** The ingredients within the cauldron create the whole, but the whole is something more than just the ingredients; there is a beauty in the totality. In this dissertation, it is difficult to draw a distinction between what it means to

cultivate a practice, how a practice becomes embodied and a tool for transformation, and intersubjective relationship as a catalyst for the overall process.

While it made conceptual sense to discuss the unique essences in nuanced depth, at this point in the creative process it is important to remember that they are all conceptual tools to help us get closer and closer to the essential meaning of manifesting and engaging a practice like Kung Fu. An ancient Taoist poem titled *Reverted Elixir* teaches,

The Tao is originally uncontrived, patterned on nature;

Sages set up images, a sphere of temporary names.

In everyday life it is completely manifest,

But only when you break through do you know the primordial (Cleary, 2003, p. 368)

Attempts to explain the nuanced dynamics of reality are always limited by human language. Both Taoist and the phenomenological writers attempt to use language and ideas to approximate human experience. Taoist teachings speak of approximation and similarly, phenomenology focuses on “the study of essences” and in putting “essences back into existence” it “does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their facticity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. viii). There will always be limitations in the utility of language and perspective to fully grasp and engage the complex dynamics of experience. In this study, participants all used different words that shared commonalities but also represented unique and individualized interpretations and meanings. Taoism teaches that “a path that can be verbalized is not a permanent path, terminology that can be designated is not constant terminology” (Cleary, 2003, p. 13). At a certain point in explorations like this one, reflective language can struggle to keep up with lived experience.

### **Intersubjectivity and Te: relational aspects of embodying Kung Fu.**

In phenomenology we understand that we live in intersubjectively interpreted communities of meaning in which others share in the process of constructing interpretations and meanings of human experience. It is important to note that intersubjectivity is not just a synonym for relationship. Intersubjectivity places increased emphasis on the creation of meaning within the shared experience of two or more people as influenced by their socially situated lived context. Intersubjective relationship has a transformational power within the context of a socially situated martial arts training practice. There is a direct connection between intersubjectively interpreted communities of meaning and the second essence presented in chapter four: *Relationship Cultivates Kung Fu, Kung Fu Cultivates Relationship*.

In discussing the intersubjective nature of lived experience, Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes, The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own. (p. xxii)

We share in the conscious experiences of those in our immediate presence, and they share in ours. Together we co-create meaning, “truth does not ‘inhabit’ only ‘the inner man’, or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xii). When talking with participants about relational topics like our first meetings with Grandmaster Pan, or about how much Grandmaster Pan valued lineage, I am reminded of the socially embedded nature of my interpretations. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

The philosopher cannot fail to draw other with him into his reflective retreat, because in the uncertainty of the world, he has forever learned to treat them as consorts, and because all his knowledge is built on this datum of opinion. Transcendental subjectivity is revealed subjectively, revealed to itself and to others, and is for that reason an intersubjectivity (p. 421).

Intersubjectivity speaks to our intimate interconnection in meaningful relationships in our social world that shape our experience and help us make sense of it. Our experience is not only our own intersubjective interpretation, it is something that at times is shared and made sense of in a social environment like a martial arts club. I am not alone in feeling the influence of the existence of Grandmaster Pan and others in the club. Intersubjectivity reflects the belief that we are not consciously isolated beings. We find meaning within a social context full of interpretative tools being consciously engaged as we all try to make sense of our lived experience. There is a sharing of layers of our experience, and in the overlap, we find intersubjective understandings. We are constant mirrors to each other of our own embodiment of Iron and Silk. We are not completely divisible and our experience, while individualized, is not completely distinct.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

We must therefore rediscover, after the natural world, the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimensions of existence: I may well turn away from it, but not cease to be situated relatively to it. Our relationship to the social is, like our relationship to the world, deeper than any express perception or any judgement. It is as false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, as it is to place society within ourselves as an object of thought, and in both cases the mistake lies in treating the social as an object. We must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere

fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification (p. 421).

In other words, I am not divisible from the club, from Grandmaster Pan, or from the other students, and my relationship to Grandmaster Pan cannot be separated from my relationship to the club. As I write this I am reminded by a quote from Heidegger that was discussed earlier in this dissertation as he highlights the interconnected underlying nature of reality,

We are mistaken if we believe that we can occasionally choose to move outwards from some inner world to take up a relationship with the various somatic and semantic objects that make up our world, because relatedness-to-the-world is a fundamental part of our constitution (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17).

