

Road to Heaven

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Abstract

Road to Heaven is a project that explores the potential of motion-control and narrative-driven game design to create an aesthetic experience that expresses the bodily and spiritual dimensions of understanding and practicing Qigong. Traditionally, studies on Qigong have focused either on its medical or psychological benefits, however, my engagement with Qigong—through historical and philosophical reading, storytelling, and movement practice—has revealed it as an embodied affective journey akin to navigating a well-orchestrated narrative game. This study's overarching question asks: Can motion control and narrative in a game generate an aesthetic experience that conveys the spiritual and physical essence of Qigong practice? To address this question, this research employs a reflexive methodology and research-creation methodology to generate media case studies and iterative game prototyping. Bernard Stiegler's theoretical framework on "technic" provides a lens to situate Qigong within a contemporary Western context, while the interplay between Western sociological analysis and complex Chinese social and historical contexts informs the Qigong practice. The resulting dynamic — between personal embodiment, cultural heritage, and interactive storytelling — guides the creation of a prototype that transforms Qigong's "Technic" into an interactive, aesthetic experience. The results plus the analytical knowledge of art and media, inform my narrative and game design. This project ultimately seeks to expand discussions on embodied knowledge, game aesthetics experience, and spiritual practice within digital media, fostering an ongoing reflexive cycle of experiential learning and prototype making.

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Preface:

Dear friend,

Imagine I am sitting down in front of you, conversing with you. Before we start this journey to heaven, I want to ask a few questions: Do you want something? Do you want to be good at something?

Don't rush to an answer just yet, but think about something you love. Think about the thing you are so determined to get that you are in awe of what you are willing to pay. If you have the thing in mind, here is the real question: Why do you want it?

Now, examine your answer. Your answer might be the consequence of your passion instead of the causation. Your answer might be a lie because you can't articulate why. Your answer might be a mumble because, like me, you can't fathom the idea of passionate desire.

Why do we have desires?

That question is extremely hard to answer because desire has no shape or form. Desire is a natural, strong emotion that makes us spring into action. Most of the time, the action is a constant seeking, whether it is seeking truth, relief, or fulfillment. The acquisition of the truth, relief, or fulfillment gives pleasure to us, making us desire more. Thus, a positive cycle forms and drives us to a better life forever.

However, desire in this purest form that only generates "good" results, is surprisingly a rarity. Some religions also categorize desire as a bad thing that needs to be suppressed. My church-going experience left me in awe when I observed the believers' agapeic love for Christ and their neighbors. I assumed their desire to do good and be loving is spontaneous due to their belief. Later, I found out there is a merit system for going to heaven, which is counting the amount of good deeds you've done. The fear of not being able to go to heaven in the afterlife suppresses people's dark desires and scares people into doing good deeds.

The combination of potentially suppressing the desire to acquire a sense of fulfillment is odd to me. However, mankind has long since used a tool called "myth" to mediate the discrepancy between desire and drive. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) deduces a formula for myth.

The formula recognizes that “the inability [of one myth] to connect two kinds of relationships is overcome (or rather replaced) by the positive statement that contradictory relationships are identical [amongst other myths] since they are both self-contradictory in a similar way” (434). As Strauss identifies, myth is a manifestation of mankind’s regurgitated problems. The unresolvable tension and a history of different iterations exalt myths of divine status and authority. Christianity has lore describing desires: desire has to be personified as demons to be banished in order to keep peace in the community, even though it’s a natural human feeling. This particular lore is still driven by fear, which creates an uncomfortable misalignment—one where the desire for goodness is not spontaneous but rather a result of fear of condemnation. I believe there is a story out there where the desire and fulfillment align beautifully.

In the summer of 2024, my wrist was broken while I was training for soccer. It was the pinnacle of my unfortunate experiences within a year, preceded by crashing my bike and being sent to the ER with a fever. Before the injury, I imagined my thesis was going to be something about sports psychology and why there is a desire to win. But I was extremely flustered by the injury. I was even more flustered by the realization of how flustered I was. Because I always had this image of myself as an invincible figure with a heart as strong as steel and un-swayed by earthly events. After the injury, the desire to win didn’t seem to matter anymore. The alignment of stars had shifted, and I had to face the fact that perhaps for me, like the Christian desire lore, the motionless quality of steel is a misalignment.

I asked one of my friends, who is a Chinese Martial Arts practitioner and physically the strongest person I know, what his view is on the notion of “invincible”. According to his master, the picture of the invincible is not a person who doesn’t have desire, but their desire is perfectly aligned with their objective. Hence, the action seems free from the struggle and burden of desire. Daoism has an idea called “Wu Wei” (无为, effortless) that proposes a perfect way of being, which is to make no effort. Slingerland (2000) further describes the paradox of this way of being illustrated by Daoism—“the state of effortless, perfected action represented by Wu Wei is portrayed as a state that needs to be achieved: [various] paths designed to bring us from our current state of effortful action into this ideal state of effortless action. The question that

inevitably arises is that how is it possible to try not to try?" (298).

This brought me to the decision to try out Qigong. Before my injury, I was always interested in this uncharted territory of bodily knowledge. After my injury, Qigong is the only activity I can do with a huge cast over my right hand. Similar to how I seek answers by going to church, I made the gesture of seeking, and it came to my doorstep.

I hope my journey will constitute a pleasant read for you and that you find your inner peace.

Sincerely,

Yiqun

1. Introduction

Road to Heaven is an interactive digital web game that uses motion control to drive forward the narrative to achieve an aesthetic game experience. This experience encompasses my bodily and spiritual understanding of practicing Qigong and my inner struggle to make peace with my desire through Daoism.

In *Road to Heaven*, the player will experience a spiritual narrative. Graduate student Zhou, stressed over her research project on Qigong, joins a local group to experience its meditative practice firsthand. There, she meets Li, an elderly aspiring rapper with modest skills but deep knowledge of Qigong and Daoist philosophy. Through their growing friendship, Zhou learns about Li's use of these practices to cope with personal struggles and past trauma, inspiring her to reflect on her own life. She supports Li during a rap battle, even helping with verses, but they ultimately lose after a fierce competition. Distraught, Li retreats to a nearby park where Zhou joins him. As night falls and birdsong fades, they share a final conversation and one last session of Qigong together. A detailed script is attached as Appendix A.



Figure 1 First Scene of *Road to Heaven*

At the start of the story, the player assumes the role of Zhou by looking into a mirror (Figure 1) and seeing their reflection, accompanied by an inner monologue. This immerses the player in Zhou's experience of learning Qigong and grounds their interactions with the fictional character Li in a sense of reality. Through Zhou's Qigong practice and interaction with Li, Zhou gained a better understanding of Qigong and Daoism's idea of "Wu Wei" (无为, effortless) by the end of the story.



Figure 2 Character design for Li (left, right) and Zhou (middle)

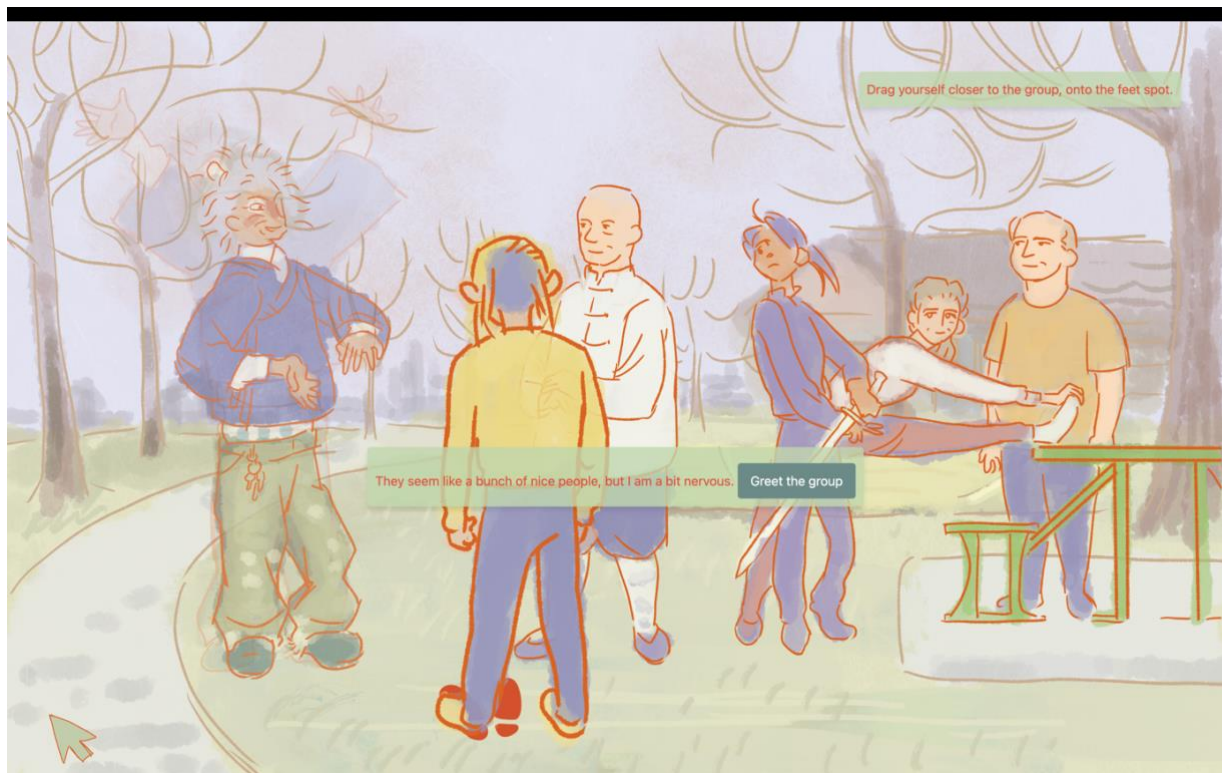


Figure 3 Screenshot from Road to Heaven / source: author

(Left: Li, second person from the left: Zhou, right: rest of the Qigong group)

In order to create the game *Road to Heaven*, this research focuses on three parts:

1. Establishing an understanding of embodied knowledge bestowed by Qigong and Daoism.
2. Conjuring my understanding of the two into a narrative story that addresses my discomfort and struggle with desire.
3. Designing interactive motion control mechanisms befitting both Qigong's embodied knowledge and the narrative's plot momentum.

I am employing both reflexive methodology and research-creation methodology for this research. Reflexive methodology is an approach that emphasizes the active role of the researcher in shaping the study. As an active Qigong practitioner, I understand that Qigong practice is not one set of non-changing movements but a constantly changing body of knowledge subject to an individual's life experience. My story-making and game design are informed by my Qigong practice and my life experience, and my learning through the making process expands my understanding of Qigong knowledge. This cycle of learning and making becomes my artistic practice.

The goal of this research is to produce a motion-control narrative game as well as a system of acquiring knowledge. This document not only records the process of game-making but also reflects a structure I created to understand Qigong and establishes an ongoing learning cycle from the methodologies I employed for the structure. This learning cycle can be applied to future projects involving a combination of research for knowledge and making for knowledge.

2. Methodology — Reflexive Methodology, Research-Creation

This research aims to generate both textual and artistic reflections on Qigong that contain both cultural knowledge and embodied knowledge. In addition, this research integrates artmaking into the process that results in a game and a deeper understanding of embodied knowledge. A combination of reflexive methodology and research-creation methodology is suitable for this complex project.

Reflexive methodology is predominantly used in the field of social science and humanities to generate a deeper understanding of the research subject by situating the subject in the author's context. This methodology helps me to connect and compare different readings, and between readings and my context to generate a deep understanding, which in turn furthers my practice of Qigong. However, the textual results from this methodology don't fully articulate the embodied knowledge I gained from practice. I felt the necessity of mixing it with my creative practice because processes in art making are not solely for artistic expression, but a tool of understanding as well. Hence, I also use research-creation methodology, which integrates artistic practice into research and knowledge generation.

Instead of depending fully on rationalism, reflexive methodology advocates for integrating experience in research. Through Alvesson and Sköldberg's reading of hermeneutics and German Romanticism. This movement ponders on people's creative potency that constitutes a sense of "life", which can't be explained but can only be sensed through intuition. This discovery was made because German philosophers observed a polarization between scientific theory and intuitive creation. Both theory and practice generate knowledge and understanding, and researchers try to create a framework that merges them. Alvesson and Sköldberg (116) expand the understanding of 'hermeneutical realism' and state that "there is no polarity between subject and object, but only reflexively constituted practices, for example, scientific practices, wherein truth is disclosed, not arrived at by verification or falsification" (116). This means truth is an understanding based on a specific context. In my case, it's my life experience.

Using a research-creation methodology to recreate the experience of Qigong is effective because this type of research involves embodied knowledge, which is best expressed through sensory artistic mediums. My understanding of the research-creation methodology is confirmed by Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2012), who coined the term "research-creation". They state that "[the] possibilities provided by the various artistic media that can be deployed for research-creation allow research components to be performed and disseminated through alternative ways of knowing as well as employing a variety of different forms of citation and/or attribution" (14). My methodology for the research lies specifically in the category research-for-creation, which means "[the] initiative and can include literature reviews,

the tracking down of precedents for one's creative ideas, the articulation of a cluster of concepts, as well as trying out different prototypes or iterations" (15). This coincides with the reading-heavy method in the early stage of this research.

2.1 Part-Whole

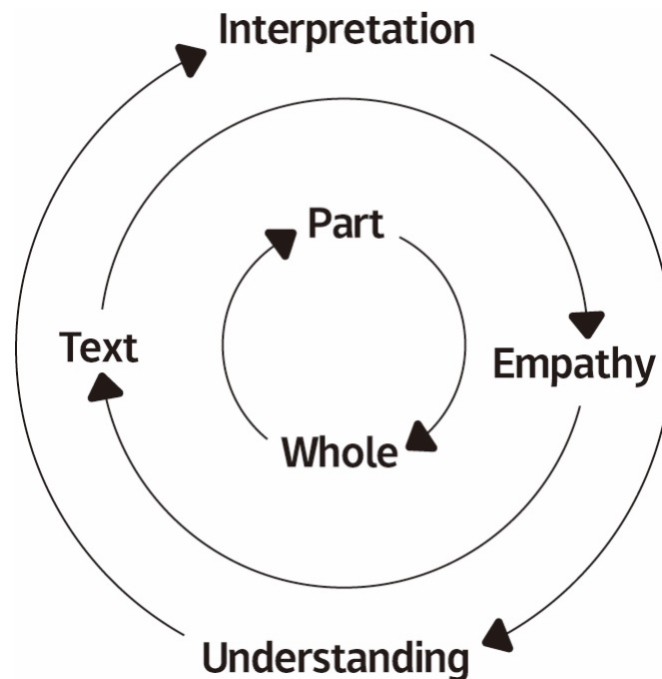


Figure 4 Reflexive Methodology | source: author

In order to start understanding Qigong and what I am feeling during the practice, I gather information using the structure that reflexive methodology offers. One key structure in reflexive methodology is that “the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2018, 116). This is represented as Figure 4’s innermost cycle since it’s the foundation of the outer cycles. Even though the process is represented as three distinct cycles, the actual process overlaps due to the nature of reflexive methodology and research-creation methodology. The Part-Whole cycle is used later (Chapter 3) to parse out the part of Qigong that’s fitting to translate into game mechanisms. The movements in embodied practices such as yoga, capoeira, and Tai Chi can’t be understood in isolation. The combination of movement, culture, and the location of practice is relevant to understanding these bodily practices. This cycle of part-whole helps generate knowledge in my research with Qigong and becomes the overarching method for understanding Qigong. My research started

with a serendipitous encounter with a small Qigong practice group, which I later learned this serendipity is essential in Qigong practice. This encounter introduced the Qigong movement itself and sparked an interest in looking at Qigong's overarching history and Daoist philosophy. After gaining a general textual understanding of Qigong's history and philosophy, I seek my master's explanation of "Qi" in Qigong and feelings about specific movements. I also seek other personal interpretations of Daoist philosophy, such as novels and movies. These two directions complement each other and generate a deeper understanding of the movements, culture, and spirits. This bounce between the part and the whole helped me "understand the underlying meaning, not the explanation of causal connections" (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2018, 116). The embodied knowledge and social phenomenon started to reveal itself as a whole to me.

