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On the Canonicity of the 1947 Edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*

Jin Yan*

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Abstract: The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan: Its Effects and Practical Applications*, an English translation of the original Chinese work, is by far the first discovered English publication systematically introducing the knowledge and skills of taijiquan (previously known as *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*). The 1947 edition had long remained in oblivion in Chinese academic circles, although it paved the way for the extensive popularization of taijiquan and has exerted a far-reaching impact on the English-speaking world. This paper applies the four dimensions of canonicity (rich content, substantial creativity, time-and-space transcendency, infinite readability) to examine the aesthetic value of the English text. The purpose is to reveal the understanding and reception of taijiquan among English readers, shed light on the English translation of the taijiquan culture, and promote the canonization of taijiquan as a representative of fine traditional Chinese culture and its integration into global cultures.

Keywords: taijiquan, the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*, canonicity, English translation of (taijiquan) culture

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Introduction

Taijiquan, as a major form of martial arts with multiple attributes (attack, defense, health preservation, health care), is a treasure of traditional Chinese culture. The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan: Its Effects and Practical Applications* (hereinafter referred to as the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*, or the 1947 edition), is an English translation of the original Chinese work and is the first discovered English publication systematically introducing the knowledge and skills of taijiquan (previously known as *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*). The 1947 edition has been reprinted 17 times by varied publishers abroad over the past 70 years, playing a critical role in spreading and popularizing taijiquan in the English-speaking world. As a product of cultural exchange between Chinese and Western sports in modern times, the 1947 edition embodies the cultural awareness and confidence of Chinese intellectuals, and cultural elites who searched, systematized, and inherited the cultural achievements of Chinese martial arts and took the initiative to translate them into foreign languages. The result was a special contribution to the canonization of the 1947 edition (Jin, 2019). Taijiquan, as a major form of Chinese martial arts, is different from other types of traditional Chinese culture in terms of translation and dissemination because the core of taijiquan does not lie in texts but in direct personal experience (grasping and practicing gestures, footwork, breathing techniques, etc.). The essence of taijiquan culture is retained and passed down either orally or in writing. As Wu Wenan said: "The translations of writings on martial arts, along with the translations and interpretations of codes and records, belongs to in-depth cultural exchanges, which are the essence of martial arts translations and dissemination" (Wu, 2019, p. 165).

The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* was published by Kelly & Walsh Limited in Shanghai. The author was Yearning K. Chen, a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and taijiquan who studied under Tian Zhaolin. Chen is the author of two publications, i.e. *Shanghai Real Estate Directory (Shanghai Dichan Daquan)* and *The Collection of Taiji Quan, Dao, Jian, Gan, and Sanshou*, but little is known about his life (Chen, 2018). To be precise, Yearning K. Chen is the author of the original Chinese work, or source text (ST), while the English translator of the target text (TT) is Kuo-Shui Chang, who was in collaboration with Chitao P. H. Tan, the planner of the publication, and Kwei Chen and Hertz C. K. Ke, two professors in charge of proofreading and revision (Jin, 2019). The 1947 edition is worth reading and studying, even if the identity of its initial translator has yet to be verified. It has been a long time since the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* was first published, and there are not many copies still available. Besides, the 1947 edition was supposed primarily

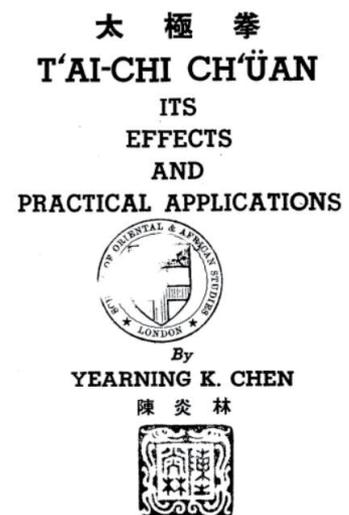


Figure1

to target English readers. As a result, the 1947 edition has long remained in oblivion among Chinese academic circles, and no relevant studies have been done. Its canonical qualities and academic values need to be further explored. This paper applies the four dimensions of canonical sources (rich content, substantial creativity, time-and-space transcendency, infinite readability) to examine the aesthetic value of the 1947 edition. The purpose is to reveal the understanding and reception of taijiquan among English readers in the 20th century, shed light on the English translation causes of taijiquan culture, and promote the veneration of taijiquan as a representative of fine traditional Chinese culture and its integration into global cultures.