While intersubjectivity highlights the relationship between our own consciousness and the other conscious beings in our social environment, the Taoist teaching of Te, often understood as a virtuous character, provides a philosophy of the path to this embodiment of Iron and Silk; melding of character and embodied practice. I believe that when Grandmaster Pan would initially meet potential students, he would look for the seeds for this character development (Te), the seeds of Iron and Silk. The essence or seed of Iron and Silk allows us to intersubjectively present as mirrors to each other, and this may represent part of the meaning in his common quote: “Relationship #1, Relationship is most important.” As Merleau-Ponty writes:

True reflection presents me to myself not as idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical with my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but,

on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them, all the rest.  
(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 525)

In Grandmaster Pan's speech, relationship is a word that begins to partially capture an approximation of this intersubjective reflection between teacher and student and between student and peer. In that intimate state of interconnectedness, intersubjective meanings and interpretations manifest. Merleau-Ponty talked about how taking a reflexive look at our experience can help us understand that what we are seeing is a dynamic interplay between ourselves and our reality; an interplay so intimately interconnected that separating the two only makes sense as a theoretical exercise. In addressing of social nature, Merleau-Ponty (1962) presents an understanding of a phenomenological world "inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which establish their unity through the taking up of my past experiences into my present experiences, or of the other person's experience into my own (p. 21). This notion of intersubjectivity is heightened and deepened when paired with the Taoist notion of *Te*.

*Te* refers to the ability of the individual being, or community of beings, to live in alignment with universal principles. Taoist teaching, when discussing the relationship between the concept of the universal Tao and the concept of *Te*, suggest that "if Tao is the overarching reality and cosmic energy, *Te* is what all beings receive from Tao; it is their own nature, with its specific talents and potentials, that enables them to act in their own way as if by their inner compulsion" (Pas & Leung, 1998, p. 332). While *Te* is at times used in religious interpretations, it can also be applied as a teaching about the value of living a life of principled and dedicated practice. Intersubjectively embedded cultivation, embodiment, and transformation is activated through dedicated practice. Essence needs a practice to become a foundation for cultivation and

transformation. Within Taoism, “Te is the power of Tao, individualized, as, for example, in a seed, which has the inner potential and unfailing power to sprout and grow” (Pas & Leung, 1998, p. 332). Practice reinforces your essence, and as your essence gets stronger, the pull toward those incongruent aspects of self grows weaker. While walking a path of lived virtue and character, Te, if you are to encounter manifestations that could pull you away from your essence of self, you are less likely to be overwhelmed, or destabilized, or pulled away from your highest self, your true being, or your essence of being.

Embodied congruence is our defence against the chaos of the world; however, we are not forced to maintain and cultivate this congruency in isolation. There is a power in being with others engaged in the same transformation practice – they help us stay in alignment and strengthen our foundational essence. Through intersubjective relationship, others mirror for us our true self, our true potential, and what really matters. For example, Grandmaster Pan always challenged his students to reach higher and farther, constantly shaping their internal narrative about what they can achieve, and constantly pushing his students to truly embody the practice.

Participants’ intersubjective relationship with Grandmaster Pan, paired with his own highly developed character, provided the possibility for intersubjectively grounded transformation. Taoism teaches, “a ruler who possesses Te in its fullness has the natural authority needed to lead the people without showing power. He nourishes his people, without self-seeking. True Te manifests itself in wu wei” (Pas & Leung, 1998, p. 332). However, despite Grandmaster Pan’s highly developed character and our intersubjective relationship, there additionally needed to be openness, on the part of both teacher and student, before it can be engaged completely. Students must know they are valued, that there is lived character that embodied that love, and provided space for us to be able to do what we did as a club, in terms of intersubjective unity and

intentional practice. True transformation occurs in the context of relationship, an intersubjective relationship characterized by trust and virtue, where you know you are being pushed and challenged intentionally as a part of the overall path to transformation. Grandmaster Pan fostered this openness with his students through investing so much of himself and his own character (Te) into his teaching, through the sharing of his lived experiences. Within Taoism, the role of Te in teaching and leadership is evident. Te is also at times

Elevated to an even higher level; it is the power to rule, not through physical force, but through inner charisma, which may be a natural talent, but also must be cultivated. There are humans who have this special power, personal charisma, possibly based on physical appearance, but more so emanating from the inner, spiritual self, almost magical in nature. This kind of power to rule does not exclude “moral virtue” in its ordinary sense but goes beyond it. It is also expressed in other leadership qualities: deep knowledge and wisdom, even moral virtues, such as goodness, compassion, sincerity, honesty, integrity. Perhaps the Confucian “sincerity” (ch’eng) comes closest to the concept of Te, since it also has a metaphysical foundation (Pas & Leung, 1998, p. 332).

