

WESTERN BUSHIDO: THE AMERICAN INVENTION OF ASIAN MARTIAL ARTS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the Second World War, very few Americans were aware that martial arts existed outside of the Olympic institutions (e.g. boxing and wrestling) and it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that Asian martial culture became mainstream in the English-speaking world. This changed when a group of dedicated, unorthodox Westerners applied themselves to the study and dissemination of East Asian martial arts, soon raising their popularity to its current level. This project explores the social and cultural process whereby the martial arts were imbued with a violent nationalist rhetoric in Japan before World War II and came to be a part of daily life in the United States in the decades that followed. Central ideas in this process are the creation of an imagined and exotic Asia and discourses of masculinity as they are negotiated within the larger framework of transforming American society.

Source material for this contextual cultural analysis includes archival and interview data as well as popular publications, films, and other multimedia in addition to standard library research. By merging these three methods, it is possible to develop a well-rounded picture of trends in society over time and, in particular, how the folk history of any one group has influenced the broader zeitgeist. In this case, the invented traditions of prewar Japanese martial arts can be seen to travel across the Pacific via American servicemen and undergo radical transformations over time depending on the needs of practitioners and spectators in any given period.

DEDICATION

For my family. Sorry about the long absence.

For my teachers. What I don't know could fill a volume. Specifically, this one.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Offering thanks should not be conflated with a suggestion of blame; any faults in the following pages are entirely my own. That said, I would like to thank my committee, which consists of a kung fu master, two boxers, and a man distinguished variously as an expert on honey, the history of kissing, and/or fossilized ordure. Thomas Green, Bruce Dickson, Larry Mitchell, and Vaughn Bryant provided me with the guidance to navigate graduate school without losing my sanity. The value of their mentorship cannot be overstated. Any meaningful contents found herein are due to their influence.

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My gratitude to the Office of Graduate (and Professional) Studies, the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, and the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, all of which provided support for my research. The staff at the Library of Congress, the American Folklife Center, the Smithsonian, and Cushing Library were most helpful in tracking down the pieces of this puzzle. I would especially like to thank Rebecca Hankins, Steve Bales, Ann Hoog, Megan Harris, Mari Nakahara, and the LoC Prints and Photographs Division staff.

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Finally, thanks to my folks, who taught me that education is valuable for its own sake and who, as Dad says, probably let me “watch a few too many Jackie Chan movies” as a kid.

NOMENCLATURE AND TRANSLITERATION

The Victorian swordsman/scholar/linguist Capt. Sir Richard Francis Burton preferred the verb “Englished” over the less prosaic “translated.” This shows the degree to which the meaning of a word or phrase can be lost when searching for cultural equivalents. That being the case, I have attempted to minimize frustration for the reader by following standard modern Pinyin and revised Hepburn Romanization when presenting Mandarin and Japanese words, respectively. This guiding principle is ignored, however, when either an established alternate spelling is more common, such as ‘jiu-jitsu’ instead of the more accurate ‘jujutsu,’ or when in a quotation, where I have not altered the original spelling. In the same line of thought, Japanese and Chinese names are generally presented in the traditional format—family name first—except where the individual is more commonly known in English otherwise.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on the role of folk history and invented traditions within the realm of stylized fighting arts as a community of practice and consumption and as imported from East Asia to the United States over the course of the twentieth century and into the present. The goal is to provide the reader with a contextualized cultural analysis of the major shifts and trends in the negotiation of the “martial artist” or “fighter” identity as it has developed in what is herein referred to as the “mainstream” and “middle-class” social set of Americans. By this I mean the numerically and financially prevalent population that represents the hegemonic culture of a given era. As this is an interpretive analysis and not a scientific survey, a holistic approach to the material is taken in order to paint the fullest possible picture of any given historical moment. Likewise, this manner of study does not lend itself well to quantitative hypothesis-testing and, therefore, multimedia including films, television, graphic novels, newspapers and magazines, and popular books are used as source material along with archival evidence and personal interviews with current and former martial arts practitioners.

While interviews are useful in establishing present-day interpretations of the social phenomena being explored, they are of limited value when looking into the long-term processes that resulted in those interpretations. To that end, I have employed interviews primarily to illustrate how some groups of martial artists and fans understand

the place of their practice in society. Archival research formed the majority of this project's fieldwork, with much of chapters I, II, IV, and V coming from sources found in the Robert W. Smith Collection in Texas A&M University's Cushing Library, the American Folklife Center and other reading rooms at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the main reading room at the Smithsonian Institute, and the Veterans History Project, currently housed in the Folklife Reading Room at the Library of Congress. Most of chapter V is comprised of material from personal correspondence between Robert W. Smith and Donn F. Draeger over the span of almost thirty years.

Here it is important to note the use of the terms "Western" and "Asian." Both of these are ambiguous, Asia accounting for roughly one third of the planetary landmass, though both Asia and the West are only geographically defined in the blurriest of senses. This word choice is intentional. While the United States is the primary Western nation discussed in this project, the transnational nature of culture in general and fighting arts in particular causes even the idea of "American-ness" to be, at best, leaky. In the same way, although Japan is the site of most concern, it is an historical Japan that also spread into mainland China, Korea, and created the Manchurian puppet state. This, combined with the process of exotification in the mid-century American context, makes for an imaginary Asia or "the East" that is, by definition, vague and uncertain in terms of geographical and cultural distinctions. Therefore, "American" and "Western," while not fully interchangeable, are applied in many of the same contexts while "Asia" is used to refer simultaneously to the tangible landmasses of the Eastern Pacific Rim and an intangible imaginary.

Influences

The impetus for the present project was a convergence of three different, though related, influential sources which were then informed by several other works that comprise the nexus of my interpretive approach. First is the edited volume by Green and Svinth (2003), *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, and specifically the inaugural essay by Green, *Sense in Nonsense: The Role of Folk History in the Martial Arts*. Green hints at a number of factors that tend to influence the development of martial culture, regardless of nationality or time period. His work centers on the idea of martial arts as social tools, which I have adopted herein as the primary guiding influence for situating martial practices within local and global contexts. He also stresses that folk history is related to, though different from, scientific or historiographical research about the past as it is neither verifiable nor, indeed, does it need to be as it serves purposes related to identity construction and social relations rather than attempting to establish an indisputable record of the past.

Second is an article by Clifford Geertz, *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (1972) in which the author stresses the value of not only close ethnographic observation, but of reading deeper meaning into such multifaceted activities as the Balinese cockfight. While a purely observational, etic style of recording an event could be argued as more objective than Geertz' approach, he states convincingly that the "culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong"

(29). I would add to this that, even though Geertz is referring to definitively foreign cultures, the conversational state of folk history and modern international state of virtually every social group means that all such ensembles of text belong to specific groups regardless of geographic location. In order to examine any community of practice, that community's context in history must be taken into account, which cannot be accomplished without some amount of reading into the practice-as-text. Therefore, historiographical events can be utilized as a background against which to read and interpret practices such as engagement in the martial arts.

Third, Dunning and Elias (1986) in *Quest for Excitement* make a strong case for the use of sport and play as means to negotiate violent intentions or sentiments that would be expressed through direct force if not for the complex web of social circumstances that prohibit outright warfare in most human interactions. Dunning notes poignantly that:

[T]he existence of diametrically opposed ideologies which stress, on the one hand, that sport might form a substitute for war, and on the other that it is an ideal vehicle for military training in that it enhances the toughness and aggressiveness of those who take part, is further suggestive of the homologous character and perhaps of the interconnectedness of the two spheres. (4)

Like Green and Geertz, here it is laid bare that sport (and, more specifically, fighting arts) are both socially-acceptable ways of avoiding warfare without surrendering conflict and a means of preparing for the physical and cognitive rigors of war through psychological and bodily conditioning of the individual and the group. The separation of intentionally harmful violence and playful violence is, it seems, an artificial one.

Although the initial question of this study was raised by the above works, others proved influential on the method and manner of analysis. In *Inventing Traditions* (1983), Hobsbawm sets out the meaning of the term as it is intended herein:

“[A] set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms, of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1).

Hobsbawm’s concept of invented traditions is imminently applicable to the context of folk culture within the martial arts, as will be seen in the construction of narratives about an imagined past among American karate students in the period after World War II. It also indicates the need for a perceived connection with an ancient past even in cases where this may not be the accurate from a historiographical perspective. Rather, this concept pairs with Cetina’s (1997) idea of intangible cultural assets as “objects of knowledge” that can be transferred, reinterpreted, and generally modified in ways that suit a given social agenda just as physical objects to show that traditions are invented

and repurposed in different ways depending on time and location as much as cultural background knowledge. That knowledge is what Krug (2001), in an expansion of Cetina's work, calls a "texture of knowledge." As an example, the standard uniform associated with karate practice came about in Japan during the 1920s, the manner of wearing it was adopted by American servicemen after the Second World War as an object of knowledge, but without the texture of knowledge (that is, the cultural background that brought about the uniform's implementation), it took on new meaning and was subject to invented traditions as the Americans returned home and founded their own communities of practice, where the traditions were integrated based on a different set of social needs.

The vessel for this intangible knowledge is as much the body as the mind. Featherstone (1991) explains how, in Western societies after the rise of secularism (especially in the 1920s), the mind and body have come to be mutual opponents, the body commoditized and made a target for advertising based on a consumer culture in which ideal images are constantly changing in a perpetual cycle of dissatisfaction (170). As the body is commoditized as a necessary part of transmitting the body culture of fighting arts, it became apparent through reading and interviews that discursive masculinity comprises a common thread in all time periods and communities of practice regardless of the combative style when discussing American martial artists. To that end, I turn to Savran (1998) to bridge hegemonic discursive masculine identity formation with Featherstone's society-level discussion of consumer body culture. This establishes

the greater part of the texture of knowledge onto which Asian martial arts were grafted over the course of the past century.

In *Re-Situating Folklore* de Caro and Jordan (2004) show that folklore as a shared cultural product cannot be defined in terms of “high art versus low art” or “traditional versus nontraditional,” but is instead in a constantly shifting and fluxing arrangement with surrounding cultural and social elements—those that comprise the texture of knowledge—in order to remain alive and relevant. Much of this project details the pertinent historical and social settings in which fighting arts are constructed and reconstituted as items of folklore in this dialectic dynamic. They further assert that folklore analysis is useful in identifying cultural frameworks that are made up of aesthetic qualities and into which items of folklore must be made to fit if they remain as a part of the greater cultural schema (15). In this way the item itself—the object of knowledge—is simply a tool for the expression of a preexisting framework.

Finally, in order to understand the framework in which folkloric object of knowledge is expressed I relied on the work of Joseph Campbell (1973). Campbell analyzes what he calls the “monomyth,” a self-contained framework that, taken in abstraction, describes virtually any narrative in cyclical terms. This proves useful in approaching the self-mythologizing (that is, the internal creation of a heroic narrative about the self, usually based on a preexisting framework, for the purpose of traversing life challenges) that I found to be critical in the establishment of identity among groups of martial artists. Creativity by means of an established textural framework, Campbell notes, is the cardinal feature of all heroic narratives, whether that product is a material

object, a community, or even a new style of fighting art (15-16). This explains much of the proliferation of martial arts styles, academies, clubs, and media in the United States since the Second World War. By viewing identity as a creative process of self-mythologizing (in terms of the personal self and the community with which one identifies), the need for narrative comes full circle, with the role of folk narrative in the collective creative endeavor as outlined by Green (2003). Martial arts are thus items of folklore as well as topics about which folklore is generated, objects of knowledge informed by a general cultural framework, and, ultimately, social tools.

Chapter Outline

This project is divided into five parts, each covering a different period of time and/or place that, taken together, may be seen as comprising a narrative arc in which the martial arts are the focal character. Chapter I discusses the history and role of the fighting arts in the United States from the end of the nineteenth century until just prior to World War II. As a more financially active public topic, much of the attention is given to prizefighting. The social context in which the act of boxing is placed as a predominantly male pursuit was heavily influenced by a movement known as “muscular Christianity.” This movement is discussed at some length, principally as it shaped and was shaped by the Young Men’s Christian Association. In the same vein, public health reformers like John Harvey Kellogg are referenced as transitional between a period of high religiosity and general secularization. All of this coincided with an epidemic of anxiety among white-collar urban men. Commentators like Theodore Roosevelt renounced what they

saw as the feminization of American men who no longer worked in physical professions and prescribed a number of curative behaviors, including combat sports like boxing. All of this led to prizefighting's golden age, which began just prior to World War II and ended within a decade thereafter.

Chapter II is concerned with roughly the same period of time, but deals with the social climate of Japan and East Asia. The twentieth century in Japan opened with the arrival of American gunships off the coast of the main island and the subsequent arrival of cultures and technology from the United States and Europe. As rapid industrialization took place, the Japanese looked to China as an example of potentially destructive effects from agreeing to unequal treaties with Western powers, and the general public as well as elite governmental leadership more-or-less unilaterally agreed to transform the nation into an imperial power lest it be conquered from the outside. Japan had the added issue of creating a national identity as it had been more a collection of independent states before the advent of the Meiji government at the end of the nineteenth century. One means by which extreme nationalists (who took power early on) sought to do this while inculcating young people with a fervent drive to conquest was by implementing, regulating, and drastically modifying both Japanese and foreign martial disciplines. Chinese martial arts are also discussed in this chapter and, in short, failed to spread to Western nations as quickly after the war as did Japanese martial arts due to a lack of personal contact with Westerners during peacetime and their use as social tools against Western powers during the Boxer Uprising of roughly 1899-1900.

Chapter III delves into the complexity of interaction between Allied servicemen stationed in Japan during the period of postwar occupation and their Japanese hosts, from whom karate and, later, other martial arts systems were acquired and brought back to the United States. Misunderstanding abounded during this phase and men like Robert Trias, who opened the first karate academy in the mainland United States in 1946, formed the first generation of creative myth-makers along with international promoters like Masutatsu Oyama, a Japanese of Korean ancestry who strongly supported the imperialist cause and described karate as an art for the improvement of men. It was during this time that the beginnings of uniquely American perspectives and adaptations of Asian martial arts can be seen, and which eventually guided the development of identity formation by later generations of American fighters.

Chapter IV spotlights the topical experts whose voices in print and film media gave license to the general public for the normalization of Asian fighting arts in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. One group, which included such colorful figures as John “Count Dante” Keehan, acted more as salesmen than fighters, advertising learn-at-home courses in comic books and magazines and essentially perpetuating fantastic stories about themselves and the martial arts while also creating an extraordinary imaged Asia, home to mysterious masters of arcane power than could be acquired by the adventurous individual willing and able to risk his life sojourning abroad—or by purchasing the advertised booklet. The other group included much more scholarly and realistic figures such as Robert W. Smith and Donn F. Draeger. These men ventured to Japan and, later, other parts of East and Southeast Asia after the war in order

to study the martial arts and with a very clear mission that they would publish accurate, true information in the English language so that those in the West could be informed and educated.

Chapter V is concerned with the transformation of the martial artist identity as it has interacted with discursive masculinity from the 1970s to the present. The rise in popular martial arts films is seen to coincide with changes in male body image ideals which result from responses to society-level transitions in the place of feminism and hegemonic masculinity. The disestablishment of exclusively male social spaces led to a reactive hyper-masculinity in the media that continued to intensify until the 1990s, at which point it had reached unacceptable levels of expression and was supplanted with a turn toward rationalism. Rationalist trends in the fighting disciplines led to a newfound public acceptance of combat sports in the form of mixed martial arts, which is currently reaching levels of popularity reminiscent of boxing's golden age. Participation in mixed martial arts training is examined and found to be associated with the same needs for identity formation and social anxiety that have driven men to pursue combative arts since the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the afterword and analysis I pose the socio-historic narrative of fighting arts as they have been imported to the United States and adapted to fit changing social climates over the period of this project's concern. Ultimately, I argue that a contextual cultural analysis of the Asian martial arts in America reveals that a greater framework is in place, cyclically drawing men into and away from particular martial arts styles at different times in a sequence of trends that are expressive of masculinity as it must be

renegotiated for each generation as the climate shifts and new mythical narratives are needed to accommodate a base desire for tradition and community.

CHAPTER II

WESTERN CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the West, the twentieth century saw the creation of a “cultural ethic” that pushed men away from expressions of aggression and toward a new, congenial manifestation of their identity (Boon 2003, 267). This has proven problematic because the same men, lacking any traditional resources for asserting (or even conceptualizing) a non-aggressive masculinity, privately adhere to previous generations’ attitudes and behaviors while simultaneously maligning those ideas in public due to cultural expectations (268). The formation of dichotomous selves is inevitable. A return to previous generations’ expressions would be unacceptable as “contemporary men are increasingly being held accountable for violence throughout human history, judged guilty by virtue of their Y chromosome,” while a new conceptualization is nearly impossible since there are so few social arenas that men may claim with exclusivity (268). For many of these men the solution has been to look outside their own culture, to the “other,” for recourse as they grasp for legitimacy in notions of the masculine.

Muscular Christianity

The notion of male social hegemony in Western Europe and North America has been treated as a given by many popular social theorists since at least the 1970s (e.g. Rowbotham 1974), however this leads to a simplistic view of the relationship between individuals and their gender identity as well as assuming that such identities are

somehow unified and even, to some extent, organized. In pragmatic reality “constructions of differing political, regional, national, and more recently, sexual identities among men have always worked to undermine any sense of a unified phallic front” (Hall 1994, 6). When considering subcultures and folk groups, then, it is of particular importance to include the personal and cultural shifts that take place over time, especially in the interest of avoiding the gloss that “all men do this” or “all women think like this.”

During the Victorian era in England and then spreading to other parts of Europe and North America, such a cultural shift took place in the form of a movement now known as muscular Christianity. Far from seeking to emulate the image of Christ as a gentle lamb, muscular Christianity stressed the value of physical prowess, confidence in the religious realm, and the ability to exert control over both one’s personal life as well as his surroundings (Hall 1994, 7-8). Crusader-like, adherents of this movement sought ways to prepare themselves for the rigors of negotiating a world filled with iniquity, seeing life as a daily battle in which the result was either stronger conviction or a weakening of the self. Writers (notably Charles Kingsley) expressed this struggle by depicting the male body in action as a “point of reference in and determiner of a masculinist economy of signification and (all too often) degradation” (9). Muscular Christianity may be defined as an extreme approach to a “Christian commitment to health and manliness” (Putney 2001, 11).

In the United States, too, this attitude that the male body could be a tool of either piety or degeneracy grew prevalent. Emerson and other moralist writers of the nineteenth

century advocated habits of self-denial, discipline, and abstinence as means of strengthening one's manliness (Roberson 1994, 156). At the same time (or perhaps as a consequence), "they consistently labeled the 'weaker' and more sensual impulses 'feminine' or 'effeminate' and attempted to expurgate them from their definitions of self" (156). Defining the self through the body and one's mastery over it became the hallmark of muscular Christianity. Both the ability to deny physical desire and to build up physical power were upheld as central to the survival and propagation of their beliefs.

In daily life this stress on physical, body-centered understanding of the self in relation to both the world and spirituality resulted in an increased social emphasis on sports and adventure as a signifying practice of the masculine. Religions founded in the nineteenth century reflect this trend, including the Seventh Day Adventists, whose doctrine includes abstinence from habits perceived to be unhealthy, avoidance of alcohol and caffeine, a vegetarian diet, and regular exercise. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in London in 1844 with similar views that Christian piety should be seen in the daily behavior choices of the adherent (Garnham 2001, 297). In its early days the various sports clubs housed within the YMCA were somewhat controversial given the views of both some members and outsiders that an overemphasis on sports could lead young men down a path of vanity, causing them to focus too much on the body and personal achievements and victories (298).

This attitude was prevalent from the beginning, as the YMCA was founded chiefly to spread an evangelical Christian message to young men living in urban centers, usually far from their families and perhaps in the city for the first time in order to seek

their fortunes (Hopkins 1951, 15). As muscular Christianity was in its infancy at the time, the general view among the YMCA's early membership indicates a markedly different concept of recreation than it would come to embody in later years. The organizations newsletter, *The Watchman*, suggested as late as 1877 that, as far as recreational pursuits within the premises of North American YMCA locations were concerned, there may have been some situations in which keeping around a set for checkers or chess would be appropriate, but only as deemed suitable by the local leadership and with the stipulation that the game pieces should remain under lock-and-key (199).

Over time, it became apparent that the organization would need to diversify its means of engaging young men or risk losing them to more entertaining activities offered by busy population centers. If not downright militant, the YMCA's approach to spreading the gospel and Protestant morality did become more and more assertive. By the 1890s silent reading rooms and Bible study groups became second-tier to networking with a high-powered audience of businessmen and civic leaders. This assertiveness was public enough that the *Atlanta Constitution* referred to the YMCA in 1885 as "the business side of religion" (Hopkins 1951, 389). The collective decision to court successful entrepreneurs and other public personalities was due, no doubt, to an effort at recruiting a particular demographic; when middle- and upper-middle-class young men moved to large cities to chase business success, the attraction to an informal and open group of accomplished movers and shakers would have been difficult to resist.

The question then became one of how to draw in membership from the higher rungs of the social ladder. The solution came in the form of a single man, Luther Halsey Gulick, Jr. An East Coast-educated physician by training, Gulick represented a new breed of American man. He was born in 1865 to missionary parents serving in Hawaii and received something of a global education, traveling with his family as they spread the Gospel. He was also greatly concerned with the state of physical health among America's burgeoning white-collar workers. Muscular Christianity was a natural marriage of Gulick's twin passions for religion and health, and while at Harvard he reconceptualized the Greek ideal of the scholar-athlete to fit a Christian mold. In 1886 he created a physical education program for the YMCA, initiating a significant departure from the established activities of the organization at that time (Green 1986, 214).

For Gulick and other physical education reformers, the goal of cultivating young men for service to church and society required not only mental, but also physical preparation. This message was readily absorbed by much of the active YMCA membership, such as a clergyman who wrote in *The Watchman* in 1885 that he almost never fell ill thanks to regular physical exercise, thereby allowing him to continue evangelizing:

“[The gym] used to be considered a wicked place, a place for pugilists to get a muscle, a training school for manufacturing Heenans. Now what do you see there? College professors swinging dumbbells, millionaires turning somersaults, lawyers upside down, hanging by one foot, doctors

of divinity with coats off punching a bag, sending out blows as if in a controversy, and the bag an opposing bishop, dyspeptics on a rope ladder, old age dancing itself young. Ah! It's better than all the curatives of earth, better than all the plantation bitters, and all the other board fence literature in creation." (Hopkins 1951, 248-249)

The editorializing here indicates the moralistic criticism of combat sports common at the time. "Heenan" is a reference to John Heenan (1834-1873), a bareknuckle prize fighter as popular for his colorful, lower-class background as for his victories in the ring. In many ways, Heenan, the child of Irish immigrant laborers who grew up to become an enforcer for Tammany Hall, was an avatar of all that the YMCA found threatening. He was not a pure American, having strong ties to Europe. He was a blue-collar worker and did not seek to improve himself through study, preferring manual occupations, instead. Perhaps most important, though, is that his devotion to professional pugilism placed him in the midst of a world of gambling, corruption, and law-breaking. Most states began outlawing prizefights in the 1850s, finding that the surrounding culture of alcohol and free-spirited revelry clashed with Victorian-era morals and religion (Gorn 1986, 113-119).

Men like Gulick, with respectable backgrounds and academic achievements, lent credibility to the idea of exercise as being more than a simple tool for lowly prizefighters to do damage to one another for public spectacle and a few dollars. As demonstrated by the clergyman's reference to professors, lawyers, and other high class occupations

behaving like fighters and athletes, the late nineteenth century marked the beginnings of what grew into a national obsession with health and fitness. Gulick and his followers transformed the now expansive YMCA from a purely social club to one that counseled men of industry to make their bodies stronger as a part of the overall person, including the study of “the manly art of self-defense” (Green 215, 1986).

The YMCA’s initial objections to physical education programs were ultimately pushed aside, then, and as a worldwide organization it has taken on the mantle of social athletics, the ministry portion of its activities becoming less of a focus over time. The early members tended to see sport as a two-way street, at once drawing in young men who would normally have avoided blatant evangelism and purely devotional meetings as well as strengthening the bodies of those same young men who could then serve more effectively abroad as missionaries (Gernham 2001, 400). This attitude resulted in a feedback loop: muscular young men were recruited through athletics, made physically capable by participating in them, and sent off to act as teachers at other locations where their virility would attract more young men (401). This concept appealed most to medical professionals and those who favored an interpretation of the Bible that called for care to be taken of the body as a “temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Spreading Democracy

Interestingly, the success of rationalistic models had a profound influence on at least some advocates of the emergent Christian masculinity. George MacDonald, author of such classics as *The Princess and the Goblin*, appears to have applied the rationalist

concept of natural selection in his telling and re-telling of fairytales. In MacDonald's world, the central hero—a young man from a family of miners—must overcome the forces of evil both through his physical agility and spiritual enlightenment. When pitted against opponents and situations equal to his strength, Curdie overcomes them through new spiritual insights. MacDonald is one example of a writer who suggested, as many would later, that the model of natural selection could be used to explain the success of Christianity in its spread around the world (Pennington 1994, 141).

As Hoganson (1998, 8-9) convincingly illustrates, the dedication of many nineteenth century American men to following a particular ideal of Darwinian social and financial success was not limited to religious institutions like the YMCA, but was instead a broader cultural conception of what constituted masculinity. Progressing from the Victorian era into the twentieth century, individual achievement came to the center of male social life. Accompanying this general focus on the individual's success was a gender-specific orientation of men toward aggression and, ultimately violence. Like Curdie conquering his goblins with spirituality in one hand and a sword in the other, successful masculine leaders of the American state were understood, in the eyes of the public, as builders of peace only through warfare (Hoganson 1998, 9).

The nineteenth century was transformative for American masculinity in this regard, however it is apparent that the transformation was one of enactment rather than the underlying schema of what constituted the masculine. Passion, for instance, was considered an essential part of manhood at both the beginning and end of the century, however the ways in which it could be suitably expressed in public and the subjects

about which it was acceptable to be passionate underwent a drastic change (Rotundo 1993, 6). In his classic *American Manhood*, Rotundo explains that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, two young men in a physical dispute would be marked with “a badge of evil” for demonstrating a lack of self-control. By the start of the twentieth century, however, the same young men would receive nods of approval from their seniors for behaving in a way to build character and show personal resilience (225-226).

Nor were such activities limited to youth; men across the social spectrum found a need to express their individual achievements and capabilities in the aftermath of the economic depression of 1893. As the nineteenth century came to a close, more and more men had followed the model of early YMCA membership and moved into white collar careers in the interest of upward mobility. The depression halted this mobility, though, and with it the sense of self-worth gained through financial success. It became unpleasantly apparent at that time, then, that a man with a passion for his work was susceptible to economic decline outside of his control. With such a tenuous thread supporting masculine identity, attentions turned elsewhere to elements of individual life that could be more readily controlled. This led to a growing concern over the physical health (or lack thereof) among urban, white collar professionals (Hoganson 1998, 34).

Rather suddenly—at least, that is, as suddenly as any sociocultural transformation can occur—the American public developed something of an obsession with health, vitality, and personal resilience. This shift is palpable in YMCA history as Gulick and others spread their muscular Christianity ever farther. Public concern over the popularity of pugilism and other athletic endeavors was silenced by a newfound

appreciation for neo-primitivism that viewed life as a Darwinian struggle for survival. The culmination of this metaphoric worldview was seen in warfare and military culture as fertile soil for building stalwart men of a truly masculine nature. The nation could not afford to be constantly seeking new warfronts, however, nor could all men serve, so sport came to be seen as a proxy for the struggle of a man against the world (Rotundo 1993, 232).

If the confluence of militarism, the cult of sport, muscular Christianity, and the generalized fear of urban living as degenerative to the vital forces of the American man were to be manifest in human form, that form would not be altogether different from Theodore Roosevelt. After surviving a sickly childhood, Roosevelt undertook a lifelong project of personal development, both physical and intellectual, that came to epitomize the new breed of American masculinity: powerful in body, confident in deed, and willing to pursue personal passions at the risk of self, family, and fortune. He followed the upper-middle class pattern established by prior generations of Anglo-Americans on the East Coast by receiving a university education, but broke with bookishness in order to practice “the strenuous life” of woodsmanship, pugilism, ranching, and other bodily pursuits in the interest of building up both health and character (Putney 2001, 44).

The desire of Roosevelt and others to build up their bodies through neo-primitivism included recreational sports, camping, and dabbling in the labor careers of the lower-classes, but it also led Americans, for the first time in decades, to consider the larger world as a potential source of useful material for the development of a new masculinity. In a curious historical episode, Roosevelt—avid as he was about combat

sports—crossed paths with Yamashita Yoshiaki, an expert judo instructor from the newly-founded Kodokan Institute in Tokyo (more discussion about the Kodokan and judo can be found in later chapters). Roosevelt’s time as president had caught up with his health and he was seeking a new avocation to aid in weight loss. After a demonstration of Yamashita’s impressive abilities, Roosevelt retained him for private lessons (Svinth 2003, 54).

Just as the new willingness to engage in sport was a continuation of underlying cultural values of male passion, the seemingly-progressive outlook on foreign cultures as a source of useful tools for building character extended only as far as underlying traditional values held. Roosevelt, despite his interest in foreign politics and military expeditions, was still an evangelical at heart, as indicated by a letter he wrote in 1908 to a student volunteer leader that “men of ability to lead the aggressive forces of Christianity” were needed more than ever (Putney 2001, 73). Not simply symbolic, it has been convincingly argued (e.g. Hoganson 1998) that the martial metaphor for building masculine character gave ample justification for warfare in the early twentieth century. For Roosevelt and other civic leaders, foreign military expeditions went hand-in-hand with efforts to spread Christianity overseas. As a new generation of young men sought to assert themselves, they had learned the lessons available on the sports field; in particular, they had come to value competition as the preferred engine for character-building, with national warfare being the ultimate form of competition (Rotundo 1993, 242).

Commercialization

As new generations took up the mantle, muscular Christianity has morphed over time. The image of the sport-playing, athletic young man well-equipped to somehow evangelize the audience through the use of his body is plainly seen in modern organizations like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Upward Sports, and Athletes In Action, an international organization that, along with planning camps and competitions for young athletes, hosts a number of high-profile events featuring famous current and former professional athletes, all in the interest of furthering a religious message. Like the early YMCA, these groups are all focused on minors and college students. Similarly, commercial efforts in the muscular Christian tradition have also targeted youths, but that was the end result of prior decades in which the American public at large were undertaken with a health and fitness craze, the echoes of which can still be perceived in modern magazines and the proliferation of gym franchises that promise to make the consumer more fit, happy, energetic, and sexually desirable.

At the beginning of the twentieth century American men were in the grips of a crisis. Social commentators became critical of the negative effects that burgeoning urban, white collar jobs had wrought on a once virile and active male population. Following the Civil War and through the 1893 depression, psychic damage was perceived as an epidemic among upper-class professionals, a cure for which could be found by comparing the “neurasthenic effects of sedentary jobs with the healthy effect of manual work... suggested to the elite that some working-class activities might help prepare them better for the future” (Green 1988, 206). Thus groups like the YMCA,

known for bringing together such men, turned to reformers like Gulick to imbue their membership with the physical vigor needed to combat neurasthenia, the supposed nervous disorder from which so many elite men suffered but that lacks a clear definition. It appears to have been similar to *ennui* in its vague dissatisfaction with the status quo.

An impressive array of treatments was developed to supplement the positive application of physical exercise. In keeping with the neo-primitivism of Roosevelt and others, camping became a valuable tool for escaping the stresses of urban life and returning to a more “natural” existence in the wilderness (though, it should be noted, in a controlled setting with modern equipment and for a short time). Drawing on Anglo-American perceptions of Native American culture, men sought to experience an elemental mode of living because “there were fewer robust heroes to serve as models for younger men, and the apparent closing of the frontier meant that young men had to search for new tests to replace the challenges of the wild West” (Hoganson 1998, 35). Lacking a frontier to conquer, the rising individualism of the twentieth century meant that men could now negotiate their notions of masculinity through personal challenges with the out-of-doors and boys were offered the same opportunity through new organizations like the Boy Scouts of America (founded in 1910) which, like the YMCA was imported from England with the expressed purpose of allaying social problems.

As individual men now embarked on a mission to defeat their personal neuroses through sports and wilderness adventuring to build healthier bodies they also focused on the fuel for those activities. Naturally, men were not alone in their newfound gastronomic interests given that women have, historically, been charged with preparing

meals in many American homes. Consequently, a number of food reformers were women like Catharine Beecher (1800-1878), sister to Harriett Beecher Stowe and advocate for public moral education. As a Calvinist, Beecher believed that moderation and temperance were the keys to a spiritually and physically healthy life, but also realized that the public may dismiss her argument as religiously motivated. Instead, she urged men and women alike to consume less food because “in proportion as man becomes elevated, this lowest species of enjoyment gives place to higher and more refined pleasure” (Green 1986, 32). Dietary discretion was important not because of religious reasons, but because the social elite did not seek out such base pleasures. In appealing to the American desire for upward mobility so prevalent among the new individualists, Beecher and those like her were able to forward their position that everyone should eat less and move more in order to resolve social woes.

Remedies for bodily problems were not so disparate that all reformers focused on individual concerns. Indeed, many health advocates were like cereal inventor John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943). Seen as somewhat radical at the time even among similarly-minded Seventh-day Adventists, Kellogg was a physician who supported vegetarianism, physical exercise, and various “water cures” in order to rid the body of toxic substances from exercise and food that “must be hurried out of the system with great rapidity” (Green 1986, 154). In keeping with this philosophy, he founded a sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, where members of the upper-class could stay to have their neurasthenia treated through holistic methods. Realizing that not everyone would be able to undertake such involved treatment, Kellogg and his brother also

marketed one of the first commercial breakfast cereals (to clean one's inner regions) and called on all levels of society to bath frequently (to clean one's outer parts; he believed that clogged pores led to kidney disease and hysteria) (154).

Taken together, physical exercise, a controlled diet, and neo-primitivism formed core elements of a new kind of American life in which the individual took on an adversarial tone with the outside world. The psyche was constantly being assaulted by neurasthenic urbanity, the body by disease and weakness, the personal character by corrupting influences of modernity. These changes were negotiated by emphasizing the role of competition as a means to invigorate the personal and collective strength of American males. Competition was added to previously non-competitive pursuits, including spelling bees, Sunday school lessons, and art displays in order to encourage participation and to heighten the effects of character building (Rotundo 1993, 241). With the emphasis now being placed on competition as a positive social mode for men and boys and the general desire for greater physical wellbeing, two individual sports, each once-maligned, took hold of Americans' attention: boxing and bodybuilding. Pugilists, in particular, came to be seen no longer as brutish avatars of human cockfighting, but as the possessors of profound self-discipline, self-denial, controlled diet, and mental toughness needed to overcome the neurasthenic onslaught.