The Literary Canonization of Taijiquan

The Chinese term “经典” (*jingdian*), which dates back to the Han and Wei dynasties (202 BC–266 AD), has three main meanings. First, *jingdian* refers to Confucian classics of exemplary significance. There is an example in the “Biography of Sun Bao” in *Book of Han (Han Shu)* by Ban Gu, “Duke of Zhou was a great sage while Duke of Shao was a man of virtue. Even so, there were times when they did not get along, as was recorded in the *jingdian*. But this did no harm to either of their images.” One more example can be found in the “Narratives” (*Xushi*) in *All about Historiography (Shitong)* by Liu Zhiji, “The so-called *jingdian* is what was said and written by sages and men of virtue.” Second, *jingdian* refers to religious texts. This can be exemplified by a quote from the Introduction of *The Lotus Sutra*, “The Buddhas, the Sage Lord (Narendrasimhā), who teach the subtle and supreme *jingdian* (sutra), are also seen.” Third, *jingdian* refers to canonical works. Yet, as society changes with time, cultural communication increases, and reading scope extends, further enriching *jingdian* with new meanings. *Jingdian* is no longer restricted to works by sages and men of virtue, and some forms of unwritten literature, such as orally transmitted folk songs and epics have been placed into this category. The English correspondence of *jingdian* can be “canon” or “classics.” The word “canon” originated from the Greek/Latin word “*kanōn*,” which originally referred to “a reed,” thus “a rule of measurement.” The adjective form of “canon” in Old English evolved from the French word “*canonie*” (canon regular) and the Latin word “*canonicus*” (according to rule). With Christianity was accepted by the Roman Empire, canon was also used to refer to priests, rituals, and religious texts in religious life. Subsequently, “canon” was endowed with strong religious associations, and its scope of application remained strictly in the religious realm until the 18th century. By contrast, the word “classics” comes from the Latin word “*classicus*” (“citizens belonging to the highest class”) and is chiefly used in Western literature. For clarity, “canon” as used in the cultural realm is adopted in this paper and corresponds to the Chinese term *jingdian*. Synonymous with “model” and “standard,” canon also refers to a list of canonical and exemplary works in writing. Its formation, or rather, canonization, is a long, complex process. “(A canonical work) has to be repeatedly read, interpreted and evaluated before its value can be gradually recognized and its canonical status is eventually established among later generations” (Liu, 2006, p. 47).

Taijiquan, a major form of Chinese martial arts, is conducive to body exercising, limb stretching, and physical and mental cultivation. It is also a health preservation approach that attaches importance to internal regulation, meridian (*jingluo*) dredging, and *qi*-blood circulation. Based on the taiji principle of “*yin* and *yang*” from ancient Chinese culture, taijiquan combines the merits of various areas such as Yi-ology, the study of military strategies, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), health preservation, and aesthetics. Thanks to the relentless efforts of generations of practitioners, taijiquan spread from the grassroots to the upper class and then returned to the grassroots by spreading at schools and among the public. Gradually, taijiquan was recognized, accepted, appreciated, improved, inherited, and interpreted by more and more practitioners and researchers. Leaving legends and controversies over taijiquan founders and origin aside, the writing of taijiquan has spanned three centuries since the emergence of *On Taijiquan (Tiajiquan Lun)* by Wu Yuxiang (1812–1880), a canonical work that made a name for taijiquan in the late Qing Dynasty and beyond. Later, the first recognized work on taijiquan, i.e. *The Study of Taijiquan (Taijiquan Xue)* by Sun Lutang, was published in 1919. Since then, the practice and study of taijiquan has become a norm. Taijiquan has spread to more than 150 countries and regions, with nearly 300 million practitioners worldwide. In 2006, taijiquan was included in the first batch of national-level intangible cultural heritage items of China. Since 1999, taijiquan enthusiasts around the world have celebrated the World Tai Chi and Qigong Day (WTCQD) on the last Saturday of April every year. In December 2020, taijiquan was finally inscribed on the *UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* after 12 years of endeavor. The above events are all indispensable parts of the complicated historical evolution of taijiquan, which contributes to cultural continuity in contemporary China. Retaining national feelings and gaining widespread recognition, taijiquan has become culturally authoritative and a universality.

The translation of works on taijiquan into Western languages began as early as the 17th century when missionary Sinologists carried out more in-depth research into Chinese philosophies, religions, and societies. Among these early missionaries were Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) from Italy and Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628) from Flanders. They translated and introduced *I Ching (Book of Changes)*, a masterpiece known as “the first among the classics and a source of wisdom” to the West, which marked the beginning of Confucianism promotion in Europe (Li & Zong, 2017). Charles Le Gobien (1653–1708), a French Jesuit who was for a time committed to introducing “Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate” (*Taiji Tu Shuo*) by Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073). German Sinologist Georg Von der Gabelentz (1840–1893) got his Ph.D. degree in 1876 with his translation and study of the Chinese and Manchu versions of “Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate” (Ma & Ren, 1997, p. 93). While Western learning was spreading to the East, many British scholars also had extensive access to Chinese culture and began to “introduce Chinese learning, including traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to the West.” James Legge (1815–1897) translated *I Ching* into English and had it published in 1882, inspiring a passion for Chinese studies in elite scholars and arousing interest in China among the general public in the English-speaking world. A series of China-related works were successively published, including but not limited to *A Description of the Empire of China*

and Chinese-Tartary, Together with the Kingdoms of Korea, and Tibet (which included *Handbook of Pulse in Verse* by Gao Yangsheng, *Compendium of Materia Medica* by Li Shizhen, and some Taoist works on health preservation), *The Hsi Yuan Lu or Instructions to Coroners: An Essential Source for Chinese Medicine* translated by Herbert Allen Giles (1845–1935), as well as *A Modern Chinese Anatomist (Yi Lin Gai Cuo)* and *The Chinese Arts of Healing* translated by John Hepburn Dudgeon (1837–1901) (Qiu, 2011, pp. 44–84). These English translations became early publications that objectively introduced and promoted the methods and theories of TCM health preservation based on “yin and yang” and the “five elements” (metal, wood, water, fire, earth) among readers in the West, paving the way for the systematic translations of works on taijiquan into English in the 20th century.

