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IMPOSING THE TERMS OF THE BATTLE

DONN F. DRAEGER, COUNT DANTE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AMERICAN MARTIAL ARTS IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

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 to the 1980s 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 others selling their wares in the American domestic market at the same time, but lacking the scholarly rigor 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. The struggle between these two groups for control of the market illustrates how textures of knowledge and objects of knowledge were often confused in the postwar period of American martial arts development.

Three central figures to the adoption of Asian martial arts in the West were Robert W. Smith, Jon Bluming, and Donn F. Draeger. Over the course of their research and training, each developed a different means of preserving martial arts and culture. For Smith, this can be seen as a holistic effort to include not only physical skills, but also a system's inherited wisdom, related arts like poetry, and overall social structure unique to a given lineage. Bluming amassed his extensive personal combative experience to create a hybrid system of striking and grappling that incorporates all of the many styles in which he was trained. Draeger's primary interest was combative effectiveness and he formulated a research system called hoplology to that end.

While the majority of Asian martial arts practitioners in the United States were for a long time 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. Robert W. Smith and Donn F. Draeger were two of the first Anglo-Americans to undertake the practice of judo. Their meeting at the Chicago Judo Club via an introduction by the legendary champion and instructor, Johnny Osako, in 1948 or 1949 proved to be the start of a long and prolific partnership, one that resulted 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 – an entire new lexicon, set of practices, and publication genre through which Western martial artists could express their thoughts on subjects for which there were few established concepts in English.

The lack of terms and phrases to express Asian martial arts concepts is a matter of 'textures' and 'objects'. Cetina's [1997] idea of intangible cultural assets classifies them as 'objects of knowledge' that can be transferred, reinterpreted, and generally modified in ways that suit a given social agenda – just like physical objects – to show that traditions are invented and repurposed in different ways depending on time and location as much as cultural background knowledge. Such 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 World War II 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.

More pragmatically, 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: '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



Draeger Posing [Smith]

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 career 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* (*qigong*) 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: 'Among mainland Chinese here, kungtao 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].

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 a 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 on 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: '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. Draeger wrote: '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].

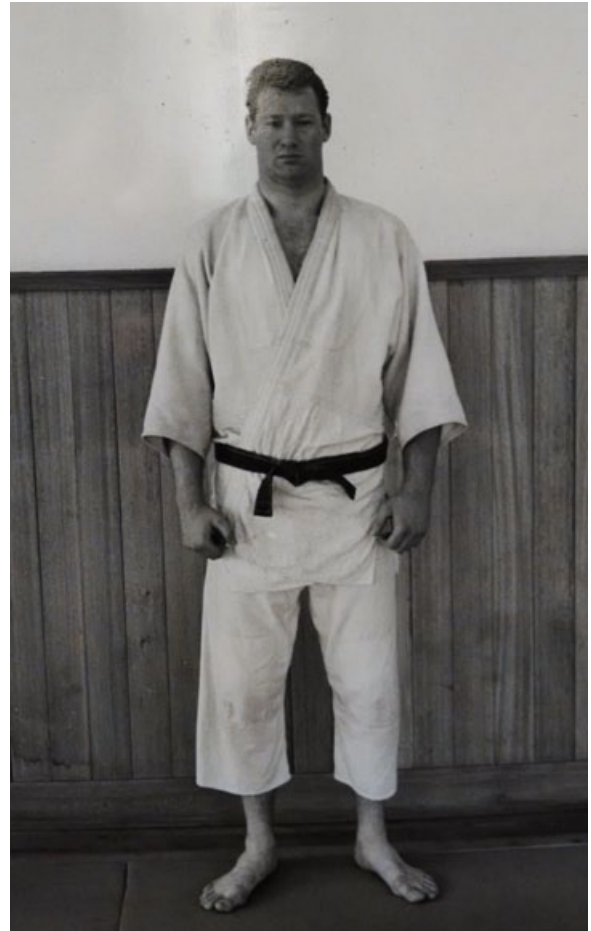
Draeger later offers, at least somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to introduce Zheng to a lucrative business opportunity training professional sumo wrestlers: 'Pro sumo assn. [sic] tells me that they would pay all expenses, etc. to have man like Cheng show them how to remove opponent from ring' [letter, 9 July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

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



Jon Bluming at the Kodokan, 1960 [Smith 1960]

as 1967, he had still been ‘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, one that also provided a buffer between himself and organizational fallouts: Jon Bluming. 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. It may explain why, despite insisting that he personally make all contributions to the field regarding Japan and myriad 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 his 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 don't [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 for 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 an 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. They form a substantial portion of most every training group's social identity and invented history; however Bluming, in his

Promotional article about Draeger for You Only Live Twice [Godfrey, n.d.]