Strongmen and Fisticuffs

Tom Manfre, 1953 Mister World bodybuilding champion, recalls meeting his inspiration, the legendary Charles Atlas, who said to him "God was good to me, and I'm

sure he'll be good to you” (Black 2009). Atlas was the stage name of Angelo Siciliano, who arrived in New York at the turn of the last century a malnourished child and proceeded to build himself up through daily exercise and careful nutrition. Advertising his transformation from self-described “ninety-seven pound weakling” to muscle man, Atlas took advantage of a personal narrative from his childhood in which he was relaxing on the beach when a more physically gifted fellow pushed him down and kicked sand in his face. Printing ads with the story in comic books and magazines, Atlas’ company sold an at-home training regimen that both reflects and had an influence on changing public perception of the male body.

If Atlas, with his exhortations to trust in a higher power, represented an older breed of muscular Christian, the new breed could be seen in the wake of his success. As commercialization took hold, two major shifts occurred in the Western conceptions of masculinity. First, the commercial ventures coincided with a secularization of manliness. No longer was it necessary for a “real man” to also be a churchgoer. Second, the hallmarks of masculinity continued to be muscular, however the focus slipped from practical (that is, sports-based) physical prowess to more visual depictions of masculinity. For instance, in their important study of male body image as portrayed through action figures, Pope, et al (1998), found that both the toys’ muscle size and definition increased dramatically from the 1970s on, noting that the 1994 GI Joe Extreme figure, “if extrapolated to 70 in. in height... would sport larger biceps than any bodybuilder in history” (68). At the same time bodybuilders found success in the film industry, with stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone portraying tough

men of action on the silver screen where the previous generation knew stars like John Wayne and James Dean. In the popular media, muscles were growing larger. The question then becomes how, in the course of less than a century, male bodies in America went from something clothed and ignored out of modesty to objects of public fascination and critique.

After 1900, the nation placed greater emphasis on the “muscular” and less on the “Christianity.” This may be tied to increasing levels of immigration leading to greater ethnic diversity in the urban centers, but it is just as likely related to a commercial turn in the public commentary on health and fitness. To be sure, it is possible to make money on religious activity, but astute entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century saw an even greater potential for wealth in the rising desire of Americans to be healthier. It was as a direct result of this turn in public interest that strongmen and bodybuilders made the leap from circus sideshow acts to mainstream fitness gurus, taking on the status of media idols. Simultaneously, pugilists, also a once-marginal group of athletes whose income and social status revolved around their participation in spectacle, come to be considered paragons of health, embodying the virtues of the new American individualism: self-discipline, personal courage, a strict diet, and physical ability.

Bederman (1995) points out that the drive toward neo-primitivism in the interest of building character was directly responsible for the rise of the muscle and fitness culture that arose from those more general panaceas espoused by Kellogg and others (74). This development is reflected in the idealized male body. During the late nineteenth century, American preference for depictions of the male form in art and

media tended toward the lean and wiry. In the early years of the twentieth century, the form morphed into a still thin, but more muscular shape, like that of larger prizefighters (15). The connecting logic here is reasonable given the premises. Assuming that neurasthenia was a genuine threat to the overall wellbeing of middle- and upper-class urban men, that the condition came about through lack of physical activity combined with a unique type of stress caused by white collar work, and that lower-class men did not suffer from these conditions, then the solution must lie in imitating the lower-class. This could be accomplished through diet, certainly (e.g. lean foods and not too much), but also by turning to the appropriate pastimes, like pugilism. In order to live like the supposedly healthier members of the urban lower-class, it would follow suit that a healthy man should look like them, as well. Manual laborers, by virtue of daily activity, were more muscular than their managerial counterparts. Greater muscle, in short, indicated physical and psychological wellbeing.

Unlike earlier reformers whose attentions centered on indirect methods for the curing of physical and psychic ills, such as chewing food slowly, consuming specially treated mineral water, or adhering to a rigorous bathing regimen, fighters and strongmen had the advantage in advertising of demonstrable feats. Either a boxer won in the ring or he did not. A strongman, regardless of actual bulk, could lift prodigious amounts of weight or bend rigid objects at will. The public took notice of these feats such that even the YMCA, now fully supportive of the movement to attract young men by offering physical education and sports programs, was hiring retired prizefighters, religious or otherwise—more often otherwise—to serve as full-time directors of its gymnasiums

under the assumption that, however else they may feel about the Association's activities, competent former pugilists at least knew how to train young men to be strong and fit (Hopkins 1951, 248).

One example of the new American obsession with health and fitness can be seen in the sales of patent medicines (see Figure 1).

The feats of strongmen had always been attractive to crowds of gawkers, thus making them a natural fit for circuses and other traveling entertainment venues, but as their abilities came to be associated physical health the scrutiny took on a rationalist, scientific bent. Before long the training methods of such performers were being discussed and replicated in educational institutions like Harvard, where George Windship and other students of the medical school developed means of molding male bodies into the shape now preferred by the general fitness-seeking public and, perhaps more important from the physicians' perspective, capable of recreating their displays of bodily power. Windship in particular makes for an excellent case study of early popular strongmen because he stood five feet and seven inches tall while managing to lift a thousand pounds, lending demonstrable credence to his claims and, like the later Charles Atlas, providing a narrative of accomplishment that would draw public interest, particularly from boys and men of small stature (Green 1986, 199-201).



Figure 1 - Sign Along Highway 99 (Lange 1939), the body's health was commoditized in the years prior to World War II

The 1920s, Secularism, and Print Media

By the advent of the Gilded Age, widespread public practice of religious austerity in the interest of improving self and society was well out of fashion, even as evangelical institutions like the YMCA, thoroughly rooted in urban America, went to great lengths in the transformation of their methods to appeal to a younger audience. Individualism was the order of the day and a successful man, both in life and business, relied on his personal improvement. Competition was so heavily embedded in all aspects of social interaction that even recreational endeavors like sport and reading centered on

training the individual to reach greater levels of achievement. This can be seen in the movement toward boxing as a spectator sport and a means of personal development. Likewise, print media of the time at once reflected and influenced the zeitgeist of personal development, intellectually, financially, and physically.

While upper-class men sought to emulate the activities of their blue collar counterparts, those of the growing middle class found themselves—many for the first time—able to afford a modicum of leisure. Indeed, because of the highly competitive nature of industry in the 1920s, these men came to identify themselves at least as much by their recreational pursuits as by their primary occupations. With such limited time to relieve stress and build the individual's capabilities, the sacrifices of traditional religious life became less of a concern for a large number of those working in the cities (Bederman 1995, 13). This proved problematic in terms of pastimes that involved solely intellectual enhancement since the neurasthenic condition was considered a direct result of “brain work” that had come to occupy the days of men in the middle and upper-classes. The solution, then, was to spend one's off hours developing the body and attempting to follow programs of self-cultivation through bodily and neo-primitive outdoor hobbies (Rotundo 1983, 29-30).

In direct response to this very apparent public turn away from communal practice of austerity and toward individualism and competitive recreation, the YMCA continued to transfer resources to its physical education divisions, building more gymnasiums and hiring more directors whose theological backgrounds were less robust than their biceps. Still, although the evangelism of the organization was not as pronounced, Gulick and his

followers maintained that they had simply “taken the gymnastic work of the world and remodeled it so that we can use it successfully” (Hopkins 1951, 256). Despite this, the gymnasiums themselves showed the slowly widening rift between the original evangelical zealotry of the founding YMCA membership and its “physical work” with young men in the urban centers. In addition to directors who were frequently unschooled Christians and, in some cases, not religious at all, the buildings tended to feature separate entrances, were disconnected or wholly separate from the main compounds, and usually had almost entirely different memberships (244).

As early as the 1890s, YMCA circulars like the *Young Men's Era* were paying for their print runs through advertising while also offering non-religious advice articles, mostly aimed at self-improvement to the end of personal profit. Hopkins notes that “At the moment it was appealing most strongly to the virtues of honesty and integrity, the *Era* was advertising patent medicines, real estate, and gold mining stock” (1951, 391). The Association, then, was as much subject to as it was an agent of social reform. As the twentieth century rolled on, secular publications followed suit, becoming the sounding horns for the various recreational communities of consumption that were now a major factor in bestowing men with a sense of their own masculinity (or, at least, how to achieve it). What would have been considered effeminate one century prior was now a hallmark of American masculinity; certain acts of recreation took on the patina of manliness and, therefore, reached new levels of popularity in the public sphere through both personal involvement and consumption of mass publications (Rotundo 1993, 283).

Here, then, was another crossover point between the waning muscular Christianity of the previous generation and a commercialized, industrial approach to masculine consumption that came to replace it. Even YMCA circulars featured advertisements and articles urging men to improve their minds, bodies, and bank accounts. In the popular press, *Physical Culture* enjoyed a healthy circulation among men from all walks of life. Founded by bodybuilder and self-improvement guru Bernarr Macfadden in 1899, *Physical Culture*—in keeping with the widespread fear of neurasthenia—was initially a magazine aimed at overcoming disease, but soon covered topics such as training muscles to be larger and more powerful, improving relationships with coworkers, and maximizing profits. Interestingly, advertisements for various programs to improve one’s English indicate that a large portion of the readership was composed of immigrants (Green 1986, 249-250).

By the 1920s, bodybuilding was among the physical pastimes most closely associated with the new masculinity and self-improvement trend. Insofar as larger muscles were seen as a means to personal success in life and business by indirect competition with other men, pugilism offered a much more straightforward method of overcoming adversaries. No longer the topic of nearly universal condemnation, men all over the United States were flocking to YMCAs and private gymnasiums to study the “manly art of self-defense” in order to emulate the physical feats and physiques of prizefighting champions. More than simply spectating ringside and through sports columns, though, boxing offered a unique sort of personal interactivity as they looked on professional fighters as avatars of masculinity, successful in their goals through personal

improvement and occupied full-time in what was, to most men, a recreational endeavor (Bederman 1995, 17).

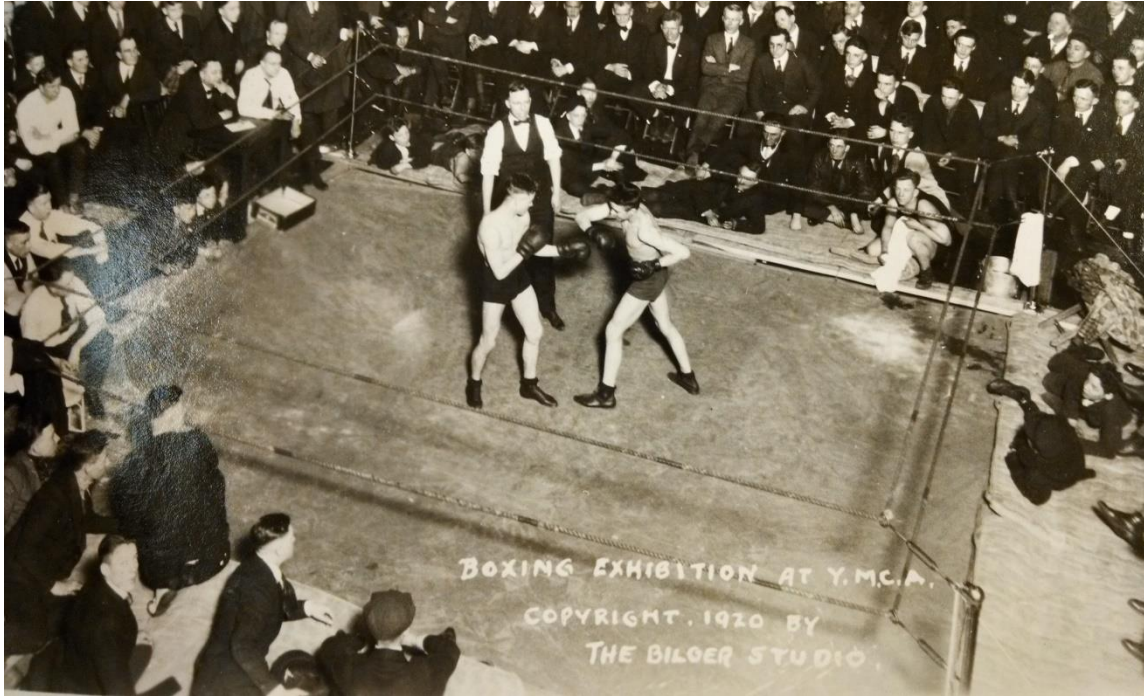


Figure 2 - Boxing Exhibition at YMCA (Bilger Studio 1920)

The drama of prizefighting, literally embodied by champion fighters and (re)enacted by communities of consumption at the newsstand and the boxing gym, gave American men a fantastical release from the mundane existence of office work and an alternative social hierarchy in which personal physical accomplishment allowed even the lowest member of a corporation to win social prestige by virtue of his participation. In what amounts to the physical manifestation of modern myth-making, men laboring under the dual stress of “brain work” and social pressure to make their muscles larger and stronger found an escape by means of acting out the roles of champions at the gym, reading magazines dedicated to masculine topics—including pugilism—and

participating in communities of men in order to share narratives of struggle and success by reflecting on the admirable qualities of mythologized professional fighters (Rotundo 1993, 32). These communities enacted their values at all levels of society, even gaining popularity among the YMCA membership, as seen in Figure 2.

From the end of the nineteenth century through the 1920s and 1930s, the rugged individualism that arose from the muscular Christian imperative that men become stronger and more capable helped usher in a new era of public focus on personal achievement, which, coincidentally, contradicted the idea of being reliant on a deity or religious institution for worldly success in business or one's personal life. Self-improvement came to be seen as the means by which one could most efficiently utilize his free time and, in order to combat the psychological dangers of "brain work," the development of the body through exercise and boxing came to be considered the manliest of activities. The new male physical ideal was larger and more muscular than it had been in the previous century and public interest in prizefighting was now more acceptable as men projected themselves onto the bodies of favored champions. Boxing and bodybuilding provided an escape from the hazards of the hierarchical workplace and redefined what constituted masculinity.

Challenges to Masculinity: Women and Suffrage

On a number of fronts twentieth century American society can best be described as revolutionary. Religious piety and abstinence gave way to a new consumerism. Collective concern for the community was upended by individualism and a newfound

need for self-improvement. Elements of lower-class life became the topic of upper-class recreations. Given this pattern, it is perhaps unsurprising that newly minted standards of masculinity were immediately threatened by the “new woman.” Connell (1998, 6) suggests that contestation is one of the defining elements of masculine identity due to the supposed hegemony that is often attributed to male social roles. Likely because of this, masculinities are also fluid, varied, and sometimes contradictory. These are highlighted in challenges from the “new woman,” not only due to the power implications of female enfranchisement, but because of the peripheral activities in which such women participated.

Both bodybuilding and pugilism offered the same central attraction to men: power. Whether that power was literal (e.g. the ability to lift heavy objects), social (intimidation, respect from peers), or mythic (acting out one’s personal narrative in the boxing ring or projecting onto other pugilists), the main goal of both pursuits was the acquisition of personal capability. Rotundo (1983) explains that the focus on men’s physical growth stemmed from their desire to display sexual dimorphism. Over the course of the nineteenth century, more fathers took to working away from the home, leaving their heirs to be the care of female family members. Consequently, the generation of boys who would become the consumer base for physical culture in the early twentieth century was, to a great extent, raised by women (32). In such a situation, those boys would always associate their mothers with authority—a complex in direct contradiction to their fathers’ worldview in which women were meant to be obedient. Increasing one’s size and physical formidability afforded men the chance to apply the

new American competitiveness to the body, which could be more readily controlled than the variegated social revolution happening around him.

Adding to this anxiety about the place of male power in the world was the effect of the new individualism on women. Despite the arguments of traditionalist commentators like Beecher, American women attained suffrage in 1920 after decades of public demonstrations and legal arguments. This is a clear indication of the degree to which women were now in possession of the same autonomy as men. Individualism came with assertion of the self in social settings, too, and the 1920s saw the introduction of a consumer fitness industry almost entirely separate from that aimed at men. Women were wearing more revealing swimsuits for the first time and appropriated traditionally masculine behaviors like smoking and drinking (Green 1986, 255). This pattern drove men to greater levels of idealized sexual dimorphism; the perfect American male physique grew larger and more muscular.

Not all emphasis was given on appearance, however, as empowered women were encroaching on the male monopoly on organized fighting, as well. A few exceptional cases aside, the boxing ring was the province of men, a sort of refuge from other arenas in which women were now appearing, including the fitness realm. Legal issues as regard female prizefighting would continue to be unresolved until much later in the century, but that didn't prevent women from pursuing other avenues of self-defense practice, such as *jujutsu*. Most popularly introduced to the British by railway engineer William Barton-Wright in 1898, the world at large took note of its potential after the Japanese victory over the Russia in 1905. The Japanese government trumpeted its application of *jujutsu*

tactics as the means by which a small nation could overcome a giant one just as a larger body may be defeated by a frail one (Godfrey 2010, 633-634).

Women fighting for their right to vote took note of this feat and sympathetic male experts trained women in the art, even producing instructional booklets and, later, short films to educate women on their potential to overcome male size and strength. When both British and American press outlets announced that groups of suffragettes would begin receiving an education in *jujitsu* en masse, it marked the first time that the women's movement and the Japanese grappling method were publicly unified (Godfrey 2010, 635). Predictably, this was disconcerting for men who, having lost their monopoly on the vote in 1920, the household a generation before, were in the process of losing exclusive hold of the "breadwinner" position in society at large. One response, as demonstrated by the explosion of prizefighting's popularity in the 1920s, was to dedicate more time and attention to the "manly art of self-defense" as a simultaneous escape from the outside world and a supportive community in which masculinities could be constructed, negotiated, expressed, and validated (Connell 1998, 5-6).

Boxing's Golden Age and the Great Depression

On July 2, 1921 the great American heavyweight, Jack Dempsey (otherwise known as the "Manassa Mauler" and "Kid Black") fought Frenchman Georges Carpentier—widely touted as the best boxer in the world—in a decidedly asymmetrical meeting. Dempsey's prowess was simply overwhelming and the European was clearly outmatched from the start. While an impressive show of force on Dempsey's part, the

fight itself is not the reason for this event to be considered truly momentous. The match's promoter, Tex Rickard, had an outdoor stadium constructed to house the spectators, charging varying amounts for the different seating levels. Built to hold 80,000 attendees, some reports estimate that as many as 91,000 turned out. This marked the first time that a sporting event drew in more than one million dollars in ticket sales. Thanks to the work of the RCA corporation, the fight's commentary was also the first nationwide radio broadcast (Silver 2008, 24-25). Boxing, as both an amateur and professional sport, had entered its golden age.

The causes that led to pugilism's popularity can be truncated to a few chief factors: neo-primitivism, the aforementioned transformation in ideals of body image, rational scientific efficacy, and the onset of the Great Depression. Due, in part, to the changing status of women in American society and the autonomy that came with it, many men sought refuge in the world of the boxing gym and the shared culture of the public fight-performance. Ownby (1990) points out that identity-based communities draw not only on what the group's constituency has in common, but on what it does not. In order to strengthen the unity and resolve of a consumptive community, it is necessary to draw a clear delineation between self and other, in-group and out-group (2). In the case of American boxing, the neo-primitive variety of masculinity espoused by Roosevelt and others found its fruition in an almost tribal mentality whereby men could act out fantasies of a supposedly simpler life in which fights, though more physically strenuous than the mundane world of office work, afforded an animalistic, natural outlet for nervous energy.

Boxing, like bodybuilding, transforms the body. In the 1920s a culture of mass consumption seized the public as more people moved into urban areas, or at least attempted to imitate the urban lifestyle. A significant part of this new consumptive mode involved marketing via magazines, newspapers, radio, billboards, and motion pictures. These new methods of reaching the public also loosed a powerful ability to influence the individual's perception of self and body. While companies now offered cures for nervous psychological disorders caused by modernity, they also generated a new kind of anxiety in which the consumer had to constantly self-monitor for imperfection, where images of perfection created by advertisers served as the measuring device. In this way, "advertising became the guardian of the new morality" (Featherstone 1991, 172). This, naturally and for the first time on such a scale, created the classic circular process of profitable marketing. Men were shown standards of perfection that they did not meet, worked to correct their flaws (e.g. by becoming more muscular), and advertisers then offered a yet more extreme measure of perfection, spurring the individual on in a Sisyphean quest for an ever-distant ideal.

Advertisers were able to commandeer much of the muscular Christian legacy during the Gilded Age because American involvement in the First World War sounded the death knell of muscular Christianity as a major political and religious movement. The reasons for this decline were twofold: the push for America to enter the war and subsequent backlash and the contradictory message of the movement itself. It was perhaps inevitable that theologians seeking to increase the masculine composition of young men in order to resolve the effeminacy of white collar work would push for them

to go to war. During the period leading to and during World War I, many preachers publicly supported sending soldiers to Europe so that they could learn and act out their masculinity. In this case, it was not uncommon for patriotic and religious messages to be mixed, as preachers “wrapped themselves in the flag” and “characterized America’s cause as God’s cause.” Even during peacetime, these same clergymen encouraged boxing as a “moral equivalent of war” (Putney 2001, 163). Immediately after the war, a sympathetic public supported critics who blamed muscular Christian advocates for leading the nation to war and, in a moment as symbolic as it was literal, pulled down a YMCA statue on the Princeton University campus (*The Christian Student*) in 1929 (195).

The message of muscular Christianity was also internally conflicted. For decades churches and organizations like the YMCA had been imparting to young men that they should surrender themselves to the service of God, would be at their most useful if physically fit, psychologically sound, and fully self-sufficient, and that the religious community would be the best place for the cultivation of these qualities. Developing self-sufficiency, however, led men to avoid relying on others and added to twentieth century individualism, inherently drawing the self away from both the religious community and its message of total reliance on a higher power. Whether consciously or not, men who followed the precepts of a muscular Christian worldview found that traditional principles of irrevocable human fallibility and weakness did not fit well with their stated goals of becoming autonomous supermen (Putney 2001, 126).

Boxing offered another allure to men seeking a more concrete form of expression and validation, as well, by means of scientific, empirical evidence. As the influence of religion receded from public life as the primary source of personal fulfillment for the masses, it was replaced with secular offerings of a more rationalized nature, including psychology and physiology. Boxing, also called the “sweet science,” represented a test of skill and principle wherein the outcome could be observed, measured, and studied. While health reformers of the nineteenth century, such as Kellogg and Beecher, were outright about their religious affiliations, the corporate-based sources of information with which they were replaced tended to focus on scientific (or, more often, scientific) language to sell their wares (Green 1986, 317). A 1927 advertisement for Bran Flakes, for instance, features an image of a woman who is clearly exhausted, stating that she “could be beautiful” if only she had the “natural bulk” lacking in her diet (313). Similarly, a 1931 ad for Shredded Wheat pictures a father and son next to copy that explains the cereal’s fiber as a source of strength (312). Rather than the vague claims made by religious reformers, the impersonal corporate products could be tested. Indeed, a doubting individual could consume Bran Flakes and, with some certainty, the evidence for “natural bulk” would be rather apparent.

Bodybuilders were able to sell their products in the same way. Beginning in the 1920s, Charles Atlas, the famous “ninety-seven-pound weakling” who recompositioned his body through diet and exercise, sold his at-home training course through magazines like *Physical Culture*. As with the above cereal advertisements, any skeptical reader could try Atlas’ program for himself and, provided he followed it strictly, reading the

fine print, would likely see in increase in strength. In the print itself, this is explained by Atlas as simple adherence to scientific physiology: “You sow the seeds of disease, and you MUST reap the penalty of poor health as a result of your disobedience of Nature’s unalterable laws” (Toon and Golden 2002, 48). While Atlas himself was a religious man, he had learned to keep this hidden, instead drawing attention and revenue by relying on public trust in provable rationalism. Boxing also became popular with this youthful target consumer base, as seen in Figure 3.

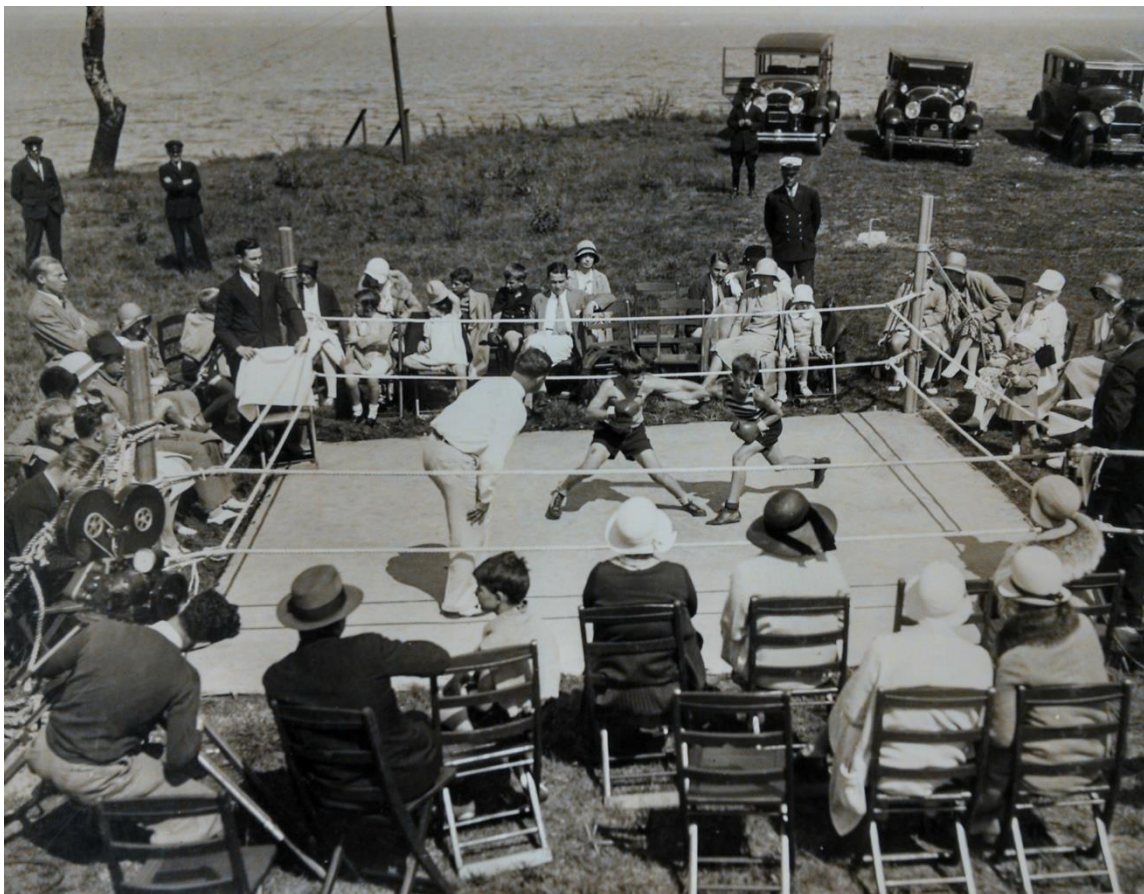


Figure 3 - Society Sluggers (Social Register), this undated photo from the famous Piping Rock Club shows upper-class boys being tempered through boxing

In 1933, *Physical Culture* added a subtitle describing it as “The Personal Problem Magazine” (Green 1986, 282). This solidified the aim of the publication to help the individual become lean, muscular, and psychologically sound. It ran articles and advertisements promising to cure all manner of ailments, improve the physique, and reveal ways of emulating movie stars. The image of the well-fed man as a symbol of wealth was dead and supplanted with the new marks of opulence; having the time and resources to exercise, buy expensive health food, and tan on the beach demonstrated one’s success (Green 1986, 323). Macfadden, the magazine’s publisher, held contests for the “World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man,” which were essentially the earliest of what would now be considered bodybuilding competitions. First among the champions was none other than Charles Atlas (Black 2009).

With newfound fame under his belt, Atlas teamed up with partners in the advertising industry to expand his reach. After the economic market crash of 1929, marking the onset of the Great depression, Atlas’ Dynamic Tension system remained the most popular of its kind. This may have been due to the growing anxiety brought on by such hardship, leading each individual to seek out ways of coping with a new world of hardship, which would reasonably allow for the continuing success of self-improvement products in the years leading up to World War II. Regardless of the causes for its initial success, though, the marketing experts behind Atlas found an even more eager audience than the adult health and fitness set by marketing to young men via comic books. Exact years are disputed, but sometime during the 1930s Dynamic Tension began to appear in the back pages of popular graphic novels, offering to teach readers with less-than-

powerful physiques to recreate Atlas' personal myth of self-improvement. By running these claims as follow-ups to narratives in which muscle-bound superheroes overcome impossible odds by demonstrating their perfection, the message was clearly that awkward youths entering a world of financial uncertainty could achieve the status of perfect men like Atlas—who actually held such a title—through hard work and time (Wolf-Meyer 2003, 498).

Many of these same young men, seeking fame, fortune, and masculine character, set out to build themselves not just through Dynamic Tension and similar programs, but by joining boxing gyms in record numbers. During the two decades leading up to the Second World War it was common for 8000 to 10,000 new professional prizefighters to be licensed annually, roughly three to four times recent years' averages (Silver 2008, 28). Such an influx of fighters invariably resulted in an abundance of talent, which, in turn, attracted even larger audiences. Silver aptly compares the golden age of pugilism to that of jazz; both arts burst onto the national landscape after years of quiet development, both are public performances of a percussive nature in which the artists must improvise to be successful (29).

In terms of fight-as-performance, it drew (and continues to draw) on traditional notions of physical conflict as a source for and protector of masculine honor. While older generations were concerned with personal disagreement as a source of fights, organized boxing during the golden age simply required that the combatant be a member of the gym, neighborhood, ethnic group, or possess the correct internal psychology (Ownby 1990, 136). The same can be said of bodybuilding and nutrition practices, with

the stage being daily life and the performance falling on each member of the audience (Featherstone 1990, 186). In the years leading up to World War II, masculinity, then, transformed from a communal to an individual performance, from religiously-based to consumer-based, and seeking ever greater levels of differentiation between men and women.

A sense of control over one's physical environs through the use of the body is clearly a significant part of the Western idea of masculinity. Presented with the possibility of transforming one's own body to match an unrealistic ideal (as with Charles Atlas' comic book advertisements that helped spark a bodybuilding boom) or through the application of social violence to achieve certain ends by negotiating the personal myth and communal need for a uniquely masculine sphere, it would appear that neither option is especially appealing. Rather, returning to the idea of muscular Christianity, it may be necessary to look outside the immediate cultural milieu to locate an alternative model of masculine expression that could be seen as both acceptable and legitimate. In this case, I propose that the model in question resulted from Western interpretations of certain historical peculiarities of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japan.

CHAPTER III

TWENTIETH CENTURY SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR FIGHTING ARTS IN EAST ASIA

A list of well-known Japanese cultural traits written today would likely contain the word *bushido*. Literally meaning “warrior path,” the term manifests images of proud samurai fighting for their ideals and defending traditions of the type dramatized in the Tom Cruise film *The Last Samurai* (2003). Certainly this notion of the warrior class as guardians of tradition and possessors of admirable qualities is prevalent in both Japanese and American popular culture, however it is a case of what Hobbsbawm and Ranger term an “invented tradition” (1983). In historical reality, *bushido* was not a codified set of beliefs, despite Inazo Nitobe’s well-intentioned effort to interpret his own nation’s social background for a Western audience through such a proxy. In point of fact, the concept could not have existed during the heyday of the samurai, the Warring States Period (roughly 1467-1573 C.E.), because archipelago-wide, multigenerational warfare was the direct result of a total lack of federated identity. There simply was no Japan and, therefore, no Japanese identity for the samurai to guard.

Nitobe’s goal in writing his *Bushido* (1972) seems to have been to explain how Western democratic principles could thrive in Japan even though his understanding of democracy relied on the existence of a core religious conviction (Christianity) to hold the democratic society together (Maeshima 2004). His conclusion was that samurai ethics of honor and social obligation drawing on Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto world

orders passed on to the modern Japanese all the cultural properties necessary to reach fully democratic integration (Maeshima 2004, 103). Interestingly, Nitobe's sentiments, although no doubt well-intentioned, gave Japanese right-wing nationalists a tool to justify the morality of their expansionist policies in Asia as well as further fueling the drive to deify the emperor (103).

During the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912 C.E.) Japanese national identity underwent significant overhauls along with virtually every other facet of the country, such as the construction of railroads, the introduction of electricity, replacement of the warrior class with a conscripted military, and the change to Western fashion in street wear. As might be expected, this was a time of social conflict and upheaval, with different factions vying over influence in all areas of life, even athletics. The Meiji government established Western-style public education in 1872 and by 1885 the mandatory system of school gymnastics (*gakko taiso*) was replaced with military gymnastics exercises (*heishiki taiso*) (Abe, et al 1992, 4-5).

The movement toward militarism in public institutions was driven by a desire to expel the powerful foreign influence that had come on suddenly and placed the Japanese in something of an identity crisis. Some members of society—particularly those who benefitted economically and socially from the arrival of foreign interests—adopted Western styles and modes wholeheartedly while others objected in various ways, sometimes picking and choosing the areas of conflict and acceptance depending on their circumstances. For example, in 1898 Ishikawa Yasujiro, a journalist with the *Mainichi* newspaper, introduced the term *haikara* (“high collar”) to indicate those Japanese who

had given themselves over to foreign influences, the term being a reference to the collars of the Western-style shirts favored by such individuals (Karlin 2002, 62). The other side of the coin included men known as *bankara*, an amalgam of “collar” and *ban*, meaning “barbarian.” The *bankara* man was one of action, adventure, and social conservatism through which he rejected Western fads and clung to a perceived Japanese ideal (68).