When discussing the practice of martial arts as a vehicle for the transformation, applying a phenomenological lens presented the challenge of embodied and intersubjective understanding beyond what is objectively happening on the surface (i.e. the physical and martial skill development) or subjectively within the individual student (i.e. the changing view of self of an individual student). Jensen & Moran (2013) discussed the idea of phenomenological embodiment when writing:

Human beings are embodied intentional agents – expressive, meaning construing and meaning intending beings embedded in a world that is loaded with significance, overlain

with fantasy, imagination, memory and all kinds of projection. The overall term 'embodiment,' then, is meant to capture this idea that human conscious subjects are intrinsically connected to the world in complex and irreducible ways. (p. vii)

The martial artist inhabits a physical body that exists within a intersubjectively constructed and interpretively embodied reality. To Merleau-Ponty, interpretation and the subjective internalizations of the individual being are important but need to be understood within a context that understands that the corporeal reality of the individual having these interpretations and internalizations also plays an essential role. We experience embodied interpretations, and these embodied interpretations exist in an intersubjective lived context. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes,

What is given is not one fragment of time followed by another, one individual flux, then another; it is the taking up of each subjectivity by itself, and of subjectivities by each other in the generality of a single nature, the cohesion of an intersubjective life and a world (p. 525).

Our Te, our pathway towards the development of character through engagement with practice, exists in intersubjective context. Grandmaster Pan and his students are approximated expressions of Iron and Silk, imperfect yet meaningful manifestations of his teachings. Engagement creates subjective changes in the self and essence of the being of the student. Abjective embodiment is neither objective nor subjective. It is a lived thing; an aspect of being that is greater than the sum of our thoughts and experiences. There is an associated sense of totality. Abject embodiment in this sense, involves a transcendence of boundaries and borders, and represents a dual action in which the human body is symbolic representation of a society (like Iron and Silk) and the means by which the society maintains itself. Where does Grandmaster Pan end? Where does Iron and Silk Kung Fu start? Where does Grandmaster Pan

end and Dianne start? Where does Grandmaster Pan end and his students or manifestation of his teachings start? At a certain point, the more I categorize, the more I move away from what actually is, and in reality, they are so complicatedly interconnected, as each are a manifestation of the Tao, and if all of us have embodied Grandmaster teachings in our own imperfect approximations, then those boundaries and borders are open to transcend time, space, and bodies.

### **Epilogue for Grandmaster Pan (2017)**

On Thursday June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Grandmaster Pan passed away from a heart attack<sup>26</sup>. His death shocked his students and left a tremendous hole in their hearts. We had just had a class the night before. In the days that followed, a visitation was held to honour his life and who he was as a person. For me personally, this was one of the hardest weeks of my life. Grandmaster Pan was more than a martial arts instructor for me, or a topic for this dissertation. He was my best friend and my mentor. At first, I was a mess, but I soon realized that it was important for me to be strong for the other students and to make sure to do all I could to ensure his memory is always honoured. I still do not really believe that he is gone. Grandmaster Pan's students are still training together and we light a candle each class to honour his memory and presence. He will always be with us, as we have truly embodied his relationship. I offer this dissertation as my own attempt at a tribute to the legacy of the Grandmaster Pan.

Being a student of Grandmaster Pan for over twenty years is something I reflect back on, after his passing, with great appreciation and gratitude. Grandmaster Pan was a fantastic martial arts teacher and a great coach. However, to be honest, I do not miss the teachings anywhere near

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<sup>26</sup> Link to Article in Kitchener Waterloo Record addressing the passing of Grandmaster Pan: <https://www.therecord.com/news-story/7425632-lifetimes-grand-master-pan-the-iron-fist-was-a-man-of-kindness-and-mystery/>

as much as I miss my personal relationship with Grandmaster Pan. I miss showing him pictures of my baby girl and seeing him smile. I miss shaking his hand before and after each class. I miss those times that something would strike him as funny and he would smirk and giggle to himself. I miss him getting upset when reflecting on his own teachers; situations that profoundly demonstrated the love he had for them and the role his mentors played in his life experience. I miss Grandmaster Pan the man. However, spending so much quality time with Grandmaster Pan makes me feel that a significant portion of our relationship has been embodied in a way that allows me to bring some of him with me; allowing his relationship a chance to still influence my daily life experience.

Grandmaster Pan would often repeat this saying “Relationship #1” and he truly meant it. Grandmaster Pan often said that he would rather have a small group of loyal students he loved, then a big money-making club. He wanted to know about who we were outside of the club, at work, with family, at leisure. Grandmaster Pan would never forget your birthday, and I really miss those predictable birthday calls where he would sing happy birthday over the phone. He taught us martial arts, but his gift to us was relational. Immediately following the visitation for Grandmaster Pan, a number of the core students came back to my house to eat and visit. That night is one I will always value. Many of the people in the room were from Kitchener-Waterloo, where our club is located, but past students from Toronto, Halifax, Calgary, and even Delaware were in my living room sharing stories about their experiences with Grandmaster Pan. An interesting aspect of those conversations is that they often circled back to the idea that Grandmaster Pan was a special type of relationship, something that is difficult to articulate but immediate to experientially understand when in his presence. Grandmaster Pan’s presence made him different than other teachers, an idea that is hard to articulate but that was felt energetically

by those close to him. He was the embodiment of Iron and Silk; the Embodiment of Kung Fu. He was both highly critical and highly supportive, strict and loving, and he would push you past your limits and encourage you to envision a higher version of yourself. Students talked about their first meeting with Grandmaster Pan, and how this meaningful relationship was established intentionally by Pan right from the beginning. These reflections heavily mirrored what was talked about during the findings chapter regarding the centrality of relationship and lead me to reflect more deeply on my own introduction to Grandmaster Pan. When reflecting on my student relationship to Grandmaster Pan, I find truth in this definition of a teacher presented by Bruce Lee,

