

*Mushin*, Morals, and Martial Arts  
— A Discussion of Keenan's Yogācāra Critique —

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John P. Keenan's recent paper is ambitious, provocative, sometimes perceptive, but significantly flawed in a number of respects (KEENAN 1989). In the attempt to cover a wide range of issues he has sometimes generalized and simplified complex historical, textual, and ethical problems, to the point of misrepresentation. A critical examination of some of his statements and arguments is therefore necessary. Like Keenan, I am particularly concerned with the moral and cultural contexts in which martial arts and spiritual disciplines are pursued. I also have an interest in the texts and histories of East Asian traditions. I shall begin by listing in summary form Keenan's main statements and conclusions, in the order in which they appear in his paper. I shall then try to deal with them, as far as possible in that order.

1. Eastern martial arts have been appropriated by the West and shorn of all spiritual and humanistic value and are now practiced for athletic prowess or street-smart fighting. A prime example is Bruce Lee, who rejected the spiritual ethos that surrounds these arts in favor of a concern with direct effectiveness in combat. Even more disturbing is the violent explosion of *ninja* cults, etc. One consequence of which was the death of a boy, shot by a policeman, when the boy tried to attack him with a sword.
2. The ethos of East Asian martial arts evolved in a context of Zen Buddhism and took on the contours of Buddhist teaching.

Martial arts in the West are almost always divorced from this Mahāyāna context, though some practitioners erroneously believe they are practicing disciplined Buddhist insight. The spiritual ethos surrounding martial arts practice is a warmed-over Taoism, quite different from Mahāyāna Buddhism.

3. Chinese Buddhist thinkers and exponents of "Samurai Zen," influenced by Indian Tathāgatagarbha Buddhology and Neo-Taoist ontology, misunderstood the concepts of *mushin* and emptiness, and interpreted them in absolutist and centrist ways. Such misinterpretations result in a forgetfulness of discriminative concepts, and lead to ethical collapse. Keenan identifies such a position with Takuan Sōhō Zenji, who is said to exemplify the "detached and aloof practitioner who realizes a head-chopping variety of emptiness," a version of Zen which is "aloof from human concern and only tenuously aware of the need for compassion." Keenan implies that it is this version of "Zen," really a form of "warmed-over Taoism," which so appeals to modern martial artists. He argues that a centrist and head-chopping variety of emptiness, and its associated concept of *mushin*, is rejected by classical Yogācāra texts and authorities. It is my view that Keenan misrepresents Zen and Sino-Japanese interpretations of emptiness, *mushin*, and morality. He misunderstands the nature of spontaneity in classical Taoist texts and in martial arts practice, and he fails to acknowledge the moral ambiguities generated by some Buddhist texts and by his own Yogācāra authorities.
4. Keenan believes that from a Yogācāra viewpoint, the association of martial arts attainments with Buddhist soteriological concepts and disciplines is illegitimate. He argues that no-mind, non-discursive thought, and bodily awareness, as described by martial artists and Zen practitioners, authenticate no true awakening. Keenan ignores the fact that it is only his own account that has implied that they do. He proceeds to trivialize the skills and attainments of spiritually orientated martial artists by comparing them with accomplished Western athletes, who, in spite of their accomplishments, may remain personally self-centered and prideful.
5. Keenan implies, without producing evidence, that modern martial artists are claiming Buddhist insights and attainments, achieved solely through their martial training. He concludes

that Westerners who wish to combine physical culture and spiritual discipline should pursue modern “ways” such as Frisbie-dō, or the Tao (sic) of kayaking, wind-surfing, or skiing.

*The General Context of Eastern Martial Arts*

My basic criticism of Keenan is that he simplifies and in a sense idealizes the relationship between Mahāyāna/Zen and Eastern martial arts. He makes a mistake common to non-practicing interpreters of martial arts, in assuming that a “spiritual ethos” is incompatible with combat effectiveness. He has been influenced by D. T. Suzuki’s tendency to artificially isolate the Zen influence on Eastern martial traditions, and neglect the complex web of elements and processes in Sino-Japanese thought and cultures, which have pervaded their martial traditions (SUZUKI 1959 chs. 4, 5, 6; DRAEGER & WARNER 1982 ch. 3). It is interesting to note that Suzuki also isolates and exaggerates the Zen role in Noh drama, and ignores popular Buddhist and Shinto motifs (TYLER 1987, pp. 19–52).

The fact that many of these elements and processes have also influenced Ch’an and Zen is also neglected by Keenan and Suzuki. I am referring to such fundamental concepts as *ch’i/ki* 氣, *yin-yang/in-yō* 陰陽, *wu hsing/go-gyō* 五行 (five phases), Confucian ideas and values; fundamental notions of Chinese medicine, alchemy, and ritual methods from Religious Taoism; *Chen Yen* (Shingon) images, concepts, and ritual methods; Shinto images, concepts, and ritual methods; sectarian movements and rebel ideologies in Chinese history, and the legends/mythologies developed around them; mythic and heroic themes in Chinese popular literature and drama. To even sketch the nature of these influences and interactions is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to acknowledge their historical role. In an excellent paper in this journal Neil McMULLIN has reminded scholars of the dangers in historical analysis of polarizing idealized constructs such as “Buddhism” and “Shinto” and then isolating them from their context in the structures of Japanese thought and society (1989). Many of his comments equally well apply to the role of Buddhism in Chinese thought and society. Keenan’s concern with the textual and doctrinal formulations of Buddhism has led him to neglect the ways in which Buddhist, Zen, Confucian, and Taoist notions are integrated and embedded in Sino-Japanese thought and culture.