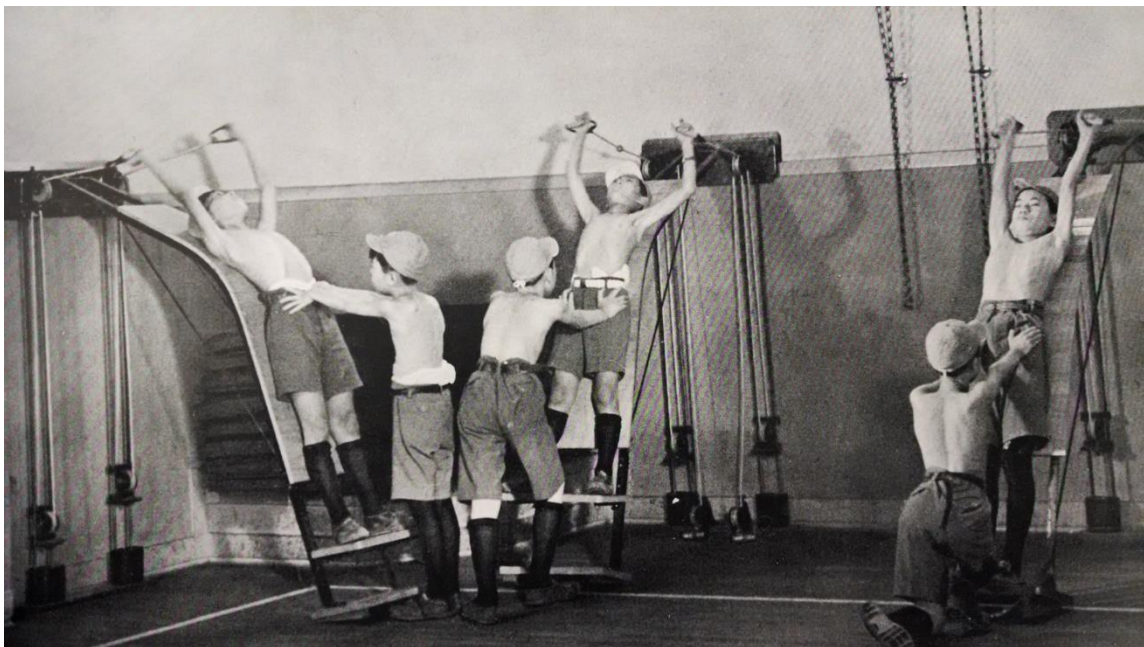


Figure 4 - Boys' Exercises (Kimura 1937), note the Western fitness equipment and military-inspired uniforms

Youths were inspired by their nation’s performance against a much larger and ostensibly powerful foe in the Russo-Japanese War, prompting a wave of nationalistic fervor in boys’ magazines and other popular media. One such magazine, started in 1908 by Oshikawa Shunro, was dedicated almost entirely to his romantic ideals regarding adventure and shunning materialism. Oshikawa pushed “a social Darwinistic view of

society and believed that conflict would serve to expel decadence and overcivilized effeminacy” (Karlin 2002, 71). The stories he published went so far as to suggest that students deliver beatings to those tainted with *haikara* aesthetics.

In keeping with the move toward social Darwinism, the national government introduced *budo*, Japanese martial arts, to the school system. By 1931 all students at the middle and normal school levels were required to practice either judo or kendo (Abe, et al 1992, 5). Here it is important to distinguish between *budo* and *bujutsu*. Generally (though, like most generalizations, there are a number of exceptions), *bujutsu* is used to refer to classical Japanese martial skills. This encompasses the methods of warfare developed primarily during the Warring States Period and, in most cases, the Edo Period (1603-1868 C.E.), including strategy, the use of various weapons, means of swimming in full armor, etc. *Bujutsu* is a word formed from the characters for “war” and “skill.” *Budo*, a combination of the Chinese ideograms for “war” and “way” or “path,” chiefly refers to those martial arts (or ways) developed during and after the Meiji Restoration. Such modern martial arts include judo, aikido, kendo, and karate, as well as noncompetitive styles less common in the West, such as kyudo (archery) and iaido (the art of drawing a sword from its sheath). The *budo*, as indicated by the use of “way” rather than “skill,” are primarily aimed at self-cultivation and often have little (if anything) to do with practical fighting ability. Likewise, physical prowess became essential to the education of young men, as seen in Figure 4.

The formation of *budo* can be linked to the 1876 ban on carrying swords. Historically a signifier of status among the warrior class, removing the swords from

daily interaction heightened the sense of identity crisis among the once-powerful clan lords and they responded, in part, by organizing the Dainippon Butoku-kai (Greater Japan Martial Virtue Society) in 1895 with the goal of preserving traditional martial arts in a way that could be overseen and controlled by sympathetic experts (Abe, et al 1992, 8). If the Butoku-kai represented one method of conserving tradition by institutionalizing technique, then the work of Kano Jigoro represented another formed mainly around modernization and re-invention.

Kano was an educator with a keen interest in both the unarmed fighting arts of Japan (frequently referred to as *jujutsu*) and in modern scientific rationality. After training in two of the old traditional methods, Kano founded his own organization in 1882 called the Kodokan, “Place for the Study of the Way.” Here Kano began to develop a new style, which he came to call judo, by having his students engage in rigorous sparring matches to test the validity of different techniques (Inoue 1998, 164). As a modernist and a devotee of educational methodology, Kano saw his new creation as simply another step in the development of *jujutsu* and, therefore, the best way to perpetuate the tradition. Kano reasoned that taking rough-and-tumble techniques of war and reconstituting them in a congenial, school-like setting (one of his mottos was “mutual welfare”), his trainees would progress more quickly and efficiently. Instead of the hermetic methods of direct bodily contact used to impart knowledge in the older systems, pupils were given a lecture explaining the principles of a technique, then allowed to practice with a partner as the instructor provided individual corrections (165).

In this manner the new judo demonstrated the nationalist concept called *wakon yosai*, adoption of Western technology while retaining the Japanese mind.

Judo's founder, however, may very well have been denigrated by his contemporaries as too *haikara* for the good of Japanese martial arts. He was active in international sporting groups and functioned as Japan's first liaison to the International Olympic Committee (Inoue 1998, 170). In the 1920s and 1930s, Kano's work to replace the combat-oriented, secrets-laden classical fighting arts with the idea of *budo* was coopted by nationalists like those at the Butoku-kai. As military expansion proceeded in Manchuria (1931), boys' magazines and the popular press pushed for a 'return' to conservative ideals like "self-abandonment" and "devotion to the nation-state," ultimately leading to the federalization of judo and kendo into *gakko buido*, school martial ways, which comprised part of the social realignment needed to engage in total war (Inoue 1998, 171-172).

By utilizing the school system and popular press to raise an entire generation of young people to associate masculinity with an "unchanging spiritual ethos" that "sought to sustain the myth of an essential masculinity while concealing the socially constructed nature of gender identity" the national government and conservative right-wing groups were able to compose a new interpretation of what it meant to perform the masculine (Karlin 2002, 77). A central part of this idea was the assertion that modern *budo* was actually the often-centuries-old *bujutsu*, with only a slightly more up-to-date mode of practice. By seeing that young men were trained in these skills with a nationalistic fervor in mind, *budo* study led to the martial arts' inevitable link with "Japaneseness." Indeed,

as of World War II it was assumed that the *budo* were “timeless” (Inoue 1998, 172). One result of this invented timelessness was the institution of quasi-traditional martial arts into the gymnastic systems of public schools, as seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5 - Fencing (Kimura 1937) - mass martial arts drills were common in prewar Japanese school life

Origins of Japanese Nationalism

Although it is often assumed that the Meiji Restoration was a sort of reset point for Japanese culture that happened suddenly and without warning, historical evidence would indicate the contrary. The Tokugawa leadership that had been in control since the start of the seventeenth century was in a state of irrevocable political impotence by the 1850s. Well aware of what was taking place in China at that time, many Japanese officials were hesitant to respond openly to the appearance of American warships in 1853, fearful that they would be subject to a second Opium War. These conservative

types chose to entertain the American commander, Matthew Perry, with an indirect show of force. Sumo wrestlers (easily some of the most powerful combat athletes in the world, even now) were asked to put on an exhibition of their art in the hopes that the Americans would be intimidated and reconsider any plans they had of exploiting the Japanese for their resources. The display failed at its intended purpose, prompting one crewmate to comment that it was “a very unsatisfactory trial of strength... any wrestler that I have heretofore seen of half the muscle would have laughed at them” (Gordon 2003, 49).

Without the authority of a strong central government, the ruling samurai class fractured into several political movements, each with a different solution to the potential crisis of foreign intervention. Among these were the *shishi* (“gentlemen with purpose”) who, even if vaguely, idealized the concept of a traditional Japan in which the emperor reigned with absolute sovereignty. Such a place had never existed, but perception being more important than documented reality, these lower-class imperialists responded to the wave of foreign influence by immersing themselves in the Confucian classics and, in a trend later reenacted by twentieth century nationalists, underwent vigorous training in the martial arts (Gordon 2003, 53). Although this group was small, they were able to effect a significant impact on official discourse through acts of extremism. This eventually coalesced in the 1865-1866 Satsuma-Choshu insurgency, in which the samurai of two powerful domains were convinced to rebel against the national government in order to restore what they believed to be the proper place of the emperor. The rebels were defeated by the government’s new, Western-style military and those

who survived were executed, imprisoned, or sent to live in exile far from the capital (56-57).

Despite continuing trepidation, the national leadership reformed itself into a quasi-republic under the technical control of the Emperor Meiji in 1868. A young man with a fondness for exotic foreign goods and ideas, Meiji allowed an unprecedented influx of foreign products, people, and philosophies into his country, much to the delight of profiteers on both sides of the Pacific. The samurai class was essentially disbanded and, in an openly symbolic maneuver, topknots and the wearing of swords in public were officially banned (not that this prevented devotees from doing so). Westernization arrived so quickly, however, that it was only a few years before a vocal preservationist movement emerged. In 1878 Ernest Fenellosa, a Harvard graduate, came to Japan as a university lecturer. He teamed up with his student and colleague, Motoori Norinaga, to push for the promotion of “traditional” Japanese art and aesthetics (Gordon 2003, 109). While not necessarily as influential as they had hoped at the time, their concept of East Asia as a unique cultural entity in which Japan was possessed of a yet more unique national tradition would be echoed by political agitators as justification for the realignment of East Asia under their rule. In effect, decades before the events that led to American involvement in World War II, the seeds of Japanese nationalism had been planted, in part, by an American.

This is also important because of how Japan was perceived overseas. Although Westerners had been aware of the island nation’s existence for centuries, the Tokugawa shogunate’s isolationist policies left most people with very little information or interest

in Japan. What claims could be found were, like those about East Asia in general, highly suspect and often fantastical. When the nation opened itself to the world at the end of the nineteenth century, then, Americans jumped on the opportunity to exoticize it, often attributing the Japanese with a lifestyle “somehow simpler and healthier” than that enjoyed in their own land (Green 1986, 274). Despite the initial lack of awe at Japanese demonstrations of martial skill, it seems that at least some Americans were impressed with the notion of *bushido*, which was, no doubt, encouraged by the publication of Inazo Nitobe’s eponymous book in 1900 (276). That no codified or coherent universal notion of *bushido* can be found from earlier than the modern period is perhaps further indicative of the degree to which it was formulated under heavy Western influence, especially since Americans had already been looking back at their own imagined traditional past since at least the mid-nineteenth century (260).

Ultimately, those Tokugawa leaders who feared a repeat of China’s experience with economic aggression by foreign powers were vindicated with a series of “unfair treaties,” which gave away control of valuable trade rights and numerous domestic commercial products to Western nations. Even after critical politicians were able to gain favor in the diet, it wasn’t until after meaningful and surprising Japanese victories against the Chinese (1895) and Russians (1905) that Westerners began to take them more seriously, as much because of their potential for trade as for the military threat on mainland Asia. Unfortunately for the Western powers occupying China, the Japanese discovered the profits that could be reaped through post-war indemnities and now looked for potential targets to spread the empire (Thomson et al. 1981, 137). At the same time,

in a fashion again mirroring the past-looking neo-primitivism in America of the early twentieth century, the Japanese, accepting that they could function successfully in the world without necessarily copying Western ways, looked to the (typically imagined) past for traditions that could help generate a cohesive national identity (77).

Judo, Karate, and the Japanese Nation-State

The founding fathers of the Meiji state were aware of the need to quickly generate a national identity in order to prevent the type of fracture demonstrated in Satsuma and Choshu. To that end, the aforementioned *heishiki taiso*, military-style gymnastics, were adopted as the core of public schools' physical education curricula. The engineer behind this move was Mori Arinori (1847-1889), the first Minister of Education. Although born into a samurai family, Mori was a thoroughly modern bureaucrat who fully embraced *wakon yosai* and was an outspoken critic of including the older *bujutsu* in public education, as was common practice in the early years of the school system. In particular, Mori's agenda included eschewing fencing from school life for fear that it would encourage the continued wearing of swords in public. Mori and his followers supported the implementation of a national police force in the interest of maintaining domestic tranquility and believed that a citizenry carrying weapons in public would inevitably be prone to violence (Nakajima and Thompson 2012, 99).

This was the social milieu in which Kano, himself a professor of education and keen adopter of modern ideas, developed judo. The influence of Mori's educational philosophy is evident when considering that Kano's system does not feature armed

training and is expressly peaceful in its stated purpose. There is, too, a mound of evidence to indicate that Kano's molding of judo was largely dictated by government responses to his repeated requests to have it integrated with the established physical education curriculum in teacher training colleges. His entreaties to have judo considered for official inclusion were rejected three times before finally gaining acceptance in 1911. In that time he seems to have made alterations to the practice and techniques of his martial art, finally managing to strike a formulation that pleased the National Institute of Gymnastics, a governing body formed in 1883 to evaluate the effectiveness of physical education methods. The leadership of the Institute was comprised of three physicians, two of whom were German (Nakajima and Thomson 2012, 101-102). In effect, judo's most formative period saw it transformed to pass approval by an organization more German than Japanese.



Figure 6 - Boys and Toys (Carpenter Collection), boys of all social classes were encouraged to adopt an invented samurai ethos

The purpose of national identity was still foremost in the minds of Japanese educators, however, and judo's success depended on a demonstrated ability to inculcate students with a sense of social unity despite being an ostensibly individualistic activity. To that end, Kano set about altering two damaging factors of public perception: that the martial arts are dangerous and that Japanese styles originated in China. The safety concern was simple enough to traverse. Kano implemented padded flooring, a scientific method of lessening impact upon falling, and included a series of resuscitative procedures (Nakajima and Thompson 2012, 106). The issue of history called for educating the public through a series of publications and lectures in 1889 in which Kano asserted that, contrary to popular understanding, the martial arts of Japan were only ever

linked to China because it encouraged acceptance of their efficacy (108). At the same time, he attempted to appeal to the controlling upper-classes within the educational hierarchy by linking *jujutsu* with a classical Confucian upbringing (107). Figure 6 demonstrates that even the very young were inculcated with the idea that their national heritage was inextricably linked to the samurai class.

While attempting to penetrate the school system proved challenging, Kano experienced much more eager success when dealing with the newly formed military. The Naval Academy adopted judo into its physical training regimen as early as 1887. This connection opened the way to other institutes of higher learning and by 1898 there were regular intercollegiate tournaments. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Bureau formally adopted judo as its unarmed physical training following a famous 1888 mixed-style match between Kano's Kodokan organization and the Totsuka school of *jujutsu*, held at the behest of the police superintendent in order to identify the most effective technique for police officers. The match also served as inspiration for one of Kurosawa's early films, *Sugata Sanshiro* (1943) (Inoue 1998, 166-167). By the time of the Russo-Japanese War, then, an entire generation of police cadets, naval officers, and many of Japan's educated elite had spent time studying judo. To this they brought their own notions of how it might be used to further the cause of nationalism and cement the Japanese identity.

In response to the needs of the demographics most widely employing judo, Kano created various elements of practice now commonplace in many martial arts around the world. As everyday clothing would be irreparably damaged during the course of rigorous

practice, he experimented with an official uniform, likely inspired by the tough hemp coats (*yakki*) worn by Japanese firemen of the period (Lowry 2006, 39). The older systems of *bujutsu* recognize technical competence through idiosyncratic systems of licensing, but with little outward recognition. Following Western pedagogical practices and almost certainly with the police and military in mind, Kano devised a system of ten grades to identify the level of a practitioner's ability and experience. His reasoning for the implementation of recognized levels centered on the concept that frequent acknowledgment of achievement would motivate students to continue applying maximum effort. These grades were later associated with the color of cloth belt worn as part of the uniform so that unfamiliar trainees could more easily distinguish between accomplished judo players and fellow neophytes (Inoue 1998, 167).

Following the technical and ideological adaptation that allowed Kano's judo to be accepted by the police, military, and ultimately middle and upper schools nationwide, the erstwhile tradition-bound Butoku-kai embraced the practice of judo as a new form of *jujutsu* along with kendo, another recent invention. A socially and politically conservative organization by design, the Butoku-kai membership reveled in the Japanese victories over China and Russia and, subsequently, provided training to physical culture educators in order to spread martial arts through the school system. This took place by means of their education branch, which was established in 1905 (the year of the Russo-Japanese War) and became a fully accredited college in 1912. In 1919 the college was made almost fully autonomous and took on the name Budo Senmon Gakko, Martial Arts Technical School (Inoue 1998, 171).

With its modern pedagogical approach, standardized uniforms, simple grading system, and clear technical corpus, judo became the template for Japanese martial arts of the twentieth century. This is most apparent in the adaptation of Okinawan karate to Japan. The Ryukyu archipelago that now comprises Okinawa prefecture lies almost equidistant between Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and China. Historically, the islands formed a sovereign kingdom with its own language, customs, and royal family. The region was annexed by the Japanese over the course of the nineteenth century, but maintains a separate cultural identity even now. Karate refers to the indigenous martial arts of the Ryukyus, however the name, manner of practice, and even costume are somewhat recent inventions (Tan 2004, 173-175).

As with judo, karate as it is widely known today was shaped and propagated by a school teacher. Funakoshi Gichin had studied the martial arts of his homeland for a number of years and, much like Kano, sought to systematize and update the disparate styles into a single, coherent corpus that could be promoted as physical education. At the same time, the Japanese military was seeking conscripts among Okinawans to fight for imperial expansion in China. One physician conducting exams noted in 1903 that, although many of the islanders lacked the proper nutrition and exercise to be of much use, those who practiced karate were in excellent condition and advised the incorporation of karate into the local schools, which subsequently took place (Draeger and Smith 1980, 59).

Having previously been known as *te*, or “hand,” the unarmed martial art spread by Funakoshi and his followers required a Japanese name in order to serve its function in

the government-run schools. They chose to call their art karate, applying the Chinese ideograms for “Tang” and “hand.” Historically, the martial arts of Okinawa are known to have come from China and the use of “Tang” reflects that understanding. Funakoshi would later change the character for another with the same pronunciation, but meaning “empty” (Draeger and Smith 1980, 60). The karate program was successful enough in Okinawan schools that Funakoshi was invited to demonstrate his exercises at the Butokuden (the Butoku-kai’s headquarters) in Kyoto in 1916 and was summarily made the official Okinawan representative to the organization. Naturally, this impressed Kano and many others, resulting in another demonstration by Funakoshi, in 1922. This time he traveled to Tokyo and performed for the Ministry of Education (Tan 2004, 183).

The path to official acceptance having been paved by Kano, Funakoshi’s karate was quickly absorbed by Japanese universities after a few alterations to make it palatable to the nationalist government. Technical terms were transliterated into Japanese, training was held in a *dojo* (Japanese-style practice space), judo-type uniforms and rank belts were incorporated, and the primary mode of exercise was made to resemble military drills, with students lined up by seniority and executing movements together as dictated by an instructor. The thoroughly “Japanized” karate appealed to university students and, by 1932, every institute of higher education in the country had a dedicated *dojo* (Draeger and Smith 1980, 60). It is also worth noting that this was approximately the same time at which Funakoshi created a list of somewhat vague values supposed to guide the karate player in his moral development. These values (such as “seek perfection of character”) are very similar to Kano’s guiding principles of judo, conformed to the needs of extreme

nationalists, and reflected the moral education demands placed on teachers by the National Institute of Gymnastics (Tan 2004, 183).

Nationalism, Adventurism, and Ethos

With the national education system placed in a firm position to inculcate Japanese youth with imperialistic fervor through both intellectual and physical training, the increasingly extremist government turned attentions to expanding its sphere of influence. In the years following the annexation of northern China and Korea as an outcome of the Sino-Japanese War, colonies of settlers had been encouraged and funded to move into Manchuria. By some estimates, there were as many as 134,000 Japanese living in Manchuria as of 1920 (Gordon 2003, 176). In keeping with Japan's move toward total mobilization of society in the interest of expansion, popular media encouraged young people—especially boys—to idolize the continental adventurers who left Japan with visions of overthrowing the Manchu and Chinese governments, not as a means of hostile conquest, but to aid their Asian brethren in overcoming corruption and the taint of Western powers that also sought to control the fragmented Chinese territories (Karlin 2002, 71).

Until the 1930s, despite what, in retrospect, appears to have been a unilateral move toward militarism and imperialistic expansion, the Japanese government established during the Meiji period did support multiple political parties, often fostering debate over the nation's future. By the time of the global economic crisis that followed the New York stock market crash of 1929, however, a weakened economy and stagnant

political system led the general public to favorable treatment of military leaders, whose ability to act without inhibition from the civilian government was established by the nation's guiding documents. Only the emperor had the absolute authority to reign in military ambitions, and he lacked either the willingness or political clout to do so (Gordon 2003, 181-183).

Japanese media outlets responded to the sudden global depression, by and large, with an optimistic push for the public to become active agents of recovery. Popular boys' magazines of the 1930s touted slogans like *risshin shusei*, "establish yourself and go into the world" (Kleeman 2005, 52). The messages were clearly aimed at encouraging young men to head for Manchuria, where the Japanese military had established a puppet state to give the appearance of autonomy despite total colonial control. This wasn't simply a response to social anxiety over Japan's conscribed situation as an island nation; as in the United States, the 1930s depression coincided with disastrously poor farming conditions that coalesced with an already weakened market, leading to all-time lows in agricultural output and profits (Gordon 2003, 183). The Japanese saw expansion into China and Korea as perhaps the only way to avoid total domestic collapse.

Japanese adventurism in mainland Asia increased sharply between groups of organized settlers sent to expand the agricultural base needed to feed both those in their homeland as well as the continental military and the popularity of romantic adventure stories published in boys' magazines like *King* (Kleeman 2005, 55). Since at least the end of the nineteenth century, Japanese men who sojourned throughout mainland Asia on a quest for personal achievement and wealth were referred to as *tairiku ronin*,

continental *ronin*. The use of “*ronin*” tied such professional adventurers to the newly minted concepts of samurai ethos and *bushido* as it historically applied to samurai left without masters (Karlin 2002, 71). During the twentieth century the image of the *ronin* as a free-spirited traveler would become romanticized through magazines, novels, and films, most notably Kurosawa’s *Shichinin no Samurai (Seven Samurai)* (1957). These narratives later served as inspiration for American westerns like *The Magnificent Seven* (1960).

Glorification of a newly conceived samurai ethos fit well with the popular practice of martial arts and aggressive adventurism being promoted in public schools, entertainment media, and through quasi-governmental organizations such as the Butoku-kai. Even assuming that there had been, at some point, a united ethical and moral standard followed by the samurai class, its implementation on a popular scale would still be markedly recent as members of that social class comprised approximately five percent of the total Japanese population (Harutoonian 1959, 256). The samurai imagery, then, like the martial arts, was coopted by those interested in promoting expansion abroad in order to attract and excite a young male audience. This trend worked to great effect as indicated by both the number of young men going overseas and the success, despite economic hardship, of magazines featuring *tairiku ronin* stories. By the 1930s the government was conscribing soldiers at such a rate that the demographics of settlers in Manchuria became unfavorably skewed. The solution was to recruit from the juvenile age set and in 1932 the national government began coordinating large groups of male teenaged volunteers to fulfill the need for labor and military presence, their time in

Manchuria being split between agriculture, education, and combat drills (Kleeman 2005, 55).

The appeal of braving what was depicted, more often than not, as the untamed Asian steppe was not limited to adolescents. Men of all ages and social classes found themselves swept up by the romanticism of liberating their Asian brethren from the shackles of local warlords, communists, and Westerners. One of the more interesting examples, whose work went on to have a substantial influence on the relationship between Japanese and American martial artists, was Ueshiba Morihei (1883-1969), the progenitor of aikido. At forty-one years of age, Ueshiba met with and became a follower of Deguchi Onisaburo, a cult leader who had taken the reigns of a colorful offshoot of Shinto. In 1924 Deguchi, Ueshiba, and a small band of settlers went to Manchuria and Mongolia with the goal of establishing their own theocracy, with Deguchi as the defacto head. Although the ensuing events were not well-documented, it is commonly agreed that the group's religious zealotries were met with unwelcoming reactions by the indigenous population and several of the party members—including Ueshiba—were placed before a firing squad only to be rescued in dramatic fashion, at the last moment, by Japanese imperial order (Bazylko 2004).



Figure 7 - Patriotic Children (Carpenter Collection), children raised after the Meiji reforms were imbued with a powerful brand of patriotism

Negotiating Nationalism

Like university karate clubs and school-mandated judo training, a number of high-ranking military officials frequented Ueshiba's martial arts academy in the 1930s, beginning a relationship (particularly with the navy) that continues to the present (Bazylko 2004). This is intriguing given that the other two modern martial arts most promoted by the education and military spheres (karate and judo) differed from Ueshiba's style drastically on the subject of the supernatural. Karate, as Funakoshi

formulated it, was inoffensive to Japanese sensibilities and even its moralistic mottos could easily be plied to whatever ends required by the practicing body. Judo, due to Kano's keen interest in things modern and Western, was powerfully rationalistic. Techniques that failed to be functional in sparring were generally eschewed in favor of those that did, in the process eliminating any sense of supernatural powers that may be ascribed to a given judo player. Aikido, however, not only recognized, but relied on a belief in the cosmic power known simply as *ki*, or "energy" (Kleeman 2005, 63).

Figure 7 shows that even the youngest Japanese were taught to be patriotic in support of the empire.

If aikido lies at one end of the fantastical spectrum by functioning entirely around the assumption of a mystical energy field, its greatest possible opposite would likely be prizefighting. The golden age of pugilism in America was the 1920s and 1930s, but in Japan, too, it had become an established, if radically different, pastime. Boxing's brief rise and decline in imperial Japan serves as an excellent rounding point to the models of Japanese (and "Japanized") martial arts as utilized by nationalist leadership. It also illustrates the degree to which practice of combative arts can lead to a deep psychological affiliation with the community of practice, whether local or national (Donohue 1994, 28).

There is little about prizefighting that could be mistaken for an indigenous Japanese development. From the costume to the arena and the individualistic nature of competition, it is incomparably Western in aesthetic and style. As with many such cultural transplants, however, Japanese boxers and enthusiasts made efforts to adapt the

art to their own social requirements. Boxing's introduction to the island nation came at the beginning of the twentieth century through two simultaneous avenues. Japanese who had experience with the sport overseas established the first clubs upon returning while foreign visitors took an interest in setting up mixed matches between boxing and *jujutsu*. One of the first Japanese to bring pugilism to his homeland, for instance, was Uriu Sotokichi, who attended the U.S. Naval Academy in the 1880s and learned to fight there (Svinth 2003, 37). The mixed matches, known as *merikan*, were popular in the 1910s, but waned in public interest as anti-Western sentiment took hold in the 1920s. The usual format for these contests was to have a gloved, often foreign boxer (American sailors are most prevalent in the newspaper articles) follow one set of rules while attempting to strike a jacketed Japanese *jujutsu* practitioner, who tended to win in short order due to the boxer's prohibition on grappling (38-39).

As with the other martial arts, the Japanese military took an interest in boxing and experimented with its application as an educational device during the 1920s. In this case, the sport being so much more foreign than even karate, it was necessary to invite the expertise of a foreigner. The individual chosen was Captain Warren Clear, an American army officer stationed in Tokyo. This was primarily in reaction to the experience of Japanese military officials who had observed British army inductees being made into "he-men" through the inclusion of boxing at their basic training. As previously established, the imperial government was interested in breeding the most aggressively masculine populace possible, even if it meant seeking outside aid. This did not, however, lead to immediate adoption of *bokushingu*. Just as karate's very name had

to be altered to fit nationalistic tastes, *bokushingu* was replaced in the 1920s by *kento*, which combines the Chinese ideograms for “fist” and “fight” (Svinth 2003, 39-42).

The decline of boxing in Japan by the time of the Pacific war appears to have resulted from several factors. Despite efforts to appeal to Japanese sensibilities by referring to the art as *kento*, much of the argot consisted of loanwords, giving the activity a *haikara* aesthetic that nationalists found unpalatable. Many of the more technically savvy fighters on the international circuit who achieved a measure of success were actually ethnic Koreans whose country was colonized by Japan beginning in 1876 and officially annexed in 1910 (Svinth 2003, 45-46). This, too, almost certainly agitated the *bankara* groups. Finally, the nature of the sport, with professional fights and the associated glamour of fame, may have appealed to some young men, but certainly did not gain favor with the imperial government that desired systemization, safety, and a communal mindset in its physical education, as established by the National Institute of Gymnastics. These issues amalgamated to cut short boxing’s run in imperial Japan. It would, however, see a postwar rise under radically different social circumstances.

China and Martial Art as Cultural Identity

While Japanese nationalism was building and the leadership sought suitable means of constructing a singular identity, including mandatory practice of carefully chosen martial systems, China was in the throes of a domestic turmoil in which indigenous fighting arts would play a key role. The spread of Asian martial arts to the Western world after World War II was directly shaped by the radically different socio-

historical events in China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as compared with those in Japan. In short, there are three primary reasons for this. First, the practice of Chinese martial arts during this period was dictated from government officials to the public, rather than the Japanese case in which practitioners like Kano and Funakoshi appealed to state authorities in a bottom-up pattern. Second, while the history of Japanese martial arts was rewritten to give them an upper-class patina, the Chinese styles were already widespread and commonly practiced by the public, preventing such a whitewashing. Finally (and certainly most important), Japanese sentiments like *wakon yosai* encouraged exchange with foreign cultures in an era when China was simultaneously occupied and fractured by several foreign powers, leading to a great deal of anti-foreign activism, most notably during the Boxer Rebellion.

Although constructing and navigating folk history is a challenge in its own right, distinguishing between real and imagined historical narratives is particularly difficult with regards to Chinese martial culture. Much of this obfuscation can be attributed to the dissemination of faulty information during the nineteenth century when certain scholars attempted to formulate a coherent story marrying common political ideologies with popular versions of martial arts narratives. These ideologies were reactionary to the violence—social and physical—brought about by foreign incursion. Between the collapse of the central government and the territorial conflict involving Western powers and Japan, everyday life in China during the nineteenth century was less-than-placid. This landscape provided ample employment for agencies of professional custodians of an antagonistic nature. At the same time, secret societies sprang up all over the territories

with the shared goal of ousting foreign interests and restoring Chinese sovereignty, frequently touting combative training as the preferred method (Henning 1981, 176).

While the most well-known of the violent groups is likely the *Shenquan* “Spirit Boxers,” other organizations with similar methods of operation appeared both before and afterward, including the Big Sword Society and the Red Spears (Perry 1984, 436-440). The *Shenquan*, in particular, combined their martial practice with belief in the supernatural, providing a strong contrast with the highly rationalistic Japanese interlopers in the northern climes of what came to be Manchuria and Mongolia:

The distinctive ritual of these Boxers was a type of spirit possession whereby in theory any member could become a god. Opening the door to universal deification, the ritual had important egalitarian implications. The Spirit Boxers, with few local gentry to restrain them, spread rapidly across the North China Plain, launching aggressive attacks against foreign targets in their midst. (Perry 1984, 436)

Neither the spiritual belief from which this manifestation sprang nor the physical arts that they practiced came into being solely as a result of perceived foreign threats, however, when triggered, intensification took place and what began as “self-defense organizations” became aggressively violent and centralized the importance of the supernatural (Perry 1984, 435).

Combining martial practice with supernatural belief structures in this way led to a search for historical justification, which some scholars found in the seventeenth century *Epitaph for Wang Zhengnan* by Huang Zhongxi (1617-1669). This work, framed as a piece in honor of Huang's son's teacher, is also a flamboyantly anti-Manchu work that references a Buddhist monk from India teaching fighting skills at the Shaolin monastery in legendary times (an imagined version of the sixth century C.E.). He characterizes this style and Buddhism as "external," stressing their inferiority in the face of native Chinese "internal" fighting arts and Taoist beliefs (Henning 1981, 176). As Henning notes, this marks the first time that martial arts in China are 1) referred to as "internal" and "external" and 2) claimed to originate with the temple at Shaolin. In this light, it is clearly a response to foreign occupation by the Manchu regime and it was a simple matter for nineteenth century martial cults like the Spirit Boxers to graft this invented tradition onto their existing structure of anti-foreign supernatural martial practice.

Of additional interest is the demographic makeup of such groups. As they were, to some extent, organized parties, historians have been able to accumulate an impressive quantity of information about the constitution of their membership. Perry notes that Western Henan province, for instance, saw more violent action from the Red Spears than did Northern Henan. The members in the west tended to be more "authoritarian" and came primarily from the ranks of "local bullies" and "demobilized soldiers" while those in the north were more likely to be land holders (Perry 1984, 440). Interesting, too, is that the lands in the west were under consolidated ownership while those in the north

were more equally distributed (440). This points to two matters that establish the context of the Boxer Rebellion and push against foreign encroachment in general: that, while violence was widespread in all regions, the west, under greater European influence, was more forcefully subject to riots and banditry than the Japanese-occupied north and that the composition of those struggling for sovereignty were mainly from the lower socio-economic classes, although the northern groups were primarily farmers while those in the west had an established history of violence.

In both cases, the organizations that went on to rebel against foreign powers were preparing their members to do so by teaching them fighting skills of one variety or another. Unlike Japan, where Kano and Funakoshi were attempting to draw patronage from the government by associating their systems with classical Confucian education and upper-class young people at the universities, the Boxers, uninterested in government attention, drew on the peasantry to spread their fighting styles, which quickly led to an association of martial arts with lower-class interests. This is not unique in Chinese history, as demonstrated by the great sixteenth century vernacular novel, *The Water Margin* (also known as *All Men Are Brothers* or *Outlaws of the Marsh*) and other later popular works. In most cases foreigners are depicted as causing trouble for the otherwise peaceful Han Chinese, who then utilize martial skill (and often supernatural power) to enact justice for the common man (Eberhard 1975, 67).

Intriguingly, vernacular novels about extraordinary martial arts heroes were both contemporaneous and analogous with Japanese popular magazines that treated Manchuria and Mongolia as fronts for exploration by adventurous young men. Also

influenced by works about the Chinese Song period bandits of *The Water Margin*, Japanese boys' magazines like *King* (Kleeman 2005, 50) applied the same messages of liberation via fighting prowess and stressed violence in the interest of common welfare, but to the exact opposite ends as those of the Boxers. Japanese colonists were depicted as freeing an oppressed people from cruel local warlords, just as the heroes in vernacular Chinese novels did. Both literatures focused on the inevitability of victory when supporting a righteous cause (Kleeman 2005, 51; Eberhard 1975, 66). Unfortunately, the conflict between colonizer and colonized being incommensurate, the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 was short-lived due to the pairing of tactical styles.

Many of the Chinese fighters who took part in the uprising were zealous believers in the virtuous nature of their cause, as well as the efficacy of their martial arts and supernatural beliefs, which included claims of invulnerability to bullets (Draeger and Smith 1980, 19). As may be expected, advanced military technology won out handily. The conflict was particularly sanguine in Shandong province, where the fighting arts are rooted in local tradition and are even more commonly practiced than elsewhere, both currently and historically. It was in Shandong, too, that social pressure to reform the government and reestablish sovereignty were extremely high as the region "had been hit by three disasters all at once: floods, famine, and the Germans" (18).