2.2 Text — Empathy

Road to Heaven's story involves two characters practicing and trying to understand Qigong. The first crucial step is to come up with the story. I employ the process I use as a comic artist, which involves textual research to build a world and speculation of the characters' intent in that world. Reflexive methodology's text-empathy cycle (Figure 5) provides clear guidance for this process. This process is further explained later (Chapter 4).

Text can be written-down words, oral history, or "human action that becomes social action when written down in the archives of history" (Paul Ricoeur 1981, 169). There are two types of text — "remnant and narrative source" (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2018, 136). As Alvesson and Sköldbberg explain, remnants are hard evidence, for example, a birth certificate, while narrative sources are stories portraying a happening, such as a journalist piece about a person's death (143). Empathy is the tool used to connect the narrative source to the remnant. Alvesson and Sköldbberg further explain that "[e]mpathy plays an important role by filling with inner meaning the merely external 'facts' generated by source criticism" (143). Being able to use empathy to re-enact the creation of the narrative sources will further the understanding of remnants.

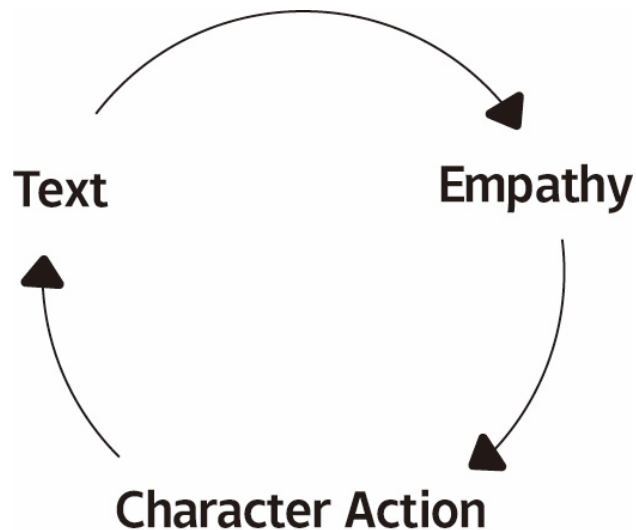


Figure 5 Reflexive Methodology: Text-Empathy Cycle / source: author

Collecting remnants through readings is setting up the stage for the characters. I am using these texts to understand the world that the characters exist in, just like how the characters are trying to understand the world. Reading means more than intake of information for me because I have to digest the information to create features and environments for the characters until they start to act of their own volition and are no longer subject to my control. Benefiting from another feature of reflexive methodology, which is to check the author's context relating to the field of study, I can turn my bias about the world into an advantage. My main character Li shares the same experience as a Chinese person living in North America. Setting this story in North America enables me to navigate my odd, complicated diasporic situation in tandem with Qigong. Making Li a fictional character allows me to add experiences I don't personally have, but are relevant to the larger Chinese diaspora. This difference in background allows me to compare the different practice environments I experience.

Knowing from reflexive methodology, my text-empathy cycle won't be able to provide unbiased documentation of the state of Qigong and the state of the current world I am living in. Using empathy to speculate my character's intention will generate a true reaction toward the status quo and increase my understanding of Qigong in the current environment.

2.3 Interpretation — Understanding

After I gain a better understanding of Qigong and generate a story from the previous cycles,

I want to produce an interpretation by articulating my findings through artful game-making. According to reflexive methodology, connecting texts to generate new interpretations is a form of creative production. One powerful mode of interpretation is metaphor. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) further explain the notion of metaphor:

The integration between different aspects that the metaphor brings about corresponds to the ‘plot’ of the narrative, which joins its diverse elements. Both metaphor and plot constitute an act of ‘productive fantasy’, a ‘semantic innovation’, which through a ‘schematic process’ generates a new unity of the whole within the realm of language. The metaphorical expressions ‘speak of the world, even though they may not do so in a descriptive fashion’, but at a deeper level. (154)

Metaphor possesses the power of revealing. Heidegger (1977) observed artistic skill also possesses the power of revealing “thorough knowing that disclosed ... a mode of bringing forth into presencing” (xxv). The gathering in research-for-creation methodology aims to bring forth this revelation through practice or craft in a metaphorical interpretation.

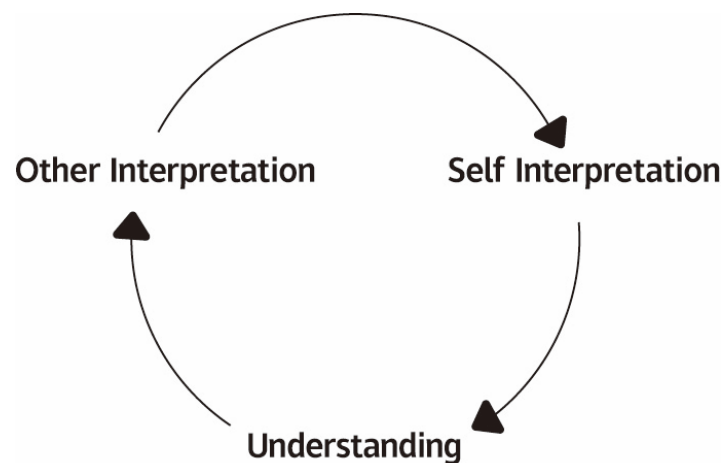


Figure 6 Reflexive Methodology: Interpretation-Understanding Cycle | source: author

This final cycle of other interpretation – self interpretation – understanding (Figure 6) helps me to achieve a state in which I can articulate my newly learned bodily awareness.

Other interpretation refers to artworks by artists. Visual artists use metaphors to interpret Qi and Daoist philosophy. Game artists use gaming mechanisms as metaphors to enhance the understanding of a movement that controls the gameplay. The flow of energy is translated into the form of graphs; the true meaning of Dao is translated into a decision when a character faces a dilemma in a story. Graphs, body movements, and narratives all become metaphors when explaining ineffable things. As shown in media works, the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000) never directly describes how unnerving the desires are for the characters, but it shows the desire as the stress the character puts on a bamboo tree. Other work, such as the game *Before Your Eyes* (GoodbyeWorld Games 2021), makes the player control the game by blinking their eyes, symbolizing how time flies by in the blink of an eye.

In reflexive methodology, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) argue that “[during] the process of interpretation we enter into an imagined dialogue with the reader of our interpretation. That is, the process is not merely private, a simple relationship between an isolated researcher–subject and the object/facts studied, in which the Truth is established with logical necessity and by empirical ‘testing’ (verification/falsification)” (127). Artwork such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is entering into an imagined dialogue with me through its metaphors.

Self interpretation refers to my translation of metaphors into gameplay, which referenced symbols from artworks, text from Daoist philosophy, and gestures from Qigong practice. Later in the thesis (Chapter 5), my gameplay metaphors enter into conversations with other artworks’ metaphors. My making of the gameplay and this conversation reveal more knowledge of Qigong practice and Daoist philosophy, which then informs my artistic making.

This cycle (Figure 6) also reveals how research-for-creation works in generating knowledge and artistic work back and forth.

3. Road to Game: From Qigong to Game Making

By following the cycle in Figure 4, this chapter understands Qigong through a part-whole cycle to parse out the content in Qigong that’s relevant to me and fitting for transforming into

my game. I first investigated Qigong in the broad context of Chinese history. Then, I compare the affordance of Qigong in Chinese history and my individual experience. I will also look at Qigong through a Western philosophy and Western medical research lens. At the end of this chapter, I will reach a conclusion on what is suitable to translate into my game from the vast repertoire of Qigong.

3.1 What is Qigong?

Qigong is a set of coordinated body postures and movements, breathing, and meditation, useful for the purposes of health and spirituality. Qigong also exists in many different important contexts that are difficult to grasp at first glance. It has a mystical, superstitious root in China, which aimed to enhance the longevity of the emperor and the empire. It also has a recent presence in the Western scientific medical world, where it improves health and self-being. One confusing fact is that Qigong is not one set of movements but includes a vast number of movements ranging from walking to Tai Chi. This openness of movement leads many practitioners to be concerned about what Qigong might be able to achieve

Having a basic understanding of the history of Qigong clarifies this complex situation and builds the groundwork for discovering how Daoist philosophy and Qigong practice complement each other. This history lesson is also important to understand my position and situate myself in this practice.

The mystical impression of Qigong mostly comes from ancient China. The author of the book *Qigong Fever*, David A. Palmer (2010), summarizes the history of Daoism. He discovers that during the Warring States period (475-221 BC), “gymnastic and breath-training were practised as forms of health cultivation, and were described in philosophical works, notably the Laozi and Zhuangzi, as means of attaining unity with the Dao” (10). Philosophers in that time period, Laozi and Zhuangzi, imparted knowledge on how to live in a Daoist “way” (the Chinese word “道”, Dao, means “way” in english) but also how to rule an empire wisely. Many philosophers read Laozi and Zhuangzi’s philosophy and gave great advice to the empires according to their work. This made Daoism’s presence prominent in the imperial court. During the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-589 C.E.), emperors fervently sought immortality through

alchemy(外丹, “Waidan” (Liu 2012, 164)), making pills and decoctions with materials that have an “immortal” quality(gold, mercury, etc.). The crazed search resulted in illness and death, and the Daoism priest who was duty-bound with alchemy then started to develop Neidan (内丹, Waidan means outer alchemy, “Neidan” (Palmer 2010, 19) means inner alchemy), which inherited the gymnastic and breath-training that became Qigong. Daoism and Neidan Qigong have thrived in Chinese history since then. Laozi and Zhuangzi become deities in Daoist mythologies.

Qigong is highly linked to the Daoist philosophy of this period. Daoist moral principles were highly esteemed during this period, and thus Daoist philosophy served as the guiding standard for both governance and self-cultivation. This fostered a peaceful yet determined mindset that permeates all aspects of life, spanning from the emperor’s ruling strategy to the military’s practice of Chinese martial arts, and even to the everyday layman navigating daily life.

The recent medical impression of Qigong happened mostly after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. It came with the transition of Chinese society into a socialist one, and it was necessary to legitimize Qigong in Western Scientism. The state put great effort into conducting scientific research and holding international conferences. A. Palmer (2007) observed that the socialist structure meant it was easier for Qigong to travel across the country as Chinese Officials would encourage and organize people living in the compound to practice together. This saw the emergence of a network of masters who had different interpretations of Qigong and practiced a different set of standardized movements. Qigong traversed through the network of masters and compounds with no definitive authority (16).

However, with Qigong’s affiliation through Officials to the State, the scale of practice got out of hand and became a menace to the State. In the 1990s, 1/5 of the Chinese population was practicing Qigong. This national movement came to an abrupt halt when a sect called Falungong was deemed a cult by the State (6).

During this period, Qigong took loose forms, contained simple movements, and passed from grassroots masters to citizens. The simplicity and the efficiency of acquiring the movements made Qigong a tool to express feelings and a sense of self. Qigong filled the void

of the collapse of Chinese collectivism created by the Cultural Revolution for self-care.

This is also the Qigong that I am most familiar with. Relatives and friends of mine practice different types of movements for health and longevity. A sense of confidence is shown during their practice even though they are not necessarily familiar with the Daoist philosophy.

3.2 Understanding Qigong through Individual Experience

After my wrist injury, I started to practice Qigong with a group of young people and a very young master in Shanghai. He is a Shaolin Martial Arts practitioner. He taught Ba Duan Jin and Shaolin Taichi. I later returned to Toronto and practiced Guolin Qigong and Wudang Qigong.

These three groups are very different in their affordances and atmospheres. The group practice in Shanghai happens in an artist community center at the heart of the city. Participants are mostly young females, and the master is a young male. The practice involves using games to understand breathing and music cues to remember Ba Duan Jin and Shaolin Taichi. The general atmosphere of this group is very playful. Guolin Qigong is a group that focuses on cancer recovery. Since the participants are mostly elderly people, the movements are derived from sitting and walking to encourage exercise after chemotherapy. The atmosphere of this group is very encouraging. Wudang Qigong is taught by a branch of one of the Chinese Martial Arts schools in Toronto. The practice is very similar to a class in a Chinese Martial Arts school. But since the group is very small and private, the atmosphere is quite friendly and almost like a family.

I find trouble in engaging with these practices. Not having friends or relatives who have practiced Qigong for a long time, I didn't establish a habit of practice by adjacency. The magical effects promised by these different practices of Qigong are often long-term rewards. Even though I recognize it's a difficult task for the masters to present Qigong as an instantly intriguing practice, it's still quite hard to be gripped by the slow movements and long-term reward at the very beginning. However, after establishing a framework for understanding the purpose of Qigong, I can identify how the movements and breathing activities affect my body and my mind. By concentrating on feeling my body and my mind during the practice, I can

engage in Qigong more naturally and comfortably.

3.3 Analytical Framework through the Lens of Bernard Stiegler

After the brief historical readings, I am intrigued by the spiritual achievement and self-cultivation that past emperors and post-Maoist Chinese people pursued. It's not surprising to find a lack of interest in the spiritual practice of Qigong in the research field because of the difficulty in translating spiritual experience into words. However, it's crucial to understand Qigong's spirituality through a mind-body relationship.

A prominent way of understanding the mind-body relationship is the Cartesian mind-body dualism. When facing the ultimate demise of human flesh, two schools of thought develop ways of viewing it. Cottingham (1992) put the Cartesian mind-body dualism in perspective by comparing it to the Aristotelian understanding of the soul. He states that “[in] the Aristotelian conception of the soul, which is never far beneath the surface of scholastic doctrine, there is an integral connection between soul and body... In a purely mechanical Cartesian universe, by contrast, there is an important sense in which there is no real difference between ‘living’ and ‘dead’ matter” (238-239). Descartes’s writing on this matter is a practical solution to ease the Church’s worry of no guarantee of the immortality of the soul after the body’s demise. This separation, unfortunately, evolved into a rationalist thinking that scientific knowledge is acquired through the labor of the mind without contribution from sensory input. The result of the separation is the epistemology of separating the body and the spirit.

Research on Qigong is conducted in the medical realm, where researchers are trying to scientifically address the effects of Qigong. In Kamila Osypiuk, Evan Thompson, and Peter M. Wayne’s (2018) paper, *Can Tai Chi and Qigong Postures Shape Our Mood? Toward an Embodied Cognition Framework for Mind-Body Research*, they try to understand if Tai Chi and Qigong benefit emotional health. They try to establish a theoretical framework by examining previous controlled experiments on the effects of postures and movements on affect and cognitive processes (4). Most of the experiments collect qualitative data from two control groups. Two groups practice opposite-effect postures, with each group performing one pose from the pair, including power poses, facial expressions, and movements (none of them are Tai Chi or Qigong, but pairs like slumped posture vs straightened standing posture). One of the

experiments involves checking the participants' arm flexion while Chinese characters are shown to them (6). However, no further explanation of the Chinese characters is given during the experiment. The framework which Kamila Osypiuk, Evan Thompson, and Peter M. Wayne are trying to establish doesn't consider including Daoist philosophy and spirituality's effect on mental health.

