

## **Fighting Bodhisattvas and Inner Warriors: Buddhism and the Martial Traditions of China and Japan**

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This paper is concerned with the nature of the association between Buddhism and the martial arts traditions of China and Japan. It is common, even in modern times, for traditional martial artists in the Far East to endorse a close association between Buddhism and their own martial practices. Among the large number of martial artists I have interviewed, the majority regard the association between Buddhism and martial arts as historically certain, and many clearly value this association. This applied to those who described themselves as non-believers in Buddhism, as well as those who described themselves as Buddhists.<sup>1</sup> Western practitioners of Chinese or Japanese martial arts tend to acknowledge an historical association, but vary greatly as to whether this is seen as significant now for their current practice. The Chinese style of Shao Lin Ch'uan Fa (Fist Way of Shao Lin) and its hundreds of variations, are traced back to the monks of the Henan Shao Lin temple. The core style is invariably traced back to Bodhidharma himself.<sup>2</sup> This "history" is endorsed by virtually all practitioners of Shao Lin "Kung Fu" styles practised today, as well as by many exponents of Japanese and Okinawan styles. It is of course impossible to corroborate such a history. My own view is that the issue of whether Shao Lin Ch'uan Fa originated with Bodhidharma and his disciples is largely irrelevant. The significant point is that by the Ming dynasty, there was a widespread belief that this was the case, and an established tradition of martial training at the temple appears to have been in place. This tradition was widely celebrated in the popular culture of late Imperial China.<sup>3</sup> Popular ballads, opera and literature are full of such accounts.

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<sup>1</sup> These findings are based on interview and questionnaire responses from leading martial artists as well as ordinary practitioners from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Japan.

<sup>2</sup> D.F. Draeger & R.W. Smith, *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts*, Tokyo, 1980, 44.

<sup>3</sup> J. Zhang, *Shaolin Temple*, Zhong Zhou Arts and Classics Press, 1983, 140-156.

These traditions continue to be celebrated in contemporary popular culture. Kung Fu movies and TV shows continue to attract massive audiences amongst Chinese communities. The focus on religious and supernatural themes in these productions is, I think, increasing. The story of the destruction of the Shao Lin temple under the Manchus, and the survival of the Five Ancestors and subsequent secret transmission of their skills, is incorporated into the myths of origins of nearly all Shao lin kung fu styles, as well as occurring in the initiatory rituals of many sworn brotherhoods and Triad groups in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In his fascinating account of Kung Fu brotherhoods in Hong Kong and Guangzhou in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Daniel Amos focusses on the social and economic marginal status of these groups. He identifies the importance and persistence of the image of the “Knight Errant” as a model for the symbolic resistance and dissent which is evident among the brotherhoods. He acknowledges the supposed Shao lin origins of these groups and their styles, and notes the persistence of Buddhist motifs such as the Five Ancestors and Eighteen Lohan, in their mythic and ritual narratives. Unfortunately, he does not examine the background to these beliefs, nor does he examine the ways in which heroic and Buddhist motifs and ideas became so closely associated.<sup>5</sup>

Some western scholars, as well as some western believers in Buddhism, find the notion of an association between Buddhism and martial arts deeply problematic. Edward Conze was one such critic, although much of his criticism focussed on his contempt for Herrigel, the “fanatical Nazi” and author of the greatly over-rated “Zen and the Art of Archery”.<sup>6</sup> More recently John Keenan has criticised the perceived association between Buddhism and martial arts, and more specifically, how that association is appropriated in the West.<sup>7</sup> I do not intend to inflict on members of the Buddhist Forum a continuation of my long-running debate with John Keenan.<sup>8</sup> What I want to do in this paper is examine the nature of the association between Buddhism and Eastern martial arts. This

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<sup>4</sup> R.J. Antony, “Pirates, Bandits and Brotherhoods: A Study of Crime and Law in Kwantung Province, 1796–1839”, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawai, 1988, 273–278; K.T. Chao & J.E. Weakland, *Secret Techniques of Wing Chun Kung Fu*, Boulder, 1983, 5–13.