The Boxer Rebellion did not last long, nor was it successful in terms of freeing the Chinese from oppression by unequal treaties with foreign powers, however it is indicative of the zeitgeist in occupied China at the turn of the last century and serves as an indicator of the domestic troubles at work during the 1911 Revolution. The

Revolution, having only been partly successful given the circumstances, ended in a still-fractured China, though now regional warlords, in many cases, acted as independent states without a strong central government. Realizing the power of applying martial arts as tools of social empowerment and control, it was common practice to hire expert instructors to train one's private army. This transformation can be seen by looking again to Shandong, where, in the period from about 1917 to 1927, Feng Yuxiang (1882-1948) came to power and mobilized the elite Big Knife Unit to secure local peace and, later, to combat Japanese forces (Henning 1981, 177). While the bulk of these men had been members of various Boxer organizations, there were also Boxers who saw the warlords as simply another threat to the common good. One such reactionary group was the Red Spear Society, who swore to oust foreigners, warlords, bandits, and gamblers alike (Draeger and Smith 1980, 19). This was, therefore, a period of tremendous social unrest, but also one in which the martial arts flourished, if not in terms of stylistic development, then certainly with regards to the sheer popularity of their practice.

It was at this time, too, that official standards of martial arts instruction were established. Ma Liang (1878-1947), leader of a garrison in Shandong, headed a gathering of martial arts instructors and published *Zhonghua Xin Wushu, New Chinese Martial Arts*, in 1917 with the aim of providing basic instruction in several methods of training that could then be regulated and instituted throughout the country. The manual was not adopted, but did see formal consideration by the National Assembly the following year. In 1919 the interest in martial arts as physical culture had grown so large that Guo Xifen produced *History of Chinese Physical Culture*, which, as Henning points out, is

responsible along with *Epitaph for Wang Zhengnan* for propagating the historically inaccurate legend that Chinese martial arts sprang from the Shaolin monastery (Henning 2003, 19-21).

1928 was a watershed year in China. Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government was finally established as the controlling power in Nanjing, effectively putting an end to the era of local warlords, while in the Japanese-controlled north, Mongolia, and Manchuria, banditry remained commonplace despite the efforts of the sympathetic Kwantung Army. That same year, a Kwantung Army officer, apparently acting of his own volition, hatched a plot to blow up a train carrying Zhang Zuolin, a former warlord and supporter of Japanese rule. The officer's thinking seems to have been that the assassination of an influential character in Zhang, blamed on anti-Japanese nationalists, would spur the Japanese colonial government into pursuing more aggressive policies in Manchuria and, perhaps, an outright war to determine the fate of northern China. The assassination did not have this effect, however, and, if anything, the Japanese became more measured in their administration of the puppet state (Gordon 2003, 187).

1928 was also the year that the Nationalist government established the *Zhongyang Guoshu Guan*, Central Martial Arts Institute, with the purpose of bringing together the leaders of the nation's vast array of styles so that they could be preserved and propagated under a single controlling body. This movement found a quantity of success and, in 1930, the Ministry of Education mandated that all public schools provide instruction in Chinese martial arts. Within three years of announcing the policy, the Central Martial Arts Institute, much like the Butoku-kai in Japan, opened the Central

Martial Arts Physical Culture Specialty School in order to train educators in the use of martial arts as gymnastic exercises. The school's curriculum included methods of unarmed combat, wrestling, saber and bayonet, and the usual academic subjects such as history, geography, etc. Similar centers were constructed elsewhere, forming a nationwide network of government-run martial arts schools, the goal of which was to breed a generation of strong, independent Nationalist citizens who could stand against the sway of foreign control (Henning 2003, 22-24).

The need for a strong citizenry was becoming more urgent as Japanese/Kwantung expansion continued throughout the 1930s. It is generally accepted that outright war between the two nations began again in 1937 (called either the Second Sino-Japanese War or the War of Ant-Japanese Resistance, depending on one's perspective) with the Japanese push south to Hangzhou. Violence followed attempts at peaceful negotiations by the League of Nations, which demanded multilateral talks in the interest of demilitarization in 1933. Japan sent a legation, angered as both the government and general public was by the implication that colonization of the Asian mainland by Western powers was acceptable while an Asian power was considered wrong in doing so. Matsuoka Yosuke, Japan's Foreign Minister and head of the contingent, was so offended by the claims made at the meeting that he and his attendants walked out and formally withdrew from the League (Thomson et al. 1981, 160). For the first time in over fifty years, Japan had chosen isolation in the face of apparent foreign threats.

In those areas still held by the Nationalist party, martial arts training intensified, but also saw the inevitable struggles of attempts to unite as diverse a field as the hundreds of systems found throughout China. The Central Martial Arts Institute found that the mentality fostered by secret societies such as the Spirit Boxers and the Red Spears led to divisiveness, secretiveness, and internal political misgivings. An unwillingness to share the full teachings of one's system was naturally tied with the anti-foreign rhetoric of the secret societies and would become almost inextricably linked to the now-nationalized practice of Chinese indigenous martial arts. This attitude even spread overseas with emigrant Chinese labor communities (Henning 1981, 177). These elements of Chinese martial culture (secretiveness, anti-foreign attitudes, and desire to remain independent from other styles even within the same organization) will be seen later as hallmarks of the Chinese fighting arts that ultimately stymied their spread within popular culture overseas until at least the 1970s.

The further development of martial arts in Manchuria and Mongolia, then, was limited by Japanese invasion and occupation. Although they were widespread in practice by groups like the Red Spears, they were used less as a means of cultivation than as a social tool for building resistance against an imposing foreign nation. The Nationalist government also understood the martial arts as an effective means of building a strong, unified polity and enculturating young people with the values and beliefs of the Party, but was able to do so through an organized network of schools, legitimizing instructors with government backing and a singular aim toward defending the nation from external threats in the form of Japanese aggression and unequal trade agreements. This program

was so readily accepted that the Nationalists sent a team of top martial artists to perform at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. This marked the highest moment of achievement for Chinese martial culture, however, as war with Japan beginning in 1937 kicked off a tumultuous period in which survival became a daily concern until well after the end of World War II (Henning 2003, 27).

It is evident that aikido, like karate and judo, whatever the initial aims of their founders, came to be associated with militarism and national expansion during the years leading up to the Second World War. Although some elements of these modern martial arts are no doubt practical in terms of physical antagonism, the technological state of warfare in the twentieth century rendered such skills an inefficient use of time compared with firearms practice. Rather, the purpose of popularizing and systematizing Japanese martial disciplines was to accomplish two intertwined goals: the inculcation of young people with nationalistic ideals that would serve the expansionist cause and the fostering of a nationwide group identity where there had been none prior to the Meiji period (Donohue 1994, 28). This government-mandated spread of martial arts to the general populace resulted from a bottom-up structure in which individuals like Kano and Funakoshi appealed to the controlling powers for official recognition, which contrasts sharply with the Chinese pattern in which the Nationalist government sought out martial arts experts to provide the means of instruction, seeing value in the use of martial arts toward nationalistic ends.

These goals were shared in the Chinese context, though, coincidentally, with Japan as the main target of anti-foreign aggression given the state of Manchurian

colonization. In the 1920s and 1930s the nation split under Japanese expansion, with Manchuria being established as a Japanese puppet state and serving as a stronghold for intended conquest of the entire mainland. Martial arts were both a practical physical tool as well as a social one in this arrangement as the central government collapsed, leaving local warlords and the wealthy to employ strongmen for the purpose of quelling unrest. By 1928 the Nationalists unified most of the south, formed an effective government, and dedicated significant resources to the growth of martial culture as a part of the educational system, again, just as was taking place in Japan at the time and with, essentially, the same ends in mind. The unstable political terrain in China, however, soon gave way to outright war with Japan in less than a decade and, combined with internal struggles among members of the Central Martial Arts Institute, led to a pause in the cultural development of Chinese martial arts until years after the chaos of the war was concluded and Chinese culture began to spread overseas.

CHAPTER IV

WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

Evidence, particularly from the example of the Sino-Japanese theater of the 1930s and 1940s, indicates that resources which might otherwise be applied to the propagation and growth of the martial arts in terms of cultural artistry tend to be directed elsewhere. This was clearly the case in China, where war with the Japanese stymied the Nationalist regime's efforts to maintain a functioning public education system and, therefore, the standardization of martial disciplines administered by the officially-sanctioned bodies. In Japan, where the fascist solution to a weak populace was to institute mandatory martial arts training, war with China and then the Allied Powers only served to heighten this reactionary policy of physical indoctrination. In the West, boxing's golden age of popularity was cut short by the inevitable resource scarcity of war. Like Japan, though, the war brought about new images of masculinity, tied more tightly than ever to violent images and physical power. Popular press and especially graphic novels reflected the dreams of young men all over the United States and elsewhere in the face of the first truly global threat to Western civilization. Within the areas of conflict, fighting arts served more immediate functions, certainly with regards to survival, but also as a means of psychic bonding, social cohesion, and much-needed recreation in the most stressful of environments.

China, having again fallen into a state of political and social tumult after over a century of foreign incursion, extraordinary Japanese military aggression, several revolts

and rebellions, serving as a warzone during the course of the Pacific theater, and undergoing its own civil war between the Nationalists and Communists was at last stabilized—to some extent— by the founding of the Communist government in 1949 and the retreat of the Nationalist state to Taiwan, which was no longer among Japan's holdings as a consequence of the nation's surrender. The new People's Republic of China was quick to place martial arts instruction under the Physical Culture and Sports Commission. The All-China Traditional Sports Festival of 1953 saw over one hundred martial arts styles represented and by 1959 the Commission not only organized and standardized the curricula of a great many martial traditions, but published a manual of rules to govern competitions between and within various arts (Henning 2003, 30).

At this point Chinese martial arts were not especially associated with masculinity, nor do efforts by early members of the Communist leadership seem to have been focused on the development of an aggressive type of male citizenry. Indeed, the rules for martial arts competition published in 1959 include special provisions and even entirely new forms for female competitors, indicating that women were participating in great enough numbers to warrant consideration of different physical abilities (Henning 2003, 32). During the period of 1953 to 1965, too, the Physical Culture and Sports Commission quietly made what would turn out to be one of the most influential decisions in the recent history of martial arts by interpreting the Party's mandate to spread the Chinese martial arts among the people as license to create a new method. After a few years of development, they unveiled a simplified form of *taijiquan* (Henning

1981, 177). This form would go on to become the most commonly practiced style of *taiji* worldwide and feature heavily in Western practice of Asian martial arts.

In Japan, where withdrawal from the League of Nations was only one act of isolation brought about by increasing tension between the fascist government and foreign powers, domestic production couldn't keep up with the demands of fighting on mainland Asia, let alone the new problems raised by the outbreak of war with the United States and its allies in 1941. At that time Japan, despite holding a place as one of the most developed of the industrialized nations, had only about one-tenth of the American productive ability, most of which was, again, dedicated to war with the Chinese, as well as holding fronts in Korea, Taiwan, and swaths of Southeast Asia. The strategy of engaging the Allies in a Pacific war relied on the notion that, while larger and more productive, the Western forces would be mostly aimed at fighting in Europe. The Japanese military further reasoned that, to a man, their troops were superior, physically, mentally, and psychologically, thanks to the careful attention given to the public education system since the Meiji period (Thomson et al. 1981, 194). American soldiers, out-of-shape, over-fed, and undertrained, would be met in a draw by the smaller, but more efficient, Japanese units.

Although professional boxing in the United States suffered greatly from a siphoning of talent for the war effort, the pastime remained popular among troops on both sides of the Atlantic as a shared cultural element and even served multiple simultaneous social roles. In Nazi prisoner-of-war camps, for instance, the Allied prisoners often engaged in athletic contests (particularly foot races) to remain mentally

occupied and physically healthy. International agreements with the YMCA allowed limited amounts of sporting equipment to be provided for these ends, the German rationale apparent being that busy prisoners are less apt to cause trouble for their captors. In an interview with the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, former POW John W. Baber explains that, in a unique moment of cultural intersection, some American captives, having been furnished with boxing gloves either by the camp staff or the YMCA, enthusiastically engaged in boxing matches for a mixed audience of German and Allied troops. The German soldiers, for their part, not only attended these contests, but, in photographs liberated from the camp where Baber was held, are seen to be socializing with the prisoners while one of their own acts as referee. Both prisoners and jailors are smiling in a number of these images (Baber).



Figure 8 - POWs Boxing in German Camp with Officer as Referee (Baber)



Figure 9 - POWs Boxing in German Camp (Baber)

Wrestling was also a popular combat sport among American servicemen during their deployments and seems to have been most common among sailors, who organized boxing tournaments with equal interest (Romano). The nature of maritime service may have favored wrestling over boxing as an entertainment medium due to the limited availability of equipment and international standard of rules. The danger of debilitating injury is much higher for boxing than wrestling, too, and sailors worried about losing pay or opportunities for shore leave if they weren't able to work. Regardless of other considerations, however, recruits had fresh experience with grappling due to the orientation of close-quarters combat training at the time. It was common in all branches of U.S. armed forces to refer to hand-to-hand combat methods as "judo," despite a

marked inconsistency of techniques with the curriculum of Kano's Kodokan school. Even so, the drills do appear to have been primarily based on or inspired by judo training and included "throw[ing] them with their rifle" and "disarm[ing] an attacker" (Carlson). Raymond Van Skiver, a military policeman during the war, recalls practicing judo as part of his training under a Corporal Swallow, who "claimed to have had training and experience." In their practice matches no one received notable injuries, however his tooth was chipped during an informal practice session because "we were boxing at the time" (Van Skiver).

U.S. servicemen retained a cultural interest in combat sports even when facilities, equipment, and training were in limited supply, as demonstrated in Figure 8 and Figure 9. Although some of these activities were intended to prepare for the occupational hazards of soldiering, most veterans' descriptions center on boxing and wrestling as enjoyable escapes from the stresses of training and war. Unlike Japan, where fighting arts were mandatory for young men, and China, where they were standardized and endorsed by governments, Western men viewed the fighting disciplines as recreational entertainment. This would come to factor strongly into their interpretations of the Asian martial arts.

Occupation

In 1946 the Allied General Headquarters ordered that all Japanese cease practicing martial arts and dismantled the Butoku-kai (Inoue 1998, 173). Given their recently-acquired nationalistic flair, the occupying forces saw *budo* and *bujutsu* as

potential threats that needed to be eliminated in order to begin reconstruction. Two years later the Kodokan was permitted to reopen and host tournaments, however instruction in public schools was strictly prohibited. During the 1950s various national organizations were founded in order to oversee the revival of the arts and in 1957 kendo was reintroduced to the education system. Now thoroughly “sports-ified,” the global spread of judo took off during the 1960s and it was even featured as an event for the first time at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (173).

Although judo was certainly the first Japanese martial art to reach a large-scale global audience, others soon followed. As discussed previously, the case of karate is notable in that it was brought from Okinawa—until very recently, a place as culturally Japanese as Puerto Rico is American—to the Japanese mainland by Gichin Funakoshi at the beginning of the twentieth century, amidst the movement toward conservative nationalism. Sponsored by Kano, Funakoshi went on to reshape karate into a package that would appeal to the Japanese: his students took to wearing a lighter weight version of the judo uniform, adopted Kano’s colored belt rank system, began practicing in specially designated *dojo*, and the names of techniques were changed to forms not so foreign to the Japanese language.

The second generation of Japanese karate practitioners included an instructor of Korean descent, Masutatsu Oyama. Oyama founded his own style of full-contact karate called Kyokushin that became immensely popular among male audiences looking for a rough-and-tumble style, both domestically and overseas. He was a prolific writer and one of his volumes, *The Kyokushin Way* (1979), lays out much of his worldview as

regards women, masculinity, nationalism, and his generation's perception of tradition. "Karate has already conquered the hearts of young people throughout the world," he wrote, "these people have turned to karate in the hope of realizing a dream shared by all people—at least by all men—of being strong" (5). Oyama portrayed a character of unrelenting and unrivaled machismo, denigrating those focused on material comfort of "the white-collar job, the little house in the suburbs, the family, and the little happinesses," insisting that "a man should seek more challenging battles and should try to expand his visions and aspirations" (33). At the same time, however, his was a uniquely Japanese brand of manliness, equally at home with outright violence and with "sitting on the root of a pine on a cliff overlooking the bright expanse of the Pacific Ocean," contemplating the words of Confucius that "he who is pure in body is like the god of energy" (15).

For Oyama and many like him, the total surrender of self to the imperial experiment was a mistake to be rectified not through the abandonment of absolute dedication, but through a change of course in one's focus thereof. The Japanese term for this is *ikigai*, that which makes life worth living (Matthews 2003, 109). For men of the first postwar generation, Matthews found that work was almost universally upheld as one's *ikigai*. Their sons, however, often expressed a desire to seek experiences for personal development, "Yet... work and self have in common the fact that they are not family—as if preserving a non-family realm as the prerogative of masculine *ikigai* in Japan" (121). The connection with Oyama's view here is clear: modern men who wish to be masculine must have something other than a family to which they are fully devoted.

He also demonstrated this level of devotion through public performances, as in Figure 10.



Figure 10 - Oyama Breaking Bricks for the Camera (Smith)

Full devotion for devotion's sake can be traced to the merging of Zen Buddhist philosophy with the Japanese aesthetic. Since the end of the Warring States Period (roughly 1457-1573 CE), "monastic practices in Zen temples and a popular interest in

artistic practices have been subsumed by the notion of a religio-aesthetic tradition” (Cox 2003, 57). The new aesthetic tradition manifest itself in the form of affixing *do* (‘way’ or ‘path’) to the names of martial and other arts. The use of *do* indicates that the activity in question is a means by which one can seek cultivation, enlightenment, or some other vague concept relating to self-actualization. By the end of the peaceful Edo Period (1603-1868) the movement of the warrior class away from immediately practical application of their skills and toward a more spiritual aim “reflects the social and political stability of the era and a growing public involvement with the martial arts” (57-58). It was because of the incorporation of Zen and the martial arts in the modern period, then, that a descendent of immigrant parents like Oyama could become an influential force in the world of Japanese fighting arts. Likewise, the Zen emphasis on absolute focus strongly influenced first the conservative nationalist approach to masculinity and, after the war, that same association of masculinity with absolute focus became a matter of individual pursuits, or *ikigai*.

Oyama’s own life illustrates this shift from a focus on the imperial system to the self. In his narrative version of history, ancient “men offered their lives willingly for the sakes of their lords. In the democratic society of today we must be willing to do the same thing for the people, but only as long as the people are saved from corruption” (Oyama 1979, 105). That corruption can come in many forms, but two that he states explicitly are the “underworld... gamb[ing], and carous[ing] with women” (107) and “nuclear war, computerized fighting, and proxy wars” (5). The message that Oyama sent via his public character is reminiscent of the early strongmen and fitness gurus telling young

Americans to drink their milk, take vitamins, and listen to their parents. He seems to have been aware of this wholesome message's appeal, even closing out his treatise by recognizing that "all young men want to be strong. Seeing what I could do made young Americans want to emulate my power" (110).

This story of transformation was depicted in a comic book and cartoon series about Oyama's life. The story goes that in his teenage years he joined the military out of love for his nation, underwent psychological trauma after losing the war, was imprisoned for fighting with American occupying soldiers, attained enlightenment after a lengthy period of solitary ascetic karate training in the mountains, and went on to prove the validity of his might by winning a number of fights and killing bulls with his bare hands. This would make for a truly incredible life story were it not a significant embellishment. One of Oyama's senior students, the Dutch karate and judo exponent Jon Bluming, was present for much of Oyama's formative period as an instructor and argues that "it wasn't a bull, it was an ox" that had been struck in the head with a hammer, the years of solitary mountain training took place "before some fight or some tournament in Kyoto" and that he was there for only six weeks. In general, he contends, the extraordinary tales of Oyama's life are "absolute nonsense" (interview, 20-21 February 1998).

This raises the question of why such a man, whose efforts were based around a physically-verifiable exercise like karate, would bother to perpetuate his own legend. Oyama sought students and he seems to have realized that they would be attracted to a charismatic leader who embodied their notions of what a good, successful man should be. As Cox suggests "the point is not that men who study... seek to be ascetics, monks

or modern-day Samurai... however they are at least aware of and may be enchanted by these flattering images of themselves” (2003, 186). By embodying these images Oyama found a way to attract likeminded followers who would, in turn, become more embodiments of these ideals. Monetary considerations aside, the success of Oyama's narrative shows that the reinvention of masculinity in modern Japan to include absolute dedication to one's *ikigai* while simultaneously fulfilling social responsibilities had mass appeal. His ability to attract foreign students through this narrative carries implications for the masculinity crisis taking place at the same time in North America and explains, in part, why Japanese martial arts were so appealing to Westerners in the decades following the war.

The Barbarians Invade

By the time of the U.S. occupation, the Japanese had reoriented their behaviors, beliefs, and worldview sufficiently over the course of a century that several cultural commodities were not only demystified, but practically tailored to fit Western consumptive preferences. This can be seen from two fronts: auto-orientalization and a ready adoption of Western-style masculine imagery. In the years following World War II it became necessary for the Japanese to recast themselves as somehow different from the unified imperial engine into which their nation had been transformed by a fascist leadership. This was accomplished by campaigns to rediscover their own nation through an imagined foreign perspective and amounted to auto-orientalization. At the same time, the generation of men raised with a hyper-masculine set of beliefs and behaviors found

that interfacing with young, recently victorious American servicemen was astonishingly easy thanks to a set of compatible values and interests.

In the world of post-Meiji Japan, it became necessary in the eyes of that nation's founding fathers to create a cohesive national identity for their people in order to avoid the negative effects seen in China. To accomplish this, a set of national characteristics would have to emerge that could be utilized to differentiate "Japaneseness" from other constellations of personality that form contemporaneous imagined communities. Functionally, this was done by locating unwanted social behaviors (including unionization of labor and individualism) as belonging to the "other," and more specifically "the West." The method proved highly successful, resulting in the nationalistic fervor outlined earlier, but also eliminating much public perception of heterogeneity within Japan. Despite the presence of indigenous non-ethnic Japanese (the Ainu), ethnically Japanese outcasts (the *burakumin*), and descendants of foreign immigrants (predominantly *zainichi* Koreans), the Japanese public came to view itself as decidedly homogenous, in direct contrast with the heterogeneous West (Iwabuchi 1994, 4). In short, all that which was favorable was defined as Japanese while those qualities deemed unseemly were identified as Western.

Such differentiation could only take place on a national and international scale through the cooperation of those acting as the cultural counterpoint. Americans, in particular, were useful to that end as they "have even a folklore about the Japanese which says that whatever we do they do the opposite... saying simply that these differences are so fantastic that it is impossible to understand such people" (Benedict

1946, 10). Thus the Japanese, taking their cue from the American vision of their own culture, sought (whether consciously or unconsciously, though most likely a mixture of both given the degree to which militarization was the result of deliberate social engineering) to build a unified Japanese national identity that, in some ways, matched the expectations and assumptions of an American audience. This process occurred again after the end of World War II, however it was necessary, this time, to satisfy both Japanese and American notions of Japaneseness. The American conceptualization of the Japanese was problematic in that it was not primarily based on actual encounters with the people in question, but rather had been cobbled together through the work of wartime scholars via the lens of Japanese Americans and the few works of Japanese literature translated into English (Iwabuchi 1994, 6). Likely the most influential example of this is anthropologist Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946).

Benedict was asked to undertake the creation of a comprehensive cultural profile of Japan with the aim of explaining the Japanese to Americans as it was assumed that: 1) it would be difficult to defeat an opponent with a non-European paradigm of warfighting and 2) occupation of the island nation would be significantly eased by having a knowledge of Japanese peculiarities (Benedict 1946, 1-2). In modern terms, these assumptions would most probably be viewed as racist essentialism, however, as Benedict explains, the Pacific war marked the first time that large-scale conflict with a non-Western political entity fell on U.S. shoulders and the amount of psychological stress removed from American leadership by at least believing they held an advantage in the form of cultural knowledge would prove as meaningful as any tangible usage that her

study may have seen. The unintended consequence of the book's later publication for mass consumption was that it, more so than almost any other such material, formed the basis of American assumptions about Japan. Interestingly, it was soon translated and became a best-seller in Japan, as well, where it was hotly debated over by nationalist scholars and liberal reform advocates as potentially demonstrating "weaknesses" to be found in the author's possibly correct assertions of "Japanese otherness" (Iwabuchi 1994, 6). In this way, Benedict's work was equally influential on the formation of post-war national identity within Japan as it was on general American assumptions about Japan.

The construction of this identity continued through the official U.S. occupation and well into the 1970s and 1980s (it may, indeed, be argued that domestic Japanese quests for national identity continue today), when Japan National Railways teamed with other companies to encourage domestic tourism through a campaign called "Exotic Japan." Advertisements for the campaign illustrated Japan as mysterious, decidedly Oriental, and showed native Japanese experiencing the wonders of their own culture, which apparently they had never investigated (Iwabuchi 1994, 15). Exotic Japan and similar promotions demonstrate a case of self- or auto-orientalism in which traditions are invented and reinvented through the application of an outsider's perspective on one's own image. Re-creation of Japanese national identity was carried out in this way, in large part, because of the need to fit with American assumptions about the Japanese, as found in Benedict's work.

At the same time, specific elements of Japanese society went through shifts as a natural consequence of the occupation. Connell points out that cultures, having survived imperialist and colonial occupation, almost always adapt to Western concepts of masculinity by conforming to them in what he terms “perhaps the most important dynamic of gender in the contemporary world” (1993, 606). Japan was no exception, though the confluence of other global concerns appears to have worked this gender dynamic favorably for those who would commercialize masculine pursuits. In particular, American concerns over the Cold War made Japan appear quite favorable when compared with mainland Asian powers, like China, that went the way of Communism. Treated with a degree of favoritism, Japan became the window through which Americans interpreted the entirety of the continent. In this way Japan came to be seen as a friendlier and less threatening locale than the rest of Asia, in part because Japan, as Americans knew it, was built with American assumptions in mind and in part because the Japanese did not pose a Communist threat (Iwabuchi 1994, 25). This returns, then, to the case of karate, masculinity, and Mas Oyama.

Judo and Karate Become Manly Arts

Judo and karate were the first modern martial arts to receive mainstream attention outside of Japan. Servicemen of the World War II era had been taught “judo” of one variety or another as part of their combat training. Japanese-American enclaves on the West Coast and Chicago had organized judo clubs decades before the war, and Kano himself had shown such interest in internationalizing his art that he traveled

extensively, sometimes as part of the International Olympic Committee and sometimes exclusively for his own purposes, including two trips to North America wherein he visited training groups, delivered lectures, and observed tournaments (Svinth 2003). Even if it had not yet become an established sport within the YMCA or as a part of the Olympics, judo was at least commonly known throughout the Western world and even began to appear on the silver screen. In Japan, Akira Kurosawa's *Sugata Sanshiro* (1943), one of the earliest hit films for the famed director, was based on the life of Kano and dramatized the events of the 1886 police tournament between the Kodokan and a rival school. In the United States, audiences witnessed what may have been the first appearance of judo in a major motion picture with *Blood on the Sun* (1945) starring James Cagney. Judo had become part of the American cultural landscape.

Karate, meanwhile, had only recently been popularized in Japan. Funakoshi was evidently wise in choosing to focus on university-aged men when promoting his art to the Japanese as those same men became political and cultural leaders during the post-war period. Among those who came of age at the zenith of domestic militarism was Oyama. In some ways, his life can be viewed as representative of many men his age: just prior to and during the war, he felt powerful emotions of patriotism and love for his emperor; losing the war resulted in a lasting personal crisis as he felt directionless; the U.S. occupation initially brought hardships, but he eventually found that Americans were a steady consumer base for his version of the (invented) Japanese cultural legacy, in the form of karate (Oyama 1979, 23).

Karate, like all martial arts, carries with it certain social and cultural practices and beliefs. When Funakoshi adapted it to fit those of the Japanese, he demonstrated the plasticity of martial systems to retain (at least some) core physical practices while also drastically altering the state of their non-physical culture. Krug (2001) explains this phenomenon in terms of “object of knowledge” versus “texture of knowledge.” An object of knowledge can be more-or-less readily transferred between cultural groups because it consists of a coherent, packaged set of information. A given song, for instance, can be transcribed and reproduced later by others, even playing different instruments and without any prior understanding of the culture from which the song originates. A texture of knowledge, however, refers to cultural practices and beliefs of a greater complexity, that require a depth of exposure to properly absorb, and comprised of parts that may be altered in one way or another, forgotten, or that take on different meaning depending on both surroundings and practitioner (Krug 2001, 395-396). If an individual song is an object of knowledge, then a genre of music is a texture of knowledge and its place in a larger cultural sphere will depend on any number of situational factors that affect its manifestation and interpretation.

In this case, karate was already employed as a tool for the masculinization of young men for the purposes of expanding Japan’s sphere of influence in Asia. Many of those who dedicated time and energy to studying the art before U.S. occupation held on to the beliefs with which they were enculturated thanks to the Okinawan system being retrofitted for appeal to Japan’s controlling educational institutions, just as Kano had done with judo. Oyama, not surprisingly, saw no separation between those beliefs and

the practice of karate, causing him to suggest that “the wandering adventurer is the ideal image for a man and that the patient, virtuous woman, waiting even until she eighty and her head is crowned with white hair for the wandering adventurer to return is the ideal image for a woman” (1979, 89). Although the continental adventurer image was, in point of fact, a creation of Japanese militarism, its connection with karate as a texture of knowledge was such that the two could not easily be split and Oyama continued to indoctrinate his own students with this conception of masculinity.

Although members of the occupying forces were probably familiar with judo to some extent prior to arriving in Japan, it was karate that came to be popularized by these men after returning to the United States. One of the major reasons for this is undoubtedly something of an historical accident. MacArthur’s General Headquarters was made aware of the use of martial arts as tools of breeding adamant public desire for expansionism, so one of the first orders issued upon seizing control of the country was a sweeping ban on the practice of Japanese fighting arts, including judo and kendo, as well as the more classical styles of *bujutsu*. Curiously, karate’s status as a recent import—and therefore not yet fully incorporated into the school system—gave the occupiers sufficient cause to allow its practice for the three years when even the Kodokan was out of operation (1945-1948) (Donohue 1994, 41). The results were immediate and twofold. First, it became the only publically practiced martial art in Japan, so that even after the end of the ban it continued to be more prevalent than ever. Second, American soldiers and sailors who took an interest in Japanese fighting arts did not have to choose between styles.

Karate was appealing to American men, too, for several reasons. Because Funakoshi's reforms were intended to gain favor with militarists, the art had taken on a militaristic flare that it never had in its original context on Okinawa. There were uniforms, ranks, set rituals, a defined curriculum, and paying of obeisance to the national flag. The Americans who chose to undertake the pursuit of karate would have recognized all of these as recently familiar due to their military service, but, like Oyama and other Japanese instructors of his generation, would not have known that these elements were grafted onto the texture of knowledge. As Donohue argues, all of these attendant aspects are part and parcel of the power negotiation and identity-making that lies at the heart of modern Japanese martial arts (1994, 10). Between the familiarity of surroundings and the appeal of messages like Oyama's supposedly traditional masculinity, karate was a natural fit for the captive audience of U.S. occupying servicemen.

In terms of pugilistic entertainment, American men in occupied Japan had come of age during the golden years of professional boxing, so karate's percussive methods, too, seemed familiar, but with sufficiently exotic components as to entice adventuresome interest. For example, Western boxing does not allow for kicking or use of the elbows as a striking tool, both of which are common in karate. Perhaps most important in this regard was the "sportification" of the art in the years leading up to the war. Funakoshi saw that, like judo, his system would lack a certain appeal for young men without some manner of competition. To resolve this, he invented a means of controlled sparring (*jiyu kumite*) that could be performed safely with minimal protective equipment (and often

none at all) and translated well into a tournament structure, completing the process of modernization that translated the martial art of karate into a sport (Krug 2001, 401-402). Already comfortable with the concept of boxing as a sport, American occupiers became a relatively common presence in karate dojo.

1945 to 1948 proved to be crucial years in the formation of Asian martial arts in Western culture. Krug explains this best: “The philosophic and esoteric practices of martial arts were generally not learned in the short time that Westerners spent among Asian cultures. Thus, what grew in ... Western cultures was...the idea of karate as Westerners imagined it” (2001, 402). Considered as a texture of knowledge, the martial arts require years—if not decades—to absorb due to their entrenchment within cultural complexes. An object of knowledge, on the other hand, such as a sport, can be acquired in somewhat short order to a minimum level of competence, and this was most certainly what young American men, on tours of duty lasting only a few years, saw in the sport, rather than the full cultural constellation, of karate and other Asian martial arts (403).

Return and Transformation

There were some Americans who, after a few years of dedicated practice, were awarded with black belt grades by their Japanese instructors. In a Japanese context, while meaningful, the black belt typically designates one who has demonstrated an understanding of only the basic corpus of a system’s techniques. The first-degree of black belt, for instance, is referred to in Japanese as *shodan*, literally “first/initial step.” That concept may not have translated well between cultures, however, and a number of

returning veterans established their own martial arts academies and clubs in the United States. Donohue notes that, no matter the time or place of origin, all martial arts are ultimately subject to modification when propagated in a new setting, not only in terms of technical execution, but culturally and aesthetically due to differences in philosophic interpretation (1994, 54).

It is widely accepted that the first professional (that is, for-profit) karate school in the mainland United States was founded in Arizona in 1946 by former Navy boxer Robert Trias. He claimed to have studied Okinawan karate under a Chinese janitorial worker and Buddhist missionary named Tung Gee Hsing, who also instructed Trias in the basics of Chinese “internal” martial arts and meditation. Trias called his style Shuri-ryu, after one of the major Okinawan schools that existed prior to Funakoshi’s reforms. In 1948 he founded the United States Karate Association in order to license other schools and organize tournaments. Trias’ interpretation of karate—and Japanese culture in general—is, at best, spurious. Although it will never be known how he actually acquired his martial arts training, it is apparent that he was a key figure in spreading the Orientalized pseudo-history, myths, and legends that continue in Western depictions of the arts. Most notable among these is his insistence that karate’s history traces back to the Shaolin temple’s connection with a mysterious Indian monk known as Bodhidharma, who, seeing that the monks of the temple were physically unable to meditate for long periods as a consequence of their sedentary lifestyle, devised a system of calisthenics that eventually became the Chinese martial arts which, in turn, were brought to Okinawa

(Trias 1973, 15). The Bodhidharma tale is still prevalent today in martial arts schools worldwide.