Much of the research on Qigong overlooks its spiritual aspects. The benefits of breathing and meditation practices in relation to spirituality are rarely discussed, and no established framework addresses this connection. Yet, during practices in Qigong, some masters' instructions suggest a strong link between spiritual gaining and physical movement. The sensations of tension and relief are more prominent during Qigong practice than in everyday activities, highlighting the lack of attention we give to our bodies in daily tasks such as typing or talking on the phone. The purely mechanical movement, such as typing on a phone, increases the mind-body separation. This separation can be remedied by Qigong's spiritual effort to unite the mind and the body. This gap in the research, particularly concerning the mind-body relationship, provides an opportunity to engage with the spiritual dimensions of Qigong and add vocabulary to this field of research.

To find a solid ground to research Qigong's spirituality, I borrow Bernard Stiegler's (1998) definition of "Technic" to describe Qigong. Stiegler writes, "the analysis of technics in terms of end and means refers to the theory of material, formal, final, and efficient causes" (8). Following the thinkers from the Industrial Revolution, Stiegler observes that society often focuses on the final product, usually objects. Stiegler is inspired by Aristotle's idea that "[every] art [tekhne] is concerned with bringing something into being and looks for technical and theoretical means of producing a thing which belongs to the category of possibility and the cause of which lies in the producer and not in what is produced" (9). Stiegler then proposes that technics is a "way of revealing" (9).

Treating Qigong as a "Technic" for spiritual revelation is fitting. Qigong promises itself as a tool for spiritual transcendence. It is a way of getting to a deeper knowledge, yet the process of practicing itself is knowledge. This resonates with Daoist philosophy's "to try not to try", as the answer is already in the gesture of seeking.

Another reason for using Stiegler's "Technic" to explain Qigong is to accentuate Qigong's ability to overcome mind-body dualism. A thinker who comes before Stiegler, Paul Valéry (1962), talks about human power as one single tool that serves both the needs of the mind and the body. Valéry uses a metaphor of ships on the Mediterranean basin, for it "brought merchandise and gods . . . ideas and methods" (196). Stiegler extends this to a broader application, where an acquired technology or body knowledge (Technic) serves both the mind and the body. After all, it is the same organ inside us that keeps us alive and gives us dreams. Understanding this affordance of "Technic" is important for me to be able to engage more fully in Qigong. The movements are aligned with Daoist philosophy. In turn, the practice of this "Technic" should bring me toward the transcendence that this philosophy promises. The answer lies within the feelings that are given by the movements, so my mind is engaged when my body listens to the movements.

3.3 Game Component — Translating Qigong movement

To translate the Qigong movement into a gameplay component, I separate the movement into three stages of understanding. These stages are layered together to construct Qigong as a "Technic". The first stage is remembering poses, the second stage is accompanying breathing, and the third stage is conjuring mind-body harmony.

To achieve this, I am translating my Wudang Qigong knowledge, which consists of a set of body movements and a set of accompanying instructions. Wudang Qigong has five animal movements: dragon, leopard, tiger, snake, and crane. Take the leopard movement as an example, the practitioner should feel a cathartic stretch during two of the key poses in this movement. These two key poses should be performed exactly as instructed, and the in-between pose could flow naturally. Instructional voices should encourage the practitioner to focus on the stretching feeling during these two poses. Then introduce the breathing cycle that's in sync with the poses. This should be a separate introduction since the breathing follows the movement naturally once the movement is perfected. The breathing cycle functions as a meditative state where the practitioner should banish any thoughts besides the flow and movement. Once these two stages are introduced, the "Technic" for revealing ways to achieve mind-body harmony will come

eventually. This learning experience will be translated as the core gameplay of *Road to Heaven*.

4. Story Design

Following Figure 5's structure, this chapter analyzes the texts in books and media works related to Daoism to generate empathy. The empathy is then used to determine the characters' actions in the story of *Road to Heaven*. Daoist philosophy is told through the form of stories. For example, essays by *Zhuangzi* (2020) start with an overarching statement and then use mini-stories with fictional characters to illustrate the statement. The "way" (Dao) lies in the actions of the characters, and the stories serve as guidance for emperors to rule an empire successfully and for ordinary people to live a peaceful life.

Since ancient texts such as *Zhuangzi* contain ancient references that are obscure to contemporary readers, it's important to look at both ancient texts and contemporary works that interpret the Daoist philosophy. By analyzing texts from different time periods, this chapter provides a broader analysis of how Daoism affects people from a relevant, contemporary context and produces more relatable and engaging actions for the characters.

4.1.1 Case Studies: *Lathe of Heaven* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

Zhuangzi's text, translated by Ziporyn (2020), opens with a teaching of not comparing oneself to others (4). The morality holds now. However, the "most desired" state of being by the layman in *Zhuangzi's* text is a high feudal government official who satisfies the emperor, which is not desirable nowadays. This example is not that relevant amongst younger generations. Recent works address more relatable predicaments.

Sci-fi novelist Ursula Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven* (1971) depicts a dystopian future where our Earth is overpopulated. Famine and pollution become serious problems. The main character, George, finds out he has a superpower where his dreams will become reality. George finds his power not exciting but very disturbing. He finds his power not exciting but very disturbing. He goes to a doctor to cure this. The doctor, however, exploited George's power to make the world

a better place. The doctor eliminated racism by making everyone's skin color a light grey; he resolved famine by disappearing a third of the world's population. George believes sometimes people have to just go with the flow and decides to stop the doctor in the end. The world George salvaged is not a perfect place, but he is at peace with the status quo. I find George's actions embodied Daoism's teaching of "Wu Wei" (无为). His way to "try not to try" is by taking actions within his power. He goes through tremendous physical pain to stop the doctor from ending the world, but does not try to fully "fix" it.

Le Guin's work takes place in a fictional world but has similar problems to our real world. Her world is running out of resources, and individuals suffer physically and mentally from the lack of resources. George takes a peaceful yet firm stance when facing the crisis and is prepared to act. This mindset is a key to finding the way in Daoist philosophy.

Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) tells a story set in a fictional China where three main characters are tangled together by protecting the legendary Green Destiny Sword. Jen stole the sword as a gesture to seek freedom from her traditional family. Her foil character Yu Xiulian was tasked to retrieve the sword. She sought help from her old love interest Li Mubai, who had already decided to give up his old life as a Wudang Daoist warrior. Their lives are entangled together by this sword, which brings them to face their desires: Jen's struggle with freedom from the old traditions; Yu's sympathy for Jen and her love for Li; Li's rekindled love for Yu, and desire for Jen.

Though *CTHD* is presented as a Chinese Wuxia film, it has messages closer to Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven* than to Chinese Wuxia films. With Ang Lee's experience as a Chinese diaspora in America, he wrote this film encompassing reflection on Western cultural values and reimagination of Chinese tradition. Linguist Junchen Zhang (2021) observes that "without a certain degree of Chinese cultural cognition, it is difficult for Western audiences to appreciate this Mandarin Chinese film. In this regard, English translation plays a key role. Even Chinese native audiences, most of them may not fully understand and appreciate the core values of the film, since Ang Lee fused Western cultural values (e.g., feminism, humanism) with which Chinese people are not very familiar" (3).

Similar to Le Guin's work, Lee's CTHD uses a Daoist lens to look at Western values such as feminism and freedom. This puts ancient Daoist philosophy in perspective of a situation that's more relatable to me. As a Chinese person who lived for 6 years in North America, using Daoist philosophy to face values such as feminism and freedom that are not pervasive in Chinese culture is enlightening. The subtle discrepancy shows the identity struggle through a common desire for love and achievement in life. The decision to situate my story in a North American setting where the player will assume the character of an indexical "me" is important, as my pursuit of understanding Qigong and Daoism is more relevant to my current situation.

4.1.2 World Building for a Qigong Story

Le Guin and Lee's works are successful at making their work engaging through the juxtaposition of different values. Le Guin sets her story in a future world that's like ours, but her character George takes up a Daoist mindset; Ang Lee sets his story in an ancient world where the Daoist ideal is prominent in people's lives that even characters' dialogue will directly reference the way, but CTHD's characters are testing the Daoist teaching against modern ideas (e.g., feminism) that usually isn't discussed in that period of time. Both of their work delves into individuality through a Daoist lens. Qigong has an affordance that's beyond health concerns, which is also to express individuality. It's important to pick a fitting environment for my story to unravel the characters' problems.

Qigong found its way to a more private life since the practice is focused on a private body and is connected to a more native cultural root. Qigong gained popularity among post-Maoist Chinese people because the freedom of expression in the Qigong movement gave them a sense of control over their lives through an existential experience. Comparative literature scholar Jian Xu (1999) points out that "the social history of the various [Qi] exercises being unified into qigong also tells a social history of the body, a history of embodiment precisely of different beliefs and ideologies as body becomes entangled with discourse" (963). The body became a speaking vessel. Following Bourdieu (1990)'s statement: "The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the

past; it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is" (73). Xu (1999) concluded that a “material change” (964) could be found in people who believed and practiced Qigong. Post-Maoist Qigong teaching is deeply linked to the individual feelings and the individual bodies and opens up feelings and cultural discussion in the public space. This results in Qigong’s practice being irrelevant to spatial confinement and free from the apprenticeship doctrine in other Chinese Martial Arts.

The longest I have been in touch with Qigong is since I joined a Wudang Martial Arts group in Toronto. My practice of Qigong began with injury recovery and anxiety reduction. The group discusses Qigong movements, and the discussion opens up conversation to our private lives. Later, my fascination turned towards Qigong’s historical context and Daoist philosophy. I shared more information with the Group and learned the history of a Martial arts gym in Toronto’s Chinatown. Some findings enhance my understanding as a Chinese kid growing up in the 2000s, some findings confuse me as a Chinese diaspora in Toronto, and some findings enhance my understanding of being peaceful and patient with my Qigong practice. This is reflected in the main character Zhou’s motivation. Being trapped in her thesis project and wanting to find a placebo for her anxiety, she gets herself into a situation where she struggles to understand her position in a new Qigong group and what Qigong means to her and other people. Making the struggles of the characters similar to my struggles sets the tone of the story.

4.2.1 Case Study: *The Banished Immortal: A Life of Li Bai*

The thesis title is taken from the book *The Banished Immortal: A Life of Li Bai’s Chinese title, which is Road to Heaven*. Li Bai’s struggle parallels the struggle I want to portray in my story. It’s important to take a brief look at his life story.

As the most adorned Chinese poet in history, Li Bai led a pretty conflicted life. As a half-blood Turk, Li Bai felt a compulsively strong tie to his Chinese side, where he tried to befriend everyone with the same last name. Li Bai’s father was a businessman, which was regarded as a low profession in the Tang Dynasty. Li Bai was driven to the path of becoming a government

official. He was incredibly talented at writing poems, so he was able to pass a governmental test where aspiring people were required to write beautiful political essays. Li Bai's poetry style was too flamboyant and hysterical to land him a job in the government. He then wandered around in poverty, sometimes wrote hysterical poetry, and other times wrote poetry that expressed a sense of longing towards a bucolic life. Li Bai's true passion was always to contribute greatly to his country or die on the battlefield for his country, but he was never given the chance and was forever remembered as this dissolute, hysterical, but crazy talented poet (Ha 2019).

Li Bai never practiced Qigong, but he was a pious follower of Daoism and was very good with swords. Li Bai was a pupil of a Daoist priest in the mountains for a year when he was 17, he sought true peace at the time. Even though Li Bai claimed to have found that experience very fruitful, his ambition was grandeur and nothing peaceful compared to some of the poets of his peers. Even though Li Bai died in agony and never found peace, I regard him as a standing principle of Daoism. The result of a peaceful state must be very enticing, but Li Bai's struggle was a living testimony to the Daoist teachings. He tried to fight his way up in the government; he tried to become a general in Xinjiang; he tried to practice sword and calligraphy to calm his mind. In the end, there were just things beyond Li Bai's control.

4.2.2 Background Story Design for Character

I find Li Bai's struggle in seeking higher achievement and coming to terms with his identity very relevant to me. As an international student trying to pursue a better chance at succeeding in the art world, it is hard not to get entangled in the identity politics and the cultural differences. Though I don't have Li Bai's talent in poetry writing, I share his sentiment of struggle.

I gave my other main character the same last name, Li, the same as Li Bai. Li is a Chinese person who used to work in the legal system in North America and lost his dear friend to the medical system. He failed at changing the system with legal power and lost his mind. Similar to Li Bai, Li became infatuated with the idea that he could change things with the power of words and text. In Li Bai's case, he used essays and poems to try to contribute to China, where Li believes that becoming a rapper will give him the power to influence the system. The futility

of Li's effort worsened his mental state, and he turned to Qigong to seek peace in his mind.

Both characters try to come to terms with their struggle while they practice Qigong. By sharing conversations and stories, they gained a better understanding of Qigong practice and each other. See the appendix "script" for dialogue and illustrated storyboards.

4.3.1 Case Study: Zhuangzi

Similar to Plato's writing, *Zhuangzi's* essays take the form of dialogues. Within the dialogues, Zhuangzi illustrates a problem using fictional characters. The dialogue revolves around the choices the characters can make or have made. The wisdom of the teaching always lies inside these snippets of mini-stories within a bigger story, which is a conversation.

These mini-stories in Daoist texts use abstract metaphors to capture the elusive heavenly "way". Absurd motifs such as a bird of the size of 1000km and a butterfly are used to remind human of their position in nature and bring forward a contrast between human ambition and the vastness of nature. These stories stir up strong emotions and offer vast interpretations based on the emotions. One story of Zhuangzi captured the emotion of my character, Li's dealing with grief, perfectly. I am using a Zhuangzi text translated by Ziporyn (2020) as the base of my core stories:

The Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, rests me with death. Thus what makes my life something good is what makes my death something good; considering my life good is what makes me consider my death good.' For you may hide a boat in a ravine or a net in a swamp, thinking it is secure there. But in the middle of the night a mighty one comes along and carries it away on his back, unbeknownst to you in your slumber.

When the smaller is hidden within the larger, there remains someplace to which it can escape. But to hide the world in the world, so that there is nowhere for it to escape to, then it has the vast realness of a thing eternal (56).

This idea of trying to grasp onto earthly possessions and losing them eventually aligns with my story. The metaphor of the mountain and smaller objects helps with visualizing Qigong

practice, especially helps with grasping the idea of the elusive “Qi”. “Qi” is not tangible through imaging it as an earthly object, but an encompassing whole.

Byung-Chul Han (2023)’s book *Absence: On the Culture and Philosophy of the Far East* analyzes how Daoism deals with desire. Han observed that “desire, appetite, is what makes you a *someone*. A *someone* in the strong sense has no access to wandering. A *someone dwells*. Only someone who empties himself and becomes a no one is able to wander” (8). When Western individualism encourages desire and appetite, Han pointed out that this strong sense of individualism is what makes people lose their “way” to the Dao. However, the act of seeking Daoist “way” is also charged with desire, thus, Daoist writings describe the highest achievement in mysterious imageries, such as a man wandering where there is no house nor door; a quail has no nest and leaves no trace in flight. These images will serve as visual cues in my game to prompt this aerial feeling. I haven’t personally come to terms with this; hence, my character will also question this.