In the late Qing Dynasty, Yang Luchan (1799–1872), a taijiquan master came to Beijing to teach taijiquan and made this form of martial arts famous among the upper class. Even so, the continuous, fluent movements, profound doctrines, as well as oral instructions and demonstrations dampened the general public’s initiative to learn and practice taijiquan and prevented overseas readers from approaching it. Later on, against the backdrop of social turmoil, new trends of thought emerged, such as “make the country strong by strengthening the people” and “save the nation through physical education.” And many people with lofty ideals advocated practicing Chinese martial arts, reviving the spirit of the Chinese nation, and keeping to the path of developing traditional Chinese sports to withstand the huge impact of Western sports culture on traditional Chinese sports culture. The Central Guoshu Institute, along with several local martial arts (*guoshu*) institutes, was established across the country during the Republic of China era (1912–1949). They gathered numerous famous martial artists, masters, and talents who worked together to protect and integrate many forms of traditional martial arts, and to further popularize the practice of martial arts at schools and among the public. A total of 32 works on taijiquan had been published by the 1930s, reaching “the first peak of taijiquan-themed writing in China” (Zhou, 2008, p. 69). The development and spread of taijiquan in China in the 20th century were covered by the English press of the time. Their coverage initiated Western readers’ interest in and concern for the society and culture of China. For example, news about the introduction of taijiquan to the schools of Nanjing for extensive practice twice appeared in “Nanking Notes,” a column of *The China Press* on September 28 and November 3, 1933. Another story that Yan Xishan practiced taijiquan for health preservation appeared in *The North-China Daily News* on July 5, 1934. Also, there was an advertisement for a taijiquan class at the Shanghai International Art Museum in *The Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury* on June 2, 1936 (Jin, 2019). Back then, the English translations of works on taijiquan were in their infancy. The *Collection of Taiji Quan, Dao, Jian, Gan and Sanshou*, which was edited by Yearning K. Chen and published in 1943, was an “expensive book” well received among readers and was widely acknowledged as “a masterpiece that reveals the essence of traditional taijiquan” (Shang, 2018, pp. 1–2). In the preface of the *Collection*, Chen concluded five reasons why taijiquan is difficult to pass down as part of the quintessence of Chinese culture and expressed his ambition to systematize authoritative works on taijiquan. Chen’s effort further advanced the canonization of taijiquan and paved the way for the English translations of

works on taijiquan. Below is an excerpt from the preface:

There are several reasons for its loss of essence. First, as people in modern society are busy, they practice taijiquan for recreation, health preservation or illness treatment, but not for skill improvement. Second, according to Chinese tradition, a school's secret skill or artistry is only passed down to its disciples, who, however, could be unworthy ones unable to preserve it. Third, secret skills are usually passed on through oral instructions or written manuals seldom shown to others. Fourth, with weaponry increasingly improved, martial arts are deemed useless, and few people go into them seriously, because they may be good for body toning and health preservation, but not good enough for repulsing the enemy on the battlefield. Fifth, although there is no shortage of talents in the vast land of China, as we are approaching the end of this era, men of superior attainments tend to escape from the secular world and move as far away as possible so as not to pass their skill to the wrong man and become an object of public denunciation. For the above reasons, this form of martial arts has been obscured, and later generations can only have half-baked knowledge and teach it wrongly, getting learners nowhere. It is such a pity that this quintessence of Chinese culture, as inimitable as the Guangling Melody (*Guangling San*), is about to become a lost art. When talking about martial arts, people in modern times all consider taijiquan to be the best. All masters of martial arts teach taijiquan, while all learners of martial arts prioritize the practice of it. It seems that taijiquan is the only choice for them. But in fact, Chinese martial arts are diverse, with each school having its own merits, and each style possessing its special strengths. We should have no bias against any school or any style. To get to the essence, one must satisfy the following four requirements: First, your body must be strong enough to bear diligent practice; second, you have a favorable environment and sufficient time; third, you must stay calm, serene, and perseverant; fourth, your master is highly competent and teaches in good faith. By satisfying the above four requirements, you are expected to grasp the essence of taijiquan. Otherwise, you are just trying to "climb trees to catch fish" ("get blood from a stone"). (Chen, 1988, pp. 1–2)

The excerpt shows how demanding and challenging it was to translate and spread works on taijiquan under the social and historical conditions of the times. The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* was eventually completed with the multifaceted cooperation of a taijiquan master, a publication planner, and a translator. Moreover, Kwei Chen and Hertz C.K. Kê, two English professors renowned overseas, proofread and revised the translation to ensure the linguistic quality and cultural impact of the ultimate English text. Thanks to their efforts, the 1947 edition was well-received among readers in the West. Having gone through the stages of secret oral transmission, systematization, and public dissemination, taijiquan then entered a new chapter of overseas distribution. The English text has stood the test of time and traveled through time and space, gaining increasing recognition and affirmation among later generations, and paving the way for taijiquan's canonization and constant re-canonization so that this sport can be shared by all.