In terms of textual knowledge, it is interesting that Trias supposedly learned an Okinawan art from a Chinese man and yet, for reasons that will never be disclosed (Trias passed away in 1989), the vocabulary of Trias' Shuri-ryu is clearly reflective of karate as Funakoshi altered it for the Japanese. Even the *kata*—predetermined, dance-like patterns for practice—that he taught include versions of the new patterns that Funakoshi created for use in public education (Trias 1973, 141). Trias carried forward another Western-created fiction about Asian martial arts in his teachings about *kata* that, like the Bodhidharma legend, manages to persist despite historical data to the contrary. In this case, Trias asserted that:

Centuries ago the formal katas were conceived and developed by the masters as a system of prearranged techniques including the usage of personal weapons as well as the techniques for walking, stepping, pivoting, stances, and blocking. Since the formal katas lend themselves to well to individual practice they should be considered as a Manual of Technique, and this is undoubtedly what the masters had in mind. (1973, 140)

This passage, more than simply claiming that karate's drill patterns carry some greater meaning in themselves, points to the central myth of Asian martial culture as invented in

the Western world: long ago, before recorded history, but still within cultural memory, there existed masters of the fighting arts who possessed extraordinary prowess that has been lost to the majority of people, but glimpses can still be had if one trains diligently and knows where to look.

Littlewood (1998) provides an excellent means of interpreting this phenomenon by reinvigorating a Victorian social scientific process known as euhemerism. In Littlewood's modernized approach, what he terms "strong euhemerism" can be identified by three requirements: 1) a clear delineation between the mundane and the fantastical or otherworldly 2) in which ordinary humans may not pass into control of the otherworld 3) except for some special individuals (1998, 8-9). Historically, euhemerism was concerned with literal apotheosis; that is, Euhemerus himself supposedly proffered the rationalistic argument that gods of the Greek pantheon were simply exceptional humans, perhaps benevolent leaders, who, over some generations, came to be considered deities. On a more abstract level, however, I would argue that Littlewood's model of the concept applies well to situations in which an (at least partially) organized group comes to profess a belief in the extraordinary state of a prelapsarian past with regards to individual persons. For the first wave of Westerners bringing Asian martial arts to mainstream English-speaking audiences, such mythologizing as tales of the "masters" and Bodhidharma in particular amount to a non-religious form of euhemerism.

The reason for such readiness to support unsubstantiated tales as those weaved by Trias and his generation may lie in a peculiarly American romantic image. Donohue (1994) recognizes the trends in American martial arts narratives as typically featuring

the image of a “lone fighter” (53). Drawing on Campbell’s work with the monomyth and the hero’s journey (1973), Donohue sees a series of key characteristics that are nearly universal in the American warrior myth. The individual is somehow marginal to, but operates as a part of, society because, without some attachment to a community, the warrior’s exploits lack meaning (1994, 56). The hero must be possessed of unusual skill or prowess, but reluctant to deploy it. He must be connected with the community on an emotional level without ever fully joining his fellows. The conflict by which he is defined is small and usually local, and the resolution must be somehow violent (62).

The attraction of the Asian martial arts for the American psyche would appear to be their advertised ability to grant individual power, ensuring the autonomy needed for enacting the lone warrior myth. This is clear in Trias’ pitch to attract new students, in which he described karate as “an expression of man’s indomitable will to survive in the most direct, self-reliant manner possible, using only that which nature gave him, a mind and body, rigorously disciplined as an inseparable entity” (Trias 1973, 17). Attending classes is guaranteed to “give the student the physical training required to effectively handle himself offensively or defensively in any situation which may endanger his life or the lives of those dependent upon him” (9). Lest the potential student desire simply violence, however, it must be remembered that the “true master of karate-do has a sense of propriety and humility which will lead him to his own sense of honor” (18).

For early promoters of Asian martial arts in the United States, the mythos is established through such rhetoric as the above. Trias sets himself (and other teachers) in the role of the “true master,” like those of the bygone age, who lives in a state of tranquil

honor while commanding potentially devastating destructive skills, but which he will only—reluctantly—unleash as needed for the “lives of those dependent upon him.” This perfectly conforms to Donohue’s model, which is further complemented by the background narrative of mysterious origins for both the art itself and those previous masters who fit the mold of the lone fighter in the mythologizing process. Green (2003) points to both the shadowy past and well-known patterns of mythic and folkloric narratives as requirements not simply for the lone fighter, who features heavily in martial arts folklore generally, but in particular for the founders and leading proponents of styles in which the stories are utilized to a number of practical ends, though most notably as a means of legitimization for the system’s combative efficacy as well as for one’s own personal enactment of myth (9-10).

With these features of the martial arts narrative in mind, the process by which Americans, particularly men, came to adopt Asian martial arts so readily from the 1940s and 50s appears cogently as a process that could have occurred anywhere in the world, but for which Americans were especially receptive given the cultural climate at the time and an already-strong predilection toward certain heroic symbolism. For a new karate student at Trias’ school in 1946, then, the structure of the tale would have appeared in this manner: long ago, before records were well kept, an Indian Buddhist monk came to a temple in China where the locals required instruction; in order to solve their problematic weakness, he taught them a near-magical sequence of movements that evolved over time into a system of combat; monk-like tranquility became entwined with combat skill and the art spread across East Asia, eventually reaching Okinawa, where it

was mastered by extraordinary individuals; a mysterious Chinese man learned from said masters and passed his knowledge along to a young American sailor; the sailor, in an act of benevolence, opened a school to spread this knowledge to his people. In short, as Green states, the folk history “reflect[s] a desire of modern practitioners to establish credibility through association with a legendary past” (2003, 5).

Masculinity in Crisis Again

At the moment of America’s move to join the war, professional boxing was at the height of its popularity. Before moving on to discuss the decline of boxing as a participant activity and the simultaneous rise of Asian martial arts from the 1950s to the 1990s, it is necessary to consider the state of American masculinity at the historical moment in which servicemen were returning from overseas. Here, too, Trias, himself having been a boxer, serves as an example of how many such individuals viewed the social scene for men at the time:

...he is hampered from making any direct or spontaneous action, but must ever rely on an intellectual approach which weighs, sorts, and chooses and then finds that it has run into a brick wall and can go no farther. To overcome this limitation by letting the original mind make the decisions (on an intuitive basis) is alarming to the Occidental, because he does not trust himself beyond his conscious thought. He has never given himself to the type of introspective meditation practiced by Oriental philosophers

and has missed a viewpoint of himself that is quite different from the ego-inspired approach. (Trias 1973, 22)

The vagueness of his criticism points to an undefined, yet prevalent frustration with the social arrangement in which post-war men found themselves. It also demonstrates a rather drastic revision of history that eschews much of the Western humanistic tradition, including philosophy of all kinds, instead insisting that “the Occidental” is given wholly to scientific, quantitative thought while “the Oriental” is more naturalistic, intuitive, and generally better at patterning a contemplative lifestyle. This anxiety appeared in the media, as well.

As Americans returned from the intensity of war, they found a homeland already concerned with the next great threat in the form of the nontraditional. Foremost among those ideas that threatened the “traditional” American lifestyle was Communism, which now represented all that which was not American, and the U.S. government began its campaigns against the political and social ideology that had conquered both China and Russia from growing to a domestic threat. McCarthy and other anticommunists of the era saw such potential threats in all manner of groups and behaviors that failed to conform to a narrowly-defined concept of American culture, including “racial integration, secularism, materialism, apathy, commercialism, conformity, youth rebellion, Jewish upward mobility, internationalism, and welfare statism” (Cuordileone 2000, 539).

In 1949 Arthur Schlesinger, a Harvard historian, published *The Vital Center* to much public attention. His works at once defended the liberal political tradition while also criticizing the degree to which its followers failed to express sufficient levels of individualism and masculinity. By 1958 his public calls for a manlier left wing grew popular enough that he published an article in *Esquire* magazine entitled *The Crisis of American Masculinity* in which he decried the weakness of right-wing “organization men” who lacked independent wills and thoughts of their own, much like the automatons supposedly generated by Communist methodology. That same year, *Look* magazine ran a series based on the same theme, which was later collected and printed as a book, making evident the general concern that men in America had fallen victim to feminization by allowing an entire generation of boys to be raised by women while the men had been away at war and concentrating on their careers (Cuordileone 2000, 522-523). To a lesser extent, though still meaningful, was the often implied and sometimes outright fear of the foreign. This was generally found in the form of rhetoric specifically focused on Communism, however the rise of foreigners went hand-in-hand with that of women in public social spheres, again pointing to the broader anxiety about nontraditionality.

That the “organization man” was now considered weak and counter to productive masculinity is interesting in that it ran against the prewar ideal of identity-affirming men’s groups like the YMCA. Indeed, the YMCA had, for decades, referred to its members as “organization men.” The American middle class shifted in a number of ways since the war, however, and anxieties from the turn of the century appear to have

been somewhat warranted. Men no longer had time for leisure as they did during the 1920s and, coupled with the unacceptability of communal affirmation (lest one be labeled a Communist), sporting clubs like the YMCA saw drops in participation as men dedicated time and energy toward employment. To be seen by others as a practitioner of such frivolity as participating in a club for playing games was anathema to cultivating a manly image in the contemporary sense. The drop in sporting behavior among middle class men, predictably, correlated with a rise in obesity and heart disease among that same group (Berrett 1997, 805). The effects of this turn in social identity were widely felt and included the decline of boxing, the reprise of a masculinized consumerism of the body as seen in the prewar years (accompanied by changes in the idealized form), and, most pertinent here, an intense consumptive drive to graft the Asian martial arts onto mainstream American culture.

As men were spending more time at work in white collar professions and American society grew less accepting of male comradery in sporting institutions due to both the conspicuous possession of leisure time and public animosity toward organization men of all kinds, a new paradigm of masculinity was needed. As with the earlier crisis in American masculine identity, some men found their solution by looking to the (imagined) past and abroad. One such consumeristic and past-oriented resolution came in the form of a mid-century update on the image of “dandies,” often referred to by the 1950s as “dudes” or “playboys.” These were men for whom consumptive leisure activities were a display of masculinity not because of, but in open and direct opposition to the public rhetoric against nonproductive pursuits. Members of the dude group made

ostentatious shows of their choice not to work, thereby inverting the prevalent conservative push of McCarthyism and the anticommunists. The gender negotiation strategy was popular enough that *Playboy* magazine launched in 1953 and enjoyed over four million subscribers by the end of its first ten years (Osgerby 2003, 76). Other magazines of the time retooled to match the *Playboy* formula, including *Esquire*, *True*, and *Modern Man*. Men were redefining consumerism in droves, and while it may have had a positive effect on their sense of masculinity, it most certainly was not working well for their physical health. Obesity and inactivity on the rise, those who embodied the man-of-leisure lifestyle could enjoy spectating at boxing matches, but they were unlikely to put in the amount of painful time and work necessary to take up the gloves themselves.

The middle class man, increasingly identifying himself with the Hugh Hefner set, responded to the obesity epidemic and social anxiety of American men being feminized by applying this new conception of masculine consumption toward dieting and weight loss. Where the previous generation turned to self-help magazines like *Strength and Fitness* and saw the body as a way to demonstrate the power of one's will, the postwar man of leisure followed a similar pattern of behavior, but with a greater emphasis on mail-order programs, doctor visits, and a vision of personal weight loss as a kind of combat in which food and the body were the enemies, professionals one's allies, and tales of suffering stood in for the glory of battle (Berrett 1997, 811). In 1950, for instance, Elmer Wheeler, an advertising expert and salesman, published *Fat Boy's Book*, a personal account of his struggle to reduce adipose tissue, in which he recalls the toil

and distress of starving at the dinner table. The book was serialized in newspapers, resulting in a great deal of public attention. It was soon followed by a sequel, which does not speak well of Wheeler's success at maintaining a healthy state (813).

Men like Wheeler exemplify how the social climate was changing drastically as a result of the postwar recovery. Urban-dwellers became commuters as suburbs cropped up across the country. The G.I. Bill sent millions of former servicemen to universities, which allowed them to join the growing middle class and escape the world of manual labor. Silver (2008) points to this as having a directly negative impact on the popularity and quality of boxing in the United States. While the middle class man turned more and more toward a consumer style of conspicuous leisure and the economic class itself was growing larger due to new economic opportunities, the likelihood that a young man would seek his fortune by emulating Jack Dempsey and become a journeyman fighter continued to shrink. The decline in both spectators and competitors was palpable. In 1949 Madison Square Garden failed to gross more than \$1,000,000 for boxing shows for the first time since before the war. As of 1952, the number of registered professional boxers had dropped by almost half what it was at the height of the sport. All over the country, YMCAs, once the breeding ground for future champions, began to remove amateur training and contests from their list of activities (Silver 2008, 36-37).

Boxing was in decline, which proved to be as much a consequence of economic as social factors. American men were no longer comfortable seeking refuge in communal identity affirmation by engaging in club sports, the boxing gym included, nor were they seeking financial solvency through the fight game as education and other

opportunities opened up less dangerous and uncertain pathways to monetary success. It may reasonably be suggested that the golden age of boxing ended on April 17, 1960, when a University of Wisconsin boxer named Charlie Mohr died as a result of injuries incurred during a sanctioned match at the university's gymnasium. The National Collegiate Athletic Association responded by discontinuing its boxing program, effectively shutting down college boxing clubs in general and the last avenue of the middle class prospect to be lured away from white collar work and into the ring (Silver 2008, 37). Without talented and dedicated fighters to continue the tradition, the quality of boxing instruction went into decline, leading, naturally, to a drop in popularity among spectators. This did not mark the end of combat sports in America, however, as television, movies, and comics presented new means of attracting a generation of participants alienated by the tumultuous 1960s and seeking a haven of physically expressive masculinity that wasn't threatened by feminism, anti-war politics, and the mundaneness of traditional America.

The First Asian Martial Arts Boom

Young people coming of age in 1960s America were subject to a radically different social climate as compared with any domestic strife encountered by previous generations. The Korean War, essentially an extension and aftershock of World War II, had come and gone, and the U.S. was preparing to increase its involvement in the Vietnam conflict, which later proved to be extraordinarily unpopular with much of the general public. In addition to intensifying protests against the Vietnam situation, racial

and gender inequality became issues of popular concern. In the midst of this volatile atmosphere, perceptions of traditional masculinity were transformed to associate it with violence, oppression, political conservatism, and xenophobia. Much of the backlash against notions of a traditional American masculinity were clearly drawn from the popular movement of feminism (Connell 1993, 597). This presents a complex case for negotiating one's male identity. On one hand, prewar fashions of masculinity of the type associated with manual labor and neo-primitivism were unlikely to garner favor, but on the other, it would still be desirable for many or even most young men to have some identity to which they could cling during such uncertain social and political upheaval. If the *Playboy* lifestyle presented one option, there were most definitely others.

In 1961, *Look* magazine published an unusual article. Entitled *Karate: Japan's Spectacular Art of Handmade Mayhem*, it drew national attention to an area of human activity that had previously only been seen in a few small regions within the United States where men like Robert Trias established their organizations. The extent to which the public was assumed to be knowledgeable about both martial arts and Asia in general can be gleaned from the article's contents. Much of the space was taken up with an elaborate explanation of karate's history, along with that of judo and sumo. "There are probably a dozen distinct systems of Oriental hand-to-hand fighting, all of them allied," suggests the reporter, and then later, "Karate developed independently from jujitsu. Karate is the essence of violence—personal combat carried to an ultimate point" (Purdy 1961, 72). The author explains that karate, coming from this background of personal combat, "reject[s] the concept of fighting 'fair' ... while rules may improve a ball-and-

stick game like baseball, they have no place in handling unprovoked physical assaults” (72). Juxtaposing the rule-less karate with the most American of pastimes not only establishes the martial art as something different from conventional sports, but also strongly implies that it is something decidedly foreign, invoking, as Benedict pointed out almost twenty years earlier, that Americans frequently exoticize Japanese culture as precisely the inverse of America.

The comparison between “Oriental” Japan and conventional America is carried to its ultimate conclusion at the end of the piece, wherein the author matches karate against boxing:

Can a karateist beat a boxer? Of course—if he is not asked to fight by the boxer’s rules. Usually, such contests are inconclusive because only the boxer can go all-out. No open fight between an expert karate or judo player and a boxer should last three minutes, no matter how good the boxer. This is not a disparagement of boxing. Boxing is a sport. Karate is not... Open, all-out bouts obviously cannot be allowed. (Purdy 2001, 72)

Karate was something altogether different from even its closest Western analog. Purdy stresses throughout the article that there are meditative aspects to the art, as well, and explains that “karate originated with a Buddhist monk,” which may account for the fact that “it is designed to kill or maim, yet karate experts are nearly always mild, quiet men” (Purdy 1961, 66). The implications are clear and echo those of Trias: Asian martial arts

are better than Western ones because they are more physically powerful and will impart a state of inner peace to the practitioner. By Orientalizing the practice, it then renders participation into something wholly different from the traditionally masculine enterprise of boxing and, therefore, would be suitable for a young man interested in gaining power and identity without being subject to social discourse against his behavior.

Krug (2001) notes that new cultural practices do not integrate into Western “normality” until and unless they are accompanied by spatially-defined multimedia that establish the existence of external authority. This happened with karate during the 1960s and with other martial arts over time (406). Magazines like *Look*, books by authors from Mas Oyama to Robert Trias, and major motion pictures including *You Only Live Twice* (1968) and *The Born Losers* (1967) brought Asian martial arts—and especially karate—into the daily lexicon of popular culture. Soon instruction for these arts became a booming industry, generating a new market for the unique institution of martial arts schools, as well as learn-at-home books and magazines. Foreign instructors came from Japan, China, and elsewhere to take advantage of consumer demand. Less direct effects were also felt as Asian-American stars began to appear on screen (most notably Bruce Lee) and films themselves grew more graphically violent during the 1970s as a new interpretation of masculinity was portrayed by muscular action heroes. As Krug highlights, though, none of this would occur without the normalization of Asian martial arts through books and articles penned by accepted experts in the field (2001, 406). These experts were few, and although colorful characters appeared domestically in the

United States, frequently passing themselves off as authorities, the core of professional specialists could be found among a small group of Westerners living in Asia (mostly Japan), including a circle of friends formed around Donn Draeger, Robert Smith, and Jon Bluming.

CHAPTER V

PUBLIC EXPERTS: HOW A HAIRDRESSER RE-INVENTED KUNG FU

The trifecta of Robert W. Smith, Donn F. Draeger, and Jon Bluming formed, for a time, the core of what became the most influential group of Western practitioners of Asian martial arts in the English-speaking world. Their collective work from the 1950s through the 1970s and 80s was central to the basis of Western martial arts folk culture, in particular with regards to the lexicon utilized even today, the nature of how performances are understood and evaluated by the group in terms of effectiveness, the availability and interpretation of the group's repertoires, and, perhaps most important, by establishing different modes of cultural preservation that resulted in radically different approaches to the subject matter by practitioners worldwide. These men can be juxtaposed against those selling their wares in the American domestic market without the scholarly rigor of works produced by the likes of Draeger and Smith. Such capitalistic figures include one of the most colorful figures in the history of American martial arts culture, John "Count Dante" Keehan.

While the majority of pre-war practitioners were almost exclusively Japanese- and Chinese-Americans living on the West Coast, there were occasions on which people of other ethnic backgrounds ventured into their clubs and training halls. Smith and Draeger were two of the first Anglo-Americans to undertake the practice of judo and their meeting at the Chicago Judo Club via an introduction by the legendary Johnny Osako in 1948 or 1949 proved to be the start of a long and prolific partnership, resulting

in some of the first English language treatments of the Asian martial arts as a field of study. Unlike their counterparts for whom Japanese and Chinese language and culture were still very much a part of daily life, it was incumbent upon the pair to introduce—sometimes explicitly, sometimes through happenstance—a new lexicon through which Western martial artists could express their thoughts on subjects for which there were few established speech patterns in English.

Toelken notes that, in many cases, a group's folk speech is the only way to appreciate and express a style of performance (1996, 234). One issue during the creation of a folk group, then, is establishing a new form or mode of speech for the purposes of transmitting knowledge and communicating aesthetic values where no concept of such values previously existed. The new folk speech had to be constructed and molded and over time this took place through a bricolage of translations, transliterations, and neologisms. One relevant example is their editorial debate over the term “Chinese boxing.” Smith had long used the term to reference Chinese unarmed martial arts in general, however Draeger was vehemently opposed.

During their conversation over articles in Draeger's ill-fated magazine project, *Martial Arts International*, the subject of editorial changes came up, to which Smith was apparently less-than-amenable, and Draeger responded that “As for leaving your work stand as is... of course... But we do have some house rules” (letter to Smith, 7 October 1974). Draeger's group, operating primarily in Tokyo, had intentionally chosen to “not normally use the expression ‘Chinese boxing’” as they considered it to be “an old, misused, wornout [sic], and improper term for something that already has its own proper

name.” Legitimacy, in Draeger’s view, was in hewing as closely as possible to the culture from which a martial art originated. “No self-respecting Chinese ever refers to wu shu as ‘Chinese boxing’,” he argued, “which is a British phrase” (letter, 7 October 1974).

A decade prior, in his seminal *Secrets of Shaolin Temple Boxing*, Smith had already established his desire to use the term “boxing” in English language discourse about *ch’uan fa* given that *ch’uan* (拳) is the Chinese character for fist (1964, 15). Despite having been a boxer in his youth and later a boxing trainer, Smith does not appear to have felt that the word carried any special weight or implication aside from fighting in general and so the use of it to connote any other style within the confines of the English language was acceptable. Draeger disagreed, continuing the argument in a follow-up letter, this time suggesting that legitimacy relies not only on remaining as close to the mother tongue’s usage of a term, but to professional practitioners’ official usage of said term:

The term “boxing” is simply not used by pros. We will follow the pro view. The ideograms for ch’uan-fa in Chinese mean the same when read in Japanese, and do not include the word or idea of “boxing!” We prefer “sparring arts” to “boxing”, tho [sic] no ch’uan-fa, in its fullest sense, is entirely made up of sparring techniques. Likewise we decry use of “fencing” for Japanese swordsmanship, “school” for ryu, etc. We will go pro route and try to educate some, re-educate others. (by way... Peking

lays use of 'boxing' term to British use during rebellion era... lay opinion of what they saw in terms of what they thought it was). (letter to Smith, 27 December 1974)

"Boxing" clearly held different connotations for Draeger than it did for Smith, as did the cultural clash between the British and Chinese referenced as sufficient enough cause to avoid the term in publication.

At the root of this issue, however, was an even more complex negotiation between two different approaches to interpreting Asian martial arts for Western audiences. Draeger, a former Marine, was primarily interested in issues of efficacy in the fighting arts and had little patience for those styles and exponents that failed to meet his expectations. He saw the Chinese art of energy cultivation, *chi gong*, for instance, as nothing more than stage magic, "These Chinese are fantastic with their ch'i kung garbage... I've yet to see one demo that isn't involved with circus tricks... all crap" (letter to Smith, 20 November 1973). For Draeger the use of theatricality in martial arts demonstrations was both unnecessary and undesirable. He was searching for the most effective means of meeting particular combative requirements in all different social and cultural situations, as indicated by a somewhat oblique reference in a letter from his 1968 trip to Java that "Among mainland Chinese here, kuntao places t'aichi lower on the combative scale than what you have focused on in your work. I'll elaborate on this later" (letter to Smith, 12 July 1968). With such specific emphasis on systematic fighting rather than generally performing, he praised only one demonstration during his 1973 trip to

Malaysia, noting that they were “indifferent to what audience likes or wants, and goes about business of training” (letter, 20 November 1973). Figure 11 demonstrates that Draeger, while serious, also had a lighter side.

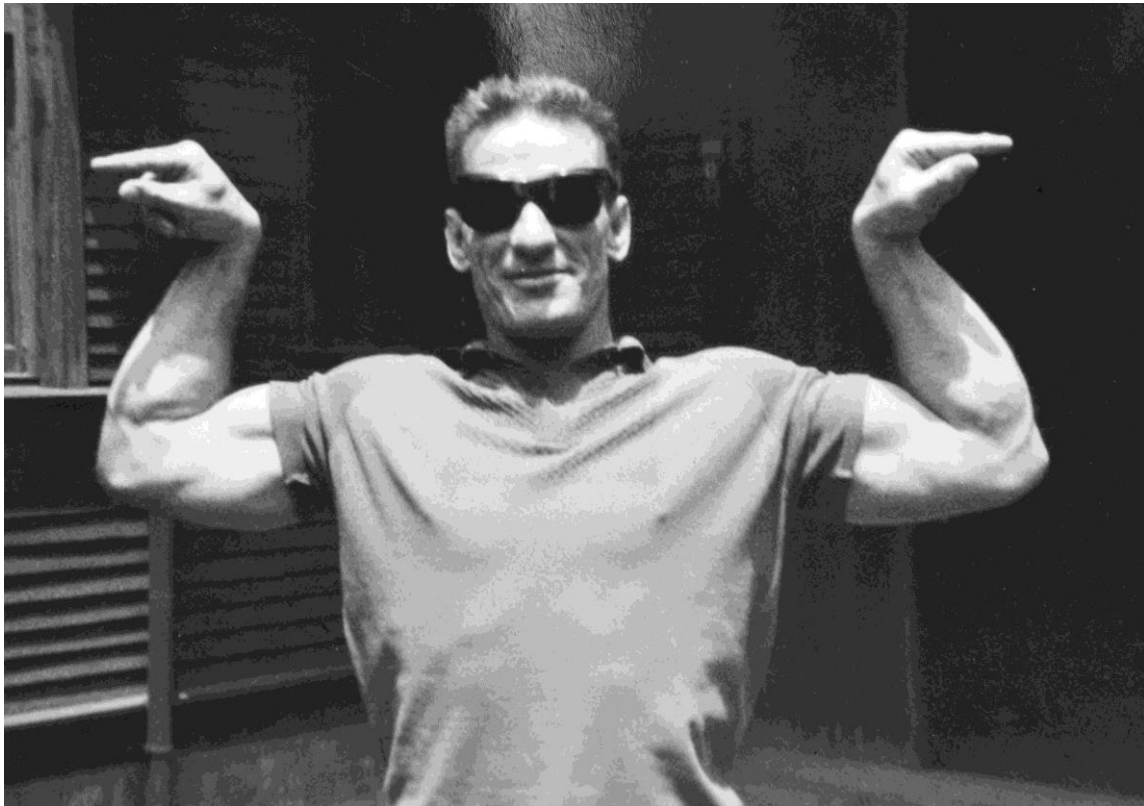


Figure 11 - Draeger in Japan (Smith)

Smith’s views of legitimacy and successful performance within the martial arts were somewhat more complex. Although he sometimes referred to sheer fighting prowess as being desirable, he also clearly supported other goals of less combat-oriented styles as acceptable, which drew strong contrast between himself and Draeger. Smith’s willingness to explore and embrace the alternative roles of the martial arts has at least some origin in the end of his period as an amateur boxer and trainer. Despite having

been an avid fan of prizefights in his youth, Smith's later education on its long-term health effects led him to not only give up the sport entirely in the 1950s, but to actively work toward having it banned. In his memoirs he bemoans that "all boxing should be banned... too brutal for civilized societies... This sterile intentionality is what stamps this remnant of primitive savagery as unfit for human beings" (Smith 1999, 21).

By Smith's own admission, there was an element of bias in each side of the debate over Chinese martial arts, and the use of "boxing" was simply an indicator of a greater rift between the two. Smith suggests that "I believed that the men and systems he showcased were inferior to those I studied under in Taiwan. I had visited the other areas [that is, mainland China] and met their leading teachers and found them lacking" (Smith 1999, 98). For Draeger's part, it was more a matter of falsifiability, even where Smith's primary teacher, Zheng Manqing, was concerned. By July of 1974 the two were in the heat of their differences, with Smith advocating for the Taiwanese martial artists and Draeger losing interest in investigating them, especially *taiji*, which Draeger saw as lacking any real-world application. Wrote Draeger, "You seem to have lost your position of objectivity Bob... and with is your sense of realism. Cheng Man ching a fighter???? [sic] A scuffler, no doubt, who isn't, but a real fighter... hardly... more literati" (letter to Smith, 9 July 1974).

Draeger later offers, at least somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to introduce Zheng to a lucrative business opportunity training professional sumo wrestlers, "Pro sumo assn. [sic] tells me that they would pay all expenses, etc. to have man like Cheng show them how to remove opponent from ring" (letter, 9 July 1974). Smith continued to counter

that Draeger simply didn't understand Chinese street culture well enough to locate the most skilled martial artists as he had in Japan. In addition, he claims in his memoirs that Draeger had developed a prejudice against the Chinese due to his service in the Korean War which was exacerbated by spending so much time with the Japanese (Smith 1999, 99). At the same time the Chinese fighters with whom Draeger was in regular contact were unimpressed with Zheng himself or *taiji* in general, "Nobody here [Malaysia] has illusions about tai-chi being useful as a sole system in combat of any kind... this confers [sic] what Wang [Shujin, a mutual friend and teacher of Chinese martial arts] always said and taught... nobody thinks [Zheng] is all that good come a good punch up" (letter, 8 September 1974).

The reference to Wang Shujin is significant. Wang spent much of his adult life in Tokyo, where he became a regular figure at the house in which Draeger and a coterie of rotating foreign martial artists lived as it was walking distance from the Kodokan Insitute and several other training centers. Draeger, ever on the lookout for unique opportunities, was intrigued by Wang's ability to accept blows to the stomach seemingly without injury. In a letter to Smith, Ellis Amdur explains that "Wang set out to teach him Pa Kua [sic], but for two years simply had him walking around a tree in Meiji shrine, and he would come by, look at the trench being scuffed in the dirt and say 'not deep enough'" (10 February 1998). This may have been frustrating enough for a talented athlete and fighter like Draeger, however the final straw with his training was likely "at Donn's house one day, Wang said, 'The trouble with you is you have no control over

your body' and he picked up an iron meteorite Donn was using for a paperweight, and... held it out at arms [sic] length, immovable" (10 February 1998).

Draeger's interactions with Wang colored his vision of the Chinese "soft" or "internal" arts as consisting of time-intensive, non-combative practices that ultimately yielded few meaningful results. He also respected Wang's abilities, however was clearly not in awe of them or the Chinese arts in general. Defensive of his teacher and confident in what he'd experienced of the internal martial arts, Smith eventually proposed a solution to the rift; Draeger, in his frequent travels, was welcome to visit Taiwan and "test" Zheng's abilities for himself. Draeger was not amenable, insisting that "'testing' and fighting are completely different... It's not for me, though Jon Bluming, the Dutch animal might consider it now as he has in the past. Short of a fight to do somebody, or myself in, I am not equipped to test anybody" (letter to Smith, 7 November 1974).

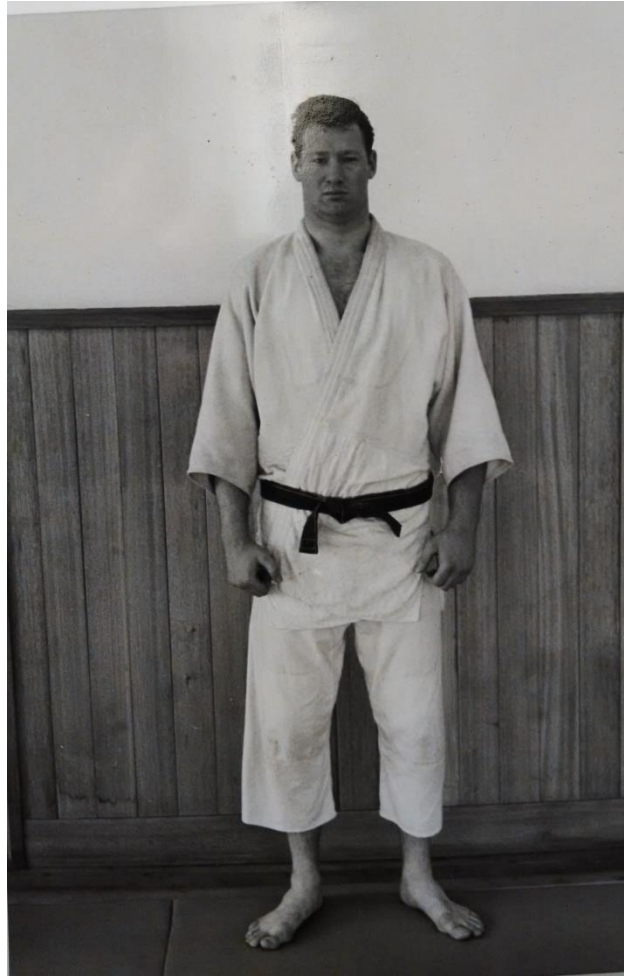


Figure 12 - Jon "The Dutch Animal" Bluming at the Kodokan Insitute, 1960 (Smith)

It remains unclear what, precisely, Draeger meant by the final portion of this comment—given that he was fifty-six years old at that point and two years prior had admitted to Smith that “as I look on my multitude of injuries, I see them all stemming from my association with judo. I don’t want to batter myself anymore... I have better things to do now” (letter, 4 November 1972). This seems rather sudden since as recently as 1967 he was still “testing” others; on his trip to Singapore that year Draeger recounts

investigating the world of *silat* via “my method—combat vs. one of their experts. To shorten the story—I flattened him with osoto-gake makikomi; only I got up!” (letter, 4 August 1967). He had also, however, given up on competition entirely roughly around the time of his 1974 trip to Malaysia. In a letter to Smith some years later, Pat Harrington, another foreign judo luminary in Tokyo in the storied days of Draeger’s Ichigaya house, comments that “nobody tried harder than Donn, but they still would not accept the advice of a foreigner. Yes, it broke his heart, and he then put all of his energy into other martial arts... and most of his time into researching and writing books” (letter to Smith, 2 June 1997).

Thus the seemingly innocuous statement that he wasn’t “equipped” to test others could be a reference to the unpleasantness of political entanglements that he preferred to avoid, being an avid researcher and not a politician. Draeger had another means by which to test his ideas, however, that also provided a buffer between himself and organizational fallouts: Jon Bluming (see Figure 12). Bluming, from Holland, was younger than Smith and Draeger during their years of active training and research in Asia and possessed certain physical attributes that allowed him a degree of leniency in questioning the efficacy of another’s fighting method. Specifically, Bluming claims that at the time he stood at an intimidating 102 kilograms (224.9 pounds) and regularly trounced the finest judo experts at the Kodokan Judo Institute, including several world champions (interview transcript, 20-21 February 1998).

In personal communication, Bluming confirmed that he had met Smith and Draeger at a time when both were most active in judo practice at Kano’s reopened

Kodokan, but that Smith was, even at that time, much more interested in Chinese martial arts than his judo studies. He further characterized Draeger's thoughts on the matter as, at best, begrudgingly accepting of the state into which he felt Chinese martial arts had fallen in recent decades, apparently having believed that there was a time when styles such as *taiji* and Shaolin were truly effective combat methods against resisting opponents, but that this was no longer the case. In keeping with his tendency to illustrate points with blunt and evocative language, Bluming informed me that he and Draeger shared the same sentiments, but only Bluming "told Bob [Smith] that I never met a Taichi [sic] champ who could beat my Granny when she had an umbrella in her hands" (personal communication).