*The Nature of Modern Martial Arts*

Keenan greatly oversimplifies the nature of modern martial arts practice in the West, and places an undue emphasis on the brutal and pathological aspects. He then implies that they fail to measure up, in moral terms, to the "spiritual ethos" of the traditional Eastern arts. In fact, a whole range of moral styles, values, ideologies, and syntheses are evident among modern martial arts practitioners and groups. This is to be expected in modern pluralist societies. The work of the following researchers should be consulted for evidence of this moral and conceptual diversity (DANN 1978; GENOVESE 1980; GOODGER 1982; SAYAMA 1982; AMOS 1983; DONOHUE 1987).

In any modern city it is possible to find a *dōjō* or *kwoon* [training hall] where "no-nonsense, street-smart" techniques are taught with no reference to moral or spiritual values. It is also possible to find others where respect and moral values are taught along with techniques, and others where meditation methods form an integral part of the training. For further evidence of the conceptual diversity within modern martial arts, a recent issue of *Inside Kung-Fu* (July 1990) may be consulted. This issue includes an article by Brian GRAY (pp. 70–73) emphasizing the indigenous nature of Chinese martial arts, and minimizing the role of Bodhidharma; several articles and reviews which refer to concepts of *tao*, *ch'i*, *wai kung*, and *nei kung* [external and internal training] in relation to healing, sparring, and fighting; two references to Christian-based martial arts groups (pp. 5, 15), and an account by Adam HSU of an internal system largely developed by Chinese Muslims (pp. 43–46). For accounts of the modern integration of Zen training with traditional martial arts and ways at Chozen-ji (Hawaii), founded by ŌMORI Sōgen Rōshi, the works of Mike SAYAMA may be consulted (1982, 1986; see also ŌMORI 1972).

*The "Ninja Killing" and Bruce Lee*

I am not sure what point Keenan is trying to make in his reference to the tragic, though possibly apocryphal, story of the killing of the "ninja boy" by a policeman. The tone suggests the superiority of good old Western "hardware" to "newfangled" Oriental martial mysticism. To me it is more of an example of the deluded, brutal, and exploitative nature of modern Western society. From a Buddhist

standpoint the mind of the boy and the policeman were fatally deluded. I would agree and add that the delusion is partly conditioned by the images, values, and fantasies of an exploitative and violent society. Was it necessary to shoot to kill, or shoot at all? Could the boy really have threatened the life of the policeman? Was the blade sharpened? Did the boy know how to use it? How could the policeman have known? With sufficient mental and physical agility and moral presence, developed through correct training, could he not have evaded an attack or have avoided the conflict altogether? (See TAKUAN 1987, pp. 29–33, 47–49, 79; MCFARLANE 1989, pp. 249–52.)

In my view Keenan also misrepresents Bruce Lee. Lee was a modernist and a pragmatist in terms of martial arts. What he rejected in many classical kung fu and other traditional systems was not their “spiritual ethos,” but their ineffective and unrealistic elaboration. These systems were often tied in with “Buddhist” and “Taoist” images and concepts; but Lee was not criticizing them on those grounds. Lee’s own pragmatic approach to combat was often expressed with reference to Zen and Taoist concepts (LEE 1975, pp. 7–25). Purists may find his blend of these with Krishnamurti, along with a little Western philosophy learned in college, naive or derivative, but it was a synthesis which was internalized and authentically expressed his own understanding. Whatever one thinks of his movies, their moral tone is considerably higher than that of the average Hong Kong kung fu movie. In my view the real high point of Lee’s best movie, “Enter the Dragon,” is the demonstration of the art of “fighting without fighting” (LAO TZU 1982, chs. 22, 43, 68, 69). This scene, where Lee non-violently overcomes a bully, is based on an incident in the life of the swordsman, Tsukahara Bokuden (1490–1572; SUZUKI 1959, pp. 73–75). Miyagi sensei in “Karate Kid” (I, II, & III) would certainly approve.

#### *Buddhism and Martial Arts, Legend and History*

Keenan’s notion of a simple linear correlation between Mahāyāna/Zen Buddhism and martial arts cannot be sustained, historically or conceptually. Systematic training in martial disciplines, and the development of formalized martial arts, clearly predates the arrival of Buddhism in China (DRAEGER & SMITH 1980, pp. 11–18). No significant development in Chinese culture is ever the product of a

simple homogeneous tradition or set of concepts. Ch'an and Chinese martial arts are both infused with Buddhist and Taoist concepts, but as I suggested earlier the situation is considerably more complex. The origins of *Shaolin ch'uan fa* [Fist Way of Shaolin] must remain a matter for speculation. The Bodhidharma legend is important in relation to the mythology, hagiography, and cultural ethos of Chinese martial arts, but any historically causal role is highly questionable (FAURE 1985, pp. 263–265; 1986, pp. 187–98).