*A teacher, a really good teacher, is never a giver of truth: he is a guide, a pointer to truth. Therefore, a good teacher, or, more appropriately, a guide, studies each student individually and helps to awaken the student to explore himself, both internally and externally, and ultimately to integrate himself with his being. All in all, a teacher acts as a catalyst, and not only must he have a tremendous understanding: he must also possess a sensitive mind with great flexibility and adaptability (Wong, 2013, p. 204).*

It is personally moving to reflect on how this period in my life, over a decade ago, was really the beginning of a process of self-examination and a new form of therapeutic engagement with my martial arts practice. This was my personal low point, and it is so interesting to look back now. Since that time, I have married, witness the birth of my daughter, went back to graduate school for MA and PHD studies, and found a rewarding full-time teaching job; in addition to my eye healing completely. Along that journey there were a lot of struggles and points of crisis, but my practice of Grandmaster Pan's Chinese Martial Arts has been a constant grounding and stabilizing force in my life through it all. My use of the Martial Arts as an escape

and as a therapeutic tool during my recovery is what inspired me to explore and pay close attention to the dynamic healing properties of the art form and science of Grandmaster Pan.



*Figure 9: Grandmaster Pan and Author (Author's Collection)*

Having completed this dissertation process, while grieving Grandmaster Pan's passing, I feel overwhelmed with feelings of gratitude and appreciation for having his influence in my life. Grandmaster Pan represents the most unique, authentic, and transformative relationship I have had in my life. I present this dissertation as a tribute to Grandmaster Pan, as a teacher, as a martial artist, and as a man. Thank you, Grandmaster Pan! Your teaching of Iron and Silk martial arts, and of the true meaning of intentional and authentic relationship will never leave us. My goal going forward is to make you proud and to honour your teachings.

## **Conclusion**

This study explores the relationship between the philosophical tradition of Phenomenology and the school of philosophical Taoism. The practice of traditional martial arts is often contextualized within the framework of philosophical and religious systems such as Taoism and Buddhism. From the lens of Taoist philosophy, the martial artist is viewed as being in a practice

of expression and transformation. Adding the phenomenological notion of embodiment to this understanding adds a valuable layer of depth. While Taoism is focused on the connection between the individual and the spiritual, in Phenomenology the focus is more on the individual's meaning-making or interpretation of conscious experience. The previous statement is an overly simplistic distinction, but it can be useful in beginning to frame the basis of the compatibility between these philosophical traditions. Phenomenology does consider the spiritual, and Taoism does consider the psychological, but their emphasis differs in how ideas like self are understood. In phenomenology, self is considered in relation to one's engagement, interpretation, and interaction within an intersubjective experiential life world. In Taoism, self is intimately connected to the Tao manifesting the perception of individualized subjective experience.

Throughout this study, I explored how being a martial artist is something cultivated and embodied within the student, and how this cultivated-embodied practice becomes a vehicle for transforming self. However, none of this is as meaningful and transformative without an underlying foundation of relationship that provides the intersubjective connection between teacher and the student. Thus, **martial arts are a cultivated-embodied-relational and intersubjective practice as the martial artist engages in the approximation of the universal Tao.**

### **Theoretical and Practical Contributions of the Study**

#### **Theoretical contributions.**

One of the theoretical contributions of this study is the attempt to engage Taoism and phenomenology to develop a holistic understanding of the practice of the traditional martial art of Kung Fu. The theoretical contributions of this study lie in the interplay between Taoism and phenomenological explorations in discussion of the martial arts as an immersive transformative

leisure practice. Consideration of theoretical and practical contributions of this study address Research Question #3: *How does Kung Fu inform an experiential understanding of leisure?* Phenomenology and Taoism offer uniquely specific language for discussing the complex and dynamically interrelated physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of experience. Phenomenological terms like embodiment, essence, and lifeworlds add useful language to deepen our exploration and interpretations of human experience; just as Taoist adds Taiji, Yin Yang, and Wu Wei as a language for discussing the complicated interplay between individual and spiritual. The Taoism inspired phenomenological lens used in this dissertation provided linguistic tools to get as close to the experience of Iron and Silk as possible. As leisure studies expands and growth in its diversity and depth of cultural exploration, it will be essential to develop an eclectic approach to nurture the concepts of utility from each tradition to get our language closer and closer to a direct reflection of experience.