4.3.2 Story within a Story: Design of the Core Story

The metaphors in Zhuangzi texts help to illustrate the way that Qigong practice will eventually lead to the “way”. The imagery of a man wandering in a place with no house, with no door, is very powerful. Imagination can fill in the blanks. Maybe there are only pillars; maybe there is wind; maybe it is the desert. This is especially effective when my eyes are closed during a Qigong practice. The openness and vastness of these images enhance the feeling of my body.

The imagery of earthly possession being hidden in a swamp, and a man can carry that swamp on his shoulder, is also very powerful. The absurdness of the situation spikes my imagination of the man. Maybe he is a giant; maybe he is tiny but has a magic pocket; maybe his skin is ultra-absorbent. The powerlessness facing the loss of possession is partially resolved by the absurdness of the situation.

It’s then organic to design stories within a story, specifically the ones Li and Zhou exchange to understand Qigong and their lives after the practice. Similar to Plato’s writing, the value lies

within these stories, hence, they are the “core story” of my game. When the player interacts with Li after Qigong practice in my game, Li will first offer stories to understand the Qigong movement you just practiced. Then Li will compare Daoist stories and the story of Odysseus getting help from Aeolia, the god of winds, to return to Ithaca through two other conversations. The compared stories deal with the desire and grief of the lost. Since Li hasn’t fully come to terms with his struggle, Li will supplement his comments on the absurdity of these stories and comment on the futility of the gestures. See Appendix “script” for the verbatim of the stories.

5. Game Design

Instead of following a more traditional game design method of deciding mechanism, dynamics, and aesthetics, I create a structure of the narrative (Figure 7) first. Similar to working on a comic book, I decide the climax of the story first, which will remain unchanged throughout the creation process. In the case of *Road to Heaven*, the climax is where the player is most engaged with the motion control mechanism to learn Qigong. This happens during the Qigong practice section. The structure in Figure 7 enables the installation of different gaming assets and gaming mechanisms into individual parts of *Road to Heaven*.

I employ the method in Chapter 2.3 to design the visuals for gaming assets and design the motion control of the gaming mechanisms. Following the cycle in Figure 6, I am studying other artists’ work to identify the metaphors they use and generate metaphors for me to express the Qigong practice experience and enhance the gameplay experience. I then go through iterations to test the combination of Qigong’s experience and gameplay. Through this articulation, I gain a further understanding of practicing Qigong. Reflecting on what I learned through game-making will help me to use Qigong as a tool to find the way.

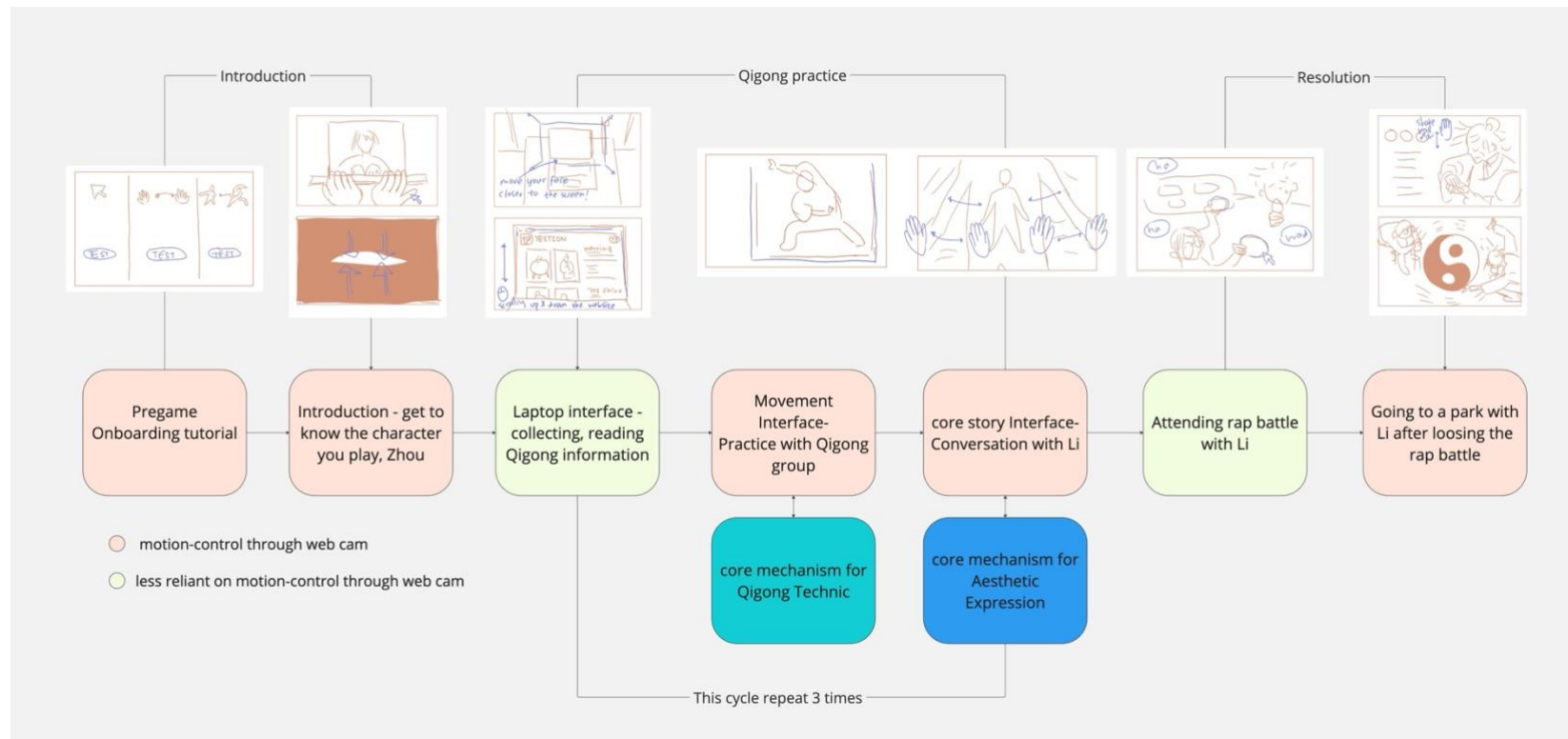


Figure 7 Game Run Through / source: author

5.1 Visual Design

Visual design plays a crucial role in the narrative game *Road to Heaven*. Illustrations introduce the characters, set the tone, and drive the story forward. The movements in the illustrations are designed to reflect and teach the understanding I've gained through Qigong.

The visuals are divided into two distinct styles. One is a plain, cartoon-like style (left in Figure 8), used to depict figurative, realistic scenes such as Zhou meeting the Qigong group. The other is a more intricate, line-filled style (right in Figure 8), reserved for abstract, otherworldly moments where the spiritual aspects of Qigong are explored, such as learning the movements, encountering the group's philosophy, and hearing the core story of Qi.

For much of *Road to Heaven*, I use my default comic drawing style, which I often employ in other comic stories with a contemporary setting featuring a fictionalized version of myself. This style suits the story's setting in contemporary North America. However, to represent the spiritual dimensions of Qigong and the core story, I developed a different visual approach.

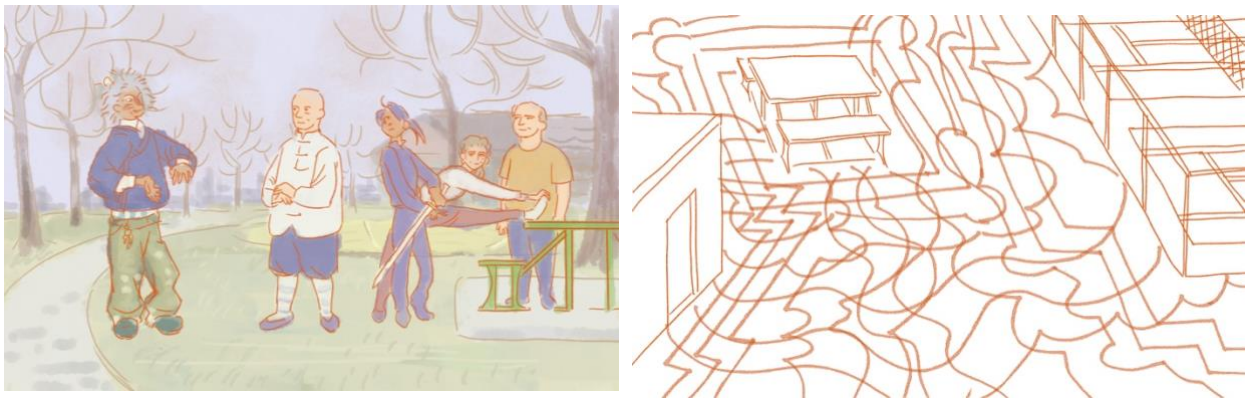


Figure 8 Left: plain, cartoon style; Right: intricate, line-filled style| source: author

5.1.1 Case Study: Guo Feng Yi

To design the Qigong movement assets, it's important to look at the works of Guo Feng Yi, who was a Chinese artist who practiced Qigong actively. Her drawings are closely related to her Qigong practice experience and are a reflection of her feelings.

Guo Feng Yi started to practice Qigong after she retired from a rubber factory in the 80s.

She practiced Qigong because she suffered back pain resulting from her working conditions in the factory. Through a deep dive into Guo's personal history, author and curator Rosario Güiraldes (2020) finds that Guo kept a journal when she began to practice Qigong. In her journal in March of 1989, Guo encouraged herself: "You have to have a strong will and endurance. Through sustained practice, you will achieve enlightenment. If you hold on to the [qigong] practice, naturally, everything will be achieved through real practice." (27) Güiraldes (2020) when writing Guo's biography, says that "only a few days after [Guo] began to record her experiences, Guo—at age forty-seven—began to see images, colors, and shapes during her meditations." (27) Guo participated in the Qigong conference in several cities in China because of her highly personalized style of practice, "Qi E Gong"(企鹅功 penguin style practice), and her drawings were made public. Guo was later scouted by the Long March artist project in 2002 and participated in an artist residency under Judy Chicago's lead. Guo's unique art style allows her works to travel around the world.



Figure 9 Diagram of Guan Ziming Compiled Xuandongjijing(above) by Guo Feng Yi

Figure 10 Analytical Diagram of the Sun Seen from a Distance in the State of Qigong(below) by Guo Feng Yi

Guo's early drawings (Figure 9, Figure 10) serve the function of journaling. They are intended to document how she feels the Qi flows through her meridians. Her drawings become a "Technic" for her to chart down the bodily knowledge she accessed through her Qigong practice.

Guo's drawings share a similar quality with Daoist images made since 471 AD (documented in Dao Zang). The aesthetic of the images is dictated by their function. Figure 11 shows the true form of the mountain where the Qi resides. A scholar of Daoist and Buddhist

visual culture in China, Shih-shan Susan Huang (2012), noted that “what is signified in the Daoist sign system is [Qi]; the myriad forms are the signifiers” (342). Qi is “the signified” in Figure 11, and this image is “the signifier”. Guo’s drawings are similar in this vein as they document the location and direction of Qi.



Figure 11 The Chart of True Form of the Topography of the Most High Man-Bird Mountain

Western illustration and painting begin with documenting what the eyes can see. The painters and illustrators went through the process of finding a unifying perspective to accurately depict the spatial relationship between objects. However, Chinese paintings more often rely on aerial perspective and regional perspective. These principles are used to depict the feeling of space relationships. Guo’s drawings function as a “signifier” for embodied knowledge when she began to draw. Later, Guo’s drawings incorporate the characteristic Chinese traditional painting, which makes her drawings more expressive. Guo’s artistic process is that she uses Qigong “Technic” to gain a drawing “Technic” that allows her to remember her learning in Qigong, but also as an artistic tool to interpret other subjects, such as the life of a rural Chinese woman.

5.1.2 Qigong Movement Assets

I adopt the same method Guo Feng Yi employed in her drawings. Instead of following Qi through meridians, I choose to focus on the feelings in muscles and organs and how they concur with Qi traveling through Dantian (丹田). The lines start at the muscle and organ (the muscle

under my armpit and my lower abdomen), where I feel most stretched during the practice. If the lines are going outward, then I am breathing out during this pose; if the lines are going inward, then I am breathing in during this pose (Figure 12). With the goal of documenting “signifiers” for my Qigong practice, I am able to focus on the feelings during practice and recall the feelings from previous practice sessions. This process recalls what Stiegler (2013) describes as anamnestic memory in the “Technic”. Anamnestic memory “[is] the source of all knowledge, all ontologically grounded episteme, all mathesis and all learning [apprentissage], constitutes the pure autonomy of thinking for oneself” (18). Drawing and practicing together became a learning cycle to enlighten me on both Qigong and drawing, especially understanding that the gestural brush strokes in Chinese painting come from a body performance rather than for a decorative purpose.

My sketches (Figure 12) for the Qigong documentation pave the way for Qigong movement assets and help to evolve an expressive, metaphoric art style for the core story assets.



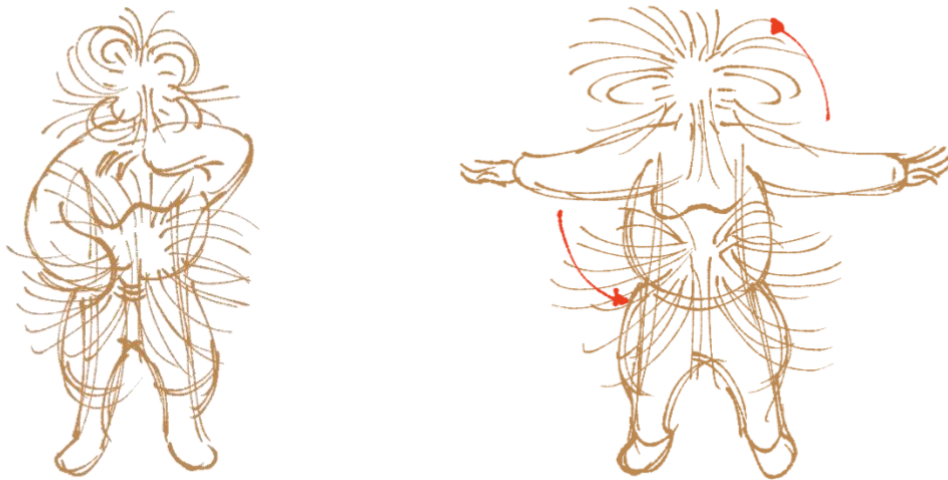


Figure 12 Qigong Feeling Assets / source: author

5.1.3 Case Study: Daoist Tu and Iconograph

To design the core story assets, it's important to capture the essence of the Daoist philosophy through visual metaphors. Expanding on the discussion in Chapter 5.1.1, I will look at how Daoism interprets images and look at visually adjacent images that contain other religious iconographies.

Daoist philosophy focuses on heavenly texts. As Shih-shan Susan Huang (2012) notices: “The originally formless nature of the Daoist divinities described in written sources makes the creation of individual icons problematic and perhaps impossible” (6). Daoist “Tu” (图, imagery) is a secondary aid and reminder to Daoist meditations and ritual performances. The “Tu”, meditations, and ritual performances ultimately work towards a Daoist way of seeing.



Figure 13 Talismans in DaoZang

The images of talismans (Figure 13) are particularly intriguing in *DaoZang*. They participate in rituals in Daoist practice. The talismans are a combination of texts and symbols describing deities dwelling in specific places. These functional tools end up being dazzling and decorative. I take inspiration from talismans to generate decorative images for a practical purpose.