The earliest reliable evidence of Shaolin monks engaging in military action, and therefore possibly using martial arts skills, is the celebrated attack on Wang Shih-ch'ung's forces, in support of the T'ang forces of Li Shih-min, in 621 CE. Memorial tablets recording this and other military exploits of Shaolin monks are still preserved at the monastery (DEMIÉVILLE 1973, pp. 275–79). I agree with KEENAN that the impetus for Buddhist monks to learn and develop martial skills was primarily the practical need for defense (1989, p. 288). Of course, defending oneself and/or others, or defending the Dharma and Sangha, can be given a "Dharmic" or expedient justification. A number of texts such as the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, texts in the *Mahāratnakūta* collection, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, and the *Mahāyānasamgraha* make considerable moves in this direction, as we shall see later in this paper.

Keenan seems to accept that Indian Buddhist ideas and Chinese Taoist concepts interacted at an early stage and gave rise to Ch'an. The question which then arises is, at what stage did the Taoist concepts become "warmed-over" and illegitimate? Are all Ch'an writings since Shen Hui (670–762 CE), and all the works of Chinese monks such as Tao-an (312–385), Hui-yüan (337–417), Tao-sheng (c 360–414), and Seng-chao (384–414) "warmed-over and quite different from Mahāyāna Buddhism"? All are infused with Taoist and Confucian concepts and assumptions (ROBINSON 1967, chs. 4–7, DUMOULIN 1988, chs. 5–9).

#### *Ultimatism and Buddhism*

It seems to me that Keenan is adhering to an ultimatist and normative view of Buddhism, which is inappropriate to the way Buddhist ideas, images, and practices have engaged and functioned in traditional Chinese and Japanese society. He is equally perplexed at the ways such ideas are applied in modern Western society. By

“ultimatist” I mean the tendency to accept as legitimately “Buddhist” only those concepts and concerns which relate to higher-order (*lokut-tara / paramārtha*) attainments (COUSINS 1984, p. 315). It is a common tendency among textual scholars, who generally address such higher-order concepts in an abstract and speculative style. As a perspective or method it is wholly inadequate when attempting to understand how traditions are lived, engaged, and integrated in different social and historical contexts. Of course, a minority of adepts within a tradition are entitled to the privilege of a normative and ultimatist perspective. That of Dōgen Zenji is one which is particularly evident in Zen, but even here it is confined to certain contexts, when specifically addressing his monks (McFARLANE [forthcoming], ch. 7). It is particularly appropriate to legendary or mythic contexts; for example, Bodhidharma’s celebrated interview with Emperor Wu of Liang, in which the patriarch uncompromisingly rejects all merit-making activities, in favor of the penetrating insight into emptiness (DUMOULIN 1988, p. 91). The Bodhidharma of legend is free to take this line; legends need not be concerned where their next meal is coming from. Buddhist scholars cannot claim the same privilege as Bodhidharma and reject merit-making or popular, “culturally specific” activities as illegitimate or un-Buddhist. Ironically, Buddhist texts and authorities do acknowledge the distinction between provisional and ultimate viewpoints. They also understand the importance of operating within, and accommodating to, both (STRENG 1967, p. 213, Nāgārjuna *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, ch. 24 v. 8–14; CONZE 1973, transl. of Asta. ch. 20, pp. 221–25; MASUNAGA 1972, p. 49; YOKOI and VICTORIA 1976, p. 69; KENNETT 1976, pp. 269–70, transl. of Keizan).

### *Samurai, Zen, Bushidō and Martial Arts*

Keenan’s statements about the “marriage of the samurai code to Zen in Kamakura times” and “the Kamakura samurai practiced martial arts as a path toward awakening,” indicate a lack of familiarity with the basic sources, interpretive literature, and historical accounts (KEENAN 1989, pp. 286, 288). He also fails to acknowledge the important theoretical distinction between *bujutsu* 武術 [martial arts—concerned with combat effectiveness / battlefield techniques] and *budō* 武道 [martial ways—concerned with spiritual and moral cultivation].<sup>1</sup> These omissions help explain some of the flaws in Keenan’s critique.

The use of the term “samurai” is misleading when referring to developments which involved *bushi* 武士 [warriors] as a whole (DANN 1978, p. 25). It is also misleading to suggest anything as formally organized as a “samurai code” in Kamakura times. Some Kamakura warriors were attracted to Zen teachings and tried to apply them in their daily lives (SUZUKI 1959, pp. 65–66). There is no evidence of the use of martial training and techniques in themselves, as means to Zen awakening in Kamakura times. Keenan has probably been misled on this point by SUZUKI, who tends to skate over the historical details and conflates early Kamakura developments with much later Tokugawa ones (1959, chs. 4, 5). There was already by the Kamakura period a well-developed mythology and symbol system focused on the sword, and derived from indigenous beliefs and esoteric [*mikkyō*] Buddhism, and from Prajñāpāramitā texts and images (LISHKA 1978, pp. 139–42). Suzuki largely ignores this. The application of Zen theory and practice to the training of martial skill and technique, and the investing of the warrior life with spiritual values, are really Tokugawa phenomena. This process of rationalizing and spiritualizing the role of the warrior, in effect creating a warrior ideology and value system, gave rise to the ideals and values known as Bushidō. The term first appears in literary sources in the early seventeenth century. Zen formed only one element in the process. Note that in traditional Neo-Confucian terms the rational and the spiritual are not incompatible categories. In trying to maintain the idea of the “spiritual ethos” of Eastern martial arts as allied to or grounded in Zen and the Mahāyāna, Keenan has greatly oversimplified the nature of that ethos.