The Authority of the 1947 Edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*

The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*, epitomizing the cultural essence of all works on taijiquan, was completed with the help of taijiquan master Yearning K. Chen and other scholars (Kwei Chen, Hertz C. K. Kê, etc.) known for their excellent command of English both in China and abroad, and was published and distributed by Kelly & Walsh Limited, a leading translation and publishing institution at the time. Their participation can be deemed the external factor that contributed to the 1947 edition's canonical status. Yet, there is bound to be a more essential characteristic that makes canon canonical, that is, canonicity. According to Liu Xiangyu (2006), canonicity includes the following four dimensions: rich content, substantial creativity, time-and-space transcendency, and infinite readability. By applying the four dimensions, this paper analyzes the 1947 edition in detail.

Rich Content

Canon is supposed to be rich in content. That is to say, "Canon should contain major ideas and concepts concerning human society, culture, life, nature, and the universe. Dialogues and debates on such ideas and concepts can help promote the progress and perfection of human societies, act upon the formation and accumulation of cultural traditions, and substantially enrich and benefit human life" (Liu, 2006, p. 51).

The original Chinese text (ST) of the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* (TT) remains missing. Even so, the 1947 edition, which was based on the gist of *Collection of Taijiquan, Dao, Jian, Gan and Sanshou*, another work by Yearning Chen, retains the main content and style of traditional taijiquan scriptures while incorporating some innovative ideas of modern publishing and science from the West. The 1947 edition can generally be divided into four sections; preface by the author, table of contents, main body, and index. The 183-page main body consists of 16 chapters in five parts and contains the "Grand Terminus Diagram" (*Taiji Tu*), an analytical diagram of body mechanics, some figures for footwork demonstration, and a few annotations. It is arguably an illustrated guide to physical activity designed under the influence of Western culture and modern science. In the Introduction of Part One, the following three questions are answered with clarity: a) What is taiji (*T'ai-Chi*)? b) What is pugilism? c) What is taijiquan (*T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*)? According to the passage, taiji (*T'ai-chi*, or the Grand Terminus) is "a subtle system of Chinese philosophy;" pugilism is "employed as a physical exercise to regulate the circulation of blood, stretch the ligaments, develop the bones, and deepen the breathing;" taijiquan (*T'ai-chi Ch'üan*) is "a branch of pugilism with an outer form of sparring but based upon the theories of the Grand Terminus" and "its formations follow the principles of the 'Grand Terminus Diagram' to which they adhere as regards *yin* and *yang*, insubstantiality and substantiality, firmness and softness, activity and inactivity" (Chen, 1947, pp. 1–3). Clear and concise, this well-organized passage specifies the subordinate sports attribute of taijiquan from the perspective

of modern science and introduces the efficacy and philosophical connotations of taijiquan as a sport. In addition, the scientific and utilitarian values of taijiquan are also discussed from the perspectives of physiology, kinetics, psychology, life ethics, and other modern sciences. Parts Three, Four, and Five cover the names and essentials of basic movements, 108 forms, and joint hand operations of taijiquan, and contain pictures for footwork demonstration and indexes. Overall, the three parts form an organic whole that is comprehensive, systematic, and all-inclusive.

Chapter Four of Part One (“Some Effects of the Practice of *T'ai-chi Ch'üan*”) is a comprehensive summary of taijiquan’s medical and healthcare benefits. According to Chapter Four: (Below is an excerpt from the English text)

T'ai-chi Ch'üan rebuilds one’s spirit and body.

T'ai-chi Ch'üan is closely related to Meditation. Long practice of Meditation may hinder blood circulation, but *T'ai-chi Ch'üan* helps to quicken it. It also helps to bring about the peace of mind and the exercise of breathing as desired by practitioners of Meditation.

T'ai-chi Ch'üan can change the weight of the body and adjusts the physique.

T'ai-chi Ch'üan clears the mind and strengthens the brain.

It promotes digestion and enables the stomach to absorb the nourishment from food more efficiently.

It makes unusually sound kidneys, which are a great help to all other parts of the body, especially in the neutralization of food poison.

It lowers blood pressure and softens blood vessels to prevent apoplexy.

It prevents lime formation or precipitation in the bones of old people, such as is likely to cause paraplegia.

It regulates blood circulation, thus preventing paralysis, cramps, etc.

It is diuretic and laxative and cleans the digestive organs.

It wastes no energy, causes no panting, promotes perspiration, eliminates wastes, and expels superfluous dampness and excessive water in the body.

It promotes the assimilation of nourishment from food, and so mends the bones and marrow. It makes one indefatigable, and capable of performing hard work.