A second theoretical contribution of this study lies in the use of Chinese philosophy within recreation and leisure studies. Studies, such as my master's thesis, often focus on the martial arts in general, or on the traditional Japanese arts like Karate, Judo, and Ju-Jitsu. An example of this can be found in one of the first academic journal articles to deal with the Martial Arts within Leisure Studies; a study on the social world of Karate, published in Leisure Studies (James & Jones, 1982). A unique aspect of my study is a specific focus on the Chinese martial art of Kung Fu. Focusing on Kung Fu specifically, introduces a unique philosophical dimension to this project. I view Chinese philosophy, and Taoism specifically, as a fascinating lens to add the interpretation of leisure experiences; especially experiences heavily focused on the dimensions of self (mind, body, soul, spirit) like yoga and other highly immersive practices.

A third theoretical contribution comes from what can be known from Grandmaster Pan and his unique lineage, historical context, and immersive practice of Kung Fu. Grandmaster Pan embodies the philosophical principles written about in this dissertation more than he speaks or preaches them. He is a highly unique example of someone who literally lives a practice; the rich historically and cultural contextualized practice of traditional Chinese martial arts. Therefore, I argue for the unique value in immersing in idiographic exploration as a way of studying the depths of a practice influence on a specific individual, like the students of Grandmaster Pan.

### **Practical contributions.**

Insights and reflections presented in this dissertation can be practically applied in three key ways. First, challenging the notion of transactional exchange as key to understanding interpersonal connections, and presenting a relationship-informed conversation about intersubjective interaction. Second, this study can inform future generations of teachers and coaches through a more holistic understanding of leadership philosophy in the arenas of sport, training, education, and personal development. Third, this study provides a concrete example and philosophical language for further academic research by the next generation of leisure studies scholars.

In our modern North American culture, our understanding of interpersonal interactions tends to center on what the costs and benefits of participation and involvement are for the individual or for the provider. While there is a theoretical value in this, it tends to ignore some highly influential human qualities that can add deep meaning and increased intersubjective engagement between teacher and student, or coach and player. One of Grandmaster Pan's most common sayings is "Relationship #1, relationship most important." It is difficult to fully explain this idea without explaining how Grandmaster Pan envisions his students and why he teaches. He

teaches for the next generation, because he loves his students, and because he wants his students to evolve and transcend their previously believed limitations. Grandmaster Pan could have easily developed a much larger student base, and could offer well attended training seminars, but his focus is not on generating business but rather on developing a sense of family and interconnection amongst his loyal group of roughly ten regular students. Grandmaster Pan teaches by skilfully engaging his students in a relational centered process of cultivation, embodiment, and transformation through the practice of martial arts.

Applying the concluding statement that emphasizes the **martial arts as a cultivated-embodied-relational and intersubjective practice**, the second practical contribution from this dissertation links to the above point about relationship as central to the student development process. These ideas have significant relevance to leadership philosophy in general, more specifically in areas of personal instruction such as teaching and coaching. Throughout this study, I explored the underlying foundation of relationship that provides the intersubjective connection between teacher and student and the importance of this to embodying Iron and Silk. Often in teaching and coaching, an emphasis is on technique and methods of approach. However, unless a real and meaningful connection is established between teacher and student, the learning will be a one-sided attempt at knowledge transmission at a primarily cognitive level. I see this every day in my own professional life. I am a full-time college professor and I teach a program that averages roughly one hundred students each year. I have learned that no PowerPoint design, clever learning activity, or stimulating discussion question can add more to the learning environment than developing a real human connection with students. Once I engage students relationally, that new PowerPoint design, activity, or discussions are invigorated by the manifest involvement, trust, and curiosity of students. I used to think teaching was all about lecture

preparation, yet I learned throughout my experiences with this dissertation that we are fooling ourselves if we devalue the fundamentally transformational human to human intersubjective connection that is taking place in the classroom (or on the court, field, or rink) and providing the bedrock for cultivation, embodiment, and transformation.

Finally, the third practical contribution of this dissertation is the potential to provide guidance and an example to future leisure scholars interested in a philosophical examination of mind-body practices such as yoga, meditation, or even immersive activities like sport, dance, and music. Ideas presented in this study provide a linguistic starting point and a variety of theoretical lenses for deepening our understanding of the role immersive leisure can play in personal development and transformative experiences. Also, my hope is that this dissertation will provide motivation for future scholars to dive deep into the histories of practices like the Chinese martial arts and value the rich traditions of these cultural activities even if there is a currently a lack of academic literature directly discussing their topic. I believe that Chinese philosophy generally, and Chinese martial arts philosophy specifically, offer a unique orientation for understanding human experience and human interpretations of reality.