Figure 14 Lord Lao Riding on an Elephant, Song Dynasty, Hanging Scroll.

China was under the influence of both Daoism and Buddhism. Since Daoist texts and rituals are hard to translate into images, artists borrow images from other religious paintings. This image depicts an old man seated on an elephant. The exquisite canopy above him suggests this image is an icon. The elephant and the foreign attendants suggested a Buddhist connection. The old man is identified to be Laozi, who is considered a Daoist deity after his death.

Another case is the comparison between *Yogi with Seven Chakras* (Figure 15) and *Neidan Tu* (Figure 16). One depicts a yoga practitioner with seven chakras drawn inside of him, another

depicts the Daoist inner landscape drawn inside a man. These images both document the understanding of how a mystical power travels through the body during a meditational body practice (Yoga and Qigong). The similarity of poses and composition suggests a cultural influence and similarity of the underlying principles behind these body practices.



Figure 15 Yogi with Seven Chakras, 18th Century, India



Figure 16 Neidan Tu, Inner Landscape, 17th Century, China

I find the ambiguity between Buddhist and Daoist icon painting beneficial, as the Buddhist painting incorporates more direct depictions of objects and environments, supplementing direct sensual feelings for abstract texts.

Another inspirational image is *Je Damcho Pekar with Hand and Footprints* (Figure 17). In Buddhist tradition, a guru yoga (a Buddhist teacher) is treated by their student as a living Buddha. And to pay homage to footprints and handprints is equivalent to worshipping the Buddha himself. Though not certain if the hand and footprints are the exact traces of Je Damcho Pekar during his lifetime in this painting, the very shape of the hands and feet, in contrast to the landscapes and disciples, creates a powerful, sensual impact at first glance.



Figure 17 Je Damcho Pekar with Hand and Footprints, 17-18th Century, Paro

These references give me a starting ground for core story assets.

5.1.4 Core Story Assets

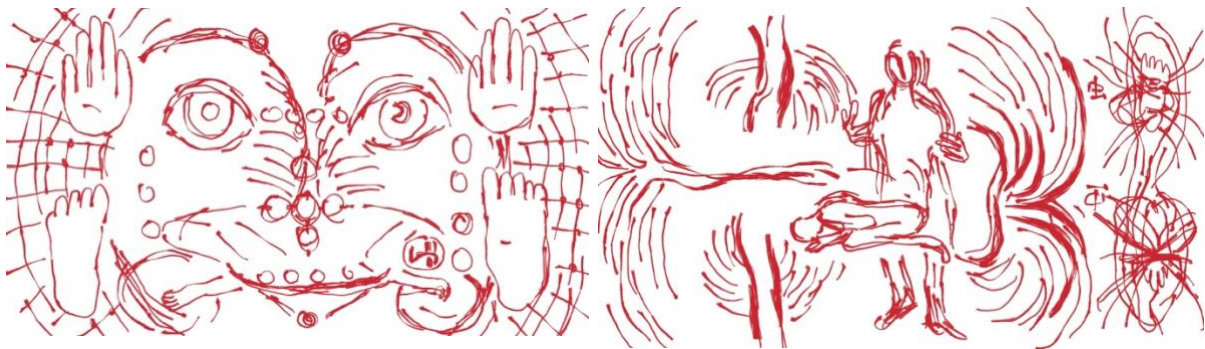


Figure 18 core story assets / source: author

When creating the core story imagery, I begin by using the Qi flow art style in my Qigong movement assets. I want to create the sensual impact that *Je Damcho Pekar with Hand and Footprints* has. I choose to create an impactful face and body with the character Li in my mind. The face and the body are composed of Qi flow lines. (Fig.19) According to my design of the character, the images should be stark for immediate attention and edging on the side of off-putting at the same time.

These images succeed at being eye-catching but fail at producing visual metaphors for the core story. I want to maintain the composition of Figure 15, Figure 16, and Figure 17, where an icon takes the central position in the image. Instead of having a sitting posture, Qigong movement, the animal this movement represents, and a posture that I associate with a sense of longing take up the center spot (Figure 19). The concept of a giant that can carry a swamp on its shoulder is represented as an inflated figure. The idea of no house, no door is represented as an osmosis cube (Figure 19). To reference the composition of images inside a figure in Figure 15 and Figure 16, I draw a thinner giant inside the giant and a cube inside the prostrating longing figure (Figure 19). Both images symbolize that there is a whole universe inside one's body. I wouldn't claim I have found an entire universe inside my body through Qigong practice just yet, but it's very true to feel there is space and capacity unexplored inside my body, and Qigong brings that forth.

The core story assets adopt a mellow color palette, as shown in Figure 19. Since the Qigong practice requires a relaxing environment, I abandoned the stark red-on-white color palette for the core story assets.



Figure 19 Core Story Assets / source: author

5.2 Motion Control Design

Since this research focuses on how to translate the bodily and spiritual experience of Qigong, I am not making a traditional game, and for that reason, I have to consider different design strategies that would allow me to accommodate the story and the body movement. As shown in Figure 7, the Qigong practice section is a section that centers on translating the bodily

and spiritual experience of Qigong. This section contains two parts, the Qigong movements part and the core story part, which require intense motion control from the players. These two parts have different affordances: one is to teach the basic movement and introduce a relaxing yet divine environment; another is to use a story to illustrate the Daoist philosophy that's relevant to Qigong practice. It's reasonable to design different motion control modes for these two parts.

For the Qigong movement part, I use Stiegler's "Technic" to study game cases to establish a design method. For the core story part, I study how the aesthetic experience of agency creates a long-lasting emotional impact. By answering the question of whether this experience could become acquired knowledge, I will be able to understand how to articulate the spiritual experience of Qigong in the form of gameplay.

The rest of the sections in Figure 7 are also integral to the experience and are also subject to the theory of aesthetic experience, specifically of the rhythm in aesthetic experience. Analyzing rhythm in aesthetic experience will reveal the placement of gaming mechanisms in different sections, which I will detail in Chapter 5.3. The introduction section includes an onboarding tutorial and an introduction to Zhou. The onboarding tutorial introduces all forms of interactions, such as waving at the camera and doing a full-body pose to the camera. The introduction to Zhou establishes the fact that the players are playing as a character, as well as themselves. The resolution sections give the story a climax and resolve the characters' arcs. The mini-game mechanism of this section is irrelevant to this research, but the story is.

Another critical design choice is to make *Road to Heaven* a web game. The illustrated storyboard created during the story-design phase follows a visual style typical of Visual Novel games, featuring expressive characters depicted in dynamic poses against detailed backgrounds, with dialogue accompanying the visuals. Combining webpage scrolling interactions and webcam-based gesture inputs actively engages players in learning Qigong, while the narrative progression can be driven by a dialogue system similar to traditional Visual Novel games. Programming these features directly in HTML offers simplicity, flexibility, ease of editing, and greater accessibility compared to dedicated visual novel engines like *Ren'Py*.

5.2.1 Case Studies: Dance Central and Before Your Eyes

When players engage in a game, they have to learn a “Technic” to interact. As a game scholar, Brenda Keogh (2018) observed: “There is nothing natural about the movements required (and acquired) to engage with a videogame” (79). Since learning how to use a simple controller is necessary to play a game, why not make learning Qigong the method of playing the game?

“Technic” is acquired through repetition and truly understanding it through anamnestic memory. This is also true for Qigong. It’s necessary to identify the difference between a body practice and a game focused on repeating the movement. Kiri Miller (2017), a researcher who investigates dance and digital play, noticed that when she introduced the game *Dance Central* to her dance class, the only student who claimed to be a gamer played the game differently from non-gamer students. While other students simply followed the movements and moved freely during the freestyle session, this gamer student found flashcards in the UI indicated certain repetitive movements. This can boost his score, so he used the free session to practice the anticipated repeat movements (113). Similar to Keogh’s observation, when the game design presents a scoring system, the training for a certain somatic attunement doesn’t aim for emotional or spiritual feelings but at getting a higher score.

Miller (2017) concludes that true dancing “must be comprehended through embodied engagement using acquired techniques, and it will, in turn, reconfigure the body that takes it up. It is the object of the techniques of proprioceptive interactivity that dance games inculcate” (118). Miller explains how her studio dancing training differs from dance games. Her instructor “put more emphasis on interpretive nuance” (119). Her instructor would use emotionally similar music as cues and explain the emotional interpretation. This is very similar to my Qigong practice.

Game as a multi-medium work using sound and narrative could replace numerical scores as an incentive for learning “Technic”. I found a game called *Before Your Eyes* (GoodbyeWorld Games 2021) as a reference. *Before Your Eyes* is an immersive narrative experience where a 12-year-old child, Benny, has his life experience unfold before the player’s eyes before his passing due to terminal illness. The game uses eye-tracking technology to detect the player’s

blinking of their own eyes, and this is the main control of the game. One of the main mechanisms is if the player blinks when a metronome appears on the screen, Benny's memory will jump forward, hindering the player from "remembering" his memory fully. This training of the eye utilizes emotional interpretation to reinforce the blinking "Technic".

Combining Miller's theory, my Qigong experience, and the design used in *Before Your Eyes*, I can design a mini-game for the practice part that translates the bodily and spiritual experience of Qigong

5.2.2 Movement Control

Moving away from the gaming system in *Dance Central*, the goal is to incentivize the player to engage with the movements instead of a numerical score reward. The idea is to design a play that rewards the player with the satisfaction of learning. The Leopard movement in Wudang Qigong is being practiced during the first Qigong practice section and could be dissected into a few poses. The reward for hitting one pose should be access to the next pose, with the help of visual cues and sound cues as interpretive guides to connect between these poses. Similar to the reward of the initial practice of Qigong, the player will gain knowledge of a new movement and relax the flanks of their body.

Version1

The initial idea is to utilize the scrolling motion on a webpage. Similar to using the blinking of an eye as a metaphor for how fast time flies, I want to make the upward-scrolling motion serve as a metaphor for the "road to heaven". for finding the "way". I dissect the Leopard movements into seven poses and draw them into seven still images with the art style in Figure 12. I used the AI training model, *Teachable Machine*, to train these seven poses as checkpoints. In this part, the webcam is turned on once the page is open and starts to look at the player in front of the camera, and compares their pose to the ones of the checkpoints. The pose images on the page prompt the player to mimic them. The instant reward is that the page will scroll automatically once it detects a pose to reveal a new pose. After going through the whole movement, the player can scroll through the page with their acquired knowledge. While scrolling up and down after the first run, the player will be able to read the text and look at the

images that indicate the Qi flow. These cues, together with getting familiar with the pose through scrolling, will provide my bodily and spiritual experience.

During this version, I realized that Teachable Machine's performance is poor when trying to differentiate between the checkpoints when the model is trained to have more than five checkpoints. Also, the still images don't provide enough information for the player to learn fluent movement. They will rather prompt the player to strike one pose and return to an idle standing pose. Last, the texts and the Qi flow images are illegible during the fast scroll.

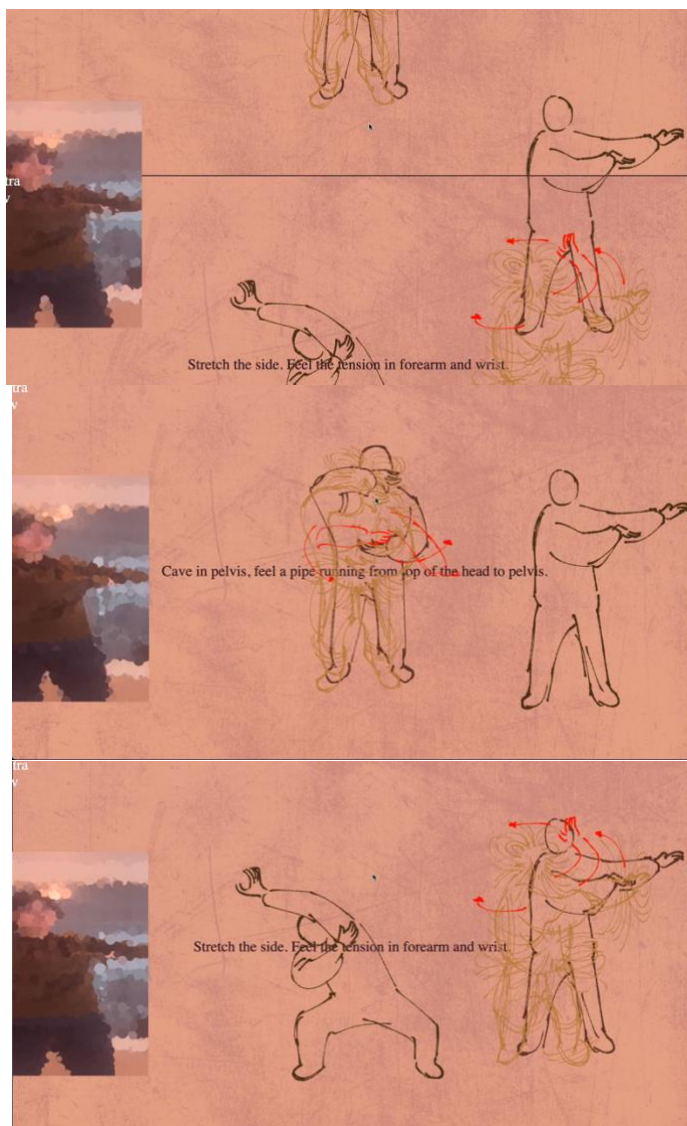


Figure 20 Version 1 of Practice Section / source: author

A play demo can be seen here: [FullDemo](#)

Version2

During this version, I decided to use video to transmit the Qigong movement. I identify only the three key poses for checkpoints, which are the stretch, the leap, and the gather. Teachable Machine can perfectly distinguish between these three checkpoints, plus one idle pose. The video plays until it reaches a checkpoint, and a blue interface shows up for the player to mimic the pose to trigger the next video. The video is accompanied by an audio cue to explain where to feel the stretch and the emphasis on relaxing the feet and knees. The videos are processed with a distorting effect to indicate that the true practice happens on a different plane.

Similar to Qigong practice, I didn't learn the movement and the breathing at the same time. The checkpoints will recur in the later part of the game during conversations with Li. Li will relay how breathing is synchronized with movement. This recreates my experience of acquiring the Qigong "Technic". The audio cues and the stories are my sharing of my spiritual findings. Interlacing them into a mini-game situated inside a story accomplished my goal.

5.2.3 Case Studies: Dys4ria and Before Your Eyes

Daoist writings rely heavily on metaphor to explain the "way." Considering the Qigong movements as metaphors helps the player tap into the "way". For the core story design, it's beneficial to look at other games that have gameplay as metaphors. Aesthetic experience in game theory helps understand how that could be effective in gameplay.

Players can get pleasure from mastering a task, but a game has more to offer beyond training a player how to push a joystick at the right moment with the right pressure. The offering and the reward could be a revealing experience. Game scholar Simon Niedenthal (2009) tries to categorize game aesthetic experience as pleasure, emotions, sociability, etc. These experiences need to be further researched because they have the potential to "[explore] ways in which our sense knowledge functions as a cultural construction, and supports our relationship to the world, in the broadest sense" (3). This specificity of a well-designed control (opposing the general controls: clicking for shooting, etc.) will ground the viewer in a geographical reality that's beyond the screen. Gaining an understanding of reality through the

metaphor of gameplay is an aesthetic experience that's satisfying and rewarding to players. Karl Duncker (1941) defines dynamical joy as "based upon a kind of experience that lies somewhere between emotion proper and sensation: the tensions, excitements, thrills, and reliefs of acting and resting" (13). Similar to the ups and downs in real life, a rhythm of emotional experience with breaks and tension is an important construct of the aesthetic experience, as it's more akin to real life.