<sup>5</sup> D.M. Amos, “Marginality and the Hero’s Art: Martial Artists in Hong Kong and Guangzhou”, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> E. Conze, “Review of T.O. Ling, *The Buddha*” in *JCP*, 2, 1974, 94.

<sup>7</sup> J.P. Keenan, “Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts. A Yogacara Critique of Mushin (no-mind)”, *JJRS*, 16, 1989, 285–98; “The Mystique of Martial Arts: A Response to Professor McFarlane”, *JJRS*, 17, 1990, 421–32.

<sup>8</sup> S. McFarlane, “Mushin, Morals and Martial Arts: A Discussion of Keenan’s Yogācāra Critique”, *JJRS*, 17, 1990, 397–420; “The Mystique of Martial Arts: A Rejoinder to Professor Keenan’s Response”, *JJRS*, 18, 1991, 355–368.

involves considering some of the textual, literary, dramatic and ethnographic material which provides the background to such associations. I shall conclude by suggesting the beginnings of an explanation as to why such an association came about and why it has been so persistent.

In thematic terms, the nature of the association between Buddhism and Sino-Japanese martial arts could be summarised under the following categories:

1. Discipline and asceticism
2. Fear and death
3. Mental cultivation
4. Ethics
5. Magic and ritual empowerment

In this paper, I want to concentrate on the material in items 2 and 5, so my comments on the other items will be brief.

### *Discipline and asceticism*

There are some similarities between the life of a warrior and the life of the Buddhist monk, as has been noted by D.T. Suzuki, when he accounts for the appeal of Zen for the warrior classes of Kamakura Japan. As he observes, there is a similar concern with discipline and the need for indifference to one's personal interests and comforts.<sup>9</sup> What is not noted by Suzuki, is the fact that this similarity was apparent long before the Kamakura period. According to the traditional accounts, the Buddha himself was a warrior by birth and training, and was an accomplished swordsman, horseman and archer. This is to some extent supported by the extensive use of martial imagery and metaphors in the early Buddhist texts. Just one dramatic example will suffice:

“Having slain mother, father, two warrior kings, and having destroyed a country together with its army, ungrieving goes the Brahman. Having slain mother and father, two Brahman kings and destroying the perilous filth, ungrieving goes the Brahman.”<sup>10</sup>

Of course these statements are all metaphorical. The commentary explains that the Brahman or Arahant is actually destroying craving, conceit, false views and attachment to sense objects, but the use of such imagery is I believe, intentionally arresting.

Not surprisingly, as a member of the warrior class by birth and training, the Buddha seems to have been at ease when dealing with kings and warriors. For example, in his reported intervention in the imminent battle between the

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<sup>9</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Princeton, 1959, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Dhammapada, tr. by Narada Maha Thera, Maha Bodhi Society, India, 1970, vv. 294–5; see also vv. 33, 40, 103, 222.

Shakyans and Koliyans in a dispute over water rights, he averts bloodshed. He asks a question which has practical and strategic as well as moral implications: “Which is more important to you, the water or the lives of your best warriors?”<sup>11</sup> The use of martial imagery is all the more striking in view of the peaceful orientation of his teaching.

### *Death and how to overcome it*

This includes overcoming the psychologically damaging fear of death. Buddhist practice has its own special concern with death. *Nirvāṇa* is the “deathless state”. The use of the themes of death and decay in systematic meditation, the generally accepted ritual expertise of the Saṅgha in dealing with death, along with the reports of monks’ stoical indifference to their own end, were greatly respected in Chinese and Japanese military and martial arts circles. D.T. Suzuki gives a very convincing account of the nature of the appeal of Zen to the Kamakura warrior elite. Much of this interest revolved around the overcoming of cowardice, fear and death.<sup>12</sup>