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

**Hello!** I am writing you to invite you to participate in a study being conducted on the Chinese Martial Arts. The study, *Kung Fu is Inside the Body: A Phenomenology of Cultivating Martial Arts Practices*, is being conducted by Doctoral student Mike Mainland, under the supervision of Dr. Susan Arai, from the Department of Recreation and Leisure studies at the University of Waterloo.

**What is the study for?** Using the Iron and Silk Kung Fu club of Grandmaster Pan, this study will attempt to articulate the essence of Chinese Martial Arts teachings, both physical and philosophical, and how these teachings are communicated and transmitted to his students. At the root of this is resolving a way for both phenomenology (social constructionism) and the Chinese philosophical system of Taoism to be explored as complimentary, yet distinct, theoretical frameworks for illuminating elements of what it means to be a martial artist within Grandmaster Pan's system of Kung Fu. Methodologically, phenomenology enables us to explore the co-creation of meaning and the dynamic layers of human experience.

**How was I selected to participate in the study?** All participants invited to partake in the study have been selected using purposeful sampling based on their involvement with the club as a student of Grandmaster Pan.

**What will I have to do?** Participants will be asked to engage in three interviews over a six month period, and will have video data captured from in-class participation within Grandmaster Pan's martial arts club.

**Do I have to participate?** At any point in the study, you may refuse to answer any questions that are asked, if you wish. In addition, you can also stop your participation in the study at any time.

**Is my information protected?** All information you provide will be confidential. This means that your name will not be connected to the information you provide. To support the findings of the research, quotations from your responses will be reported but we will use of pseudonyms to protect your identity (and that of the others participants in the Outdoor Classroom). Your real name will not be attached to interviews, questionnaires, observation notes, and will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this study. In addition, paper documents and audio-recordings will be erased at the end of the study.

This project, *Kung Fu is Inside the Body*, has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (file #19704). If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:

- Mike Mainland, PhD Student, University of Waterloo, email: [mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca)
- Susan Arai, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo (Tel: 519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at [sarai@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sarai@uwaterloo.ca)).

Concerns about your involvement in the study may also be forwarded to the Director in the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo, Dr. Maureen Nummelin (Tel: 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005; email [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca)).

We hope that you will be able to participate!  
Sincerely,

Mike Mainland  
Doctoral Student  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Susan Arai  
Associate Professor  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

## APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

**What is the study about?** The study, *Kung Fu is Inside the Body: A Phenomenology of Cultivating Martial Arts Practices*, is being conducted by Doctoral student Mike Mainland, under the supervision of Dr. Susan Arai, from the Department of Recreation and Leisure studies at the University of Waterloo.

Using the Iron and Silk Kung Fu club of Grandmaster Pan, this study will attempt to articulate the essence of Chinese Martial Arts teachings, both physical and philosophical, and how these teachings are communicated and transmitted to his students. At the root of this is resolving a way for both phenomenology (social constructionism) and the Chinese philosophical system of Taoism to be explored as complimentary, yet distinct, theoretical frameworks for illuminating elements of what it means to be a martial artist within Grandmaster Pan's system of Kung Fu. Methodologically, phenomenology enables us to explore the co-creation of meaning and the dynamic layers of human experience.

**What will I be asked to do?** Participants will be asked to engage in three, one-hour, interviews over a six month period, and will have video data captured from in-class participation within Grandmaster Pan's martial arts club.

**How are my rights being protected?** All information you provide will be confidential. This means that your name will not be connected to the information you provide. To support the findings of the research, quotations from your responses will be reported but we will use of pseudonyms to protect your identity. Your real name will not be attached to interviews, questionnaires, observation notes, and will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this study. In addition, paper documents and audio-recordings will be erased at the end of the study. Confidentiality will be maintained unless disclosure of information is required by law. For example, in instances where the intent to harm self or others is disclosed to the researcher.

**If I agree to participate now, can I withdraw from the study later?** You may withdraw from the study at any stage in the process by informing the researcher.

**How will I find out about the results of the study?** A written summary of the findings will be made available to you either by email. Additional reports may appear in academic journals and conference presentations; however, the specific identity of the participants in the study will not be disclosed (Except for Grandmaster Pan and Dianne – due to their centrality to understanding the topic).

**Has this research been approved by an ethics committee?** This project, *Kung Fu is Inside the Body*, has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (file #19704).

**Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns?** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:

- **Mike Mainland**, PhD Student, University of Waterloo, Email: [mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca)
- **Susan Arai**, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo (Tel: 519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at [sarai@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sarai@uwaterloo.ca)).

Concerns about your involvement in the study may also be forwarded to the Director in the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo, Dr. Maureen Nummelin (Tel: 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005; email [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca)).

We would like to express our gratitude for your contribution to the study!