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between *bujutsu* [martial arts] and *budō* [martial ways] is consistently applied by DRAEGER (1973, ch. 3; 1974, ch. 3, pp. 58–60, DRAEGER & SMITH 1980, pp. 90–94). The terms do have classificatory value in understanding Japanese martial traditions. However, it should be recognized that the distinction is itself a product of the rationalizing and interpreting of processes and traditions, which took place with and after the emergence of Bushidō. The terms are not used with complete consistency in Japanese sources (DANN 1978, pp. 18–24). It is misleading to apply the terms and the distinction to martial traditions which are not Japanese in origin, though this is frequently done. The indiscriminate use of “dō” or “Tao” as an English word leads to irritating and tautologous expressions such as: Bruce LEE (1975) *Tao of Jeet Kune Do* and James W. DEMILE (1977) *Tao of Wing Chun Do*. KEENAN’s disingenuous “Frisbie-dō” is even more deplorable (1989, p. 296). Even in traditional Japanese-based systems, the diversity in styles, applications, and training methods makes it impossible to apply the *jutsu/dō* distinction with consistency. One can find *aikidō* groups who train as if they were street fighting. Alternatively one can find *jū-jutsu* groups who train very “soft” and emphasize moral and spiritual values in their training.



Significantly, it was only with the peace and stability of Tokugawa times that the warrior class had the incentive, leisure, and opportunity to reflect upon itself, and define and construct a role in consciously articulated terms. It is in these circumstances, when a warrior is no longer likely to be called on to kill or die in battle, that we find a shift from a concern with battle and combat-orientated techniques 術 [*jutsu*], to spiritually-orientated ways 道 [*dō*]. We also find the expression of training in terms of *shugyō* 修行, which originally referred to training in Buddhist disciplines. This whole process, described by DRAEGER and WARNER as the “Civilizing of the Warrior Class,” had profound implications for Japanese intellectual and social life through to modern times (1982, p. 66; see also FUKUSHIMA 1984, chs. 3, 4, 8, and DRAEGER & SMITH 1980, pp. 85–90). They also help us understand how martial traditions and techniques were consciously employed in Japan as means of education and spiritual cultivation (DRAEGER 1973; DANN 1978; SCHMIDT 1986, pp. 69–74). The works of Takuan Sōhō, whatever the author’s intention, were certainly part of this process. Like the later Bushidō writings, Takuan’s are pervaded by Taoist, Yin-yang, Shingon, Confucian, as well as Zen images and concepts (LISHKA 1978). I shall return to his work in relation to *mushin* in the next section.

#### *Mushin, Emptiness, and Morals*

Keenan’s Yogācāra critique of Sino-Japanese interpretations of no-mind [*wu hsin* / *mushin* 無心], emptiness [*k’ung* / *kū* 空], and Buddha nature [*fo hsing* / *busshō* 佛性], only stands if it can be shown that:

- a) these terms were regularly interpreted literally in a centrist and absolutist way, and
- b) the consequence of this kind of interpretation was/is the “detached and aloof practitioner who realizes a head-chopping variety of emptiness” and “dispenses with any awareness of ethical action in the world.”

Neither case can be supported. Keenan correctly points out that the concepts of no-mind, Buddha nature, and emptiness are best interpreted metaphorically rather than literally. In my view, most texts and commentators understood this. Consequently they employ a range of images and metaphors to express fundamental Buddhist insights about the conditional and relational nature of existence, and about human spiritual potential. Ming-Wood LIU has shown

how the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* shows considerable buddhological and metaphorical sophistication in avoiding the charge of adhering to a “soul theory” [centrism/essentialism] (1982, pp. 84–94). If anything, the emptiness and no-mind language of some Chinese texts tends more towards voidism or annihilationism than centrism, though I think that in general they avoid both. Part of Keenan’s difficulty is that, having admitted that the language of no-mind in Buddhist texts is metaphorical, he cannot then rigidly and prescriptively lock these metaphors into a single meaning or content. Recent work by JAN has shown the range of meanings of *wu hsin* [no-mind] and *wu nien* [no-thought] in Chinese texts, and helps establish that these terms were used with greater sophistication than was implied by SUZUKI (1959, pp. 37–57). The most basic meanings revolve around the idea of the absence of workings of the mind, or absence of mental reactions such as craving and grasping. I would agree that there is a discernible shift of emphasis from Indian-based “Dhyāna” and “Prajñā” texts in Chinese, which are concerned with the kind of mental processes that facilitate detachment and seeing things as empty, to later Ch’an texts, which place a greater emphasis on the resulting quality of mind that arises in such a state (JAN 1989, pp. 38–46).