### *Mental cultivation*

The role of Buddhism as a tradition which stresses the control and understanding of mental processes was clearly appreciated by more reflective warriors and martial artists. The force of the example used by the Buddha in demonstrating the superiority of mental action over physical action would not be lost on such people. In a discussion with Upāli, a Jain householder, the Buddha illustrates his position by pointing out that, while a swordsman could kill only a limited number of people in a town such as Nālanda in a set time, a man trained in meditation could obliterate the whole town using his psychic power, thus proving that mental action is more powerful than physical action.<sup>13</sup> The illustration used by the Buddha seems to have been chosen almost intentionally to shock the Jain apologist. Of course, the Buddha’s fundamental point is that mental acts of ill-will are more blameworthy than physical actions. My point here is that military and martial metaphors seem to have readily come to mind in the teaching of this former warrior.

It is of course in the writings of Takuan (1573–1645) that the relationship between swordsmanship and meditation are explicitly addressed. In his *Fudōchi shinmyōroku* (Record of the Mysteries of Immovable Wisdom), he emphasises the need for the “immovable mind” (*fudōshin*) or the “mind of no mind” (*mushin*)

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<sup>11</sup> See: E.W. Burlingame, tr., *Buddhist Legends: Dhammapada Commentary*, Part 3, London, PTS, 1969, 71 or *Jātaka* 536, ed. by Cowell, vol. 5, 220.

<sup>12</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *op. cit.*, 1959, 64–79.

<sup>13</sup> I.B. Horner, tr., *Middle Length Sayings*, 2, 42–3.

*no shin*) which flows and responds without getting “caught” or distracted by one attack, technique or opponent.<sup>14</sup> The writings of Takuan have been particularly influential. Initially, this was helped by his association with the powerful Yagyū family and the third Tokugawa Shogun. Subsequently, Takuan’s writings have had a formative influence on many Japanese martial arts, and help to explain the Zen orientation of many of these traditions. Unfortunately this has led to a neglect of the important role of the Shingon mikkyō tradition of Buddhism. In certain schools of swordsmanship such as the highly respected *Tenshin shōden ryu*, presently represented by Master Otake, Shingon ritual forms an integral part of the training. Master Otake continues to practice ritual healing and exorcism through the use of *mantra*, ritual and visualisation.<sup>15</sup>

### *Ethics*

What Buddhism brings to martial arts in these respects are ethical dimensions over and above Confucian public ethical values such as propriety, loyalty, duty. Conventional Buddhist ethical teachings, which differ little from traditional Confucian ethics, do play a part in Chinese and Japanese martial teachings. The following passage from a work on Shao Lin Chuan Fa provides a typical example of this kind of conventional ethical teaching. The specific precepts are attributed to the monk Chueh Yuan of the Ming dynasty.

1. A student must practise without interruption.
2. Boxing must be used only for legitimate self-defence.
3. Courtesy and prudence must be shown all teachers and elders.
4. A student must be forever kind, honest and friendly to all his colleagues.
5. In travelling, a boxer should refrain from showing his art to the common people even to the extent of refusing challenges.
6. A boxer must never be bellicose.
7. Wine and meat must never be tasted.
8. Sexual desire cannot be permitted.
9. Boxing should not be taught rashly to non-Buddhists, lest it produce harm. It can only be transmitted to one who is gentle and merciful.
10. A boxer must eschew aggressiveness, greed, and boasting.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> W.S. Takuan, Sōhō, tr. W.S. Wilson, *The Unfettered Mind: Writings of the Zen Master to the Sword Master*, Tokyo, 1987, 29–36.

<sup>15</sup> H. Reid, & M. Croucher, *The Way of the Warrior*, London, 1983, 137–156; see also M. Kiyota & H. Kinoshita, *Japanese Martial Arts and American Sports: Cross-Cultural on Means to Personal Growth*, Tokyo, 1990, 17–28.

<sup>16</sup> R.W. Smith, *Secrets of Shaolin Temple Boxing*, Tokyo, Rutland Vermont, 1964, 42–3.