Anna Anthropy's game *Dys4ria* (2012) documents her experience with gender dysphoria and her journey on hormone treatment. This game is a set of mini-games paced like WarioWare while the player is asked to use four directional keys to navigate a two-dimensional plane. The game doesn't offer a winning objective but an aesthetic pleasure.

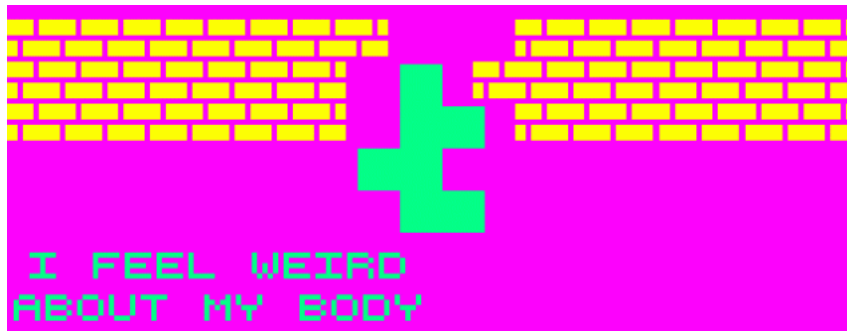


Figure 21 *Dys4ria*, Anna Anthropy

For example, the first mini-game the player encounters is a Tetris-like shape-fitting game. The player is supposed to control a shape to pass through a gap in the wall. The problem is that the shape doesn't fit the wall, hence, it is unable to pass. This is a metaphorical expression in which the author constructed an abstract space to single out a sensory experience, specifically her sense of gender dysphoria, of which she doesn't fit in. The frustration became an aesthetic experience illustrating a reality.

Anthropy's autobiographical piece reimagines the game mechanism not to achieve a certain goal but as a narrative tool for rhythm experience. The Tetris-like game reappears in the game at the final stage. Nothing changed but the Anthropy's mentality. The shape was not meant to fit the wall anyway. We are there, together, with her, to go through this experience. The Tetris-like opening introduces a sense of tension. After the middle of the game, where the player experiences ups and downs, this Tetris-like game reappears to bring a sense of relief and



Figure 23 *Before Your Eyes*, blink at the eye icon to draw



Figure 22 *Before Your Eyes*, blink when the metronome appears

give a hopeful outlook. This rhythm shift gives the gameplay a richer meaning, and understanding the shift is an aesthetic experience for the players.

Before Your Eyes achieves an aesthetic experience using webcam motion input. The players will try not to close their eyes when there is a metronome on the screen. The choice of using a metronome and the dialogue where Benny's mom introduces the metronome as a tool to "measure time in music" shows the players that this is a metaphor for the passage of time. JJ Abu-Halimah (2022) describes this inability to stop the closing of eyes as not hindering the players from getting the full game graphics but provides a "feeling of just how fast the past goes flies away, and this immerses [players] in Benny's reminiscence of his life" (Abu-Halimah 2022). Unable to always open eyes to stop time from fleeing is also a metaphor for the passage of time.

In the game *Before Your Eyes*, players are losing a staring contest with the computer and missing out on a part of the narrative. The feedback from the game is not negative when players close their eyes, but positive by offering an aesthetic experience of being unable to stop time from flying past and feeling a sense of regret. The tension of getting harder and harder to open the eyes throughout the game also builds up a rhythm of getting more and more frustrated until the final relief. The metaphoric gameplay, together with the pace of the gameplay, provides a satisfying aesthetic experience.

5.2.4 Core Story Control

Learning from *Before Your Eyes*, I aim to design a mode of control that has a metaphorical link to what is controlled inside the game. The motion that the players do can't be generic, but

a motion related to how to feel the Qi. Learning from *Dys4ria*, the graphics of the game could be representational instead of very realistic images. Since the core story part aims to provide a further understanding of the Qigong movement practice, the metaphors should be both visual and gestural.

From the case study of Zhuangzi in Chapter 4.3.1 and the case study of “Tu” in Chapter 5.1.3, I deduce that Daoism often uses exaggerated, sometimes hard-to-visualize, metaphors to invoke a strong emotion, and Daoism often uses a “signifier” for visuals. It’s crucial to finalize one of the core stories that incorporates these elements. In the case of the Leopard, Li will tell this story to explain to Zhou what he feels about Qi:

-When you close your eyes and begin to practice, to feel the Qi, you will sense that your body is larger than its actual size, as if an invisible layer of skin is expanding outward.

-In Zhuangzi’s writings, it is said that Daoist practitioners do not dwell anywhere, they have no doors, no houses, and they leave no traces as they move—like a goose flying by without leaving a mark.

-When I close my eyes again, I suddenly feel this leopard that’s spouting inside of me, dying to come out. And the Qi it carries is the space where I belong. It can expand or shrink. It can grow large enough to wrap around the ozone layer, or if it’s tired, it can shrink and rest inside my appendix.

I identify three metaphors in the Leopard story: skin expands, the goose flying, and the leopard inside the body. For these three parts of the Leopard story, I designed three mini-games to enhance the embodied experience with these metaphors. The first game is when the webcam reads if the players’ hands are closing close together or opening far away, the image of Li shrouded in lines of Qi and enclosed in a temple, will grow big and small with the movement. This movement, which resembles another movement in the preparation stage of Wudang Qigong, gesticulates breathing in and breathing out. The second game is where the players’ hands represent two geese; the players need to use the images of geese to wipe out 80% of the screen to reach the next part. This is a reference to “a quail has no nest and leaves

no trace in flight” (雁过无痕), symbolizing the “way”. The third game is where the player’s hand represents a man and a leopard; the up and down movement of the hands will bring the man and the leopard closer together. This represents a teaching of Wudang Qiong, which is that the animal is within one’s body, and one should let the animal out naturally. At the end of the leopard story, Li also tells a joke where he is not afraid to lose his skin because he is a lizard man (see Appendix A).

Having a joke at the end of the initial story is very important because the mood will shift during the latter two recurrences of the practice sections, where Li tells more stories. These gestures will return in those sections, bearing different meanings. For example, during the last section, where Li tells you a story about Odysseus getting help from Aeolia, the opening and closing of hands are no longer a gesture for feeling the Qi expand to achieve a no-dwelling state but to open the sack for the wind as one of the sailors, blowing Odysseus and the ship so far away from Odysseus’s home Ithaca. (See appendix)

5.3 Rhythm and Aesthetics

Designing the gameplay for the introduction section and the laptop interface follows a different set of design rules. It’s not practical to have the full game controlled by motion input through a webcam. It’s also not pleasant to experience a narrative that has no pace change.

Adding a dialogue part between the Qigong movement part and the core story part provides a rhythmic break for the game. The player learns the Qigong movement first from a group practice and then engages in a conversation with Li to acquire the core story. So, there needs to be a section before the conversation for a deeper introduction to Li and a reason to talk about an in-depth understanding of Qigong. I need to provide a game mechanism for the dialogue to provide a breather and review the movement with a lower stake.

The player talks to Li by clicking a dialogue button. This gives the player a sense of agency as the character Zhou, and gives the players a break from learning new motion-control methods.

Since the player can only learn the breathing cycle of the movement after some familiarity with the movement, it makes sense to repurpose the pose detection. Look at how game scholar Johan Kalmanlehto (2023) talks about rhythm as an aesthetic experience in gameplay, it's important to know that the rhythm “arises from the constantly changing affordances that are present in every gameplay situation” (9). Kalmanlehto suggested that rhythmic gameplay “can mean both a recurring pattern and a continuous change” (10). Changing the affordance of the pose detection provides excitement but also provides familiarity to the players. I revised the script to include a banter that directs the conversation to do a quick review of the Leopard pose practice. The same pose detection is employed here, but instead of following a filtered video, the player is following Li, who is gesturing and explaining the breathing simultaneously.

6. Documentation and Reflection of ‘Road to Heaven’ in the DFX Group Show

This project was exhibited at the 2025 DFX Show for a week. A fully functional prototype of the project was presented at the show, while the artist accompanied the visitors through the experience.

6.1 Set Up and Exhibition Design

The exhibition is designed to create a spacious environment where players can experience the game freely and move their bodies with minimal obstruction. The circular carpet shown in Figure 24 marks the designated area for players to perform movements while engaging with the visuals projected on the screen. The space will also feature a brief overview of the game and introduce the key movements that players will learn during gameplay.

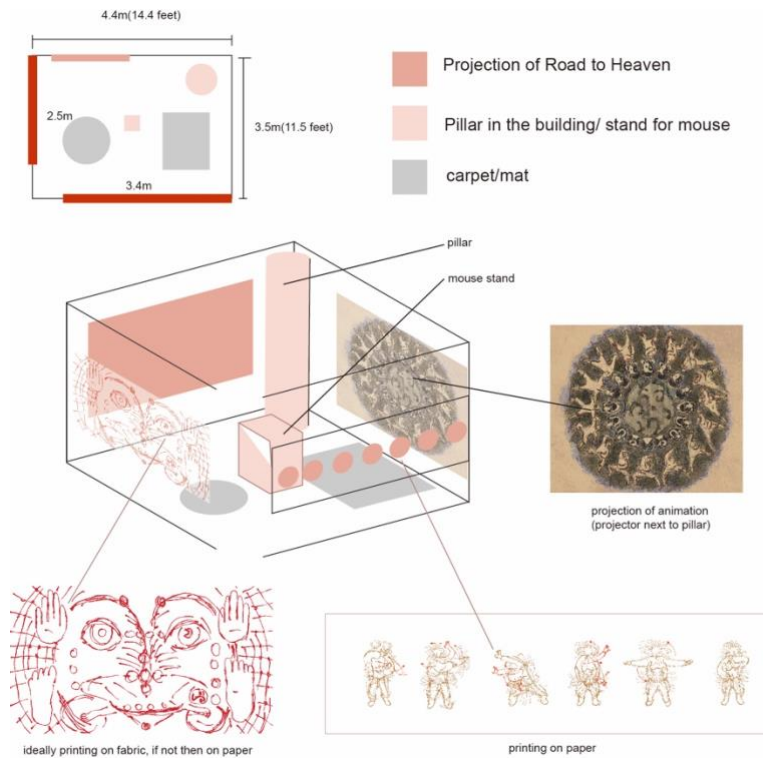


Figure 24 Floor Plan

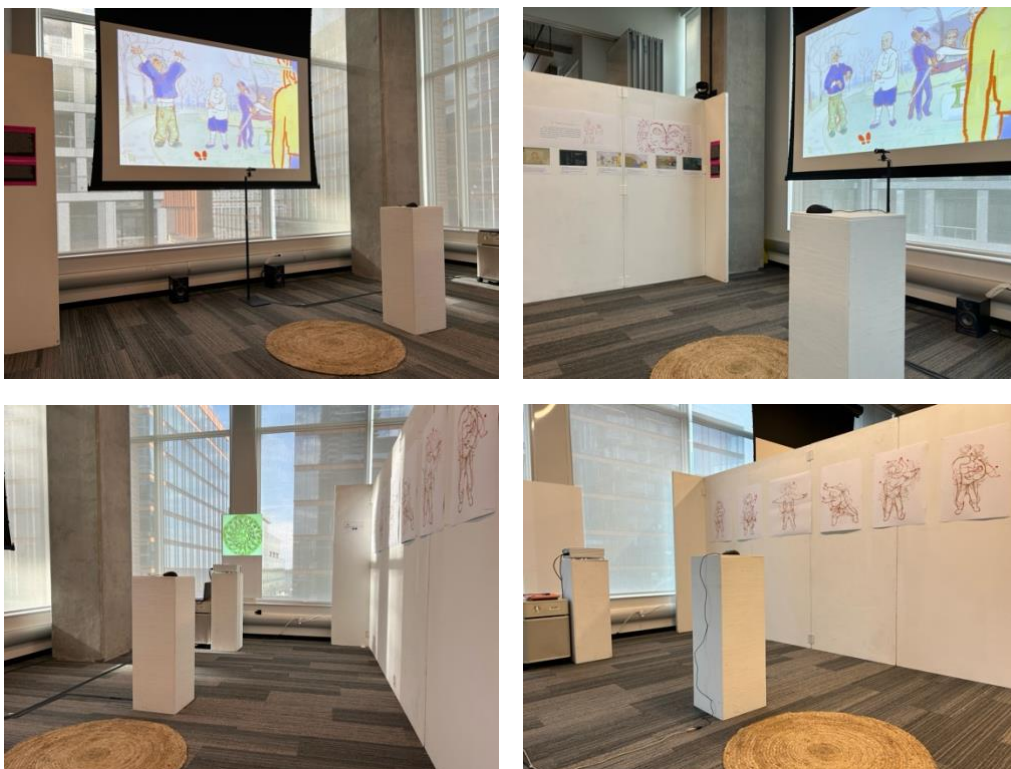


Figure 25 Installation View

The actual installation view is shown in Figure 25. The top left of the image shows the setup of the webcam, the position of the carpet, and the position of the projection. The top right

image shows that the summary of the game is positioned to the right of where the player will be standing. The bottom images show the projected animation and printed illustration of the movement taught in the game.

6.2 Guided Tour

During the exhibition, I gave a small group guided tour for the visitors, which consisted of three parts: introducing the game in front of the summary wall; accompanying the players when they experience the game; and talking to them after they play through the game.



Figure 26 Summary Images

I started by bringing the visitors to the summary wall (Figure 27). Since the prototype in the exhibition only showcased the Qigong practice section in Figure 7, and it is essential to know the whole narrative to understand the prototype, I made illustrations (Figure 26) to summarize the story. I also delivered a short verbal summary while the visitors looked at the illustrations:

This is a game that tells the story of a graduate student, Zhou, who meets an interesting old man, Li, during her research on Qigong. Zhou desires to seek peace through the practice of Qigong with a local group. Zhou's process is soon deviated by conversations

and rap battle adventures with Li where he seems to struggle with the understanding of the

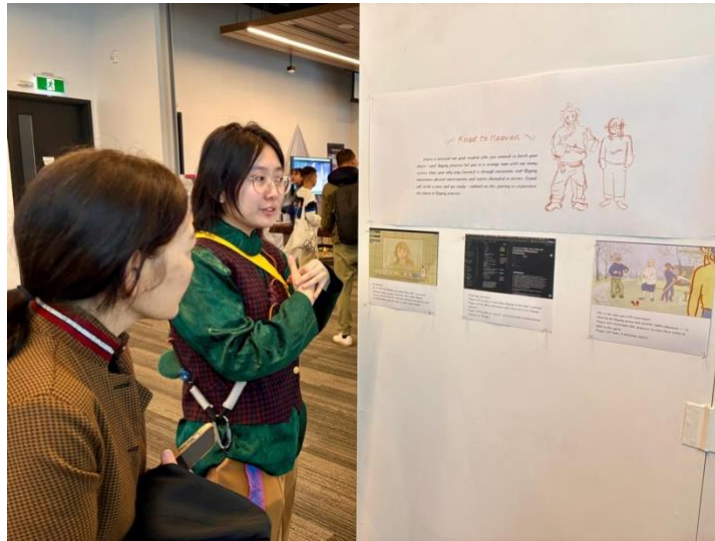


Figure 27 Bringing visitors to the summary wall

“way”. They come to a resolution in a practice in a park in the end.