While Smith and Draeger were committed to maintaining mostly congenial relations with other martial artists and researchers, Bluming was committed to personally verifying the effectiveness of any given method, theory, and individual and did so seemingly without regard to political (or sometimes legal) consequences. Smith shares the story of the ever-upfront Bluming and himself being approached by a "strapping 200-pound Korean carrying an umbrella" who attempted to sell them pornographic magazines. He recalls that Bluming "seized the man's umbrella and chased him down the street beating him about the head. I didn't see him again until later in the day. His first words: 'Bob, do you want an umbrella?'" (Smith 1999, 108).

Draeger, beleaguered with cross-cultural issues as both an expert and a foreigner in a Japanese institution, saw in Bluming the opportunity to prove at least some of his more contested points. During the early days of the Ichigaya house (around 1958),

Bluming traveled from Holland to Japan to practice judo at the Kodokan and soon began working with Draeger and company: “Draeger said ‘Look, I am trying to prove a point that weight training and judo, if you do that, you become a better judoka. So I want you in the team to prove that point’” (interview, 20-21 February 1998). The experiment was successful and the already impressive Bluming claimed to have put on twenty kilograms of muscle within the same year.

Draeger’s triumph in the weight training experiment led him to consider Bluming as a litmus test against which to compare anyone laying claim to superhuman abilities or unverified levels of achievement in the fighting arts. In particular, the matter of Wang Shujin remained suspect in Draeger’s mind. Indeed, it wasn’t until the mid-1970s that his opinion on the matter of Chinese internal martial arts like *taiji* came to rest squarely in the critical camp. In a letter to Smith he references his time in the Marine Corps during the Korean War:

Chinese in general lack guts such as compared to Thai or Japanese fighters. The history books are filled with evidence of the general lack of Chinese fighting ability when they are faced with real fighting men... I know from Korea when my company knocked hell out of 4 Chinese divisions.... Milling mobs and masses, yes, but fighters... I have not seen any. (9 July 1974)

Confirming Smith's suspicions, Draeger's wartime experience certainly did give him a distinct prejudice against the Chinese, which, as a passionate expert on East Asian martial arts and prolific writer on the topic, was an issue that continued to trouble him throughout his career and may explain why, despite insisting that he personally make all contributions to the field regarding Japan and a myriad of Southeast Asian culture groups (which caused him to be constantly traveling and drained what little funds he had), he was quite comfortable asking Smith to handle Chinese martial arts in their joint publications. It was this personal struggle that seems to have fueled his interest in Wang, eventually leading him to bring the Chinese man together with Bluming for a "test."

Wang was known for his apparently indestructible belly. Possessed of a prodigious waistline, he would assume a *taiji* posture and invite anyone to strike at his abdomen, simply absorbing the blow no matter how large or powerful the aggressor. Draeger saw that this was a parlor trick of one sort or another and resolved to determine just how durable the man's gut might be. Bluming recalls that he was invited to meet Wang at a private training hall where few could be witness to the spectacle. Because of the somewhat secretive nature of this meeting, a number of rumors have been generated over the years with all manner of variations on the basic idea that Wang and Bluming had an all-out fight. Bluming insists that this was not the case, explaining that, at first, Wang took his usual stance and allowed Bluming to punch him in the stomach. The Dutchman did so, with the usual results. At that time Bluming was focused much more on judo than karate, however, and they agreed that testing the European's grip would be a better means of judging Wang's powers. Gripping Wang's shoulders (he was not

wearing a judo uniform), Bluming was surprised when the *taiji* expert shot is belly forward, checking Bluming so hard that he was thrown “meters away.” There ended the meeting, with Bluming and Draeger walking away unconvinced that Wang would be of much use in a street altercation. “I did not at the time and still dont [sic] think much of their style,” comments Bluming, “he died Young of FAT [sic]” (personal communication).

The Chinese were not the only group with whom Draeger and other Westerners in Asia at that time encountered racial tensions, however. Bluming also knew of the political issues at work during Draeger’s time with the Kodokan as he insisted that “they did very dirty things to foreigners... Draeger was a better teacher than anybody else there. He was a better kata man than anybody else” (interview, 20-21 February 1998). In spite of these issues with the Japanese and others within the foreign martial arts community Bluming remained anything but timid in his career of challenging and testing others. This did not escape the observant Smith, who acknowledges that “over the years, there have been rumors and gossip about Bluming’s so-called misconduct on and off the mat. He was a fierce competitor... giving no quarter to anyone” (Smith 1999, 111). Despite any number of personal misgivings, it was more-or-less universally understood at the time that Bluming was nearly unbeatable in a fair match of any kind. He was also not afraid to issue personal challenges to others. Another successful Dutch judo competitor of the 1960s, Anton Geesink, quickly rose through international competition toward the end of Bluming’s main activity in judo and the two were often made out to be rivals by the press, although the narrative concocted by journalists was, according to

Bluming, not entirely accurate given that he issued seven requests for a private match with Geesink via registered letters (that is, said Bluming, “he has to sign for it. So his signature is on the paper, he can never say he didn’t get the letter”) with the sole intention of proving who was the stronger judo player (interview, 20-21 February 1998).

Bluming’s interests were primarily vested in fighting itself. As time went on—and especially after Draeger’s passing—he spent more time focusing on Mas Oyama’s kyokushin karate and a system of Bluming’s own invention that he calls simply “free fighting,” something akin to contemporary mixed martial arts in which both percussive and wrestling techniques are permitted. Such disinterest in the narrative surrounding an event and the greater spectacle of the performance may serve to explain at least some of Bluming’s and, to a lesser extent, Draeger’s political quandaries.

Regarding further cross-cultural frustrations, Bluming complained that “the Japanese are great at manufacturing legends. When I hear the stories they tell about me from the old days I’m really amazed that they are so naïve to believe it” (interview, 20-21 February 1998). Here “legend” is indeed the correct term to such tales. His karate instructor, Oyama, became the embodiment of the very manufactured narratives that Bluming despised. There are several stories surrounding Oyama, but one example serves to prove Bluming’s point. As one Internet site dedicated to kyokushin karate explains:

In 1950, Sosai (the founder) Mas Oyama started testing (and demonstrating) his power by fighting bulls. In all, he fought 52 bulls, three of which were killed instantly, and 49 had their horns taken off with

knife hand blows. That it is not to say that it was all that easy for him....

In 1957, at the age of 34, he was nearly killed in Mexico when a bull got some of his own back and gored him. Oyama somehow managed to pull the bull off and break off his horn. (Masutatsuoyama.com 2013)

Oyama's bull stories are common fair in karate circles, however Bluming's frustration with them stemmed from having been so close to the source that his information, if not more accurate, was certainly more believable. "It wasn't a bull, it was an ox," he insists, "...Kurosaki [another of Oyama's students] comes along beforehand and hits him on the horn so the horn is loose, and then Oyama comes in there and makes a lot of noise... and the horn comes off." The rest of the Dutchman's version follows a similarly unimpressive vein as he reveals that Oyama "never killed a bull. That's absolute nonsense" (interview, 20-21 February 1998).

As with all communities, legend narratives tend to propagate among martial artists. This forms a substantial portion of most every training group's social identity and invented history, however Bluming, in his ceaseless search for the strongest fighters, not only failed to recognize this element of the culture with which he had surrounded himself in the 1960s, but from the beginning seems to have despised that it makes up such a meaningful part of the social milieu. A trope of Japanese fiction, for instance, that especially bothered Bluming is the protagonist who takes to solitary ascetic practice in the mountains in a sort of Taoist-style search for greater power, enlightenment, or some other missing portion of the success formula before returning to society with revealed

knowledge or ability. Oyama utilized this trope to great effect; the stories of his solitary training in the wilderness claim anywhere from eighteen months to three years of daily feats that would hospitalize a lesser man, including toughening his knuckles with rocks and punching trees until they died (Masutatsuoyama.com 2013).

In his 1998 interview Bluming insisted on telling a more believable account of Oyama's asceticism, "When I came to his dojo the first time the old man told me that before some fight or some tournament in Kyoto he went to the mountain and stayed there six weeks for training, hitting a tree so many hundred times a day, training hard and doing Zen meditation" (interview, 20-21 February 1998). He went on to note that, by the time he returned to the Netherlands, Oyama's followers were claiming much more extraordinary occurrences, even resulting in the publication of graphic novels, films, and a cartoon series based on the legendary version of the man's life. Bluming wasn't able to escape the rumor mill that turned out these narratives, either, finding himself playing a supporting role (branded "the Dutch Animal), he and his teacher were said to have "really went to the yakuza... and knocked them all out and so on. Unbelievable!"

Bluming argues that the fantastic stories of the martial arts that came to be commonplace among later generations of Westerners have their roots in the Asian cultures from which the arts themselves originate, stating, in his singular way, that "Chinese and Japanese are great storie [sic] tellers and legends builders and when you check tham [sic] you will find mostly BULL shit." Oyama was perhaps more prolific at

commercializing the fantastic stories than anyone, a matter at which Bluming continues to balk even decades after their parting:

Oyama was a great teacher and used the stories about him with a smile but never denied them. He was a perfect example well build and used the stories for his advantage. But in the [S]eventies he really overdid it by not letting people stand on his shaduw [sic] and things like that thats whan [sic] I stopped... BUT I am sure when he had to fight he was a terrific fighter and not much people could beat him. (personal communication)

Bluming was once offended by the tales spread about him and his teacher, but has come to accept the transmission of myths and legends as a necessary—in inexplicable—part of the fighting arts regardless of location. “I thought it was very funny and hearing all the stories thru [sic] many years its like part of Budo and Wushu they cannot apparently [sic] get without it,” he notes with a more congenial frame of mind than the Bluming of fifty years prior may have had. Just the same, “many idiots still believe it” (personal communication).


The most confrontational member of Smith and Draeger’s circle was judgmental of more than just the Japanese public’s aggrandizement. His general policy toward other martial artists was that “I respect anybody, as long as he doesn’t say, when I see that it is bullshit, he says it is terrific. Because then I challenge him” (interview, 20-21 February 1998). His judgments—as well as his willingness to express them—were clear and

simple, as when asked his thoughts on being in Tokyo during the final active years of aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba: “aikido is a kind of phony dance for girls and queers. It’s nothing to do with fighting. But—some of the techniques in aikido are good, you should learn some of them.”

Although Bluming faulted the Japanese for their tendency to stretch the fabric of history, the 1960s and 70s were a time of similar tale-spinning in the West. Following the 1967 release of the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*, a media blitz surrounding the Japanese fighting arts included interviews with Draeger, who did some choreography and stunt work during the Japan unit’s production. These often sensationalized his life much in the same way that the Japanese public morphed the exploits of Bluming and Oyama. One article, *Donn Draeger: Man with the Deadliest Hands in the World* (see Figure 13), refers to his ability to “take the loudmouth and bend him into a pretzel, break every bone in his body or reduce him to a lump of lifeless flesh with a single sweep of his hand,” claims that his hands are “so lethal they are outlawed by the courts,” and ironically recognizes that “a lot of poppycock has found its way onto the printed page” (Godfrey 29).

DONN DRAEGER

**MAN WITH THE
DEADLIEST
HANDS
IN THE
WORLD**



The first non-Japanese ever asked to fight at the famed Kodokan combat academy, Draeger upset hosts, received recognition as No. 1 and stayed to teach.

by JOHN GODFREY

WOULD YOU believe that if a professional boxer hits you with his fists during an argument he can be charged by the police for the criminal act of "assault with a *deadly* weapon?"

Would you further believe that if a Karate or Judo instructor gets it into his head to tangle with you – even if he only means to "mess you up a little" – he will be guilty in the eyes of the law of "aggravated assault with intent to kill?"

And lastly, would you believe that if a guy's been trained to kill in 36 different ways – *all of them with just his hands* – he's a good type to steer clear of? Well, if you believe those three things you've got a pretty good idea of what it's like to be Donn Draeger, the man who is widely reputed to have the world's most deadly hands.

Forty years old and an ex-Marine, Milwaukee-born Draeger has devoted his life to learning (and teaching) the 2,000-year-old fighting arts of Karate, Judo, Jiu Jitsu, Kung Fu, Savate, Yawara, Kendo, Aikido and Ate-Waza to name just a few. All of them involve killing with hands. And Donn Draeger is an expert in every one.

"That means Donn has to 'walk softly' because he sure as hell carries one big stick," a friend of the former Marine Corps major (Continued on page 68) 29

Figure 13 - Promotional Article About Draeger for *You Only Live Twice* (Godfrey)

In such surroundings, with Draeger (and Oyama, as well) hoping to prove his value to the Japanese through the vessel of the physically-gifted Bluming while also vigorously studying and documenting the martial culture around them and, at the same time, realizing that Western popular culture and magazines had embraced unrealistic notions of their activities, the trifecta came to a decision that, if one couldn't correct the situation through upfront presentation and frank discussion, it would at least be possible to enjoy some mockery of the newly popular Asian martial arts community in the West

as it emerged. With Bluming's power, Draeger's experience, and Smith's keen wit, they created a fictional representation of their real-life conglomerate: the Bruce Wayne-esque John F. Gilbey.

"Gilbey was a joke, an exaggeration, a fantasy" admits Smith in his memoir, "He had money, time, and amazing skill in everything. We were sure that readers would be smart enough to realize this. We were wrong" (1999, 113). The original intention was to lampoon the legends of superpowered fighting men by having Gilbey's adventures be so over-the-top that those with some sense of reality would understand the joke. A great deal of these fictions are based on actual events that were made legendary, such as Bluming's meeting with Wang. In *The Way of a Warrior*, for instance, "Gilbey" recounts his efforts to learn the secret Kurdish art of *Fiz-les-loo* by traveling throughout the Middle East, eventually meeting a master of the system, testing his abilities, and, in what was clearly intended as a punch-line, "after a week's hiatus I had walked away from hitting myself in someone else's groin" (1982, 29).

Despite such a concerted effort to point out the absurdities of some modern legends of the fighting arts, many readers simply accepted that men such as Gilbey existed. This unintentionally served as an experiment in the spread of information among a community and was perhaps the turning point in each of the three's approaches to studying and preserving different aspects of the fighting arts and their attendant cultures. Draeger all but gave up on the modern Japanese arts, dedicating more time to classical systems and his forays into Southeast Asia while Bluming returned to the Netherlands and set about establishing both an international branch of Oyama's Kyokushin

organization while also teaching his own “free-fight” or “all-in” method. Smith became a family man, earned a graduate degree in Asian studies, and took a job with the Central Intelligence Agency in Taiwan, after which he eschewed all other martial arts and taught a repertoire of three Chinese styles to a small group of followers.

Upon his return to the Netherlands, Bluming, as the head of his own judo and karate organization, eventually running into myriad political roadblocks:

When I came back to Holland... I was supposed to participate in the world champ [sic] judo in Paris. But because of hate and bickering... they reaily [sic] screwed me and in the end I was put on a side track and I stopped competing and instead became a teacher... in 1990 I made the Kyokushin Budokai [his group] All around fighting. (letter to Smith, 5 December 1997)

As Bluming made the transition back to his homeland during the 1960s and 70s he ceased frequent contact with Smith and Draeger, even stating in his first letter to Smith in over two decades that “I heard years ago that you passed away, so you old rascal welcome back” (letter to Smith, 5 December 1997). Bluming was soon preoccupied with his own dealings in Europe, spending less and less time in Japan and eventually losing nearly all contact even with his teacher, Oyama.

Meanwhile, Smith and Draeger continued their cooperative efforts, publishing the first edition of *Asian Fighting Arts* in 1969. This was an achievement for the pair as

writing had begun at least six years prior—a 1963 letter has Draeger complaining about the Charles Tuttle Company, the intended publisher, mistreating its authors and “fudging my royalty statement”—and was arranged primarily through the mail while the two were mobile, Smith moving to Washington, Taiwan, and Maryland and Draeger frequently conducting fieldwork in Malaysia and elsewhere (letter to Smith, 10 March 1963). By 1972 Draeger was planning a magazine of his own with heavy contributions and editorial support from Smith. This seems to have been inspired by Draeger’s contacts at the University of Hawaii’s East West Center and he even had the support of the director “for academic study of world martial culture” (letter, 2 June 1972).

The initial foray into the world of institutional academics set off a spark that laid Draeger’s later plans, which grew more ambitious in both the publishing and academic realms. Smith’s involvement with the projects lessened as Draeger put a new team together. Although his June 1972 news of the magazine plans included the use of Smith’s “name on masthead, and give you what scope you feel is necessary or can do,” by November of that year Draeger’s expectations of his friend’s assistance had fallen to “any good article, that is thought provoking will be gladly accepted” (letter, 4 November 1972).

Draeger’s efforts to document the fighting arts in an organized and at least quasi-official fashion became a career goal, but so did a much more pragmatic realization that his aging body could not continue in the lifestyle he had chosen for the past several years. A trip to Hawaii to give guest lectures on his experiences with martial culture solidified this reality and he became determined to settle in Kona, “I’ve ambled around

this... earth, and insofar as the U.S. is concerned, if one must live somewhere, for me it is Kona.” His plan was relatively simple, if not easily accomplished: “to build international martial culture research center, and to tie close to U of H on such study. We will be teaching local police and civilian units on various arts” (letter to Smith, 1 July 1973). His intention was to continue living in Asia for half the year and Hawaii the other. For Draeger, the plan to preserve and spread the fighting arts (as well as to live comfortably) necessitated institutionalization and organized study.

His focus on institutionalization was no more clear than in his (re)invention of hoplology, the study of the science and mechanics of human combative behavior and a term lifted from Sir Richard F. Burton’s writings in the nineteenth century. This study would be the basis of Draeger’s dream to build a martial culture center and, as the 1980s began, the plans seemed to be coming together. Draeger wrote to one of his primary supporters in the endeavor that “While I am here [Hawaii] I will attend to the legal matters which will make the Center a tax-exempt non-profit corporation, an educational institution” (letter to Geoff Wilcher, 3 December 1981).

Draeger passed away in 1982 after several months of hospitalization due to cancer. By the time of his passing the magazine project he had initially planned with Smith was transformed into *Hoplos*, the newsletter of his International Hopology Research Center, the term that he planned to apply to the martial culture establishment at the University of Hawaii. Unfortunately for those vested in the development of the Center, only a small cadre of Draeger’s associates would carry on his hoplology, continuing to publish *Hoplos* at irregular intervals, but abandoning the Hawaii

connection entirely. Despite his best efforts to avoid the kind of political intrigue with which he and Bluming wrestled on a daily basis in their training and competition lives, the hoplology group fell to the same sorts of squabbles following Draeger's death. Regarding the scholarly work of Geoff Wilcher, Chris Bates, a member of Draeger's circle and one of Wilcher's martial arts students, explained that Draeger "decided when near death that he wanted Geoff to take over as research director for the IHRC. This was not to be. Phil [Relnick] killed it as soon as Donn died and when the dust settled it was 'Geoff who?'" (letter to Smith, 8 November 1996). The IHRC became the International Hoplology Society under the direction of Hunter Armstrong. Now based out of Sedona, Arizona, the IHS continues to produce and republish material, primarily through *Hoplos*, however with a more evolutionary/biological component than much of Draeger's own work.

Robert W. Smith, meanwhile, embraced the Chinese "internal" martial arts that he studied in Taiwan during a three-year period from 1959 to 1962. His approach to these arts seems somewhat contradictory. In *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts* Smith suggests that "solo form work is a useful exercise... But the solo exercise is not fighting" and therefore "in the end in fighting we must come to scratch with an actual antagonist... It little behooves... never to try conclusions with a living man (Draeger and Smith 1980, 22). In *Martial Musings*, however, he is very clear that "the main thing I wanted to elicit from him [Zheng Manqing] was simply: what can taiji do for character?" (Smith 1999, 195).

Smith's claim to focus on the reality of combative engagements in the earlier work may be an accurate reflection of his experience at the time, given a strong background in amateur boxing and judo and having first encountered such training while serving in the military. During his time in Japan he spent a great deal of time with Draeger and Bluming, whose single-minded concern for effective violence is apparent. Smith's time in Taiwan—and especially with Zheng Manqing—then, seems the likely catalyst for his shift toward the artistic and sentimental aspects of martial study.

His efforts to preserve the art of Zheng through both documentation and teaching would have been hampered by an empirical, perhaps hoplological, method as Zheng was, at least in Smith's eyes, “the multifaceted savant, the ‘Master of Five Excellences,’ famed as a painter, calligrapher, poet, medical doctor, and taiji genius” (Smith 1999, 201). Here it is plainly visible why Smith and Draeger disagreed over Zheng; Smith had found a teacher who had captured his attention and, possibly, imagination while his friends from the old Ichigaya house were traveling the world, “testing” fighters and systems. Draeger spoke broadly with exponents of many systems, some of whom were unimpressed with Zheng, while Smith undertook deep study with a small group of Zheng's acquaintances who held the teacher in high regard. For Draeger, preservation of the fighting arts was systematic and essentially scientific; for Smith it was more artistic, conceptual, and emotionally experiential.

Another *taiji* pupil, John Lad, illustrated the sort of mindset necessary to learn their style:

In a sense, it does not really matter what he [Zheng] knew or didn't know about science. His conviction that T'ai Chi Ch'uan could and should survive in the modern world, and even be communicated to and developed by people who are relatively innocent of traditional Chinese concepts and values was evident in his teaching efforts. It was obviously the result not of a scientific analysis, but of his own understanding of the depth of the practice itself. (letter to Smith, 25 January 1983)

Smith had joined what may be considered a more traditional model of pedagogy and preservation within the Chinese martial arts than Draeger and Bluming found in their experiences (with the possible exception of Draeger's dedication to his classical *bujutsu* teacher and mentor, Otake Risuke). The result was a non-institutional, highly personalized method of instruction that Smith passed on to his own students, only granting teaching permission to those who mastered the full repertoire of the genre. This contrasts strongly with Draeger's notion that the fighting arts can be dissected, analyzed, and passed on through institutional orchestration. Concludes John Lad in his letter, "[use of] scientific terms and formulas only serves to obscure the teaching concerning T'ai Chi Ch'uan that Prof. Cheng was no doubt trying to communicate."

The trifecta, especially in their respective later years (Bluming, the youngest, is still active as of this writing) grew more interested in the preservation of the various arts with which they had experience. Bluming formed his own organization. Draeger planned to open a research center in Hawaii and already had a team of researchers prepared to

staff it. Smith, a dedicated family man, taught local students *taiji*, *bagua*, and *xing-i*, fostering personal relationships with each individual while working full time for the Central Intelligence Agency (Smith 1999:233).

It could be argued that Smith's approach to continuing the line of his adopted community (that is, the collective of students following the lineage of Zheng) was not only more traditional, but more effective in the long-term than institutionalization. Toelken notes that repertoires of performance are rarely confined to a single genre and, indeed, tend to integrate several at once, particularly where preservation of the performance style is concerned (1996, 209-210). Smith's repertoire included not only the three physical arts he studied in Taiwan, but also a litany of jokes, anecdotes, riddles, and, printed material. What might be termed his "legitimate" information was passed to others through these media, particularly among his private students, but so was another, "illegitimate" lineage through the person of John F. Gilbey, the unreliable narrator who perpetuates unbelievable tales amalgamated from Smith, Draeger, and Bluming's accumulated knowledge of legends and humor. These legends were spurred on by sensational articles like those about Draeger (see Figure 14).

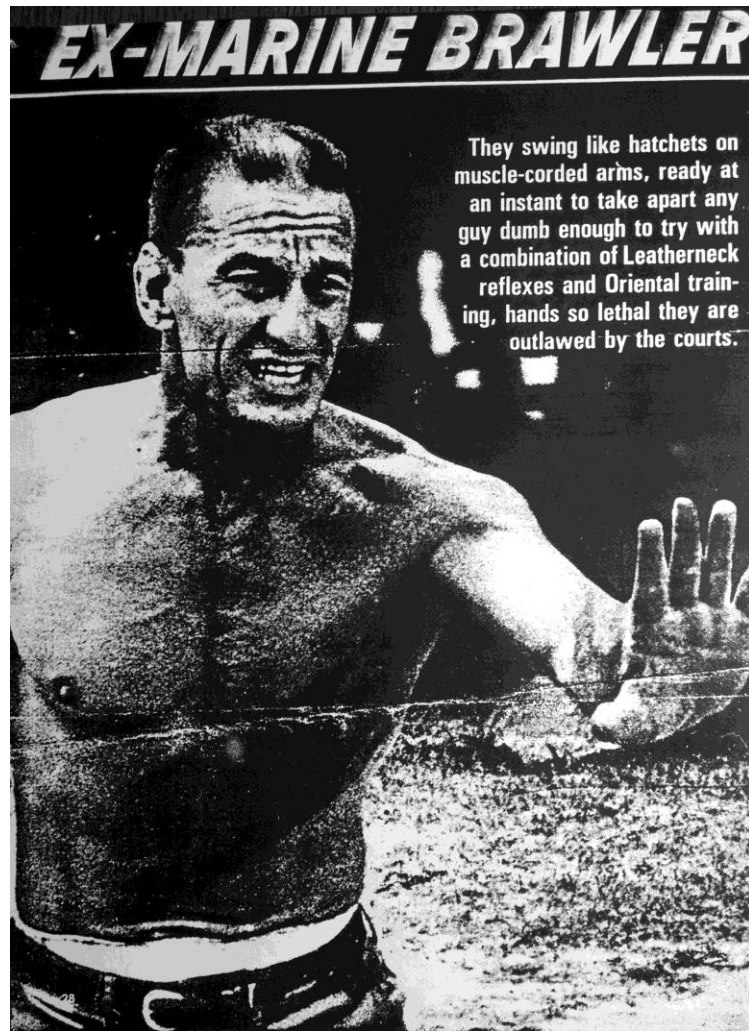


Figure 14 - Even Draeger Could Not Escape the Media's Sensationalism (Godfrey)

Deadliest Man Alive

Gilbey, the unreliable narrator and obvious joke that proved not-so-obvious to English-speakers in the Western world may have been unintentionally convincing because the character so accurately portrayed the fantastical figures he was intended to lampoon, thereby blurring the line between real people with extraordinary stories and the purely fictional. Although the individuals willing to undergo the rigors of training and

living abroad for years at a time formed a basically cohesive community with an understood comradery, the domestic community of Asian martial arts practitioners in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s was of a much more questionable nature as far as historical legitimacy and commercialism are concerned.

Almost certainly the most colorful figure in the world of American martial arts during this time was a man name John Keehan. Keehan's background is uncertain at best, however his role in the popular mythos of the time is unrivaled. He is most well-known for a series of advertisements that appeared in graphic novels and magazines aimed at young men, much like the muscle-building advertisements that began to crop up in such publications during the early part of the twentieth century. Keehan, though, was not selling a system of weight gain, but rather promised to impart "secret fighting arts" as won through hard training in death matches around the world by the "Deadliest Man Alive." The product was a short pamphlet containing photographs of Keehan and students executing eye gouges and groin strikes, stressing the danger of unleashing these "dim mak" or "death touch" techniques on live subjects (Dante 2014, 11).

Draeger, especially, hated these publications. *Black Belt* magazine, which once contracted him to pen a series of articles about competitive judo, was especially offensive in his eyes for printing articles without fact-checking or even considering the qualifications of the authors:

Black Belt gets nothing from me..... only criticism. I'm on them now for series planned on Japanese Budo which includes article on Jodo which

some Kendo teacher is writing. Jodo federation here tells me that this man is not qualified in Jodo and has no knowledge of what he writes. Hope to get BB [*Black Belt*] to realize that this type of crap always hurts them and to go directly to source for info. (letter to Smith, 21 June 1965)

Despite obvious problems with the quality of information presented in these popular publications, they continued to sell well thanks, in part, to the fodder they presented for self-mythologizing among young men seeking personal power by making public experts available and thereby normalizing the practice of Asian martial arts in America.

Keehan was Draeger's and Smith's polar opposite in most ways, so it is interesting to note how they came from similar backgrounds. Notably, Keehan's first personal exposure to Asian fighting arts was probably his time spent at the Chicago Judo Club with Johnny Osako during the late 1950s or early 1960s, the same club at which Smith and Draeger met. Another of Keehan's instructors during the 1960s was Robert Trias, the promotional rival of Mas Oyama and founder of the first national karate organization in the United States. Like Smith and Draeger, Keehan was also a Marine and later joined the United States army during the Korean War, although his deployment overseas is disputed (Roy 2010, 19).

There the similarities end, however, as Keehan was much more interested in making money by furthering his spurious claims than spreading the most accurate and reliable information possible in order to educate the public, a matter with which Smith, Draeger, and Bluming all took great pains. Rather, Keehan enjoyed building his own

legend, even changing his name in 1967 to render his public persona more amenable to aggrandizement. From that year until his death, John Keehan became Count Juan Raphael Dante. Interestingly, he claimed that the royal title was legitimate and, according to those who knew him, this is almost certainly the case, although not, as he declared, by inheritance from his mother's Spanish ancestors, but rather through a significant check written to an office of the Spanish government (Roy 2010, 27).

According to his claims, Count Dante was a globe-hopping playboy who spent his time ferreting out martial arts masters in the exotic "Far East," learning their secrets and winning personal glory and inner peace by engaging in death matches. The character sounds suspiciously like Gilbey, and it is quite likely that some portion of Smith's creation was aimed straight at mocking the absurdity of Dante's masquerade. In reality, Dante's qualifications in judo, karate, and some systems of his own design appear to be legitimate, if substantially inflated. However, his alleged personal tutelage from aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba in 1964, mastery of *taiji* and other Chinese martial arts, and participation in underground no-holds-barred fights in Thailand are all unsupported by any evidence whatsoever. What is certain is that Count Dante owned a chain of karate schools, sold used cars, was a licensed hairdresser who worked for *Playboy*, operated pornography stores in Chicago, and unsuccessfully attempted to launch his own brand of Count Dante cigarettes (Roy 2010, 57-58). If not a master of martial arts, Dante was at least a master of business promotion.

Dante famously claimed membership in something called the Black Dragon Fighting Society. The name is evidently taken from one of the militant nationalist

organizations operating in Japan before and during World War II with the stated goal of ousting foreign powers from Japan and Manchuria. According to Dante, the occult group was an invitation-only, anonymous (except for himself, apparently) society for the preservation and dissemination of Asian martial arts. In order to accomplish this, the Society was supposed to have held tournaments around the world in which exponents of the different styles would face each other in one-on-one combat without rules. It was in these tournaments that Dante is alleged to have killed two men with his bare hands. In reality, the Japanese Kokuryukai (literally, “Black Dragon Society”) was named for the Amur (“Black Dragon” in Japanese) River that marked the boundary between Japanese-controlled and independent areas of China, campaigned for Japanese political and military sovereignty over East Asia, and, as far as any inquiry has revealed, had no involvement with secret death matches (Time magazine, 5 October 1942).

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 brings you the forbidden secrets of

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Until recently the forbidden training secrets of the society have been closely guarded by the members who were sworn to secrecy and joined together thru their initiation ceremony of blood. Breaking of the oath is severely meant death by torture to the offender. Now for the first time their FORBIDDEN SECRETS OF TERROR can be shared with you.

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 Included in the manual is a GUARANTEED method of brick and board breaking enabling anyone to break a brick or board after only minutes of training. THIS IS NO EXAGGERATION. THERE IS NO THICK OR GUMMICK. There is nothing to be held in the hand, or any hand brace needed; and no special stunt bricks or boards are needed. This is the same method that many famous Karate Masters use.

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 Considered by many as evil and cruel; the lethally savage ripping, tearing, slashing, clawing and gnawing techniques which comprise

the POISON HAND ARSENAL are used to attack (by strike, touch or pressure) the nerve centers, pressure points, major blood vessels and vital organs of the body. You will learn the original 77 "POISON HAND" techniques of ancient China in actual photographs showing them in application. These are not photos of drawings, but actual photos of COUNT DANTE applying these terrifying techniques which are meant to maim, disfigure, cripple or kill and have been used by oriental terrorists and assassins to MURDER!

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 We cannot guarantee to make you a Fighting Arts Master or even an expert, as this is up to you; but we can make a \$10,000 GUARANTEE that this book is DEADLIER than any other book, manual or course ever printed anywhere, at any cost and that, if was, as mentioned before, refused for past publication due to its extremely FEROCEOUS nature. We also guarantee that the "WORLD'S DEADLIEST FIGHTING SECRETS" contains the most SECRET and FORBIDDEN attack and defense methods ever devised by man and that the DIM MAK and POISON HAND techniques are completely authentic and the WORLD'S DEADLIEST FIGHTING FORMS. Last we guarantee that you can break a real, authentic brick or board WITH NO GUMMICK—just your hand, using our method AFTER ONLY MINUTES OF TRAINING. If you are not satisfied, return the book in good condition and you will receive a refund. MAIL COUPON NOW! AIR MAIL REACHED US OVERNIGHT.

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(Illinois residents please enclose 25¢ for Illinois Sales Tax (Total \$5.75))

Figure 15 - Advertisement for Count Dante (Black Dragon Fighting Society 1968)

Count Dante, with his flamboyant, provocative personality and memorable public image, was fertile ground for creating myths and legends about an imagined Asia, home to elusive masters of esoteric fighting arts. The narratives that grew over time formed the basis for popular culture of the 1970s through the 1990s as films and television, especially, latched onto the desires and whims of a generation of young men in search of a new means to express masculinity in a nation where their notions of traditionalism

were no longer suitable to the social climate conceived in the wake of the civil rights movement, the Cold War, and the rise of feminism. Fantasies of the hyper-masculine became fundamental to the new masculinity and the exotic East proved a useful imaginary space in which to enact it (see Figure 15). Men like Draeger, Bluming, Smith, and Keehan served a vital role in helping to bring attention to the Asian martial arts in American culture during this period, as well as making the practice and depiction of these arts a part of the “normal” texture of knowledge in the process.

CHAPTER VI

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS, COMIC BOOKS, AND THE RETURN OF NEO-PRIMITIVISM

A sudden boom in the popularity of Asian fighting arts, both as an object of spectatorship and participation, came about during the 1970s that, due to the work of pioneers like Robert Smith and Donn Draeger, was spurred on by the ubiquity of karate, kung fu, and other styles in films, television, and other media. The Americanization of these foreign arts can be seen in their manifestation through actors who, with the exception of breakout stars like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan—far more successful overseas than in North America—were overwhelmingly Western and conformed to a new male body ideal, more aggressive and muscular than ever before in American history. Through the 1980s and 1990s media portrayal of ideal masculine traits became more extreme, reflecting a male preference for intensive sexual division in reaction to social pressures against perceived traditional Western male identity traits. During the 1990s and early 2000s this tension came to a head in the form of male backlash against those social norms adopted since the 1970s. In particular, interpersonal violence as a refuge of personal expression and bonding was adopted as a focal point for sense-making. The multimedia franchise *Fight Club* and the rise of rationalistic mixed martial arts contests are strong indicators of how widespread this sentiment had become. Analysis of the social climate both generated by and reflected in the media, paired with interviews with members of the martial arts community, indicate the ways in which

American interpretations of Asian martial disciplines have changed in recent years that they could serve as social tools for negotiating identity, frustrations, and anxieties in culture that has changed drastically since their mainstream introduction in the 1940s.