The influence of Buddhist ethical teachings on Chinese and Japanese martial arts is not confined to the issuing of straightforward moral injunctions. Buddhist texts and teachers through the centuries have confronted issues of violence and aggression in challenging and sometimes surprising ways. This is particularly so in the Mahāyāna traditions of Buddhism, which explicitly articulate “skilful means” (*upāyakauśalya/fang pien/hōben*)<sup>17</sup> as a central concept, and employ it as an important method of teaching.

Most of this section on ethics will, therefore, be concerned with the notion of “skilful means” and the way it has been appropriated in the popular cultures of China and Japan. The concept of skilful means is a sophisticated soteriological teaching with important ethical implications. As such, it is very much a product of advanced, spiritually orientated Buddhist teachings. This is the way it is to be interpreted in Buddhist Mahāyāna texts. As we shall see, these texts often articulate the principle of skilful means in vivid and dramatic ways. The concept and its means of articulation have, therefore, stimulated the Chinese literary and dramatic imagination. The use of violent examples and martial motifs occurs in Buddhist Canonical texts. This clearly was one factor which stimulated the popular appropriation of these concepts and images.

I shall begin with two stories of great Japanese swordsmen; as far as I am aware the stories are true. The first concerns Kami-idzumi Ise no kami Hidetsuna (d. 1577), who was the founder of the Shinkage-ryu. While passing through a remote mountain village, he found the villagers in great distress. An outlaw had taken refuge in a deserted house and was holding a baby as hostage and threatening to kill it. The swordsman weighed up the situation, and exchanged his clothes with those of a wandering Zen monk, and had the monk shave his head. Disguised as a monk he appeared no threat to the outlaw, and while offering him food he used his *ju-jutsu* skill to overcome him and save the child. As Ise no Kami returned the clothes to their owner, the monk declared him to be a true swordsman and gave him his *rakusu* (square of cloth worn by Zen monks, symbolising the Buddhist robe). Ise no Kami wore it for the rest of his life.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Sanskrit term *upāyakauśalya* is translated as *fang pien* in Chinese and pronounced *hoben* in Japanese. A whole range of English terms have been used to translate it, including: expedient means, expedient devices, expediency, tactfulness, convenience, methods, tricks, ingenuity. The best account in English of the concept and its meaning in Buddhist texts is M. Pye, *Skilful Means*, London, 1978.

<sup>18</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959, 128–29. Notice how the traditional account of the incident given by Suzuki differs slightly from the version Kurosawa creates in his superb film *The Seven Samurai*. In Kurosawa’s version, the hero kills the kidnapper with his own (i.e., the kidnapper’s sword). In the traditional version, he merely arrests the outlaw and surrenders him to the mercy of the villagers. Of course the kidnapper dies in both versions, but in the traditional one, not directly by the hand of the samurai. Such distinctions can be important from a Buddhist ethical or karmic point of view.

In another incident, Tsukahara Bokuden (d. 1572) founder of the Shinto-ryu, was in a boat crossing lake Biwa. Also on board was a rough and arrogant samurai, boasting about his skill. Bokuden ignored him which seemed to annoy the bully. He demanded a response from Bokuden, who quietly replied that his art was one of not defeating others, but of not being defeated. This puzzled and angered the bully still further who demanded what *ryu* he followed. Bokuden replied that he followed the no sword school. The bully demanded why he carried a sword. Bokuden replied that his sword was for cutting through ego not for killing others. The bully was angered still further and declared. “So you will fight me with no sword?” Bokuden accepted the challenge and suggested they take the boat to a nearby island to settle their contest. As they approached the island, Bokuden took off his swords and the samurai jumped out of the boat and drew his sword ready to fight. Immediately, Bokuden pushed the boat back out to sea, leaving the samurai stranded. As he pulled away he declared: “This is my no-sword school.”<sup>19</sup>