Sincerely,

Mike Mainland  
Doctoral Student  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Susan Arai  
Associate Professor  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** Kung Fu is Inside the Body: A Phenomenology of Cultivating Martial Arts Practices

**Researchers:** Mike Mainland & Susan Arai, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Faculty of Applied Health Studies, University of Waterloo

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Mike Mainland of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo.
- I have had the opportunity to ask Mike Mainland any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time by advising the researchers of this decision.
- I am also aware that my information will be kept confidential and that my name will not be used in reports and presentations. I understand that answers I provide may be used word for word; however a made up name will be used in place of my real name. I understand that confidentiality will be maintained unless disclosure of information is required by law. For example, in instances where the intent to harm self or others is disclosed to the researcher.
- I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.
- I am aware that by signing this consent form, I am not waiving my legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.
- I understand this project has received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (file# 19704)
- I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact **Mike Mainland**, PhD Student, University of Waterloo ([mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca)) or **Dr. Susan Arai**, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo (Tel: 519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at [sarai@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sarai@uwaterloo.ca)) or **Dr. Maureen Nummelin**, Director in the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo (Tel: 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005; email [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca)).
- I understand all of the information that has been provided to me about this research study, and I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.  
 YES  NO
- I agree to the use of verbatim quotations (with the use of a pseudonym) in any report or presentation that comes of this research.  
 YES  NO
- I agree to have my responses to the questionnaire audio recorded and to have a training session videotaped.  
 YES  NO
- I would like to receive a summary of the research results.  
 YES  NO

I would like to have a copy of the executive summary mailed to me. (Please provide mailing address below.)

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
Province \_\_\_\_\_  
Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Name (*please print*): \_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To be completed by researcher:

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the participant.

Researchers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**To be completed if you choose to withdraw from the study (Verbal or Written):**

\_\_\_\_\_ wishes to withdraw from participation in Kung Fu is Inside the Body study.

Please indicate below your wishes regarding your data:

- I wish that specific observations of me not be taken but acknowledge that the researcher will continue to make general observations of the Iron and Silk martial arts group. I will allow data previously collected to be used in this study.
- I wish that specific observations of me not be taken but acknowledge that the researcher will continue to make general observations of the Iron and Silk martial arts group. I will not allow data previously collected to be used in this study.

Signature of the Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: LETTER OF APPRECIATION

[Insert Date]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in the research project, *Kung Fu is Inside the Body* and for taking the time to share your experiences with us. As you are aware, this research project was being conducted by Mike Mainland & Susan Arai of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo.

Feedback about the results of the study will be available in [insert month], and as you indicated on your informed consent form.

If you have any concerns, questions or further comments about this research project, please do not hesitate to contact Mike Mainland, PhD Student, University of Waterloo ([mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mdmainla@uwaterloo.ca)) or **Dr. Susan Arai**, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo (Tel: 519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at [sarai@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sarai@uwaterloo.ca)) or **Dr. Maureen Nummelin**, Director in the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (Tel: 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005; email [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca)).

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Mike Mainland  
Doctoral Student  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Susan Arai  
Associate Professor  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

## APPENDIX E: INITIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GRAND MASTER PAN

Four Initial Phenomenological Questions based on the Lifeworld Existentials  
(Four Lifeworld Existentials = Lived Body, Lived Time, Lived Relationship, and Lived Space)

**Q1: What does Kung Fu mean to you?** (Phenomenological Meaning, Lived Body)

Q2: Can you tell me about your practice of Kung Fu today? (Immediate/Direct Experience, Lived Body)

Q3: What is it like teaching Kung Fu to your students? (Lived Relationship, Lived Time)

Q4: How does this club, influence your teaching and training? (Lived Space)

Although the interviewer will attempt to probe the participant in a manner that focuses elaboration on topics related to the four lifeworld existentials, those specific terms will be avoided to leave room for respondents to use their own situated terminology and to see how they internally make sense of it. For example, questions like: how did it feel to teach that class? How does your own training influence how you teach within the club? How did the other students in the class shape your approach to teaching? Etc.

Probes will include common elaboration cues, such as:

- Can you say more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- Can you explain what you meant by \_\_\_\_\_?
- How did \_\_\_\_\_ come up in class?
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ happened, what was that like for you?
- You used the term \_\_\_\_\_, what does that term/idea mean to you?
- How does it influence your training practices
- Can you provide a story/example/metaphor of \_\_\_\_\_ (event/situation they mentioned)?
- Even though this is asking for a story/example, it will stay focused on immediate experience of the participant and will be a sideways approach to lifeworld concepts.

**PROBES** will be used to get at the personal and immediate experience of the participant. The goal is to use these probes to encourage phenomenologically rich elaborations and clarifications of their personal experiences within the club.

**Additional Note:** Although probes will ask participants to consider different aspects of their experience, there will be a focus by the researcher to continually come back to a wholistic understanding of their experience. In phenomenology, the whole and the part need to stay together through a focus on the direct and immediate experience of the individual participant.