It strengthens the skin, and keeps it free from boils, psoriasis, etc.

In a word, people suffering from neurasthenia, high blood pressure, anemia, tuberculosis, gastric and enteric diseases, paralysis, kidney diseases, etc., can all profit from the practice. Extraordinary results will come to even those with incurable diseases. However, people having serious cardiac diseases or in the 2nd or 3rd stage of tuberculosis must prolong the spells of practice gradually, instead of trying too hard at the start. (Chen, 1947, pp. 10–11)

The above excerpt is an early claim in English that taijiquan and traditional Chinese medicine are of the same origin and that practicing taijiquan can help prevent and treat illnesses and boost

health. Health is an eternal pursuit of all mankind. That is why taijiquan has continuously inspired the curiosity of overseas readers since it was first introduced to the English-speaking world. The overseas readers are willing to try it and test its medical efficacy in person. The study of taijiquan overseas, particularly in the English-speaking world over the past years has been evidence-based and comprehensive, focusing on the extensive application of taijiquan as an “exercise therapy” to health promotion, health preservation, and chronic disease management (Zhang & Zhu, 2018; Yang, Guo & Shi, 2018; Ma & Wang, 2018; Shi & Guo, 2018; Zhong, 2015; Wang, J., Wang, P., Xu & Liu, 2012).

Substantial Creativity

Canon features substantial creativity. That is to say, “(Canon is supposed to) include as many ideas and concepts as possible. More importantly, the discussion of those ideas and concepts must bring about inventions and creations, not just repeat what has been illustrated by predecessors” (Liu, 2006, p. 52). And the translation of a cultural canon is by no means a simple process of code-switching, but a complex conversion and transmission of cultural information. To better reveal the philosophical connotations of traditional Chinese culture embodied in taijiquan, the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* incorporated the historical essence of traditional Chinese culture and combined it with modern science from the West to interpret relevant historical, cultural, and scientific principles of taijiquan in a creative way. To ensure that target readers can read at ease and with interest, the 1947 edition combined the strategy of “domestication” with “foreignization,” and introduced the theory, techniques, and movements of taijiquan in clear and simple language. There are some notes and indexes, along with relevant analytical diagrams and movement schematics in the book, allowing readers to grasp taijiquan knowledge more directly and vividly. In this sense, the 1947 edition is of substantial creativity.

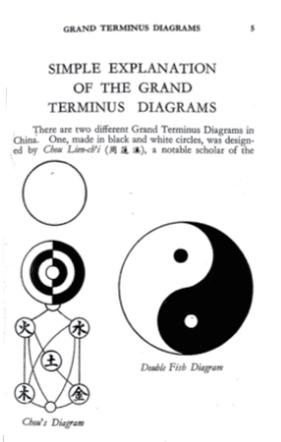


Figure 2

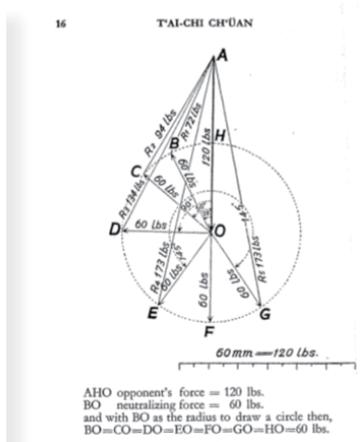


Figure 3

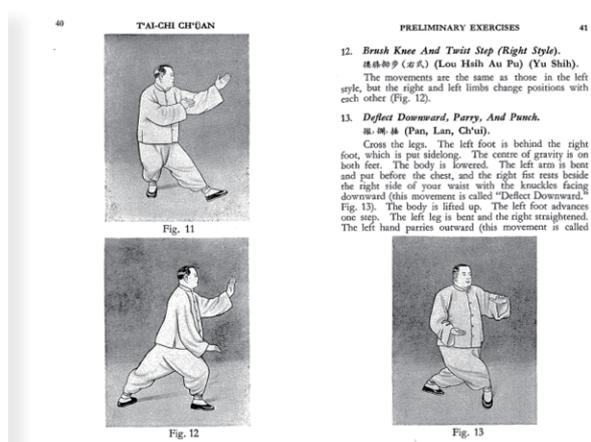


Figure 4

In Chapter Two of Part One, the origin of taijiquan and its theory are explained with the help of the “Grand Terminus Diagram” (*Taiji Tu*) (see Figure 2) created by Zhou Dunyi during the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), and a scientific analysis of taijiquan gestures and footwork (see Figure 4) is made by applying Issac Newton’s laws of motion (see Figure 3). The combination of Chinese and Western made it easier to interpret the historical and cultural connotations and scientific attributes of taijiquan, which made it easier for early English readers to learn about taijiquan culture and the special connotations of Chinese martial arts. The writing style, which has substantial creativity and transcends time and space, demonstrates the author’s effort to apply the theory of canonicity to the interpretation and canonization of taijiquan.