Then, I brought my visitors to the circular carpet (Figure 28) and informed them of the following:

The game shown here is the part that focuses on my experience of learning Qigong.

There are three parts to it. First, I learned the movements themselves. Second, I learned when to breathe during the movements. Last, I read texts to gain a deeper understanding



Figure 28 Accompanying visitors when they experienced the game

of the “way” in Daoist practice (Figure 29). I want to offer this experience naturally in a narrative.

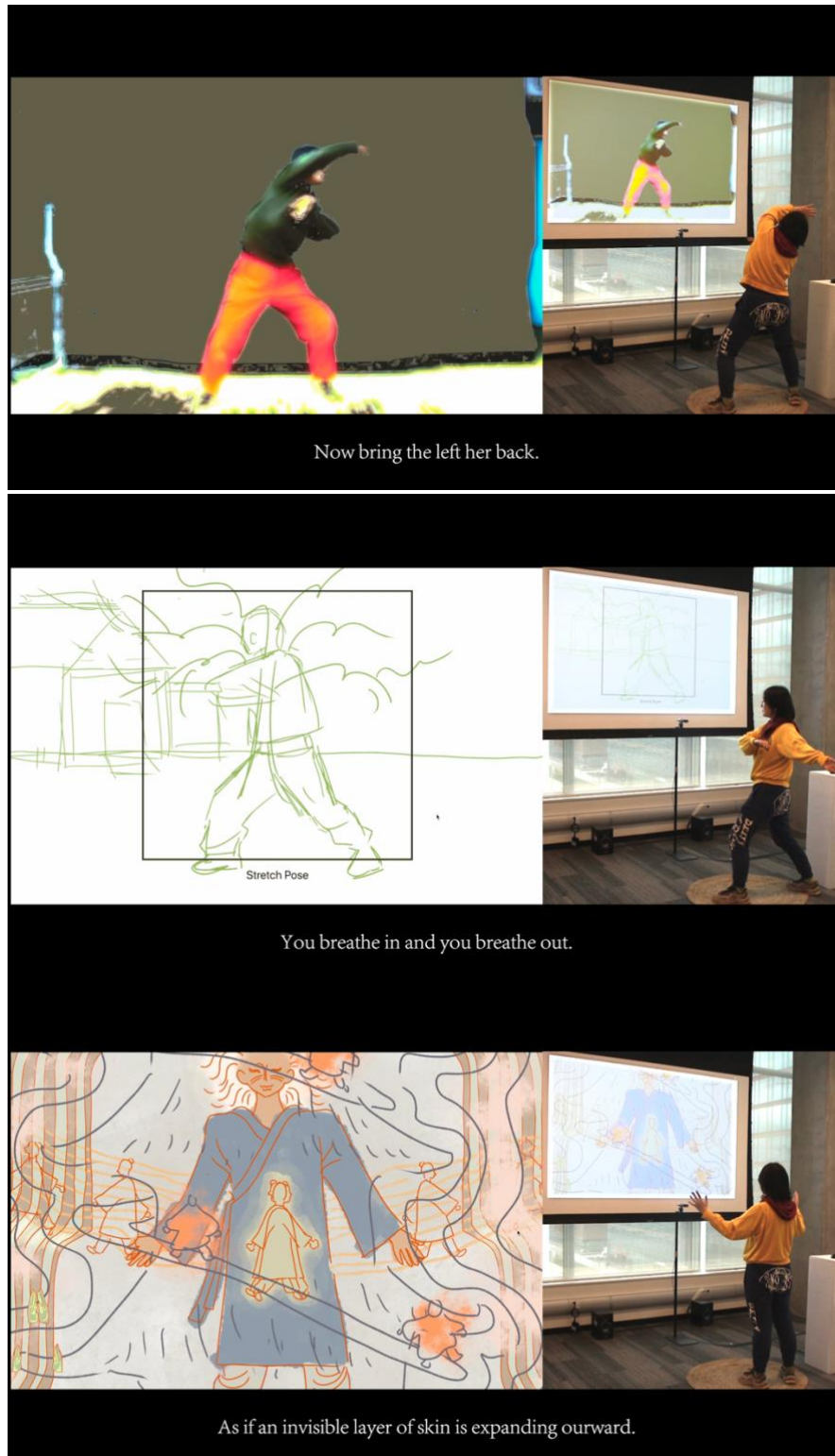


Figure 29 Top: first step of learning; middle: second step of learning; bottom: third step of learning.

Last, I waited for the visitors to play the game and observed how they interacted with the setup. I had conversations with people on either the gameplay or bodily knowledge.

Here is a detailed play-through of the game:

<https://youtu.be/AL9eaiyXuEY>

6.3 Reflection on the Prototype and Audience Experience

It becomes clear during gameplay that there are two distinct mechanisms for interacting with the visuals. The first involves performing a static pose to trigger a new video. This method introduces stricter checkpoints and poses greater challenges for players. The second mechanism allows players to use both hands to manipulate visuals projected on the screen, with animated illustrations responding immediately to their gestures. This approach does not halt the story's progression even if the designated movements are not perfectly performed, making it generally more engaging due to the instant feedback.

The full-body setup enhances the benefits of motion-controlled input, offering deeper engagement while intentionally moving away from traditional mouse, keyboard, or controller interaction. It also reflects the way Qigong is traditionally taught in group settings, providing players with a more authentic learning environment. However, the system is only capable of accurately tracking a single player at a time, making the semi-public setup less ideal for what is ultimately an individual practice. That said, Qigong encourages individuals to interpret movements and the flow of Qi according to their own mind and body, making it both a private and a communal practice. The illustrations at the bottom right of Figure 28 offer a space for players to share thoughts and insights after their experience, echoing the important communal aspect of traditional group practice. Extending this idea into an online space could further foster a community where players share and reflect on their embodied knowledge.

However, the input methods created some confusion among visitors. With a webcam in use, players naturally expect a single mode of interaction, but the game currently requires both webcam and mouse input. Simplifying the experience to rely solely on the webcam would create a more unified and intuitive interaction.

Another reflection concerns interface design. In most games, players have access to an

interface where they manage inventories and character abilities. I initially omitted such a system, aiming for a narrative-driven experience without external "props" influencing the narrative experience. However, visitor feedback revealed a desire to revisit the Qigong movements they had learned. This made me realize that the Qigong "Technic" could function as a form of inventory—an embodied knowledge that players carry with them, in the literal inventory "sack" of the main character. This insight points toward future improvements, suggesting the interface should evolve to reflect the player's accumulated knowledge as the game progresses.

7. Conclusion

Through creating the project *Research to Heaven*, I proved the feasibility of creating a web-based motion control narrative game experience that encompasses my bodily and spiritual understanding of practicing Qigong. Through this research experience, I am a step closer to the Daoist way of being.

Achieving mind-body harmony and aligning the rational with the creative is a difficult endeavor. Daoism's idea encourages people "to try not to try" to find the "way". However, the "way" doesn't reveal itself by simply doing nothing. This is where Qigong serves as an essential practice, guiding the body in its search. Different kinds of preparatory works are required, such as going to different Qigong practices, talking to friends with different Martial Arts backgrounds, and sifting through modern myths of Qigong. Once the knowledge is accumulated, I employ the reflexive methodology to find a thread in the pool of knowledge. I establish desire as the root theme of my work, and I start to picture the work. From here, I employ research-creation methodology to structure my making process. Once a general direction is decided, I research with a focused direction to add to the game-making. And during the making, I need to research to further explain the phenomenon I observed. This cycle results in systematic knowledge acquisition.

7.1 Contributions

During the process of defining Qigong, I drew significantly upon Stiegler's concept of

“Technic,” which describes technology as an extension of the human body. For example, modern people can integrate a smartphone so well that it almost feels as natural as it is an organ. This is because the affordance of a is aligned with modern life, which is to be efficient. Qigong’s affordance lies in aligning the mind and the body and eventually finding the true way of living. Stiegler’s “Technic” cannot fully describe embodied practices such as Qigong, but it offers language that builds toward a repertoire that can fully describe embodied practice in the future

During the visual design process, I developed a more embodied, sensual understanding of creating illustrations. In the past, my study of illustration often left me puzzled by the role of highly decorative elements. I was never drawn to beautiful patterns, as they seemed to lack informational depth. However, exploring Daoist “Tu” and Guo Feng Yi’s drawings revealed that expressive lines often began as forms of documentation and evolved into powerful, ornate illustrations. This insight aligned with somaesthetics philosopher Richard Shusterman (2017)’s observation about brushstrokes in Chinese calligraphy: “the creation of skilled brush strokes involves not only the hand wielding the brush but the soma (or shen) as a whole: one’s vision, proprioceptive and kinesthetic feelings, one’s energy, balance, breathing, and emotions—all influence the quality of the brush stroke” (86). My experience of oscillating between visualizing through practice and drawing through feeling has led me to develop a new approach to illustration—one that integrates embodied movement as an essential part of the creative process.

During the process of motion control design, I discovered the benefits of building a custom HTML code to facilitate the game. Game engines such as Visual Novel Maker cater to game artists who focus on honing their narrative, but the interaction is limited to only clicking choices inside a dialogue box; game engines such as Unity offer a variety of interactions, ranging from joystick control to webcam motion input control, but it’s an overkill for artists who aren’t dealing with 3D assets. The format of the website offers a variety of interactions through the keyboard, mouse pad, and webcam. The system I established for programming my game offers the potential of branching narrative in Visual Novel Maker and a wider range of interaction than in Visual Novel Maker. Moreover, this system benefits from the advantage of easy access to motion graphics through web design, making the process of creating and changing animation

for assets more flexible.

7.2 Future Works

Road to Heaven starts as a web-based game to gain a wider audience. A game with an intriguing story but a lower stake in playing might find its way leisurely to a lot of people's afternoon break. This will help spread the word about Qigong, and hopefully, this game will find its way to people who practice Qigong to share my findings with them and gain insights of their practice. I am only a humble beginner with much to learn. Acquiring and sharing more knowledge about Qigong and its embodied practice will be my future project, even though the format is unknown.

The work presented in this thesis document is a part of a larger game to be developed. The finished game is planned as the walk-through shown in Figure 7.

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Appendix

A.script



[Section 1]

Player interaction:

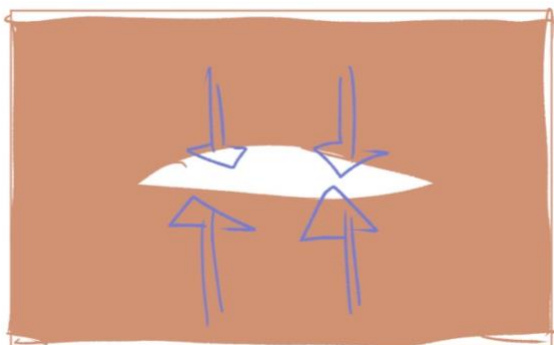
1. Look up to see self-reflection
2. Move hand to brush teeth – increase stress level
3. Click on = **dialogue box** = to hear the inner monologue introducing Zhou and her endeavor on her Qigong thesis Research.

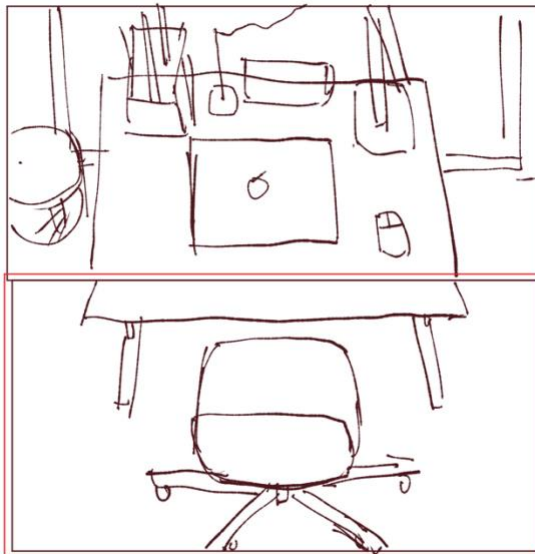


[Section 1- Section 2 Transition]

Player interaction:

1. Click on the hand to wash face – page black out with an animation similar to closing of the eyes.





[Section 2]

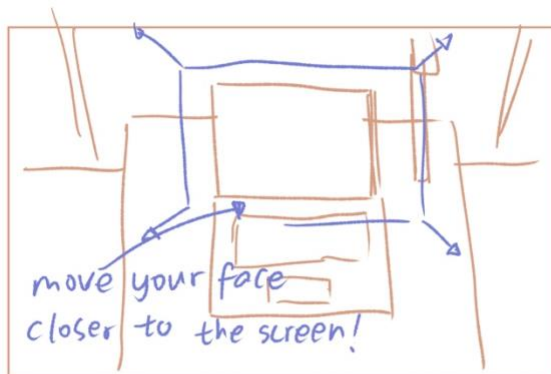
Player interaction:

1. Look up to see the laptop.
2. Click on mouse to open the laptop

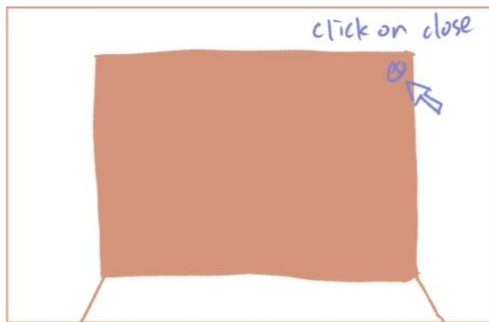
Player interaction:

1. Player move their face closer to the screen to full-screen the laptop image.
2. Player uses the mouse to scroll up and down a parody of Notion (Yestion) to see Zhou's current notes on Qigong.

Click on = **dialogue box** = to hear the inner monologue



Yestion content: 2 sections- real images of the Warring Period in China and 70s in China.

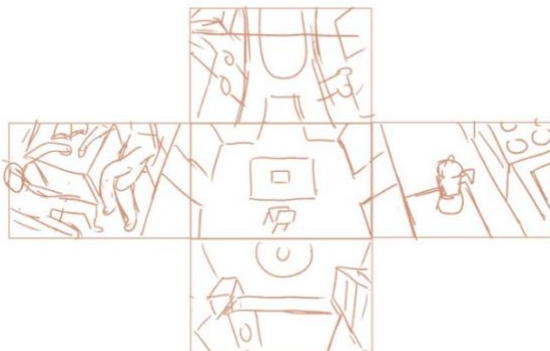
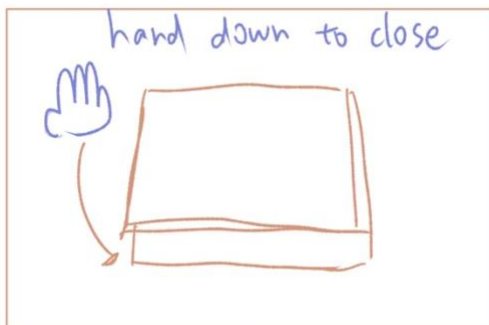


[Section 2- Section3 Transition]

Player Interaction:

1. Click on the x to close the laptop page.
2. Player pull their hand down to close the laptop lid.

An animation will play, setting the focus on the center of the map.



Map 

[Section 3]

Player interaction:

The player uses their finger to point up, down, left, and right to navigate to different rooms.