It seems to me that the tricks or stratagems described in these incidents are influenced by the concept and practice of skilful means. It can also be argued that these cases are themselves examples of skilful means as understood by some Mahāyāna texts and authorities. Mahāyāna Buddhist texts teach that skilful means arise from the wisdom and compassion of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They are the methods, tricks or strategies used by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and wise teachers, to lead deluded beings out of ignorance, grasping and suffering, and into higher levels of understanding. These methods often involve the Bodhisattva intervening with unconventional or apparently immoral acts in order to save beings from their own egoism and delusions. Some of the earliest Mahāyāna examples of skilful means occur in the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra/Myōhō-rengē-kyō*). A famous one in chapter three of this *sūtra* concerns a rich householder whose house is on fire. His three young sons are so happy playing with their toys that they refuse to come out of the house. To get them out and save their lives the father promises them a toy cart each. In reality, he does not have the carts but the lie is justified because it saves his children. Later, he makes amends by giving his sons a real full size cart to play in.

The symbolism of the story which is explained in the *sūtra* is quite complex. Briefly, the householder is the Buddha, the burning house is worldly existence

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<sup>19</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *op. cit.*, 73–5. Notice how this famous incident is used in Bruce Lee’s film *Enter the Dragon*.

(*samsāra*), in which deluded and distracted beings will spiritually perish unless they are given help. The three toy carts promised by the father are the Buddhist teachings, ways or vehicles (*yāna*): Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva. All these have provisional status, and they are effective in delivering deluded beings from the “burning house”, but they are not ultimately real. The real cart given at the end is the Buddhayāna which the *sūtra* sometimes equates with the Mahāyāna. The moral of the story is that the father’s lie is justified because it saves his children. Also, the Buddha’s teaching of ways or doctrines, which are not ultimately true, is justified because it is these teachings which are appropriate to the beings concerned, and are effective in delivering them from suffering.

In other Mahāyāna texts, more extreme transgressions of conventional Buddhist moral norms are justified in terms of the demands of compassion and skilful means. An early text on skilful means, translated into Chinese in the later Han dynasty (between 25–220 AD), describes how a Brahmin convert to Buddhism is part of a caravan of traders when he meets a friend who is scouting for a gang of 500 bandits who attack such caravans. The bandit warns his friend of the ambush so he can save himself, and the Buddhist kills him.<sup>20</sup> He reasons that if he warns the traders, they will kill the bandit and carry the *karmic* responsibility for his death. But if he does not warn them, the scout will guide the bandits to attack the traders and there will be great loss of life. The Buddhist therefore, takes the course which is the lesser of three evils and accepts responsibility for his action.

Later Mahāyāna texts use the same kind of ethical or *karmic* dilemmas in similar situations to illustrate the notion of skilful means and its ethical adaptability. A text in the Chinese Mahāratnakūṭa collection named “Skilful Means in the Mahāyāna” (*Ta ch’eng fang pien hui*) translated in 419 provides some fascinating examples. It describes how the Buddha, in a previous existence, was leading some traders on a voyage when he learned that one of their number was planning to kill and rob them, in order to prevent this, he kills the man with a spear.<sup>21</sup>

The same text uses the following vivid image to express the Bodhisattva’s use of the strategy of skilful means:

“Good man, as an illustration, consider a fighter, who hides the sword he carries and escorts a group of travellers. None of the travellers know this man’s secret stratagem. They despise and pity him, showing no respect,

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<sup>20</sup> T 156, vol. 3, 161b–162a; see also P. Demiéville, “Le bouddhisme et la guerre”, in *Choix d’études bouddhiques* (1929–1970), Leiden, 1973, 293.