There is also a tendency in Ch’an writings to inflate and generalize the significance of *wu hsin* and *wu nien* terminology, and use it as a metaphor standing for the whole process of practice and attainment. Shen Hui particularly reflects this tendency.

Good friends, those who are still remaining in the state of learning, should illuminate the arising of the mind, when you are aware of the arising. When the arising mind has perished, the illumination will be eliminated by itself. This is No-thought. This No-thought is identical with the negation of all realms. It will not be No-thought even if there is a single realm that still remains.

(JAN 1989, p. 46)

My argument here is that whatever centrist or absolutist connotations were attached to the concepts of emptiness, Buddha nature, and no-mind in the Tathāgatagarbha texts, these connotations were largely ignored or rejected in later Ch’an writings. Up to a point Keenan’s simplification of the complexities of Chinese interpretations of these concepts is understandable, since to deal adequately with them is beyond the scope of one paper. What is illegitimate is to

derive normative conclusions about the moral status of Ch'an and Zen practice on the basis of such abbreviated accounts. Equally suspect is Keenan's imputation of a dubious moral position to Takuan and his successors, supposedly from the standpoint of a Yogācāra moral position. Far from being centrist or monistic, Takuan's use of *mushin* emphasizes a flowing, responsive quality of mind. As LISHKA rightly points out, Takuan is concerned with showing how the mind functions from a practical viewpoint, and not with an abstract account of the nature of no-mind (1978, p. 144). I suspect that Keenan is too literal in his reading of Takuan's mind and no-mind terminology, causing him to see it as endorsing a centrist or monistic metaphysical position. A passage from Takuan's *Fudōchi shinmyōroku* 不動智神妙錄 [Record of the mysteries of immovable wisdom] should help to correct this impression.

The mind of the no-mind is the same as the previously described original mind; it is a mind free of solidification and settling and discrimination and conceptualization and the like. It extends throughout the entire body, and the mind that moves around and through the complete substance is called the no-mind. This is the mind that is not positioned anywhere. It is not, however, like wood or stone. Not stopping in any position is called the no-mind. In stopping there is something in the mind, but in not stopping on any position there is nothing in the mind. Nothing in the mind is called the mind of no-mind, and is also called no-mind and non-thought.

If one is able to thoroughly practice this mind of no-mind, one will not stop on a single thing, and will not lose a single thing. Constantly like being filled with water, it exists in this body and responds in functioning when needed.

(LISHKA 1978, pp. 155–56;  
TAKUAN 1987, p. 33)

### *Buddhism, Morals, and Martial Arts*

The charge of moral collapse and lack of compassionate understanding that KEENAN levels at Takuan and Zen cannot be substantiated (1989, p. 290). The ethical dimensions of Takuan's works are clearly apparent. They are a characteristic blend of Buddhist and Confucian ethics and methods.

Right-mindedness is a name added temporarily when it manifests itself in external affairs. It is also called human-heartedness.

Benevolence is its function. When we indicate its substance, we say “human-heartedness”; benevolence is a designation we give it temporarily. Human-heartedness, right-mindedness, propriety, wisdom—the substance is the same but the names are different.

These things should be understood as the core of the mind. It is for this reason that the Way of Confucius is said to be that of sincerity and sympathy. Sincerity is the same as “the core of the mind.” Sympathy is the same as “like mind” or “oneness.” If the core of the mind and like-mindedness are achieved, not one in ten thousand affairs will ever turn out poorly.

(TAKUAN 1987, pp. 54–55; cf. 28–32, 38–39)

Keenan must know that moral conduct is fundamental to Zen practice, just as it is to any other Buddhist path. Acceptance of the precepts constitutes the formal starting point of Zen training (DŌGEN 1988, ch. 31, pp. 236–42). The practical basis of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as well as one of its highest goals and ideals, is compassion (*karuṇā*), as exemplified in the career and conduct of the Bodhisattva. Yogācāra, Zen, and all Mahāyāna-based Buddhist traditions subscribe to this ideal. The active operation of compassion by buddhas and bodhisattvas is achieved by “skillful means” (*upāyakaushalya*, 方便 *fang pien / hōben*). It is clear from many Mahāyāna texts that, in applying compassion and skillful means, buddhas and bodhisattvas may be obliged to set aside moral and doctrinal norms in order to effectively teach beings and lead them out of suffering. The *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra / Myōhō-renge-kyō*) contains many examples or paradigm cases of the operation of skillful means in such contexts (PYE 1978, chs. 2, 3, 4). A famous one in chapter three of the sūtra is where the rich householder “lies” to his children to tempt them out of the burning house, promising toy carts which he does not have. The lie is justified because it saves the children (HURVITZ 1976, p. 60). The underlying logic and method of skillful means are apparent in pre-Mahāyāna texts, even though the explicit teaching of the concept is not found. One example is where the Buddha shows the lovesick monk, Nanda, the beauty of the nymphs in a heavenly realm, to break his attachment to his human partner. The trick works, and Nanda renews his efforts in meditation, in order to attain to this realm. As his practice deepens he forgets all about his desires for human or heavenly maidens, and becomes an Arhat (PYE 1978, p. 122).