Part Three focuses on the translation of the names of taijiquan gestures and movements by using the strategy of “phonetic notations (Wade-Giles) + Chinese characters + English paraphrase.” For example, “野马分鬃” in ST is translated as “Partition Of Wild Horse’s Mane (Yeh Ma Fên Tsung)” in TT; “揽雀尾” in ST is translated as “Grasp Bird’s Tail (Lan Ch’iao Wei)” in TT. In Part Five, the basic essentials of taijiquan, namely “虚灵顶劲、含胸拔背、沉肩坠肘、坐腰松胯、尾闾中正、上下一致” are accurately rendered as “straightening the head, hollowing the chest and raising the back, lowering the shoulders and elbows, keeping the energy down to the navel psychic-center, loosening the waist and groin, setting right the sacrum, and co-ordination of the upper and lower parts of the body” (Chen, 1947, pp. 169–172). Moreover, the lesser-known “五法八门” (Five Methods and Eight Entrances) and “推手” (Joint Hand Operations) of taijiquan are also translated and defined in TT (see Table 1). Such inventions, signifying substantial creativity, enabled early English readers to grasp the basic gestures and movements of taijiquan, and paved the way for better understanding and repeated practice of this form of martial arts among readers worldwide.

Table 1 Contrastive List of Chinese and English Terms for Taijiquan Gestures and Footwork

Chinese	English	Chinese	English
五步	Five Steps	懂劲	To understand intrinsic energy
进步	Advance	定步推手	Joint Hand Operations with Fixed Steps
后退(退步)	Retreat	活步推手	Joint Hand Operations with Active Steps
左顾	Look To the Left	沾	Stick-to Upward
右盼	Look To the Right	黏	Attach
中定	Central Equilibrium	连	Join
八门	Eight Entrances	随	Follow-up
四正	Four Sides	开	Split
棚	Ward Off Slantingly Upward	合	Enclose
(捋)	Pull Back	拿	Fast Hold
挤	Press Forward	引	Feint
按	Push	化	Neutralize



四隅	Four Corners	發	Attack
採	Pull Down		
捌	Bend Backward		
肘	Elbow-stroke		
靠	Shoulder-stroke		

Time-and-Space Transcendency

Canon is supposed to transcend time and space, which concerns two aspects. “First, canonical authors and works are, as Ben Jonson said in praise of Shakespeare, ‘not of an age, but for all time;’ second, canonical authors and works should always be closely related to social reality, that is to say, what makes canon of any past era canonical is the fact that it is relevant to the present (the contemporary era), as well as the past” (Liu, 2006, p. 53). In short, canon should be contemporary. It has been more than half a century since the first publication and circulation of the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*. Due to the limitations of its historical background, the 1947 edition is distant from the global development of taijiquan culture in contemporary times. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that this pioneering and comprehensive book has contributed to the popularization and acceptance of taijiquan in the English-speaking world and even the whole world. In particular, Preface Three, which answers the question of “What is taijiquan?” is an incisive interpretation and linguistics reconstruction of *Taijiquan Treatise (Taijiquan Lun)*, a canonical work on taijiquan culture.

The *Taijiquan Treatise*, a 434-Chinese character piece, contains the philosophical traditions and classical martial arts theories of ancient China. The work applies the principle of “yin and yang” to expound the essentials and methods of the joint hand operations of taijiquan. Featuring smooth flow and concise language, the *Taijiquan Treatise* was widely regarded as a guideline by later generations of taijiquan practitioners and has become a canonic introduction to taijiquan theory. Its English translation, a 374-word piece, clearly establishes multiple concepts of dualism, such as “yin and yang,” “firmness and softness,” “activity and inactivity,” and “virtuality and reality” in taijiquan theory. Through the combination of “domestication” with “foreignization,” the parataxis-prominent and loosely structured source text (ST) was transformed into a hypotaxis-prominent and rigorously-structured target text (TT), which accords with the reading habit of English readers while retaining the rich content and concise style of the ST. The English translation, clear and concise, allows foreign readers to appreciate the charm of traditional Chinese culture in the ST without being troubled by the barrier of classical Chinese. Injecting new vigor and vitality into taijiquan culture, this English translation commendably transcends time and space in its own way. The following are three examples:

Example 1

ST1: 人刚我柔谓之走, 我顺人背谓之黏。

TT1: I take softness as my opponent takes firmness, and I take pursuing as he takes retreating. (Chen, 1947, p. 3)

According to ST1, when you play taijiquan with someone, you draw the opponent's force (i.e., the pressure exerted on you by the opponent) away by "walking away," so that the force hits nothing; you keep following the opponent's force while attaching to the opponent to gain a "force of attachment." ST1 illustrates how the idea of "overcoming firmness with softness" in the art of attack and defense is accomplished in taijiquan through the movements of "walking way" and "attaching." TT1, featuring two contrastive pairs ("softness and firmness;" "pursuing and retreating") and a parallel structure, concisely and vividly represents the rhetoric (antithetical parallelism) and lingering charm (rhythm and rhyme) of the original Chinese sentence (ST1). Although the verbs of "走" (walk away) and "黏" (attach to) in ST1 are omitted, the original style is retained in TT1, which therefore sounds exotic. In this way, the translation bypasses over-interpretation, which often creates cultural barriers and accords with the reading habit and aesthetic preference of target readers. The translation can also be deemed circumstantial evidence that the indefinite readability of taijiquan culture and its related canon should be attributed to the sport's primary reliance on the teachers' oral instructions and demonstrations and the learners' self-study and practice, and its scant attention to written expressions.