Left: talk to classmates =dialogue box=

Right: making a coffee =dialogue box=

Down: lying on bed and playing phone
=dialogue box=

Up: getting on line 1 to go to the park for Qigong =dialogue box=

[Section 3 – Section 4 Transition]

No player interaction

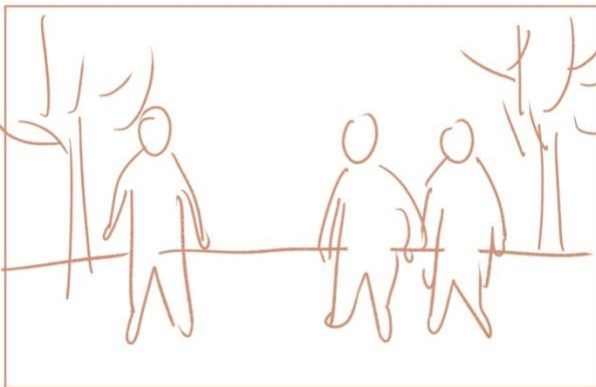
Animation of Fa Lun Gong group outside



[Section 4]

Player Interaction:

Move the mouse to drag Zhou closer to the group.



Player Interaction:

The player moves their hand in front of different people to greet the group.

Dave: Hello, nice to meet you, I am Dave!

Jessica: Hello. I am Jessica, nice to meet you.



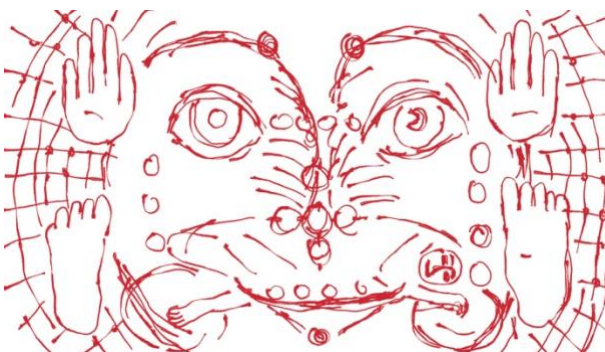
As hand moves to Li, a distinctive illustration appears.

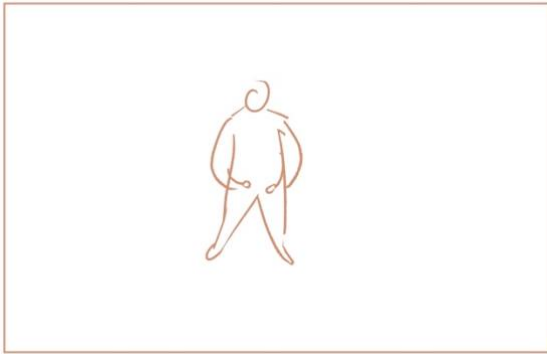
Li: Who are you talking to? It's Li, of course.

Dragging my ass to class at 8 for sure.

Tao flows like water, I'm grabbing its source,

Balance in the cosmos, that's my force!

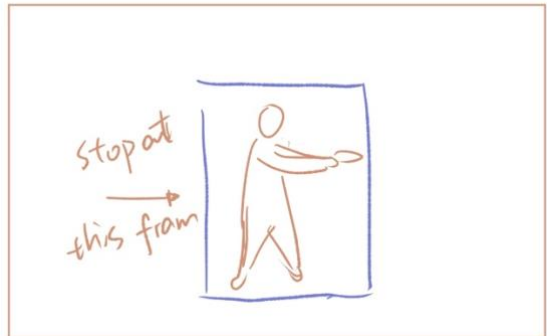




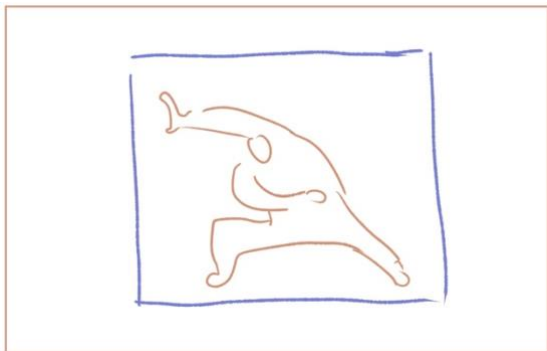
Player Interaction:

Dave: Ignore him.

Now let's start practice. Try to follow, don't worry if you didn't follow this time. Just focus on the three main poses.



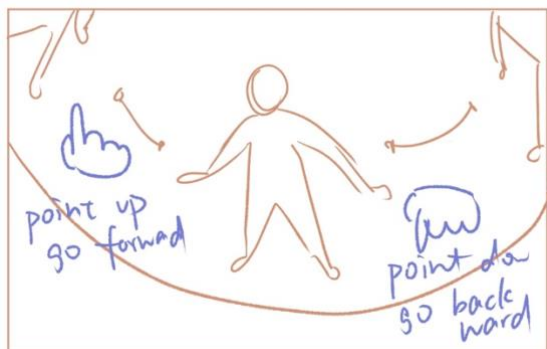
A video plays and stops, and a detection square appears. When the player completes this pose, the video keeps playing



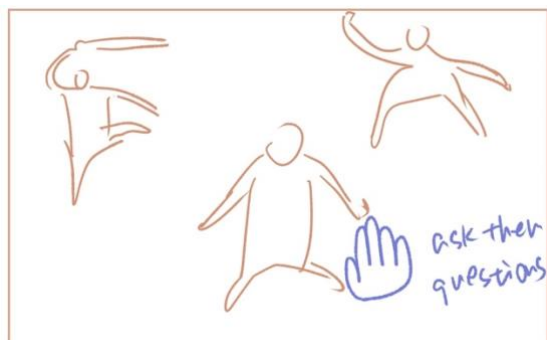
A video plays and stops, a detection square appears

Dave: You seem to get the hang of it!

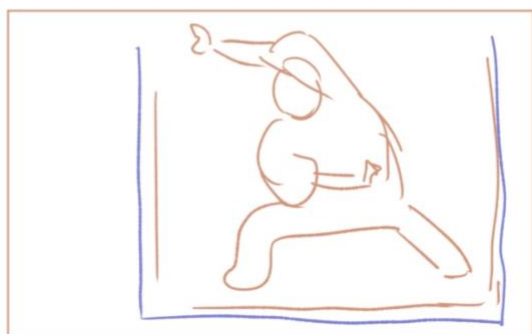
There is also a trick: if you point upwards, you can remember the previous movement. If you point down, you can remember the later movement.



Look at the movement at your own pace!
Free of the bounds of time!



Dave: Now, you can talk to the group about any questions!



*Move hands in camera closer to pattern on

the back of Lee's clothes*

Zhou: What's that on your clothes?

Lee: Oh, it's my rap record, it's really nothing.
We should do more Qigong now!

An animation started to play with texts

Lee: Show me your move! Come on! Do you feel the Qi?

Zhou: I can't really... Can you describe it for me?

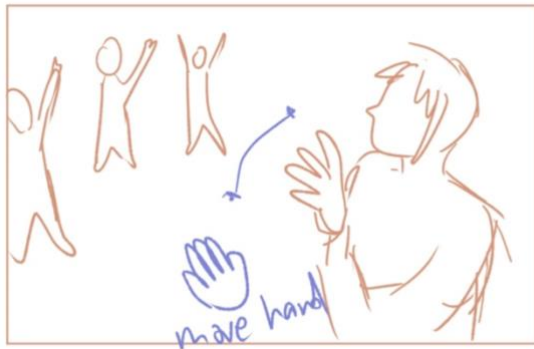
Li: When you close your eyes and begin to practice, feeling the Qi, you will sense that your body is larger than its actual size, as if an invisible layer of skin is expanding outward. In Zhuangzi's writings, it is said that Taoist practitioners do not dwell anywhere; they have no doors, no houses, and they leave no traces as they move, like a goose flying by without a mark. When I close my eyes again, I suddenly feel that this layer of Qi is my dwelling without doors, windows, or walls. It can expand or contract. It can grow large enough to wrap around the ozone layer, or if it's tired, it can shrink and rest inside my appendix.

Zhou: Ohh, that sounds amazing. Sounds like you acquired a mystical skin.

Li: It really is amazing. The most amazing thing is that I'm not afraid of anyone stealing this skin.

Zhou: Oh? Is it because you are enlightened, and the skin is truly yours?

Li: No, it's because I'm a lizard person—I can grow a new one anytime.



[Section 4 – Section 5 Transition]

Player Interaction:

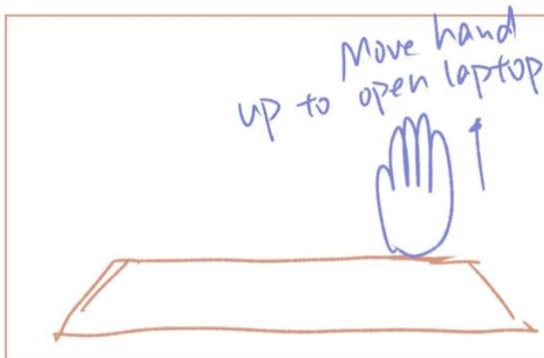
The player waves their hand to say goodbye to the group.

The player goes on public transit

=dialogue box=



Inner monologue about the question of the Qigong session today.



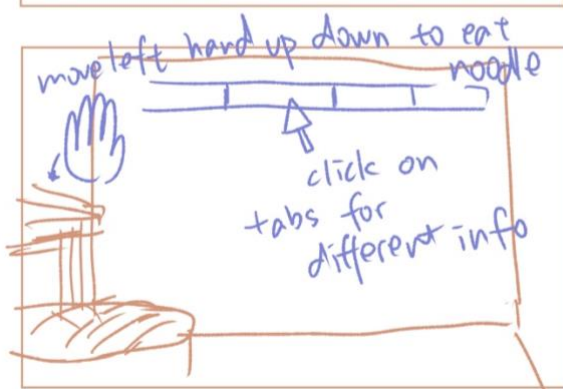
[Section 5]

Player Interaction:

Move your hand up to open the laptop.

Move the left hand up and down to eat noodles, and click on tabs to look at Qigong websites

Qigong website content



Qigong in the 1980s became a personal sanctuary for individuals. Different schools came about.

Guofengyi's drawings + Super natural power investigation images.



[Section 6]

Going to practice is basically the same. The movement will change.

Li was rapping while he was walking.



Li: Are you going to the Station?

Zhou: I am getting a coffee.. It's too early in the morning.

Li: I know! There is an awesome community over there, we should go together!



Li tries to scramble for money. He withdraws random things, including fake money with his face on it.

Cashier: *Sigh* You know what, Li, this will do...

{There are brochures about immigrant legal help in the corner of the shop.}



An animation started to play with texts

Zhou: Li, I have to be honest. I don't quite understand your metaphor about skin. I feel like it's too abstract, or maybe too carefree. How can a person not think about necessities like food, clothing, shelter, and transportation?

Li: Do you know a story from Zhuangzi?

"The great mass of nature carries me with form, tires me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me with death. Therefore, one who understands life well also understands death well. Someone may think they have securely

hidden a boat in a ravine or a mountain in a marsh, believing it to be safe. Yet, if in the middle of the night a powerful person comes and carries it away, the ignorant would not even know." Zhuangzi is too careless. Someone had something precious, went to great lengths to hide it deep in the mountains, yet in the end, someone stole it. And Zhuangzi simply called them a fool.

Zhou: ...

Li: The only thing I can do is offer my blessings to the mighty one who can lift a mountain in the middle of the night. I often wonder, who is he? Did he have any use for what he took from me?

Zhou: Didn't he steal your skin? Aren't you a lizard person? You can always grow a new one, can't you?

Li: Growing layer upon layer of skin—it could be a lizard, or it could be milk when it's heated to a boil. But none of that really matters anymore.

[Section 7]

Going back home and researching more on Qigong

[*Qigong website content*](#)

Qigong in the 1990s was banned in China. It's deemed a cult. It's getting too messy. People are profiting off it, the state was scared that way too many people practice that.



[Section 8]

Going to practice is basically the same. The movement will change.

After the practice, Li wanted to tell your fortune with Ba Gua.

An animation started to play with texts

Zhou: What does this mean?

Li: It's telling you that you can try to do this, but doing so might not be of much use.

Zhou: That sounds really discouraging. I feel like Taoist stories always leave me unmotivated, like they're just telling me to go with the flow. Maybe that's also why people prefer epics?

Li: Do you know the story of how Aeolus helped Odysseus return home? Odysseus arrived at the island of the wind god, and the god was moved by his story. He gave him a bag containing all the winds that would hinder his journey, so that the only winds left in the world would carry him home. But just before reaching home, his sailors, thinking the bag was filled with gold and treasure, opened it—and in an instant, he was blown all the way back to the empty island.

Zhou: So epics also tell you to do nothing?

Li: I don't think so. In ancient Greece, the goddess of fortune was often depicted holding a ship's rudder. Odysseus should have been someone who transcended fate—he could

Li: In the city of Ying, there was a man who let a craftsman apply a tiny speck of white clay on the tip of his nose, as small as a mosquito's wing. He then asked a master carpenter to chop off just that speck with an axe. The carpenter swung his axe with a whooshing sound, carelessly yet precisely slicing off the white do travels thousands of miles without needing a rudder. But he still encountered the unexpected. And people, in the end, always have to *do* something...

Zhou: So that's why you started practicing Qigong? Do you have any other hobbies?

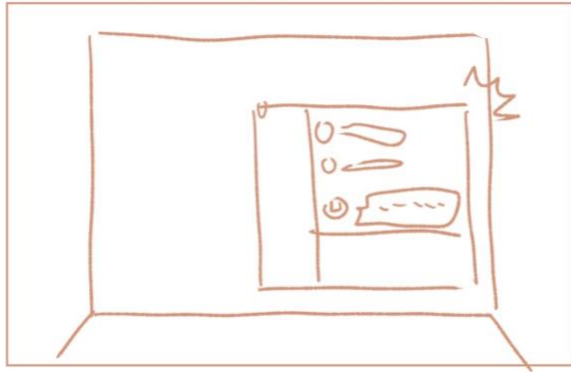
Li: (Shows the scar on their arm, bike pump.)

Zhou: What is this? I thought you are going to say rapping.

t—without even scratching the man's nose. The man stood there, completely unfazed. When the ruler of Song heard about this, he summoned the carpenter and said, *"Do this for me as well."* The carpenter replied, *"I once had the skill to do it, but the one who could stand still for me has long since passed away."*

Zhou: So your hobby is slicing open arteries on your arms?

Li: Hahahaha, no! Not at all! Honestly, it's kind of embarrassing... Never mind, I am going to do more fortune reading.



[Section 9]

[*Qigong website content*](#)

Qigong has morphed quite a bit nowadays. It's kind of gentrified, with artists' attention turning to community work in the center of the city and traditional Chinese Medicine.

Qigong group chat pops up.

Li: I did fortune telling today! I am going to win this rap battle this weekend! I invited you to join and witness my victory!!!

[Section 10] (need a lot of refinement, this bit will not make it to the show)

Zhou is the only one coming Li's rap battle. Li gets eliminated on the first round, people are mocking him, and he loses really badly. Li gets a bit bumped out.

They go to a park afterwards. Zhou felt bad and bought both of them a can of Coca-Cola. Li tried to say something but failed. Li then started to do Qigong movements, Zhou used the empty can to make a beat, birds sang for them, and trees whistled for them.

[Fin]