In later Mahāyāna texts extreme cases of skillful means are em-

ployed, partly I believe, to shock conventional Buddhist hearers/readers out of their prosaic assumptions. This intention is clearly discernible in cases where bodhisattvas are described as changing sex (PAUL 1985, ch. 5). Some texts use ethical or karmic dilemmas to illustrate the notion of skillful means and its ethical adaptability. The *Ta ch'eng fang pien hui* 大乘方便會 (Skillful means in the Mahāyāna) in the Chinese *Mahāratnakūta* collection describes how the Buddha, in a previous life, kills a bandit with a spear to save five hundred traders, and to save the man from the consequences of his intended actions (T 310, 11.604c; see CHANG 1983, pp. 456–57). The same text uses the vivid image of concealed sword mastery (used to protect a caravan of traders) as an illustration of the bodhisattva's use of skillful means and the "sword of wisdom" (T 310, 11.597b; see CHANG 1983, pp. 435–36).<sup>2</sup> The Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* offers some even more extreme cases. The Buddha in a previous life kills some Brahmins who defame the Dharma, to save them from a worse fate in hell. Earlier, the same sūtra approves the principle of taking up arms in defense of the Dharma (T 374, 12.459a–460b & 383b–384a; see also DEMIÉVILLE 1973, pp. 292–98).

It is Asaṅga who comes the closest in Mahāyāna terms to offering a buddhologically coherent account of the theory and practice that underlies such cases. It is important to note that, in his discussions of the bodhisattva's conduct, Asaṅga is prescribing and not just theorizing in relation to purely abstract issues or hypothetical cases. Some scholars have clearly found Asaṅga's arguments "casuistic" and problematic (LA VALLÉE POUSSIN 1929, pp. 202–14). LAMOTTE goes further and attributes a form of Buddhist antinomianism to Mahāyāna in general (1962, p. 415, note 4). It must be acknowledged, however, that Asaṅga's arguments are ethical and soteriological in intent, and take as their starting point an understanding of the

<sup>2</sup> The similarities between some of these skillful means scenarios in texts preserved in Chinese, and the legends of the origins of *Shaolin ch'uan fa*, are striking. Both types of material refer to spiritually or morally heroic figures using martial skills to defend traders, travellers, and in some cases Dharma itself, against bandits in remote and dangerous places. My own view is that there has been a textual or orally mediated influence of the Buddhist ideas and images upon the later legends or "myths of origins" of the Shaolin martial traditions. The romantic appeal of the stories and the fact that they give coherence and Dharmic legitimation to established martial practices are important factors. Further investigation of this relationship is needed. I shall pursue the issues in further publications.

overriding demands of supreme compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*) and the need to activate that compassion through skillful means.

There are certain offenses of nature which the bodhisattva may practice through his skillful means, whereby he commits no fault and indeed produces much merit. For instance, when the bodhisattva sees a thief or bandit ready to kill many hundred beings, even great beings such as śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas. Seeing this he refines his thought and reflects: "If I kill this being I will be reborn in a hell, but I am willing to suffer it. This being may later act in such a way as to avoid hell." Resolving in this way, the bodhisattva, with kind thoughts towards the being, one with him in his heart, with compassionate regard to his future and abhorring his act, kills him. He is free from fault and produces much merit.

So too is the bodhisattva when there are kings or great ministers who are excessively cruel and have no compassion for beings, intent on causing pain to others. Since he has the power, he makes them fall from command of the kingdom where they cause so much demerit; his heart is compassionate, he intends their welfare and happiness. If there are thieves and bandits who take the property of others, or property of the sangha or a stūpa, making it their own to enjoy, the bodhisattva takes it from them, reflecting, "Let not this property be a disadvantage and misfortune to them for a long time." So he takes it and returns it to the sangha or to the stūpa. By this means, the bodhisattva, though taking what is not given, does not have a bad rebirth; indeed, much merit is produced.<sup>3</sup>

(Asaṅga, *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, pp. 165–67)<sup>4</sup>

Such arguments and examples are certainly open to casuistic exploitation, particularly when it is remembered that technically anyone on the Mahāyāna path, even at a low level, is a bodhisattva. It is therefore striking that, in fact, such ideas have rarely been cynically exploited in Asian history, though it would be misleading to suggest that they have never been (DEMIÉVILLE 1973, pp. 282–99). Whatever one thinks of Asaṅga's arguments as justifications for killing and other offenses, they are undoubtedly expressions of a general Mahāyāna ethical position, to which Zen and Yogācāra clearly

<sup>3</sup> With thanks to my colleague David Smith for help with the translation of the Sanskrit text.