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 1. million 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)

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 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 seventies 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 – if inexplicable – part of the fighting arts, regardless of location. 'I thought it was very funny and hearing all the stories thrue [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 in much the same way that the Japanese public morphed the exploits of Bluming and Oyama. One piece, *Donn Draeger: Man with the Deadliest Hands in the World*, 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'. It also 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].

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 super-powered 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 ran 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 really [sic] screwed me and in the end I was put on a side track and I stopped competing and instead became a teacher... [I]n 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'. Moreover, writing 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 scholarly 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 [I'll] 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: '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 hopology, 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 hopology 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 Hopology 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 hopological, 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.

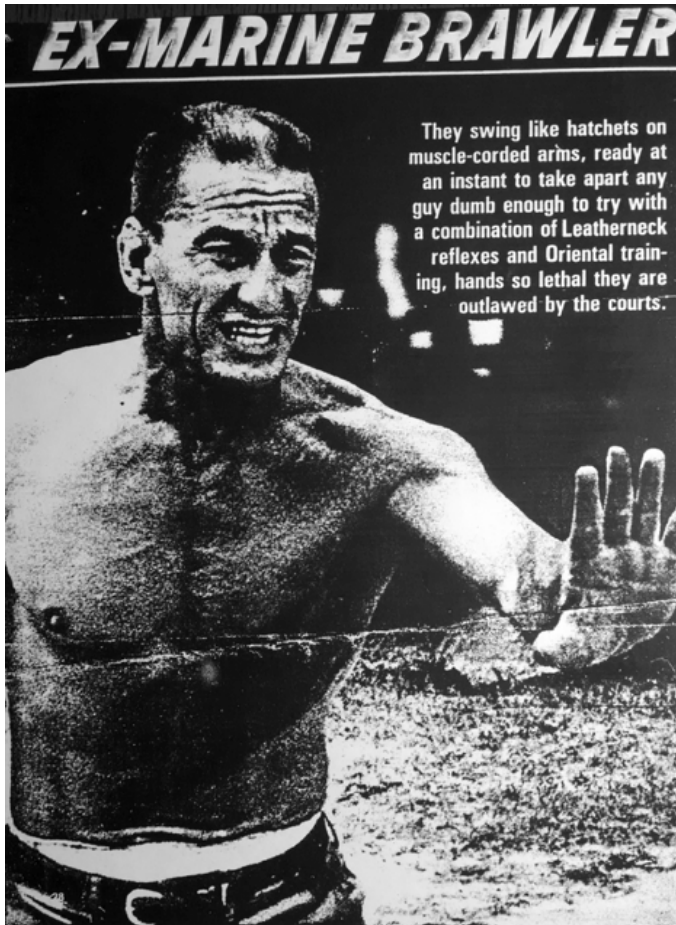
Another taiji pupil, John Lad, illustrated the sort of mindset necessary to learn their style:

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. John Lad concludes 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



Even Draeger could not escape the media's sensationalism [Godfrey]

youngest, is still active at the time of 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.

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 camaraderie, 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

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Advertisement for Count Dante
[Black Dragon Fighting Society 1968]

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 over 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].

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 hegemonic 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. While both women and ethnic minorities made their own use of Asian martial culture, such groups cannot, by their very nature, have contributed to book sales and magazine circulation, and thus did not form the target audience for such mainstream advertising as that used by Count Dante. Minority uses for martial arts warrant their own studies and are far beyond the scope of this simple analysis. With that in mind, it can be seen that 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. Men like Draeger, Bluming, Smith, and Keehan served a vital role in helping to bring mainstream 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.

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