Example 2

ST2: 不偏不倚, 忽隐忽现。左重则左虚, 右重则右杳。仰之则弥高, 俯之则弥深。

TT2: There is no overdoing and no insufficiency; it bends and stretches as intended... the movements are exact in position and are invisible at times and visible at others. Too much weight on the left makes the left weak, and too much on the right weakens the right. It is lofty when it rises, and it is deep when it falls. (Chen, 1947, p. 3)

ST2 consists of four Chinese sentences, none of which have a subject. They are written in classical Chinese and are loosely structured. Featuring contrastive pairs of words, and four-character and five-character verses, ST2 conforms to the typical succinct formula of Chinese martial arts and shows the beauty of traditional Chinese culture. By contrast, TT2 strictly follows the rigorous rules of English syntax, adopting a demonstrative pronoun ("it") and a demonstrative adverb ("there") to achieve a fuzzy reference, and using multiple contrastive pairs of nouns, adjectives, and verbs to make the text intertextual, dynamic, and full of tension. Always allowing readers to utilize an endless imagination, TT2 appropriately creates an on-site experience and shows how exquisite, changeable and fluent the taijiquan movements can be. Any over-interpretation can deprive taijiquan of its intrinsic cultural connotations such as the combination of *yin* and *yang*, the alternation of quick and slow motions, and unrestrained harmony.

Example 3

ST3: 一羽不能加, 蠅虫不能落, 人不知我, 我独知人……察四两拨千斤之句, 显非力胜……立如平准, 活似车轮。

TT3: A feather cannot be added, and a fly cannot be placed. My opponent can by no means tell my intended movements, but I can foresee his actions. It is weighted as a balance, and active as a wheel. All these are principles of *T'ai-chi Ch'üan*. Besides, to follow the opponent instead of oneself is the characteristic of *T'ai-chi Ch'üan*, and to move a thousand catties with four taels is its efficiency. (Chen, 1947, pp. 3–4)

ST3 is concise, forceful, and to the point. By mentioning that a feather cannot be added, and that a fly cannot be placed, ST3 highlights the keen body perception of taijiquan practitioners when their performance reaches a higher level. The images of “balance” and “wheel” are used metaphorically to better illustrate that the practice of taijiquan involves standing still and upright, harnessing *qi* (internal energy), controlling eight directions, breathing smoothly, and staying calm. By contrast, TT3 accords with the reading habits of English readers, retaining the two images (of “balance” and “wheel”) while representing the rich content, rhythm, and rhyme of ST3 through parallelism and contrast. In particular, three words, namely “principle,” “characteristic” and “efficiency” are adopted to refer to and highlight the corresponding abstract ideas of taijiquan in ST3, thereby effectively illustrating how taijiquan can achieve the goal of “defeating someone stronger and superior” by means of “moving a thousand catties with four taels,” rather than simply “relying on physical strength.” TT3 enables English readers to appreciate the charm unique to traditional Chinese martial arts. Transcending time and space, this fluent and elegant translation can be seen as a creative rewriting of the *Taijiquan Treatise*.

Infinite Readability

Canon is supposed to be infinitely readable. In other words, “A canonical work is worth repeated reading by not just a minority, but also a majority of people in not just one specific era, but also many more eras” (Liu, 2006, p. 54).

The publisher of the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* was Kelly & Walsh Limited, a major printing and publishing house founded by British investors in Shanghai in 1876. Prior to the publication of the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*, Kelly & Walsh Limited had already gathered and trained a number of Chinese and foreign authors, editors, and publishing professionals adept at translation, writing, and other skills. Together, they created a unique publishing style and raised the profile of Kelly & Walsh Limited internationally (Sun, 2008). Among them were well-known British Sinologists (Herbert A. Giles, Arthur Waley, Walter C. Hillier, James D. Ball, Thomas F. Wade, Samuel Couling, etc.) and Chinese scholars (Qian Zhongshu, Chen Shou-yi, John Wu Ching-hsiung, Lin Yutang, Quan Zenggu, etc.). These Sinologists and scholars worked for Kelly & Walsh Limited as contributors, editors,

translators, and proofreaders, making most of its publications quickly known to English readers. Kelly & Walsh Limited's rich experience in publishing and distribution accumulated over the years, along with its extensive marketing network, which facilitated the overseas dissemination and promotion of the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*, and undoubtedly enabled taijiquan to take a big first step on the road to canonization.