<sup>4</sup> For Hsüan-tsang's Chinese translation see T 1579, 30.517b. For a variant translation of the Sanskrit with reference to the Tibetan translations and Tsong-kha-pa's commentary see ASAṄGA 1986, pp. 70–71, 214–15. See also LA VALLÉE POUSSIN 1929, pp. 201–17; ASAṄGA 1973 vol. 2, ch. 6, pp. 212–17; MCFARLANE 1986, pp. 100–102).

subscribe, along with other Mahāyāna-based traditions and lineages. The justification in terms of skillful means clearly applies to the celebrated assassination of the Tibetan king gLang dar ma by the monk dPal gyi rdo rje in 842 CE. The king was violently persecuting the sangha. The monk had to act to protect Dharma and sangha, and save the king from the consequences of his actions (WILLIAMS 1989, p. 190, DEMIÉVILLE 1973, p. 294). The arguments and examples of “direct action” cited above do not seem to be so different in moral intent from Takuan’s swordsman. None of them suggest aloof practitioners, without compassion or with no awareness of ethical action in the world.

Well then, the accomplished man uses the sword but does not kill others. He uses the sword and gives others life. When it is necessary to kill, he kills. When it is necessary to give life, he gives life. When killing, he kills in complete concentration; when giving life, he gives life in complete concentration. Without looking at right and wrong, he is able to see right and wrong; without attempting to discriminate, he is able to discriminate well.

(TAKUAN 1987, p. 81)

The biographies of many eminent swordsmen suggest that Keenan’s charge of a lack of compassion and ethical concern is incorrect. The prompt and skillful action of Kami-Izumi Ise no Kami Hidetsuna (d. 1577) in rescuing a kidnapped child provides a dramatic example. A bandit held a child hostage and threatened its life. The swordsman disguised himself as a monk and, while offering the bandit some food, used his *jū-jutsu* skill to overcome him and save the child (SUZUKI 1959, p. 128). Kurosawa’s portrayal of this incident in his “Seven Samurai” has a more violent conclusion, with the swordsman using the bandit’s own weapon to dispatch him. Whether the incident in either version can be classified as “skillful means” in terms of Asaṅga’s understanding of the term can be debated. What is certain is that the swordsman does not conform to Keenan’s charge of a lack of compassion or lack of ethical awareness.

#### *Ultimatism, Body Awareness, and Authentic Awakening*

Keenan’s ultimatist assumptions have caused him to read into Takuan’s writings and later uses of *mushin*, higher-order claims to Buddhist spiritual attainment, which are not in fact made. Takuan makes

it clear that he is using swordsmanship as an extended analogy for the functioning of the mind in Zen training. He is not saying that the whole of that training is contained within or perfected by sword mastery. Keenan's mistake is surprising, because it is clear that Taku-an was not an accomplished swordsman. There is a difference between Buddhist ultimate attainment and the temporary focus and tranquillity, achieved through the pursuit of a traditional way or discipline such as calligraphy, swordsmanship, archery, or the tea ceremony. It seems to me that the difference was, and is, well understood by most practitioners of the latter. A number of scholars, including LISHKA, have discussed the difference (1978, p. 151; PILGRIM 1977, pp. 290, 303). Unfortunately, Keenan's ultimatism is too limiting, and his "Yogācāra" criteria are much too narrow.

In a Yogācāra context, an experience of no-mind, of no discriminative thinking, may indeed be simply a direct awareness of defiled ālaya consciousness. . . . But body awareness is itself simply an awareness of the defiled ālaya consciousness. It authenticates no true awakening.

(KEENAN 1989, p. 295)

In such a context, the experience of the formless *jhāna* states, or of a devout monk chanting the *nenbutsu* 念仏 or *Hannyashingyō* 般若心經, or a pious donor providing for a monk, are also experiences of defiled ālaya consciousness and authenticate no true awakening (KING 1980, chs. 3–5). Do we therefore dismiss them as illegitimate? Body awareness may also be awareness of defiled ālaya consciousness, but we do not therefore dismiss the practice of Mindfulness of body and Mindfulness of breathing on the Satipatthāna path (NYANAPONIKA 1962, pp. 57–66, 117–20; KING 1980, pp. 64–81). In themselves these attainments also fail to authenticate true awakening.

I have accepted a distinction between the practice and orientation of the Buddhist spiritual elite on the one hand, and the experience of the practitioners of traditional arts and ways on the other. But ultimatism considerations should not lead to the complete dismissal of the role of informal, "spontaneous" or "non-Buddhist," experiences of tranquillity, loss of self, and flashes of insight. Keenan forgets that in traditional accounts, Śākyamuni's initial experience of the tranquillity of meditation, usually identified as first *jhāna*, occurred spontaneously, when he was a boy. It was to this experience that he returned when seated beneath the Bodhi tree as he neared the culmination of his spiritual quest (PREBISH 1975, pp. 11–13).