1970s and 1980s

By the end of the 1960s, American attitudes toward Japan had gone from prewar indifference and ignorance, through a period of postwar fondness, to a level of respect for the nation's achievements in rebuilding itself. A survey of American businessmen published in the January 1970 issue of *The Journal of Marketing* found not only that Americans had developed a high opinion of Japanese-made products, but that this esteem correlated with positive assumptions about the character of the country and, by extension, Japanese people themselves. Indeed, this extended so far that "U.S. businessmen rated Japanese products much higher than Japanese businessmen rated their own products" (Nagashima 1970, 74). Karate and other Japanese martial arts were no less subject to this turn than any material product. The work of Smith, Draeger, and the other expatriate experts alongside the outrageous influence of Count Dante was in full service by the 1970s as a gateway for Americans to appropriate Asian martial arts for their own ends. While Bruce Lee depicted Chinese martial arts as ethnically-based social tools in films like *The Chinese Connection* (1972) (in which Lee's character fights members of an oppressive Japanese martial arts school in 1910s Shanghai), the Japanese martial arts were adopted by Westerners more readily for their own ends, with James Bond studying the mythical art of *ninjutsu* in 1967's *You Only Live Twice*. Likewise,

Asian and Asian-American actors were exceptions even in martial arts media; the critically-acclaimed series *Kung Fu* (1972-1975), which featured a bevy of Asian-American actors, still starred the Caucasian actor David Carradine as the wandering Shaolin monk, Kwai Chang Caine.

The inclusion of ethnically Asian cast members in forms of popular media is indicative of a common strategy employed during this period in American negotiation of identity. As Savran (1998) points out, all manner of alternative identities turned to an imagined and ubiquitous “East” for means of escaping the mundane along with those elements of domestic social crisis that proved frustrating. Shortly after World War II, the beats found solace in Zen Buddhism. During the 1960s, the hippies followed suit by escaping into varieties of mysticism, Indian and Tibetan meditation, and yoga (114). These countercultures were chiefly the product of a disdain for major corporations that were fostering the postwar consumerist culture of middle-class America, driven by the rise of major corporations which, as the young people who made up the majority of these groups saw it, were exploitative of weaker foreign economies in the third world. By fleeing to products of those same foreign locales, counterculture members were at once rejecting hegemonic American consumer identity and exploiting the very foreign cultures in question through exotification and commoditization (137). The hippie movement, especially, relied on the notion that exotic cultures from India to Japan to Native America were somehow more pure or contained greater depth of meaning than hegemonic American culture because of their primitive status. In essence, fleeing from American corporatization led them to be exploitative by other means (119). Such a

longing for a return to a supposedly simpler state that has been lost in the United States was nearly identical to the neo-primitivism of Theodore Roosevelt and the other early twentieth century commentators on that period's male anxiety.

During the 1970s, such elements of the counterculture movements became, ironically, mainstream with Bruce Lee and David Carradine issuing Zen-inspired nuggets of wisdom between primetime commercial breaks. It was in this milieu that a new interpretation of masculinity took hold of many young men and became hegemonic. The new masculinity, as expressed in popular media, was decidedly muscular, unapologetic for its treatment of women, and clearly in response to the rise of the feminist movement within historically male-dominated realms like the university (Connell 1993, 198-199). If uniquely male power could not be had in the workplace or the university due to the general move toward equal opportunity and the postwar trend away from manual labor, then it was perhaps inevitable that a primitivistic, physical, and decidedly violent fashion of the ideal male would come about. Clint Eastwood's films saw box office success as his antiheroes exacted justice and violated modern social norms in *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Magnum Force* (1973). Eastwood tended to play characters situated on the social periphery, often outlaws in westerns or law-breaking detectives. These characters would, inevitably, save the day while meting out unnecessary destruction, objectifying women, and generally expressing a near-primal level of behavior that pulled back the veneer of civil society.

If Eastwood's characters implied a fantasy of primitivism, the implication was eschewed in favor of blatant messaging in the embodiment of American male frustration

in *Rocky* (1976). Sylvester Stallone's down-and-out boxing fairy tale struck a chord with young men and rocketed the actor to global fame. While Stallone's larger, more muscular build separated him from other movie stars and rendered him iconic for the new generation of young men in the post-Vietnam era, it wasn't until the 1980s that the new male body ideal became fully hegemonic. 1982 brought two major films to the box office that demonstrated the extent to which body preferences had changed in U.S. culture over the course of three decades. Stallone's role in *Rambo* (1982) featured a hyper-violent Vietnam veteran, unable to cope with the artificial niceties of American culture, who established himself as an entrepreneurial force of destruction that does not require much interpretation to understand as social commentary. That same year another hit film, *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), starred bodybuilder-turned-actor Arnold Schwarzenegger as Robert E. Howard's pulp magazine hero from the 1930s. *Conan* was literally looking to the past for inspiration as it displayed a model of behavior, like *Dirty Harry*, that intentionally violated discourses of feminism and modern social behavior. These characters had in common that they displayed impressively muscular physiques, clearly the result of hard work and self-discipline, which also enabled them to most effectively carry out the extreme violence needed to negotiate their situations. As Savran (1998) argues, the new masculinity of the 1970s and 1980s idealized a man who "learns to master his frail body, to make it submit absolutely and repeatedly to the cruelty of his will" (194).

These films may have provided a fantastical release from the disconcerting arrangement of missing male-exclusive power in daily life, but lacked any semblance of

reality. One could no more realistically assume the physical dimensions of a world class bodybuilder than he could carry a broadsword to the office or fight for the heavyweight title. The Asian martial arts, however, had become fully assimilated into American popular culture by this time and offered a suitable outlet for power fantasies, along with other attractive benefits. Looking to writings of Trias and Oyama, the imagined exotic “East” could serve as a psycho-social space within which a physically powerful male identity could coexist alongside emotional stability, personal autonomous competence, and fantasies of near-supernatural experience while also providing a supportive group setting for these beliefs and practices without having to worry about several decades of cultural baggage from prior generations of American exposure. Continuing with the analysis of this transformation as seen in film media, the 1980s Asian martial arts boom is evident in some of the nation’s most popular movies: *The Octagon* (1980), *Missing in Action* (1984), *The Karate Kid* (1984), *American Ninja* (1985), and *Bloodsport* (1988), all of which spawned numerous sequels. In a cyclical pattern of supply-and-demand, the popularity of the martial arts entertainment genre drove enrollment in academies, which then drove demand for consumables. By the end of the 1980s, the martial arts craze was in full bloom in the United States.

A 1986 feature in *The New Yorker* demonstrates how far American commoditization was able to take Asian martial arts as an object of cultural knowledge. In the May issue of that year, Mark Singer penned an article about what was, most likely, the nation’s (perhaps even the world’s) first karate-themed, child’s birthday party, held at an academy, and designed and operated by professional instructors. The product

of Tokey Hill and Howard Frydman, the two produced the concept in their Queens, New York, *dojo* to mitigate financial troubles. According to Singer, “for the basic fee-\$100- you get a 30-minute karate class for the entire party, plus fifteen minutes of professional kicking, punching, blocking, and board-breaking,” which, for an additional charge, included, “a ninja to come out and terrify the guests with one of the magnificent steel-and-chrome ninja swords that you see advertised in martial-arts magazines.” All of this was followed with pizza and ice cream (Singer 1986). Comparing this incarnation of karate with Oyama’s, it is apparent that mainstream popularity, while financially lucrative, caused public perception of Asian fighting arts to travel from a deadly-serious, hyper-masculine endeavor to the stuff of children’s entertainment. The relationship between boys and men seeking to establish a masculine identity, however, was not damaged by this change so much as it was led to intensify during the 1990s.

1990s

The nature of Western masculinity has historically been associated with issues of power and control. As the social makeup shifted drastically during the twentieth century, certain types of victimization were selected by scholars and activists as especially abhorrent examples of men’s abuse of power, including homophobia, misogyny, and violence (Boon 2003, 270). As Boon points out, that violence in general has been identified as a universal negative is both unfair and unrealistic. He cites the example of airline passengers who carried out violence against hijackers, preventing mass fatalities. In this case, as in any situation where one is forced to protect others in the interest of a

greater good, a radical sense of pacifism is necessary in order to justify inaction in the face of imminent threats to the safety of loved ones. Certainly, then, violence cannot be written off as wholly bad, but instead should be viewed as a tool that can serve any number of functions.

In that vein, it would seem that one of those functions is a reassertion of a sense of control and masculinity. As Boon (2003) points out, the wildly successful novel *Fight Club* (1996) and its film adaptation of the same title (1999) serve as a prime illustration of this potential use for violence. One of the central characters, Tyler Durden, sets off on a quest to carry out his aggressive intentions against a culture “which has caged men within bars of denial and shame” (Boon 2003, 273). By destroying that which he finds oppressive, Durden intends to free himself and his fellow men from the bonds of a cultural norm into which they cannot comfortably fit. If violence is, in fact, a part of human male biology—or at least a part of the deep history and psychology of the cultural tradition in which they are raised—it only makes sense for the surrounding culture to allow some outlet for that expression lest, as occurs in *Fight Club*, the violent side of the psyche lashes out from repression.

With this in mind, the 1980s boom in Asian martial arts media makes sense from a social standpoint, but leads to questions of authenticity and validity with regards to their consideration as a pursuit for the establishment of masculine identity when instructors offer karate-themed birthday parties and bucolic children’s television is taken up with images of mutated ninja amphibians in the same cultural space as instructors claiming to impart inner peace and deadly combat training. These represent two separate

spheres of exotification in terms of Asian martial arts in America. In one, cultural elements from Japan, China, and Korea carry the cache of harmless fantasy, with the martial arts being seen as no more threatening or real than other children's make-believe games. Jones (2002) makes the argument that play-fighting and imagined violence form a necessary and ubiquitous part of a healthy childhood, so the specific manifestation in questions (ninja mutants, for instance) is more-or-less incidental (11). In the other sphere, the exotification is aimed at a more serious (if not more fantastical) application as meaningful level of interaction with the cultural knowledge and community are sought. In this case, an example would be adults who carry a sense of identity as "fighter" or "martial artist" with them throughout daily life, choosing and justifying action based on abstract notions learned from the martial arts practice community.

Far from being rigidly divided, these two spheres interact and it would not be unusual for one to cross into the other. An example of this would be the fantasy of 1984's *The Karate Kid*, which plays off of the idea of the mysterious, exotic mentor to a troubled American youth. The image of the film's mentor figure, Mr. Miyagi, is an obvious utilization of Campbell's monomyth concept in which the hero seeks out a marginal member of society—often an older male—to acquire the skills needed in order to then successfully navigate his adventure (Campbell 1973, 72-73). Mr. Miyagi, a Japanese-American who lives on the edge of town and speaks in a stilted manner, is the ideal form for the spiritual guide and teaches the protagonist to both physically defeat his opponents and spiritually master himself. This became the template for Asian martial arts teachers in the United States, coloring the perceptions and expectations of real-life

participants as well as being copied whole cloth by successive films. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Sidekicks* (1992), and *3 Ninjas* (1992) all feature elderly Asian martial arts masters who mentor troubled teenagers as they solve both physical and spiritual dilemmas.

By 1993, however, the desire to separate spheres became more intense. Perhaps spurred on by films like *Bloodsport* (1988), in which “full contact” tournaments offer a proving ground to determine the most powerful system of fighting arts, an untapped market for mixed style combat sports was identified by a synergy of foreign and domestic interests, resulting in the first nationally televised, state-sanctioned mixed martial arts (MMA) contest, *The Ultimate Fighting Championship*. Held in Boulder, Colorado, the tournament featured exponents of popular styles (including karate and boxing) and served, essentially, as a commercial for a brand of martial art taught by immigrants from Brazil, known as Brazilian jiu-jitsu. In order to understand this odd amalgam of terms, it is necessary to give a brief account of how it came to be as, in the present day, Brazilian jiu-jitsu is not only widely practiced, but comprises a central part of the contemporary MMA movement.

The Rise of MMA

The men who left Japan to introduce Kodokan judo to the world were tasked not only with demonstrating the system, but, as they learned, proving its effectiveness. Many of them opted to follow a century-old method of accepting challenges with local “champions” (often boxers and wrestlers of less-than-global standing), frequently with

special rules, and tended to find themselves victorious (Green and Svinth 2003, 63-64). One such luminary, Mitsuyo Maeda, traveled extensively through North America, Europe, and ultimately settled in Brazil. He encountered financial troubles along the way and took to participating in paid exhibition matches and professional wrestling, both of which were forbidden by the Kodokan (65-68). Around 1920 Maeda took a job with a traveling circus that also featured a boxer managed by Gastao Gracie. Gracie's oldest son, Carlos, learned judo from Maeda, opening his own academy in Rio de Janeiro five years later, where he called it "Gracie jiu jitsu" (67). This proved to be of monumental importance to the American martial arts scene.

Decades later, Carlos' brother, Helio, who had performed as a wrestler with the circus, trained his own children in the Gracie method of judo. One of them, Rorion, traveled to the United States in 1969 and discovered that films and television, along with soldiers who had served in the Pacific Theater during World War II, fueled a martial arts craze among the public (Green and Svinth 2003, 69-70). Rorion began teaching his family's style, but with limited success until 1993 when he introduced the idea of the Ultimate Fighting Championship to cable television. Based in large part on Helio's days as a performer in Brazil, the ring was an octagonal chain-link fence and exponents of different styles (karate, kung fu, etc.) were chosen to participate. As might be expected, one of Rorion's brothers competed and won with little difficulty, crediting the achievement to their family's technical innovations. Objectively, the participants were less-than-top-notch examples of their respective disciplines with at least one admitting during the course of the broadcast that he was out of shape. Another, Ken Shamrock,

was a well-known professional wrestler in Japan and had only recently begun to train for real fights. It is especially telling that members and alternates of the Olympic judo team were not convinced (and perhaps not even invited) to participate in the early days of the UFC when the Gracies dominated the tournaments. One American female Olympic judo medalist, Rhonda Rousy, for instance, went on to join a professional MMA promotion and met extraordinary success years later.

The Gracies were relative late-comers to the North American market compared with Japanese instructors like Oyama. That the UFC and other MMA contests reached an eager audience can be attributed at least as much to the work of the (mostly Japanese) martial artists as to Rorion and his advertising scheme. The reason, then, for the North American interest in fighting arts should be investigated. I propose that, owing to the commercialization, deconstruction, and ultimate downfall of muscular Christianity in the early part of the twentieth century, droves of young men reached adulthood without clear social definitions of manhood and a means by which to understand and express their masculinity. For many of these men the martial arts offered a foreign, pre-legitimized way to resolve their identity crisis.

The legitimacy and authenticity needed came out of the zeitgeist rather than age-old tradition. As discussed in previous chapters, the spread of Asian martial arts in North America and, subsequently, the West as a whole, mirrors the invention of tradition seen in Japan during and shortly after the Meiji period. Kano's initial movement based on self-cultivation and creating a harmonious society was coopted by Japanese nationalists who utilized *budo* as a tool to fulfill their own interests regarding the enactment of

masculinity. After the war, dedicated martial artists like Mas Oyama looked overseas—as well as domestically—for ways to spread their industry and influence. North America proved a fertile market for a packaged concept of *budo* and *bushido* that had been tested and fitted to a youth demographic in Japan during the prior generation. Seeing the opportunity to attract a ready-made audience, the Gracies brought their brand of “Japanese” martial arts from Brazil via the clever sales pitch of an ostensibly fair contest of products. Besides personal financial windfall for the family, this also led to the development of MMA into a government-regulated spectator sport with an international audience, most of whom are young men.

Identity

The paradox of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century American culture provided an impossible problem for young men to solve: aggressive men in movies, television, and the military were heroes, however the expression of aggression in daily life was taboo (Boon 2003, 269). Building a muscular, unnaturally strong body was admirable, however the ideal continued to become more extreme and the purpose of the bodybuilder’s efforts was display rather than application. By adopting the image of an adventurous, physically capable, aggressive-yet-socially-conscious man via participation in the martial arts these contradictory messages could be more easily merged.

Hirose and Pih (2009) see a distinction between men who engage in striking-focused styles of martial arts (e.g. karate, kickboxing) and grappling styles (judo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu) in terms of public perception of relative manliness. That is, in a North

American context, MMA matches have historically pitted a “striker” against a “grappler” and, in post-fight interviews, color commentary, and crowd reactions it is apparent that winning via submission (forcing an opponent to surrender due to a joint lock rather than a knockout) is seen as “cheating,” “not fighting like a man,” and generally disappointing, as opposed to a Japanese MMA context in which victory by technical mastery of grappling is well-respected (199-200). In contemporary, pragmatic terms, though, it is unusual for a professional MMA fighter anywhere to eschew training in both striking and grappling techniques if only to maximize opportunities for victory.

Holthuysen’s fieldwork with MMA fighters in Arizona is useful in understanding how such identity issues manifest in daily reality (Holthuysen 2011). She found that the matter of body image, for instance, involved a great deal more than interest in attracting sexual attention. Due to the variation among weight classes, the only true universals of ideal body image among her subjects were low body fat and well-defined muscles. Although some subjects related these qualities (particularly visible abdominal muscles) to their attractiveness, a more frequent association was with professionalism. Those fighters who appeared to be in extraordinarily lean condition at a pre-fight weigh-in were seen as honoring their obligation to be fit for the performance (121).

Her interviews with MMA participants revealed their formation of a group identity in a way that can easily mirror the advent of other fight-focused folk groups. Most interviewees, fans, trainers, and active fighters, shared their perception of the public’s MMA stereotypes that fighting is barbaric, the fighters are uneducated, and, therefore, the spectators are also barbaric and uneducated (Holthuysen 2011, 212). None

of these are, of course, especially true of MMA more so than any other contact sport and clearly reflect the interviewees' understanding of their own culture. By viewing themselves through such a lens, however, those who identify as fighters and/or martial artists then construct a sense of self-versus-other and, naturally, the creation of an in-group is necessarily defined by the existence of an out-group. This identity is dependent, too, on the narrative utilized in its formation.

Holthuysen's subjects tended to describe themselves as "warriors going into battle" (2011, 156). This attachment to the warrior image is prevalent in the culture of Western martial arts and the samurai, especially, are invoked in this way. "Samurai" is attached to the names of countless martial arts clubs and academies, as well as providing themes for competitions (in 2011 a professional Brazilian jiu-jitsu tournament called Samurai Pro was held in California) (Graciemag.com 2013), narratives explaining the formation of the arts (the official Gracie Jiu-Jitsu Academy website claims that judo may have been formulated in an effort to hide the more effective combat techniques from American soldiers) (Brajitsu, Inc. 2013), and even the background for movies like 1992's *American Samurai* starring Mark Dacascos. This demonstrates a reemergence of the imagined Japan found in narratives of American martial artists from the 1940s through the 1960s, though now merged with the desire for greater levels of perceived reality and realism when embodying a fantasy of violent power through the community of practice. In order to understand this psycho-social drive toward a warrior ethos among American martial artists (particularly the currently *en vogue* MMA community), it proved helpful to conduct ethnographic work with active MMA fighters.

The Professional's View

William “Bubba” Bush has competed in combat sports since childhood, especially wrestling. When he found that the university he chose to attend did not have an established wrestling program, he turned his attention to mixed martial arts. Now, some years later, he is a professional fighter, having recently signed a contract with the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Bubba was very forthcoming with his thoughts on the state of martial arts in America and his insights are representative of both amateur and professional levels of involvement, having recently transitioned from one to the other. In terms of the warrior ethos among American martial artists and MMA audiences, he stated in an interview that:

It points to something better inside of them. The same way that you desire The Force. You desire the ability, the confidence, the strength to defend your family, to defend yourself from the bullies... And so you desire and admire the ability to do that. And any time you see someone with the ability to do that, you idolize them.

Bubba’s statement cuts to the basis on which much marketing and invented tradition surrounding martial arts in the United States appears to be constructed. Promoters and propagators of the community, from Trias to Oyama to modern magazines like *Black Belt* and UFC advertising, all rely, fundamentally, on depicting individuals possessed of

enviable power of one sort or another as the primary means of drawing interest from the general public.

He was also quick to point out what he understands to be a major difference between MMA and Brazilian jiu-jitsu and other styles that became established earlier in the United States:

We had commercialized tae kwon do much earlier than Brazilian jiu-jitsu, but you didn't actually strike each other, for the most part, in American tae kwon do schools. In the ones that were popularized. So it was a difference between boxing, which takes a lot of dedication, a lot of work, a lot of damage to your body, you have to be tough to do it. But how many dads, say, or people, wanted to actually go in there and dedicate the time and energy to make it fun, versus just getting beaten up? So that was a lower income sport, but something that took passion, took commitment, but it was very small, very dedicated. Tae kwon do became available to the masses as a commercialized martial art because it didn't have the pain involved, so it was more accessible to people, but it didn't solve the original problem, necessarily, of instilling manhood or being pragmatic, or practical, in the most basic of situations. So you run into people who've been point sparring for ten years, but punch them in the face and it's different.

For Bubba and many of his generation, there was a decision to be made between an unrealistic fighting art and one that requires a great deal of time, dedication, and physical danger. He sees Brazilian jiu-jitsu (and MMA, by extension) as a martial art grounded in realistic scenarios, but without the distasteful elements of boxing—in particular the toughness required of participants. One could enjoy the psychological, physical, and social benefits of practicing a martial art without the danger of permanent damage or being pushed into greater levels of competition.

Community is central to his appreciation of MMA:

MMA gyms are quickly becoming the new golf courses... It used to be this men's club where you'd go over and golf and hang out, and now it's more diverse. You know, men, women, and children. But there have been a lot of nights where we've been here until midnight because people just want to talk and socialize through the sport of Brazilian jiu-jitsu or fighting.

It is important to note that the socialization dimension is not simply the physical performance in a group setting of an individual endeavor. Rather, having a common activity in a shared space is equally important to the practice of technique itself. Bush sees his martial arts academy as a place that fosters social bonds and, therefore, the fighter identity. This identity, it seems, is not exclusive to men in the way that he

juxtaposes it with an earlier era of golf courses as a “men’s club,” but as more “diverse” and egalitarian in its appeal.

Diversity, efficacy, and purity were major themes that came up repeatedly during our conversation:

Purity also encompasses what works. What works in the environment with the least restrictions. The least artificial restrictions. You know, artificial light, right? We talked about that and how it affects you. Well, artificial rule sets also change your life. Like we have an artificial sense of security. In life, because it is the way it is, when you get into an elevator with someone who’s bigger than you, your life is in their hands. If you don’t know more than they do, then you’re just assuming that repercussion, uh, societal repercussions are going to save you. When you get into the fighting world, we’re now dealing with the most basic form of ‘what is self-defense?’ and ‘what is combat capability?’ and so we want to go to the purest version of that. Boxing has unrealistic rule sets, where if you take a boxer and you stick them in a thai fight, uh, a muay thai [kickboxing] fight, they will get kicked in the leg until they can’t walk.

As with many of those who practice and/or watch MMA, Bush has no qualms about discussing his interpretation of the signals sent during a match or sparring session. For

him, modern American life has resulted in a pervasive artificiality that is, for the most part, undesirable. He referenced an earlier part of our conversation in which we talked about the effect of artificial lighting on circadian rhythm, causing disruptions to sleep patterns. In the same way, he sees “artificial” sets of rules for competition as somehow damaging to the final goal of becoming strong and capable.

This element of “purity” extends to the philosophical and even metaphysical dimensions of his training, as well:

I was reading about Aristotle talk about rhetoric the other day and he was saying how, you know, a lot of people say rhetoric is dangerous because it’s persuasion. It’s the art of persuasion and talk. He said it’s only as dangerous as anything else. You have to know how to use it dangerously or how to use it defensively. So we have to be skilled as fighters, able to hurt other people and defend those we love. So, yeah, it’s very, unavoidably pure. And then the spiritual aspect of it, which has always been tied it, I think, is there and is so strong because you are in a life-or-death situation. Anyone that’s been in the cage has had to think about their life.

Here Bush likens physical antagonism to philosophical antagonism. As in *Fight Club*, realism seems to give way to hyper-realism which, in turn, leads one to address internal metaphysical quandaries. By returning to what he understands as a more naturalistic

state (in this case, of violence), Bush, along with likeminded members of his community, create a psycho-social space in which they are given license and perhaps impetus to explore existential quandaries without the need to justify their contemplations as so much navel-gazing.

Given the prevalence of this new brand of neo-primitivism, it seems almost inevitable that the topic of masculinity and its expression would be another theme:

As far as bravado and machismo in the U.S., it's always been kind of, you know, a black belt in tae kwon do has carried that attitude. It's a braggadocios thing. Growing up, I looked at a lot of people, 'I've got a black belt in this or that' and I'm like, I don't care. You're a seven-year-old-girl [laughter]. The thing in the gym that I really enjoy, in an MMA gym, is that that is wiped out. Now, you go out to a bar or social setting there's still a lot of vying for position, ego, and those sorts of things. But you get in the gym, and, well, that's Machado's tagline: leave your ego at the door. We adopt it as well. Even if you don't preach it, it happens, because what you end up with is fifty men in a room... that all know where they stand. It's not, 'man, if I got in a fight I would knock you out in one punch.' There's none of that talk. It's, 'well, we sparred last week and you did knock me out, or you didn't, or we're very close.' And so you know where you stand. Your relationships aren't just ethereal.

Addressing internal psychological struggles gives way to absorbing and identifying with the MMA community's tenant of realism and efficacy in all realms. For Bush, the bar scene is representative of modern artificiality and goes hand-in-hand with a manufactured sense of security and an unnatural social order. The gym, as a place of primitive purity, is safe from such artificiality because both the community members and the practice itself are inherently opposed to an inflated sense of self-importance. Exposure to one's flaws, he makes clear, inevitably results in a reduction of self-aggrandizement because "ego" is the consequence of an unnatural bent in American society. This powerfully echoes—and even amplifies—masculine discourses of earlier generations that also called for neo-primitivism. Bush's statement is specifically critical of the tae kwon do black belt as an indicator of both rank and ability because it is, like the bar setting, inherently artificial, and therefore lacks real meaning. In order to remedy this pervasive unreality, then, just as in *Fight Club*, it is necessary to practice fighting and to do so in a way that carries out a hyper-reality, thereby correcting the imbalance.

David McClung, an MMA coach with over thirty years of experience in combat sports and who participated in what may have been Texas' first legal mixed martial arts contest, generally agrees with Bush's assertions about the nature of fighting arts *vis-à-vis* social relationships and identity formation. In particular, the issue of "purity" as a descriptor of both combat efficacy and naturalistic lifestyle came up time and again in our conversation:

Personally, the thing that I've always loved about combat sports: there's a purity to it... there's a simple-ness to it. You do it, and everything else in the world gets the volume turned down [...]It's a very simple thing, so everything else feels unnatural.

Again, a sort of neo-primitivism in the spirit of early twentieth century masculine discourse appears to be the main driving force behind and benefit from engaging in a fighting art that is perceived as having few artificial strictures placed on it. He also extends the artificiality of rules that govern more historically-established combat sports to the associated cultural environment:

When you talk about boxing culture, it gets pretty ugly at the top. I think in certain areas you would see cultures within certain gyms. But I think those are natural male cultures, I don't think there's a lot of history behind them. They're sort of in their 'teenage years,' so to speak.

Interestingly, boxing, a fighting art with a very long history in the West, is seen here as possessing a largely undeveloped culture of community at the local level, while the professional realm is seen as established, but decidedly corrupt. By contrast, then, MMA gyms are seen to bring about a more robust community of practice.

Also like Bush, McClung sees training in the fighting arts as an avenue for the personal improvement of the individual in both a physical and a spiritual sense:

Training is easy. You can teach people technique and it gets easier over time. What never gets easy is the personal stuff. You're going to see it, and I'll tell you why you're going to see it. There is no negative human emotion that you will not see in this gym. It's all going to come out and you don't get to hide it from the people around you. If somebody beats the snot out of you and you've had a horrible day, it's just not going the way you want... We've had grown men shed a tear in the corner, get really upset. You either leave the gym and never come back or you just accept that these people are, sort of by proxy, your family because they're going through something you're going through, that nobody else is experiencing, and they're seeing every single side of your personality. So, I would argue that we know each other as people far more than you would ever know your regular coworkers... or anything else because not only do you become a better fighter, but you become a more well-rounded person.

For McClung, then, the primal nature of frustration elicited by failing to conquer another fighter physically becomes the key to unlocking more complex emotional struggles within the individual. As he makes clear with the statement "We've had grown men shed a tear," crying is not an emotional response typically expected of men—at least not the type of men who participate in martial arts—and the power of the activity to bring out

underlying issues and lead to their eventual resolution is meaningful in terms of social bonding. In this case, the community is formed around shared exhibits of vulnerability as well as strength. Returning to a perceived primitivism allows men to be “pure” and genuine in their relationships without surrendering the tough fighter identity.

Far from a panacea, however, McClung has seen patterns in the way a given martial art can come and go with the fickle desires of consumerism. As for his own style of preference, he worries about the future of Brazilian jiu-jitsu in a nation where all physical pastimes seem to become competitive sports:

[Brazilian jiu-jitsu] is going the way of tae kwon do. It's becoming too sport-ish [...] Any fighting art that got here [the United States] was generally embraced by early adopters. Generally tough guys looking for a way to fight. When I started fighting I searched gyms and sparred with instructors... finally found one that just ripped me a new one. I went, 'you're the guy.' This is the guy who I'm going to learn from because, obviously, he knows what he's doing.

The process becomes cyclically predictable, though, as isolated incidents and media exposure draw in more public interest:

Other people see that. It's exciting. It's like, 'wow, OK, this karate thing.' Maybe some little guy on the street beats somebody up. You know,

someone tries to rob this guy and he ends up kicking him in the face. It draws in more people. There is a limit to the number, in its purest form, of people who are actually going to do it because, it turns out, people just don't like pain.

Purity is equated with pain and unpleasantness as well as combative effectiveness, indicating that those who aren't genuine in their desire to practice a fighting art are guilty of perpetuating an "impure" form. The process is finalized with the weakening of the original, "pure" style:

This happens over and over and over. You can see it starting in the sixties with the judo thing, the seventies with the karate thing, and the eighties with the tae kwon do thing, and the eighties and nineties with jiu-jitsu. And what's next? Who knows. Sumo [laughter]. But that's what happens. The sports have to be watered down to get enough people to make them monetarily viable, and therein lies their demise.

This "watering down" of a once-pure fighting art is seen as akin to death. In McClung's scenario, as in Bush's rendering of the historical narrative of American martial arts, commercialism is a necessary evil that leads to the popularity needed to sustain "pure" fighters and their art alongside a larger group of quasi-fighters, who may still identify as such, but do not comprise the core of the group identity.

In this cosmological view of the fighting arts as they are currently depicted and experienced in American popular culture, the genuine fighters operate at the highest level and, in order to survive in a capitalist system, participate in professional fights. Outside of this core, amateur fighters and others who attend training gyms make up a semi-pure community of practice, and this spectrum of involvement extends to spectators, whose money is necessary to support the core of pure, monetarily disinterested fighters:

The sport doesn't exist without the fans, so I wouldn't say they're an annoyance. But I would say that in the moment of the fight you're doing everything you can to tune that out. There are those fighters that absolutely embrace it. We call those 'second place.' In the long-term they don't do as well. You learn to deal with it. You come to terms with it. But to me it was always a distraction.

In McClung's experience of professional fighting, fans are inconvenient, but also make positive contributions through their money and attendance at fights, although the pure fighter sees their presence as a distraction from the central activity. Paradoxically, the only reason for a professional bout to take place is the entertainment of the audience, and yet the audience itself stands in the way of the fighters performing optimally.

While the fighters at the core are interested in combat as a pure activity and those comprising the rest of the local community of practice vary in degrees of purity and

involvement, the outermost spectator who chooses not to be involved with the training side of combat sports, in McClung's estimation, likely holds different motivations altogether from the pure fighter:

Why do people watch gladiatorial games? Why do they sit and throw beer bottles when their team doesn't do well? Because they want something transcendent. There's a primal aspect of it... there's this idea that something primal is not cerebral. But primal man developed the cerebral. That's part of survival, having a sharp brain. It takes a sharp mind to do this [MMA]. People don't realize it, but it does.

As with the fighter whose identification with the activity is so strong that failure drives him to tears, the spectator identifies in the same way, though through the proxy of others in the fight. The desire for a primitive experience of transcendence is not unique to MMA, as can be seen with the golden age of boxing in the United States. In both cases, the nonparticipant observer seeks to mitigate his own social frustration and anxiety by fantastically projecting himself onto the active fighter, regardless of the venue being a ring, cage, or other platform. Pointing to the importance of media and personal mythologizing in the world of American martial artists, McClung references a film to illustrate his point, *Vision Quest* (1985):

That scene can answer very eloquently some of the questions you're asking. Why do people watch sit and watch? Because all of the sudden they feel like part of something so much greater than they were before they did it. That's a big part of MMA, too.

The scene in question sees the protagonist, a high school wrestler in the final hours before his match against a larger, nearly inhuman opponent, visiting his mentor figure for advice, at which time he finds the mentor putting on a suit and tie in preparation for viewing the match. Asked for an explanation (as one does not ordinarily wear formal attire to a wrestling tournament), the mentor tells him about watching a televised soccer match in which he experienced a transcendental moment as Brazilian superstar athlete "Pele" Edson Arantes do Nascimento scored a goal in the most acrobatic manner imaginable. The implication of the scene is that the spectator of any situation in which other humans accomplish extraordinary physical feats provides the opportunity for a spiritual experience.

As seen during the 1960s and 1970s, the spread of Asian martial arts in the United States also instigated their association with all manner of mystical, frequently supernatural qualities to the point of exotification and Orientalism. This indicates a general desire by spectators and participants alike for the transcendence to which McClung refers and, for him, is connected with America's age as a country and the lack of a more established set of defined traditions:

It goes back, I think, to being almost traditionless. Almost without culture. So when you see a culture like that, it seems like maybe they know something we don't. So people start to quickly pantomime those things in the hope that... How many times have you gone to a gym somewhere and seen them counting drills in the language of the thing they're doing?