After the first publication by Kelly & Walsh Limited in 1947, *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan: Its Effects and Practical Applications* was reprinted multiple times by publishers in countries such as China, the US, and Singapore. More specifically, publishers engaged in the publication of its various editions include the the US-based Chara Publications (1967 edition), China-based Unicorn Press in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (1971 & 1974 editions), China-based Pan American Books Co. in Taiwan province (1975 edition), Singapore-based Chinese Nature Cure Institute (1978 edition), as well as the US-based Borgo Press (1980, 1984, 1988, 1990 & 1993 editions) (Jin, 2019, p. 75). The contributions of various patrons and publishers to its canonization helped the English text span time and space, continuously expanding readership in the English-speaking world and increasing canonicity. With the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* and its original Chinese author critically affirmed by scholars of taijiquan in the English-speaking world, the 1947 edition appeared on the list of references for the study of taijiquan, martial arts, and event Sinology, and became available in many libraries. Taijiquan culture and the 1947 edition were increasingly accepted and interpreted by the target-language (TL) community from their ideological perspective, which in turn standardized the canonization of the 1947 edition in the English-speaking world. For example, Sophia Delza (1903–1996), who was generally recognized in the West as the first female master to spread taijiquan in the US, wrote *Tai Chi Chuan: Body and Mind in Harmony* by drawing references from the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan*. The *Collection of Taijiquan, Dao, Jian, Gan and Sanshou* by Yearning K. Chen was compiled and translated into English by Stuart Alve Olson, an American scholar of Taoism, who renamed it *Chen Kung Series from the Private Family Records of Master Yang Luchan*. The series includes seven volumes, with the first edition of the first volume published in 1986 and the following volumes successively published by Bubbling Well Press. In 2001, the chapter on the “qi” of taijiquan in *Collection of Taijiquan, Dao, Jian, Gan and Sanshou*, along with a brief introduction to the author, was included by Catherine L. Albanese, former president of the American Academy of Religion, in *American Spiritualities: A Reader*, a book consisting of 27 essays by thinkers from varied cultural backgrounds in different academic areas across the globe. The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* by Chen is still referred to by many overseas scholars in the 21st century. For example, the 1947 edition was included in the References of *The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation* (by Barbara Davis, an American Sinologist and taijiquan translator) in 2004, and in the References of *Scholar Boxer: Chang Naizhou's Theory of Internal Martial Arts and the Evolution of Taijiquan* (by Marnix Wells, an American Sinologist, scholar and practitioner of martial arts) in 2005. In the English book *Tai Chi Chuan Martial Power: Advanced Yang Style* (2015), Yang Jwing-Ming, a Chinese American who holds a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering and teaches taijiquan, said, “In the 1940s, he (Chen)

wrote a book on taijiquan that is still considered one of the best” (Yang, 2015, p. 638). “Canon can be formed only when the collective reading experience, accumulated generation after generation, becomes a collective consciousness. Collective reading experience is a collection of countless individual reading experiences” (Liu, 2006, p. 50). The fact that the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* has been read, appreciated, and recommended by readers and researchers of different times confirms its canonicity and promotes the canonization of taijiquan among English readers.

Conclusion

Canonical works form the cultural soul of a country or a civilization. The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* is the earliest English translation that systematically introduced taijiquan as a representative of Chinese culture. The book is known for being an early publication that epitomized the cultural essence of taijiquan masterpieces. More importantly, with skilled English writers joining in the translation, the previously fragmented oral formulas used by overseas taijiquan teachers were sorted out, integrated, and optimized, and the English text was polished to make the taijiquan theory more innovative, holistic, systematic, and academic. The 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* marks an indelible milestone in the history of taijiquan development and has become a special authoritative canon. The 1947 edition highlights the cultural awareness and translation ideas of Chinese intellectuals and cultural elites, as well as translators pioneering the English translations of works on taijiquan. The whole process, from translation and publication to overseas dissemination, also reflects the canonization of taijiquan culture in the English-speaking world. After more than half a century of circulation and promotion, the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* is still a good reference for foreign translations of this Chinese cultural canon, although the edition is distant from the latest development of taijiquan culture in contemporary times due to the limitations of its historical background. Moreover, the 1947 edition is a testimony to taijiquan's special journey of modernization, that is, moving from the periphery to the center, and from a privately transmitted form of martial arts to a publicly promoted modern culture. In today's society where culture is becoming increasingly diverse, the interpretation and translation of a cultural canon is no longer limited to the text itself, but also takes other social factors (culture, politics, ideology, etc.) into account. The textual construction and canonization of taijiquan as a heterogeneous culture overseas was a long and winding process in which there were ups and downs, with its canonical status constantly fluctuating. To successfully popularize the cultural canon of taijiquan among foreign readers, more importance needs to be attached to the authoritative natures and universality of related texts, particularly the four dimensions of a canon, i.e., content, creativity, transcendency and readability. The interpretation of the canonicity of the 1947 edition of *T'ai-Chi Ch'üan* can help explore the special path of taijiquan evolution that involves inheritance, development, foreign translation, innovation, integration, and sharing in history, understand the important role of cultural translation in enriching taijiquan culture and world canon, and reflect on the canonization of taijiquan culture and the foreign translation of Chinese cultural canon in contemporary times.

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