<sup>21</sup> T 310, vol. II, p. 604c; see also G.C.C. Chang, *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, London, 1983, 456–7.



and say to one another: ‘He has no weapons and no partner, and is not even strong or powerful. He cannot even save himself from danger; how can he help others? It is impossible for him to defeat any bandit. He will certainly run into trouble.’ When a gang of bandits suddenly appear from an uninhabited marsh, the fighter stands ground firmly and draws his hidden sword. In one move, he kills them, and conceals his sword. In the same way, good man, a Bodhisattva who practises skilful means conceals his sword of wisdom and joins other beings, amusing himself with the five sense pleasures as a skilful means to convert those beings. When people see the Bodhisattva amuse himself with pleasure, not knowing it to be skilful means, they pity him and think him dissipated, saying: ‘Such a person cannot save even himself from saṃsāra, let alone all sentient beings. It is impossible for him to defeat demons.’ However, the Bodhisattva is skilled at using skilful means and the sword of wisdom. When he has attained his object [of saving beings], he will, with the sword of wisdom, cut through all hindrances and attain a pure Buddhaland...”<sup>22</sup>

I realise that the above account with its highly dramatic imagery sounds more like something from a Chinese or Japanese warrior story, or even a Kurosawa movie, but it is assuredly from an ancient Buddhist text to be found in the Chinese Tripiṭaka. The importance and popularity of the text in China is demonstrated by the fact that it was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese three times between 300 and 1000 AD.

The notion of skilful means is of course part of an advanced spiritual teaching, and was initially directed to serious Buddhist practitioners, who were already observing the Buddhist precepts and engaged in the systematic practice of meditation. It was never intended to be invoked as a blanket justification for moral transgressions, killing and violence. Despite the obvious potential of such a teaching for exploitation, and the possible use of it to justify offences which are not in accord with Buddhist wisdom and compassion, this appears to be quite rare in Asian history. Of course, actions which are not in accord with Buddhist precepts, or do not reflect wisdom and compassion, have taken place throughout Asian history; but the invoking of the concept of skilful means to justify individual acts is unusual. It is also clear that the Buddhist texts themselves, and later discussions by authoritative masters such as Asaṅga (fourth to fifth century AD), do tend to extend the notion of skilful means to a wider range of contexts, not in order to cynically exploit the teaching but because it was believed to be appropriate to the circumstances. There is a tendency in Mahāyāna Buddhism to

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<sup>22</sup> T 310, vol. 11, p. 597b.

generalise and universalise key teachings, both conceptually and socially. Hence, values and practices which in archaic Buddhism would have been thought appropriate for monks are extended in the Mahāyāna and made available to lay people. It is also true that skilful means does enter the language and thinking in Chinese and Japanese cultures in contexts which are not overtly Buddhist. Michael Pye is the only western scholar to address this aspect of skilful means.<sup>23</sup>

The great Buddhist philosopher Asanga was clearly aware of the dangers of exploiting such teachings, but he was prepared to invoke the concept of skilful means and apply it in the appropriate circumstances. The following passage from his *Bodhisattvabhūmi* provides one of the clearest examples of this. The text has survived in Sanskrit as well as in Chinese and Tibetan translations. The translation here is from the Sanskrit.

There are certain offences of nature which the Bodhisattva may practise through his skilful 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 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 toward the being, one with him in his heart, with compassionate regard for his future and abhorring his act, he 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 the property of the Saṅgha 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 Saṅgha 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>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> M. Pye, *Skilful Means*, London, 1978, ch 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, ed. by U. Wogihara, Tokyo, 1930–36, 165–7. For another translation based on the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts see M. Tatz, *Asaṅga’s Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary by Tsong-kha-pa*, New York, 1986, 70–71, 214–215. For Hsüan Tsang’s Chinese translation, see T 1579, vol. 30, 517b. See also E. Lamotte, *La somme du grande véhicule d’Asaṅga*, Louvain, 1973, 2, 212–217.

Asanga does seem to understand skilful means as a practical teaching and not purely as a theoretical or doctrinal concept. It is interesting to note how these skilful means passages, in texts which are acknowledged to be Indian in origin, describe conditions similar to those which the legends/histories say precipitated the development of the “Buddhist” martial art of Shao Lin Ch’uan Fa. The Mahāyāna texts speak of bandits, pirates and other malefactors threatening the lives of and property of traders, travellers and in some cases monks. These texts provide Buddhist or “Dharmic” justifications for violent measures to prevent attacks and save lives, as well as saving beings from terrible punishments. The legends/histories of Shao Lin Ch’uan Fa speak of exactly the same kinds of threats, and describe Buddhist monks developing the methods and skills to counter them and protect the Dharma. “Protecting the Dharma” in this context means protecting the lives of the monks and therefore protecting their wisdom and knowledge, and of course protecting the texts and other property of the Saṅgha.