Keenan would probably protest at a comparison between the Buddha's initial meditative experience, and some of the "spontaneous" meditative and illumined states described in the Chuang Tzu, but the similarities in some cases are compelling (CHUANG TZU 1968, pp. 36, 47-48, 57-58). It is sometimes difficult to avoid reading the Chuang Tzu in a "Buddhist" perspective. On the issue of spontaneity, Keenan, like many others, has misunderstood its nature and function in the Taoist classics and the martial arts. Events and experiences may appear spontaneous, simply because we have insufficient knowledge of their causes or background. Cook Ting's skill with the knife appears effortless and "spontaneous," but has taken many years of practice and reflection to develop (CHUANG TZU 1968, pp. 50-51). Chuang Tzu's immediate or "spontaneous" response to his wife's death was, on reflection, not the most appropriate one, so he changed it (pp. 191-92). Lao Tzu's commander of an army reflects carefully and engages an enemy reluctantly; spontaneity does not really have a place (LAO TZU 1982, pp. 103-107). Despite the fondness of Western writers for the term, "spontaneity" does not adequately translate any term or expression in the above Taoist texts. Graham's literal rendering of *tzu jan* 自然 as "so of itself," and his definition of "follow the Tao" as "respond with awareness (of what is objectively so)," gives a much better sense of these terms (GRAHAM 1983, pp. 8-12). The role of spontaneity in martial arts tends to be exaggerated by non-martial artists. Much training is concerned with the modifying or deconditioning of an instinctive, automatic, or spontaneous response. In terms of technique and tactics, often the above kinds of response leave one most vulnerable. Admittedly, one is aiming to train new responses, which will eventually flow so naturally that they will be *regarded* as spontaneous or automatic, but only in the interpretive view of the observer.

#### *The Moral and Social Dimensions of Martial Arts*

Keenan does acknowledge that there is a moral dimension to much traditional martial arts training, but appears to confine it to an Eastern context. How this moral dimension was achieved and sustained in the light of the supposed adherence to a "head-chopping" view of emptiness and ethical indifference, Keenan does not specify. Typical statements of Buddhist and Confucian principles of restraint, respect, and non-aggression can be found in Chinese Shaolin boxing

texts from the Ming and Ch'ing periods (SMITH 1964, pp. 40–43). Similar moral principles are articulated in classical Bushidō writings and in modern *kendō* training manuals (DRAEGER & WARNER 1982, ch. 3; DRAEGER 1974, ch. 5, pp. 102–11). It would be misleading to suggest that every Shaolin boxer and every Japanese swordsman subscribed to and observed such principles. I have suggested in this paper that he fails to take account of the plurality and diversity of values and approaches to martial training, both East and West. What is certain is that this pluralism will continue, and the practice of martial arts in the West will expand. Given the prescriptive and normative approach that Keenan adopts in parts of his paper, and given his ethical concerns, one would expect him to support martial arts training that does include a moral dimension and does invest the training with a degree of seriousness and responsibility. Historically, and for many contemporary practitioners as well, the moral dimension is provided by elements or combinations of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist values and ethics. To prescriptively disassociate martial arts from such values seems to be surrendering the field to the brutalized, street-fighting approach that Keenan so deplors. Naturally, I have no objection to fellow martial artists rejecting the above alternatives and relating their practice to Christian, Islamic, or Humanist values and principles.

My objection to Keenan's proposal that those seeking a "way" should adopt skiing, kayaking, or wind-surfing, is partly a moral one. His proposal also reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of martial arts training. What is striking about the activities he lists is that they are all deeply individualistic, concerned with the exhilaration of one's own private experience. They entail little or nothing of the engagement with the world that Keenan so values. They lack a sense of tradition or sense of their own history; in short, they lack an ideology. When pursued as competitive or commercial sports they often foster prideful, acquisitive, egocentric, and delusional tendencies, rather than patience, humility, and restraint. Keenan's example of morally and socially deficient high-level athletes is appropriate here (KEENAN 1989, p. 295).

What Keenan overlooks entirely from the practice of martial arts is precisely their social and socializing dimensions. One cannot train to any level of proficiency without continually engaging cooperatively and patiently with a teacher and fellow students. It is not long before even beginners realize that the art they are learning

has a lineage and history that depends on the labors, sacrifices, and generosity of the masters of the past. Serious martial arts training in an appropriate moral framework can foster values and qualities of humility, patience, cooperation, discipline, self-control, mental clarity, and physical health, as well as facilitate the joy of play and non-competitive achievement (BECKER 1982, pp. 19–29, SCHMIDT 1986, pp. 69–74, McFARLANE 1989, pp. 248–50). The acknowledging of this potential is not new. Martial arts training in the East has frequently been encouraged because of these moral and educational benefits. Many of the major teachers and innovators in martial arts in the last hundred years, such as: Kanō Jigorō (*jūdō*), Ueshiba Morihei (*aikidō*), Ōmori Sōgen Rōshi (*kendō*), Cheng Man-ch'ing (*T'ai chi ch'uan*), Funakoshi Gichin (*karate*), have acknowledged these benefits and articulated them in their teaching (DRAEGER 1974, ch. 5–9; UESHIBA Kisshōmaru 1987; STEVENS 1987; ŌMORI 1972; SAYAMA 1982, ch. 6; CHENG 1962; FUNAKOSHI 1981). Unfortunately, with his emphasis on the brutal, pathological, and sometimes fictive aspects of martial arts, Keenan has ignored their contribution. While I have been critical of many of Keenan's points, I have at least accorded his paper the compliment of careful and detailed attention.

#### ABBREVIATION

- T TAKAKUSU Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and WATANABE Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 ed. 1922–33. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏経 [Newly revised Tripiṭaka of the Taishō era]. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō.

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