The example of “pantomiming” a foreign tradition by counting in a non-English language (e.g. American karate students counting drills in Japanese) is used here to demonstrate that exotification of foreign settings—that is, not necessarily overseas, but socially foreign as in a martial arts academy—is essentially akin to a cargo cult in which carrying out gestures without full knowledge of the background helps to establish traditionalism and a sense of identity even when that tradition is manufactured as a product of the gesturing. This is precisely the means by which objects of knowledge can be transferred from one culture to another and result in different textures of knowledge given enough time.

A desire for transcendence is universal, in McClung's view, and the martial arts aren't always embodiments of that experience, but can act as a gateway to other selective elements of foreign cultures that are then incorporated into the texture of knowledge:

People love to think they're doing something exotic or outside of their everyday, so when it comes to spirituality, they're looking for an answer

and they think, hey, maybe if I look to the Eastern arts... Then they start reading Eastern philosophy. That's how I did it. Martial arts first, then somebody said, hey, read this book, it'll really help your state of mind when you're fighting. I read it, and it did [...] In their mind, there's a crane flying overhead and a pan flute playing in the background as they sit. If you've ever seen somebody fake meditate, it's the most hilarious thing in the world. I almost feel bad for them. But they're still reaching for something. They're still looking for that place inside themselves where the modern world has emptied them. And it's not going to fill it, but they're going to try.

In this case, the Asian martial arts (and the cultures from which they derive) are already subject to exotification by the individual in question prior to being sought out. It isn't necessarily the art or philosophy itself, then, that leads to transcendence or other personal changes, but the perception thereof. Inventing traditions, crafting explanatory narratives, and personal mythologizing are central to this American encounter with Asian martial arts.

As for the generation of experts like Draeger and Smith, whose efforts in relaying a fuller picture of the Asian martial arts as they existed in a cultural and historical context, the few who remain active today seem polarized in their opinions of MMA's popularity. Most have remained silent, but a few influential voices from the days of Draeger's Tokyo consortium have spoken out on the subject. Robert Smith wrote

in his memoir that “To me this sorry activity reflects nothing so much as the nihilism of current America” (2009, 352). This assertion contrasts sharply with the views of those directly involved with MMA, although Smith’s rationale draws on the same features of the sport that fighters like Bush and McClung see as beneficial:

Ultimate Fighting is ridiculous. It has minimal regulation, making for a brutal, dangerous hash that most competent fighters avoid, although their technical competence is much higher than the rag-tag participants Ultimate pulls, and they would have a fairly easy time of it if they entered... The competent fighters see Ultimate as a beastly activity reflecting nothing so much as a terribly neurotic insecurity in participants and fans. (Smith 2009, 352)

That Smith saw the supposed openness of MMA regulations as a matter of brutality that appeals only to bloodthirsty nihilists points to an apparent miscommunication between generations. The same aspect of MMA is what the participants consider “pure;” where Smith saw brutality, they see unfiltered naturalism. Perhaps both parties would agree that the concept is an expression of neo-primitivism, but whether or not that is beneficial to society would almost certainly remain a point of contention.

While Smith was also outspoken on matters related to violence in general (he decried hunting as unsportsmanlike and called for a ban on professional boxing), Bluming, whose “all-around” style that mixes Kyokushin karate and judo preempted the

Ultimate Fighting Championship by at least four decades, is much more specific in his feelings about modern MMA:

The current style is more a drunken [sic] brawl in a bar and has most of the time NOTHING to do with real techniek [sic] I dont even looke [sic] at it anymore. Why people like it like the UFC it beats me and since I am 81 and full of injuries I dont give a damn anymore I just still teach my Ideas [sic] and my students. (personal correspondence)

It is telling that one of the men most central to spreading Asian martial arts to the Western nations through both personal instruction and by helping to introduce judo to the Olympics would hold hostile sentiments toward the modern incarnation of the same open-style contests in which he once participated. Like Smith, he is critical of what he sees as a lack of refined technique among MMA fighters, although this does not seem to be the case upon visiting Bush's gym, where technical drills are polished with the same intensity that one sees in more "traditional" settings, such a judo and karate clubs. Rather, I suggest that a cultural gap is evident between the generation that produced martial artists willing to travel overseas and undertake scholarly as well as kinetic research into the textures of knowledge that produced Asian fighting styles and the current generation that sees rationalism and neo-primitivism in the fighting arts as socially beneficial and feel disinclined to concern themselves with cultural context at the expense of combative efficacy. In this respect, it could be said that the pioneers of the

1950s and 1960s were outward-looking while the present MMA community is focused inward.

Reemergence of Asian Exoticism

The Western fascination with—and mythologizing of—the samurai runs deep in popular culture. A fitness craze was even founded on the basis of “the samurai sword workout” (Montagnani 2005). In her book detailing the program, Montagnani, the inventor, claims that:

In the samurai philosophy, the sword symbolized a tool for cutting down your own ego, cutting down your faults, fighting an internal battle with the aspects of yourself that are undesirable, and making you more altruistic, caring, understanding of the world around you.” (10)

While there were, certainly, some Warring States Period thinkers who would have supported this concept, in general the samurai class existed to conduct warfare and efficiency in mechanisms of killing was paramount among their concerns. Self-cultivation and the internal struggle with personal faults resonate much more strongly with the amorphous *budo* espoused by Kano and others who, it must be reiterated, were inventing and reinventing tradition. The idea that, as Montagnani suggests, hours of repetitive practice “forge rightness within us just as they did for the ancient samurai men

and women” may be historically inaccurate, but keenly illustrates the Western reconceptualization of Japanese martial culture (10).

Such a reconceptualization was necessary in order to create a sense of authenticity and a veneer of legitimacy for the purposes of those men who came to adopt Asian martial arts as a means of negotiating masculinity in a postmodern Western setting wherein their perceived native traditions of masculinity were marginalized and made self-contradictory. As Montagnani’s romanticizing implies and Holthuysen’s interviews confirm, the sense of self generated by identifying as a “fighter” or “martial artist” can provide a moral compass, community, and feeling of community connectedness to men who otherwise experience a feeling of purposelessness (Holthuysen 2011, 177).

Japanese culture is not alone in being reconceptualized for American purposes, however, as evidenced by the Chinese-inspired work of Xeric Award-winning graphic novelist Ben Costa, whose *Shi Long Pang* (2013, 2014) follows the adventures of a seventeenth-century Shaolin monk and is very much situated in a background of American interpretations of Asian martial arts. His primary influences in terms of graphic novels are the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise and Stan Sakai’s *Usagi Yojimbo* series, both of which lampoon the exotification of martial arts in America while alternately producing quite serious dramatic dialogue and frank, sometimes disconcertingly-violent action sequences. Other media, however, shaped Costa’s choices in storytelling, as well:

It all started out by watching kung fu movies. My brother loved Bruce Lee, and also started amassing a big collection of Jackie Chan movies during a time when such films weren't widely available. I was fascinated by the aesthetic of kung fu movies more than anything. Later on, I began practicing martial arts, and that's when I really took an interest in Shaolin history and Chinese culture in general. Before that I had never pursued any specific interest in history outside of a mandatory school assignment. For one reason or another, the classroom never piqued my curiosity.
(personal communication)

Costa's statement regarding history and schoolwork are in reference to his unique tendency to provide explanatory footnotes and bibliographies at the end of each volume. In this way, as a media producer his work represents a turn in the popular perception of Asian martial arts in America. Although it has grown apparent that Orientalist approaches to inventing traditions and weaving mythologies around the objects of knowledge like kung fu and karate has resulted in a new texture of knowledge alien to the arts' places of birth, Costa and others of his generation choose to embrace that Americanized Asian tradition, even blending it with verifiable historical reality. Here the influence of both earnest scholarly pioneers like Smith and Draeger operates in tandem with that of outrageous characters like Count Dante.

Although part of the generation that has made MMA one of the most lucrative professional sports enterprises, Costa is not a fan, preferring to patronize the stylized

films of Jackie Chan and read about Chinese martial arts history. He favors Chan and other Hong Kong filmmakers over most contemporary American martial arts media because:

I dislike how there is usually some mystic, magical element attached to most depictions of martial arts, as if they can't stand on their own. This applies to comics as well. Also, there's almost never an Asian lead character in mainstream media, which is just ridiculous.

His comment here indicates that, like Bush and McClung, Costa is disillusioned with the notion of the unrealistically extraordinary being manifest in the Asian martial arts. While his interests are markedly more artistic, historically-oriented, and entertainment-driven, he shares the desire for the arts themselves to be the focal point of media and involvement, rather than any supernatural abilities promised or implied by promoters. Compared with Oyama and Trias advertising inner peace and superhuman invulnerability as results of their training, this more realistic worldview appears to be common among the current generation of the American martial arts community. Costa goes on to explain that:

Knowing that Shaolin history itself is quite legendary and "inventive," I wanted to ground that in reality. I felt there was no way that I could avoid historical inaccuracies when exploring Shaolin, so it was my

responsibility to depict the cultural backdrop as accurately as I could. The setting and period in most kung fu movies is very nebulous, and that's something that usually bothered me. I think this is where *Usagi Yojimbo* influenced me the most. Stan Sakai has married a highly-researched depiction of feudal Japan with a world full of funny animals. So in my case, Shaolin history is the funny animals.

Again, he sees a necessity to provide an accurate historical setting for highly unrealistic fight scenes. He even goes to the extent of criticizing Hong Kong-made kung fu films for their lack of historical setting, pointing to a willingness to adopt and adapt some source material while ignoring others in order to fashion a uniquely American product that remains true to a newly-established tradition of martial arts narrative fiction.

Costa also approaches the question of the tough-guy image in American martial arts media with a combination of breaking from a perceived trend while firmly couching himself within the recent narrative tradition:

I didn't want to write about a stoic, badass character solely bent on revenge, which is what martial artists are often like in media. While that can be great, it's been done. And it's not something most people can relate to. People might think super-masculine characters are "cool," but what percentage of people actually identifies with that character. I wanted a character that was capable but unsure of himself, smart but completely

naive. An actual human being [...] It's a construct, and I wanted Pang to struggle with that. In Vol. 2, I wanted the struggle to focus more on learning what it is to be a monk outside the temple. And I think that is also at odds with a conventional masculine identity.

By going against what he perceives to be a trend of “super-masculine” characters, he links his work to a much more established tradition of Buddhist monastic life, which, while being more historically accurate, also aligns his characters with the ideals espoused by MMA fighters that vulnerability is desirable in the appropriate context and a return to a state of realistic, naturalistic lifestyle is preferable to modern masculine artifice.

Since the 1960s, the American martial artist identity has gone from describing a small collective of dedicated individuals, through several periods of waxing-and-waning prominence in the popular media, and is currently comprised of diverse and disparate communities of practice. These local communities are spread across a spectrum of involvement, from nonparticipant fans of combat sports and martial arts cinema to fighters in the arena, experienced instructors, and media content creators. Asian martial arts in particular have been depicted in a number of ways that reflect more the unique social needs and situation of Americans in any given period than the social arrangements in their places of origin. Likely because of their nature as systems of stylized and controlled violence, masculinity has been a running theme in the American treatment of

fighting arts, regardless of their historical backgrounds. Currently, there appears to be an impetus among many active members of the community to both depict and practice martial arts with a greater concentration on realism, as reflected in the hyper-realism of media like *Fight Club*, in which neo-primitivism has again come to the fore of male social activity.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, ANALYSIS, AND AFTERWORD

As discussed in chapter II, the nineteenth century definition of American masculinity involved one's utility and ties to the community. Vocational apprenticeship was highly valued as a means by which to build an external persona that established the individual man as a contributing and responsible member of his immediate social environs. Situated in this way, the center of community life was often the church, especially in rural situations. A well-regarded man within the local population, then, tended to lead a life focused on activities related to the church, work, or both. Even where entertainment and sport were concerned, middle- and upper-class American men centered their leisurely pursuits on church and vocational acceptability, with some exceptions. In the antebellum southern states, for instance, cockfighting and fisticuffs, even when explicitly illegal, remained relatively popular pastimes among men, to the extent that fathers were known to bring their sons to such events, which came to constitute a rite of passage in many cases. Still, nationwide, violence as an entertainment medium was broadly looked down upon by moralists and boxing, in particular, continued to be outlawed in most locales.

As the century turned and new technological and scientific innovations led to the growth of centralized production in urban areas, young men migrated away from home to seek their fortunes as industrialists. Community continued to be seen as essential to success, however, and the YMCA identified itself as one means of joining together

under a common set of ideals and behavioral regulations that eased the stresses of city life, provided informal business connections, organized leisure activity, and involvement in religious life, all under a single roof. As the century wore on, the YMCA's membership began to decline in the face of increasing consumerism brought about by the industrialized lifestyle of the city and an increased focus on the value of the individual—chiefly the result of transplants from rural areas finding the city a more isolating arrangement. In response, the YMCA leadership turned more and more to sports and other play activities in order to attract young men to its cause. Although numerically successful, this led to a de-emphasis on the religious message of the YMCA-as-church and, eventually, to near total secularization, with some YMCA gymnasiums even having a separate entrance that allowed the unsavory likes of boxers and bodybuilders to avoid the churchgoing set.

That sports became the YMCA's main attraction for young men (and, later, women) can be tied to a greater shift in American consumer habits of the early twentieth century, culminating in the extreme and unabashed consumerism of the 1920s. With community life no longer the primary determining factor in the value of the individual, secularization of society as a whole rose and even public health reformers like Kellogg found that their messages of fitness and salubrious living, though ultimately derived from religious beliefs, could not be advertised as such because the general public would ignore proselyting. Rather, consumerism and individualism converged on the body, making it a target for advertisers and creating an entirely new market for health food, exercise machines, and fitness magazines.

With women, too, gaining independence and a sense of agency in American society, men found that their identity as sole breadwinner, head of household, and possessing physical dominance over their partners was beginning to slip. At the same time, a general anxiety over work-related conditions also spread. As white-collar workers let slip their physical states, the rhetoric of health advocates and fear of effeminization took hold. This led social reformers like Theodore Roosevelt to call for a greater concentration on breeding masculinity among the nation's men. Many sought to do so through the implementation of neo-primitivism, a perceived return to more traditional ways of life which were often represented by imagined versions of foreign and past cultures, including Native Americans, Asians, and early American settlers. The primitive activities included camping, hiking, hunting, exercise, sports, and organized fighting. The circulation of men's fitness magazines shot upward, with many expanding their coverage to include self-improvement more widely. Strongmen, once relegated to circus performances, found steady employment as instructors of physical education, even within the YMCA, where their theological credentials were often overlooked. Likewise, state after state legalized and took to regulating professional boxing.

With men seeking to negotiate new definitions of masculinity in the face of a general anxiety over effeminization, the body became a ground for individual control and personal mythologizing. By engaging in bodybuilding and gymnastic exercises it became possible to exert one's will over real-world circumstances. This way of thinking, along with control of the diet and a prevalence of advertising that indicated the perpetually unsatisfactory nature of the consumer's health, created a carnal culture in

which the body became the direct enemy of the self, constantly trapped in a struggle with disease and weakness. With their own physical states not being satisfactory—and frequently, too, because white-collar jobs were regimented and under the command of others—men also turned their leisure-time attention to spectatorship of prizefights. By projecting oneself on professional fighters, anxious men could weave personal mythologies, seeing an ideal self as reflected in the bodies of top-level athletes who, even when they lost, retained a sort of dignity in their ability to absorb punishment. Consumerism and anxiety combined in this way to create a golden age of American prizefighting during the 1930s and 1940s.

While men were renegotiating the state of masculinity in early twentieth century America, the newly-created nation of Japan was establishing itself as an imperial power on par with Western powers. Having borne witness to the impact of the opium trade and colonialism in China as a consequence of unequal treaties with Western nations, Japanese leaders responded to the forced opening of trade ports by the United States in 1854 and the Meiji reforms in 1868 by instituting a European-style constitution, modernizing its military forces, disarming the hereditary samurai class, and rapidly improving domestic infrastructure. Within only a few years, Japan became a country capable of matching any established Western state in terms of technological ability. This confederation, however, left the new national leadership with a cultural problem in the form of a disparate society that, only a few generations prior, had been locked in intense civil war. The invention of a national identity was needed.

While domestic forces vied for control of Japan's direction, it became apparent that the Western colonial powers segmenting China may very well move east and pose a greater threat to Japanese sovereignty. Both individual political leaders and much of the public at large agreed that practicing colonialism was the most logical solution, and justified this decision by noting that an Asian power would be most fit to administer Asian colonies. The first targets for Japanese expansionism were Manchuria and the Korean peninsula. Territory was won through the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, the latter of which served to show the world that Japan's military capacity was on level with even the largest of Western forces. More specifically, the claim was that Japan, though small and with limited natural resources, could command greater efficiency and that the individual Japanese was superior in most ways to any Western opponent. After victory in the Russo-Japanese War, mandatory judo training was most notably credited as the source of such efficiency.

Nationalist forces took up the reigns of Japan's government in fairly short order after the turn of the century, heeding to public calls for greater protection from foreign threats and expansion into mainland Asia. These ultraconservatives saw potential in their indigenous fighting arts as a means to inculcate youths with imperial fervor and patriotism, but the classical martial arts were not suited to preparation for Western-style military training, or to working with large groups in a regulated manner. During the turn of the century and into the 1910s and 1920s, a forward-thinking professor of education, Kano Jigoro, carried out an intensive study of the classical Japanese martial arts and formulated a system that he called "judo," which conformed to the demands of the

national government's needs in terms of physical education, could be taught *en masse*, and could be quickly modified to fit the nationalist cause. Kano, responding to official critiques as he petitioned to have judo implemented in the school system, altered his original product in a number of ways. The reforms continued over the following years and by the end of the 1930s judo practitioners wore standardized uniforms, had military-style ranks indicated by their belt colors, and could follow a set of regimented exercises under the auspices of a central authority, Kano's Kodokan Institute.

Kano was also responsible for bringing another martial art to the attention of the educational authorities. An Okinawan schoolteacher, Funakoshi Gichin, had studied karate for much of his life and, like Kano, felt that (with some modifications) it warranted a place within the physical education curriculum. Although later incorporated as a full prefecture of Japan, at the time Okinawa was still essentially a foreign culture and Kano's sponsorship of Funakoshi proved the most tactful way of introducing karate to the central government. Also like Kano, Funakoshi was able to appease a nationalist audience by having karate students wear judo-style uniforms and rank belts, practice in block formations, and many of the techniques were altered and renamed to make them simpler to acquire. Even the name of the art, originally written with characters meaning "Chinese hand," were subtly changed to retain the same pronunciation, but with the meaning of "empty hand."

The value of martial arts as tools for social control was fundamental enough to the imperial cause that the government established a teacher education college specifically to prepare physical educators for instruction in the fighting arts. Kano saw,

too, that public support for new martial disciplines would hinge on perceived tradition, so he stressed that judo was simply a continuation, like other martial arts of the era, of the proud samurai heritage so vital to the expansionist movement into mainland Asia. The education system, then, was honed into a mechanistic process whereby both classroom and physical education teachers inculcated young men with a nationalist discourse in which martial heritage formed the backbone of the national identity, which could be enacted in the world by spreading Japanese leadership and values across Asia, through violence when necessary. This rhetoric was supported outside of schools in boys' magazines that featured adventure stories about young men journeying into Manchuria as saviors of Asia from bandits and troublesome Western conquerors. The message must have seemed universal to Japanese youths of the early twentieth century: masculinity and success depend on one's love of country, which is best expressed by carrying superior Japanese values to fellow (and unfortunate) Asian neighbors.

After the Japanese surrendered to Allied occupation, one of the first orders of business for Douglas MacArthur's General Headquarters was to ban the practice of Japanese martial arts, fully aware of how they had been utilized in the years leading up to the war as tools of social control. In order to prevent an reprisal of the grassroots support on which nationalists initially relied, it was apparent that these arts could not be allowed to publicly flourish as they posed an obvious danger to U.S. hegemony on the islands and would provide a physical space for plotting against MacArthur's occupation as well as a psychological space for occult retention of prewar sentiments toward the outside world. Curiously, karate was exempt from the martial arts ban, most likely due to

its Okinawan origins, which could be emphasized in order to present the art as decidedly un-Japanese and, therefore, acceptable to the American occupiers.

Consequently, while karate was growing in popularity prior to the war thanks to Kano and Funakoshi's promotional efforts, the immediate postwar period saw an extraordinary growth in practice and even attracted a number of foreign soldiers looking for a means to pass the time in what proved to be a rather placid nation that offered almost no violent resistance to the occupiers. Because of prewar changes incurred by Japanese nationalists, karate was highly accessible to Western military men who were already accustomed to moving in formation according to rank, wearing uniforms, paying obeisance to the national flag, and following all manner of standards and regulations. Even without a strong command of the Japanese language, soldiers and sailors were able to acquire the body culture of karate rather quickly. This allowed a number of the Americans to feel confident in founding their own clubs and academies upon return to their home country.

While they were physically competent, however, the majority of American military men who studied Japanese martial arts during the occupation lacked both the linguistic and cultural understanding to have a sense of the arts within their own context. The process, as discussed in chapter IV, led to a transfer of objects of knowledge (technical components of the fighting arts) to the West without their being embedded in the original texture of knowledge (those social, cultural, and historical components that cause otherwise illogical elements to be understood as fully rational). Taken out of context, then, the martial arts that these men acquired in Japan and, to a much lesser

extent, other regions of East and Southeast Asia were plastic enough that they could be mythologized, affixed with fantastical narratives, and, ultimately, offered a nearly blank slate for American social needs to be passed via the construction of a cultural “other” in which the exotic and legendary acted as a means of reflecting the contemporary experiences of practitioners.

During the years of the American postwar economic boom, the middle class continued to burgeon as improving technology, social conditions, and the G.I. Bill afforded many the chance to acquire training and education not previously available. The growth in white-collar positions directly impacted the number of prospective prizefighters as fewer young men saw fighting as an attractive alternative to physical labor. Amateur recreational boxing also declined in this period thanks, in part, to new standards and expectation of male social behavior. Men’s magazines, social critics, and politicians expressed distaste for “association men” who sought comradeship with others as weak and lacking independence. Physical culture in general went out of public favor at this time, giving way to a man-of-leisure aesthetic in which spectating was acceptable, but visiting the gym oneself was akin to work, which did not fit the lifestyle espoused in publications like *Playboy* and the early years of *Look*.

Lack of involvement in physical entertainment, combined with a rise in office-based occupations, correlated with an epidemic of weight gain and related health problems in American middle class men. By the late 1950s and 1960s this resulted in a general anxiety akin to that which had been prevalent after the turn of the century, and for similar reasons. As women attained greater levels of autonomy and equality in all

areas of life, men, no longer able to identify their masculinity by means of vocation, turned to their bodies which, in a now primarily secular social environment, came to be highly commoditized. With the body once again seen as the enemy and boxing no longer a viable retreat, many young men of the postwar generation sought personal power by identifying with the Asian martial arts as made available by returning servicemen like Robert Trias, as well as Japanese instructors with international ambitions like Mas Oyama. Both sets offered a tightly-packaged, invented tradition of holistic masculinity alternative to the now-stigmatized world of Western boxing.

Markedly Western (and especially American) narrative structures were melded with the body culture of Asian martial arts in the United States to produce fertile ground for acting out a mythology of the lone warrior, which is essentially the same figure seen in other narrative genres of the American psyche, such as western films and novels and frontiersman tales. Hollywood latched onto this shift in male folk culture and, by the 1970s, movie heroes were not only muscular individualists, but almost always employed some manner of stylized fighting art. The process of bringing erstwhile exotic products to mainstream American attention, though, typically requires both a significant measure of media exposure and the public presence of individuals understood to be experts on the topic. While films, magazines, and graphic novels afforded the opportunity to project personal mythologies, expertise came in the form of two very different groups of martial artists.

In domestic popular culture of the 1960s, 1970s, and even into the 1980s, one could find instructional books, articles, and videos for martial arts techniques

demonstrated by self-appointed experts, frequently with flamboyant personalities. John Keehan, known more commonly as Count Dante, was perhaps the most notorious such figure and is therefore useful as a demonstrative. Keehan, a hairdresser and used car salesman based in Chicago, claimed to be a master of several different Asian martial arts, acquired during his many world travels as an apprentice to the secretive leaders of the Black Dragon Fighting Society. He sold a series of how-to pamphlets by mail through advertisements in graphic novels, complete with imaginative explanations of both techniques and a wholly fictive history of both himself and East Asia in general. Count Dante represented one type of attempt to commercialize the interest that young American men were developing for exotic fighting arts of the East.

The other source of experts was smaller and perhaps less visible given their lack of flamboyancy. Men like Donn Draeger, Robert W. Smith, and Jon Bluming actually traveled to Japan and elsewhere (Smith later moved to Taiwan and Draeger is known for having mounted expeditions all over Southeast Asia) in order to study the highly exoticized martial arts in their own contexts. Though no doubt less commercially successful than characters like Count Dante, the quality of their work often continues to be on par with any research produced today. Draeger and Smith's *Asian Fighting Arts* (1964), for instance, remains a standard reference for anyone researching the topic. In addition to being more scholarly rigorous than men like Keehan, the pioneer martial arts researchers in Asia also held verifiable records of their exploits. Bluming won innumerable honors in both judo and karate. Draeger was so well-known among classical Japanese martial artists that he was invited to join the Butoku-kai and even

served as cultural consultant for a James Bond film. Smith actually was an employee of the Central Intelligence Agency (although in an analytical capacity only, never as an operative).

The latter group of researchers conducting scholarly rigorous study in Asia was aware of and frequently irritated by the extraordinary claims of Count Dante and his ilk, to say nothing of the political squabbles from which each would eventually renounce himself as regards the world of competitive fighting (especially judo). Smith, Draeger, and Bluming, in order to satirize such shameless commercialists, concocted a character named John Gilbey, a sort of portmanteau of the unbelievable qualities and exploits with which each of them had been attributed over the years. Gilbey was a giant of a man, possessed near superhuman strength, his bank account was vast enough to support full-time globe-hopping as he searched for martial arts masters, and his mind contained an encyclopedic knowledge of 1920s jazz records. Penned by Smith, Gilbey authored two books and a few articles which were clearly intended for humor. It is revelatory of American perceptions of the Asian fighting arts, then, that Gilbey not only received fan mail, but was treated seriously in a number of books and magazines, his ludicrous adventures apparently having been taken at face-value.

By the late 1980s these experts—even Gilbey—were responsible along with the entertainment media for normalizing Asian martial arts in the broader American social environment. What began as a folk movement toward the arts as a means of negotiating new standards of masculinity was commoditized to such an extent that Hollywood action heroes became hyper-masculine, with bodybuilders being cast as boxers and soldiers. By

the end of the 1980s, the ideal masculine image for a large number of American men involved total conquest of the body leading to an unnatural musculature that at once differentiated the sexes in a way that vocation and civic activity no longer could and lent intimidating physical power to the owner. Even where the protagonist of a given story invited personal identification through lack of physical prowess (e.g. *The Karate Kid*), Asian martial arts could be acquired as a tool to achieve the same ends of physical power and independent agency.

During the 1990s a curious change took place as American men practicing Asian martial arts and consuming related media became disillusioned with the hyper-masculine action hero image. This can partly be attributed to the rise of child enrollment in martial arts schools, thereby damaging the ability of adult men to successfully embody fantasies of fistic achievement. As a social barometer, one may look to the popularity of martial arts comedies, such as those starring Jackie Chan. Chan frequently lampooned the more serious socially critical work of Bruce Lee, making light of his own lack of toughness and capacity for violence. At the same time, a new group of martial artists emerged under the banner of rationalism.

The rationalists looked to reintegrate empiricism within the context of fighting arts competitions by patronizing mixed-style contests with regulations that allowed for the most diverse array of techniques possible. The first Ultimate Fighting Championship was held in 1993 and the franchise saw extraordinary public attention. The main selling point of mixed martial arts tournaments proved to be the question, dating back to the mixed contests in nineteenth and early twentieth century Japan that pitted boxers against

judo practitioners and, frequently, Americans against Japanese, of which fighting style would prove superior in an open setting. Although mixed martial arts bouts in the United States are, in fact, subject to rules and regulations mandated by governmental authorities, both the fictive history shared by participants and spectators as well as the self-mythologizing that takes place in the community of practice sets the stage as one in which there are “no holds barred,” thereby allowing all involved to believe that the victor of an MMA match truly is the better combatant.

Practitioners sometimes compare the current style of MMA with prizefighting, which they see as corrupt and lacking in the type of supportive community necessary for the proper functioning of an MMA gym. Where boxing is perceived as a male-exclusive activity that may even be tied to class- and race-based distinction, MMA is described as egalitarian and rationalistic in the community’s acceptance of all methods that prove applicable. Indeed, one wall of William Bush’s gym features a banner with a quotation from Bruce Lee, “Accept that which is useful. Reject that which is useless. Add what is essentially your own.” Whereas sports like boxing and golf are seen as men’s clubs, the MMA community is understood by practitioners to be diverse on all fronts, although still strongly associated with expressions and negotiations of an essential masculinity.

The negotiation of this masculine discourse appears to be as much the result of tertiary aspects of fight training as it is embodied in the direct application of force. The MMA gym setting provides a psycho-social and physical space in which it is acceptable for men to demonstrate powerful emotions, even crying at times when the emotive process of technique acquisition yields to outside frustrations from individuals’ lives. In

this way—and from an analytical perspective—MMA serves more-or-less the same social function that boxing did during its golden age and exoticized Asian martial arts did for a period from the late 1960s through the 1980s: men (and some women) seek a rationalistic, neo-primitive escape from the anxieties of modern life by projecting themselves onto professional fighters, navigate their own emotional struggles by bonding with one another in a community wherein displays of weakness are accepted, and acquire or strengthen shared beliefs by embodying a shared experience, the act of which provides the chance to self-mythologize.

In the visual and non-combative performing arts, too, invented traditions of the Asian martial arts in America have come to be combined with rationalistic historical research to create a uniquely Western representation of Asian martial cultures. Graphic novels like *Shi Long Pang* and *Usagi Yojimbo* reimagine dimensions of the lone warrior myth so prevalent in American martial arts imagery to be at once consummately accurate (*Shi Long Pang* includes an extensive bibliography and footnotes) and patently artificial (*Usagi Yojimbo*'s protagonist is an anthropomorphic rabbit samurai). While depiction of fighting in this context is certainly stylized, it also tends toward a more rationalized approach, with either the stated goal of aesthetic appeal or an attempt to approximate the reality of combat through exaggeration: *Shi Long Pang*'s fight scenes are florid affairs while *Usagi Yojimbo*'s are frank and violent. Even outside of professional fighting, then, the Asian martial arts in America have continued to follow the path of rationalization. Even when discursive masculinity is less outright, the undertone of navigating a masculine identity in a world with few exclusively male realms is still prevalent.

Future Study

What began as a study of American inventions pertaining to Asian martial arts revealed that the topic is situated in much broader social and historical backgrounds than could be investigated within the scope of a single dissertation. Although folk group identity was the starting point, it quickly became apparent that the more central issue is masculine folk identity, which was and continues to be in a dialectic relationship with the surrounding popular culture, including political interaction between governmental leaders and the grassroots. Where the use of the body is concerned, martial arts of all origins (Western and Asian) are inevitably used as social tools, at times by an established leadership and at others in the service of bottom-up, bricolage-style folk usage. Contrasting judo practice in Japan during the 1930s with boxing in the United States during that same period, for instance, reveals that, in Japan, the government was official administering judo via the education system as a means of fostering a particular mentality of nationalism in the nation's youth while American boxers were responding, to a great extent, to the anxiety brought on by the isolation of white-collar urban work, shifting power arrangements of social power, and commoditization of the body.

Each of the above elements deserves its own treatment, and I would propose five immediate projects that are pertinent to multiple fields of scholarly discussion. First, this study was mainly limited to the male contributions to what is, inarguably, a predominantly male pursuit in the art of fighting and would thus be complemented by a thorough investigation of women's involvement in martial practices of all kinds. Most

relevant to the current context of American martial arts, though, would be an inquiry into the state of women's MMA, which has grown significantly in recent years, with some female fighters going on to careers in film and television. As MMA provides a professional avenue for Olympic athletes in the grappling arts, it would be pertinent to examine how women from judo and wrestling transition into mixed competition and what implications or effects this may have as regard both local communities of practice and national demographics for martial arts involvement. Such a study would likely hold implications for female empowerment, male response, and, in this way, may reveal how vernacular practice of the martial arts is influenced by media exposure.

Second, a comprehensive quantitative approach to the demographics of participants and spectators of various martial arts-related media would be useful for several reasons. Little such data is available as large populations are concerned and the ability to analyze what subgroups are attracted to which material would reveal trends that may be able to point researchers toward shifts in vernacular culture. As with the above case, knowing how the public writ-large responds to various levels of exposure to the fighting arts may well reveal the next wave of popular practice early on and afford researchers a chance to study the rise and decline of phenomena that have previously only been understood post-hoc. This holds more than novel promise, too, given that the emergent messages of certain organizations are connected with particular styles, such as nationalism in prewar judo and rationalism in current MMA.

Third, this study has also, by necessity, largely ignored the Japanese-American community as the cultural enclaves in Hawaii, the West Coast, and major cities were and

are not indicative of the larger middle-class zeitgeist and represents a specialized set of historical and social interactions, complicated by the trans-Pacific nature of the community and the antagonistic history brought about by internment during the course of the Second World War. Consequently, a study focusing on Japanese-American martial artists and how they interact with their community's past in order to construct a folk history and identity would be vital to understanding the progress of Asian martial culture in the United States.

Fourth, an ambitious-but-necessary project is the composition of a volume specifically focused on the construction and role of folk histories of the fighting arts globally. As has become apparent in the process of the present work, folk history (invented or verifiable, real or imagined) plays an integral role in martial arts communities, which hold a great deal of influence, at various times, over the local community in general, and, therefore, society at large. Folklore being of a dynamic nature, such a volume would need to be regularly updated as a sort of "living" text, like any encyclopedia, in order to stay relatively current. This would have the added benefit of revealing transnational relationships between culture groups.

Fifth, and perhaps most relevant to contemporary world politics, a recent resurgence of militaristic nationalism in Japan has caused strife between Pacific powers. Calls for Japan's constitution to be revised in the interest of collective self-defense have been accompanied by a growth in extremist groups that have perpetrated a number of highly publicized acts that disrupt the status quo, including displays of the old Japanese imperial and Nazi flags, unannounced parades through the streets of Tokyo while

donning imperial army uniforms, and, in one case, a series of visits to libraries where copies of Anne Frank's diary were defaced. Should the public adopt such attitudes, more violent conflict in East Asia will become increasingly likely and, undoubtedly, the martial arts will once again be utilized as a tool for inculcating the nation's youth. I cannot propose a solution to such a potential conflict between Japan, China, and the Koreas, however it is clear that it will almost certainly be indicated well in advance by trends in local communities of martial arts practice. As with Japan in the first half of the twentieth century, the folk history of a given martial art will be rewritten to reflect not only the perceived past, but the probable future.

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