Of course, the actual incursions of Buddhist monks into political and military affairs in Asian history tend to be more difficult to justify in terms of Buddhadharmā. They are rather less spiritually idealised than the traditional legends. Issues of political power and economic expediency are important factors in how these incursions took place, as well as how they are subsequently interpreted by official and sectarian historians.<sup>25</sup>

Returning to the similarity between the skilful means scenarios in Mahāyāna texts and the legends/histories of Shao Lin Ch’uan Fa, there are four main alternative explanations for this:

a) The circumstances are coincidental and have no bearing on each other. Bandits and pirates were common throughout the ancient world, and can be expected to appear in religious texts and romantic histories. This explanation leaves unanswered such questions as: Why is such violent imagery employed in these Buddhist texts? Why did some Chinese monks and monasteries engage in martial training and military action? Why did legends and histories concerning the nature of this engagement emerge in medieval China, permeated with Buddhist themes, motifs and references?

b) Martial arts skills were developed by Buddhist monks in India and Central Asia for either defensive or spiritual/ritual purposes and were transmitted to China along with all the other elements of Buddhist teaching and culture such as medical traditions, new styles of textual, linguistic and rhetorical learning and

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<sup>25</sup> For some examples and discussions of these issues, see P. Demieville, *op. cit.*, 293–299.

argument. Not that China lacked indigenous forms of all these things, but the Buddhist/Indian forms provided supplementary and variant dimensions to them.

c) Martial skills were developed by Chinese and Central Asian Buddhists at such an early stage in the development of Mahāyāna textual traditions, that knowledge of the arts and imagery drawn from them was transmitted to India and Central Asia, and influenced the imagery and examples employed by the Mahāyāna teachers there. This explanation suggests that the martial and monastic connection was known and accepted at least by Mahāyānists as unproblematic. It also suggests that the medieval Chinese legends and histories accurately reflect much earlier historical realities. This seems to be unlikely if not impossible because the whole explanation is full of major difficulties and unwarranted assumptions.

d) The textual examples and their underlying moral message were well known in China as they were transmitted in textual forms and through oral teachings. These were appropriated either consciously or inadvertently (or elements of both) and incorporated into the legends and myths of the origins of Shao Lin Ch'uan Fa. This is the explanation which I think is the most likely. I doubt whether the legends and myths alone created the traditions and practices of Shao Lin Ch'uan Fa, but I think they helped to give such practices greater coherence and legitimation in Buddhist terms. The real nature of the origins of "warrior monks" and of Shao Lin Ch'uan Fa in China are very vague and indeterminate. My own view is that imperial patronage and the economic ambitions of monastic communities in the T'ang dynasty (618–907) played an important role.

The warrior monk as a heroic or anti-heroic figure in Chinese literature, ballads and opera, is as popular and important as the knight errant or the Taoist magician. Some of the examples of this motif again reflect an influence from the Buddhist textual traditions. Almost certainly such an influence developed indirectly. The composers and compilers of ballads and operas did not systematically study Buddhist texts looking for material. But they were exposed to Buddhist popular preaching and *sūtra* exposition. Since the skilful means scenarios in the texts are partly employed for their capacity to shock and entertain the hearer, it is not surprising that such stories became part of the currency of popular Buddhist teaching in China. The following passage is taken from a late twelfth-century dramatic ballad, *The West Wing* by Dong Jie-yuan. In this passage, a warrior monk named "Dharma Acuity" urges the community to resist the outlaws who have surrounded the monastery. As we shall see, his rousing speech to his fellow monks conflates Buddhist moral terms and images with a bloodthirsty call to arms, and stirring battle-cry. There is clearly intended ironic humour in the juxtaposition of Buddhist principles and violence. The outcome is