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

### Interview Setting:

Interviews will take place right after class sessions, in a meeting room within the training facility.

The interviews will consist of two main parts:

- 1) Discussion of their direct experience in the class
- 2) Discussion of the lifeworld existentials (Body, Relationship, Space, and Time) through probing questions that focus the participant on those aspects of their experience related to the lifeworld.

### Initial Question:

(Focused on addressing the *immediate and direct experience* of the participant, as a starting point)

Q: You just finished a training session with the club, can you tell me what that was like for you? Taking the lead (topic wise and word usage wise) from the participant's initial response, the interviewer will make use of the four lifeworld existentials (Lived Body, Lived Relationship, Lived Space, and Lived Time) to create follow up probing questions focused on the participant's direct experience of the club. Although the interviewer will attempt to probe the participant in a manner that focuses elaboration on topics related to the four lifeworld existentials, those specific terms will be avoided to leave room for respondents to use their own situated terminology and to see how they internally make sense of it. These follow up questions will focus on their relationships within the club through an exploration of "lived relationship"; their engagement in the club setting as a "lived space"; their experience of the training moment as "lived time"; and their experience of internalizing the martial arts practice taught by Grandmaster Pan as "lived body."

Probes will include common elaboration cues, such as:

- Can you say more about \_\_\_\_? Or, Can you explain what you meant by \_\_\_\_?
- How did \_\_\_\_\_ come up in class?
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ happened, what was that like for you?
- You used the term \_\_\_\_\_, what does that term/idea mean to you?
- How does it influence your training practices
- Can you provide a story/example/metaphor of \_\_\_\_\_ (event/situation they mentioned)?
- Even though this is asking for a story/example, it will stay focused on immediate experience of the participant and will be a sideways approach to lifeworld concepts.

**PROBES** will be used to get at the personal and immediate experience of the participant

- The goal is to use these probes to encourage phenomenologically rich elaborations and clarifications of their personal experiences within the club.

**Additional Note:** Although probes will ask participants to consider different aspects of their experience, there will be a focus by the researcher to continually come back to a wholistic understanding of their experience. In phenomenology, the whole and the part need to stay together through a focus on the direct and immediate experience of the individual participant.

## **APPENDIX G: DESIGNING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEW**

**Questions to Include in a Phenomenological Interview** (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 60)

- Descriptive – Please could you tell me what you do in your job?
- Narrative – Can you tell me about how you came to get the job?
- Structural – So what are all the stages involved in the process of dispatching orders.
- Contrast – What are the main differences between a good day and a bad day?
- Evaluative – How do you feel after a bad day of work?
- Circular – What do you think your boss thinks about how you do your job?
- Comparative – How do you think your life would be if you worked somewhere else?
- Prompts – Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- Probes – What do you mean by ‘unfair’?

**Questions to Avoid in a Phenomenological Interview** (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 60)

- Over-empathic – I can image that your job is quite boring, is that right?
- Manipulative – You’ve described your job as quite repetitive. Is it even worse than that?
- Leading – So I don’t suppose you’d say that your job is rewarding?
- Closed – So you’ve been working here for five years then?

## **APPENDIX H: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ATTITUDE AND REFLECTION**

The following attitudinal constituents and active operative procedures have been identified in the practice of phenomenological reflection (Wertz, 2011, p. 132)

### **Constituents of Basic Attitude**

1. Empathic immersion in the situation described.
2. Slowing down and dwelling in each moment of experience.
3. Magnification and amplification of the situation as experienced.
4. Suspension of belief and employment of intense interest in experiential detail.
5. Turning from objects to their personal and relational significance (Wertz, 2011, p. 132)

### **Procedures of Reflection on Individual Examples of the Subject Matter**

1. Identification of the “existential baseline” or temporal background of the experience.
2. Reflecting on the relevance of each moment of the experience, what is revealed about the phenomenon?
3. Explicating implicit meanings that are not thematically clear
4. Distinguishing the various constituents and their roles or contributions to the whole experience.
5. Understanding the relations among constituents and their roles or contributions to the whole experience.
6. Thematising recurrent modes of experience, meaning, and motifs.
7. Interrogating opacity – extending and acknowledging the limits of comprehension (end of page 132)
8. Imaginatively varying constituents in order to identify their mutual implications and essential, invariant structures.
9. Formulating descriptive language for psychological knowledge fusing everyday parlance, received scientific terms, or philosophical discourse);
10. Verifying, modifying, and reformulating findings after returning to data.
11. Using received concepts as a heuristic to guide descriptive reflections. (Wertz, 2011, p. 133)

### **Procedures for Achieving General Findings**

1. Identifying potentially general insights in individual structures.
2. Comparing individual examples of the experience for general, even if implicit, invariant characteristics.
3. Imaginative variation of individual examples to identify generally invariant features and organizations (Wertz, 2011, p. 133).