particularly violent, as one would expect in a piece of popular entertainment. The ballad as a whole is a love story, with the violence thrown in for dramatic contrast. The skilful means scenarios of the Buddhist texts described earlier are rather less vivid in description, but the underlying dilemma for the Buddhist participants is the same. How to confront a threat to the Dharma and its representatives, as well as threats to the safety of innocent beings. The similarities are so close in the case of this ballad and the skilful means illustration from the previously quoted *Mahāratnakūṭa/Ta ch'eng fang pien hui* that a familiarity with the text seems to be a possibility. This cannot be established, but the ballad reflects an understanding of the contradiction inherent in the notion of a warrior monk. And he skilfully exploits it to humorous dramatic effect. Notice also the interest in Dharma Acuity's near magical martial skill, and the comparison to a Vajrapāṇi (temple spirit guardian).

From "West wing" *zhugongdiao* by Dong Jie-yuan:

(Sung) "The abbot declared: 'What course is right? The mutinied soldiers are camped at our gates, and we cannot oppose them in fight.' A monk among the crowd, in a voice thunder-loud, called out stem and clear: 'Grand Master, have no fear! We are bonzes three hundred and more, yet all we can do now is natter and jaw! What's the use of our corporal munificence? Eating our dough wasn't worth half a pence, if it's filled us with so little gumption and sense!' He hitched up the hem of his one-sleeved habit, and raising in his hand his three-foot knife (sworn to harm no plant and take no life), he roared: 'I am ready to butt with the brigand horde!' Who was this monk? Why, none other than Dharma Acuity. Acuity was, you see, descended from Mongol warrior tribes to the west of Shensi, and as a youth had been very fond of archery and fencing, and delighted in hunting expeditions, and would often sneak off into those foreign lands to engage in robbery and plunder. So he was a bold and warlike man. One day, when his father and mother had suddenly perished, he awoke to the fickleness and shallow insubstantiality of the ways of the mundane world, and left his home to become a monk at this monastery.

'Any man worth his salt sticks to his ideals come what may! Now we have encountered this rebellion, we cannot just sit back and watch it, can we! That's not the attitude that a goodly man of virtue takes! I would like those of my brother monks who have the courage to join me, and if we unite our strength in the endeavour to destroy the brigands, we shall find it as easy as "striking the withered stalk, which severs of its own accord". In all their great host, there are only one or two of them who are actually making the rebellion. All the rest have gone along with them willy-nilly,

greedy for the gain they can see in front of their noses, but forgetting how easily things can swing to other, disastrous extremes. If we put it to them quite plainly what they have to gain and what they may lose, it is bound to damp their martial ardour, and make them contribute to their own collapse.'

(Sings) He cannot read the holy scriptures; his penances, he cannot recite. He is neither pure of error, nor clean of sullyng spleen and spite. All he has is sky high pluck and fight! A pair of unblinking eyes there stare that can take away life without touching a hair! Since he vowed the Buddhists' abstentions, the iron quarterstaff he holds has stayed many years unpolished, and dimming grime its gleam enfolds; the thou-shalt-not-kill cleaver slung at his waist was once a tiger-chopper, a dragon-lopper, death's taste, but after he clove to the law that "all living things abhor a destroyer of life", that knife hung on the wall, there lingered long unfingered, its ram's horn hilt, solid, tough, now cased in dust, its snowy blade and frost-sharp point, jagged, rough, now laced in rust. He bellows: 'Monkish ranks, who among you will join me in arms? I only beg you to have no qualms—you will suffer no slightest hurts or harms!' Inwardly, he muses with much relish: When my pacifist knife comes into play, it will not be salad on the menu today, and my iron staff should acquire a good polish!' He stations himself at the end of the cloister, and proceeds his monkish men to muster: 'Daring, dogged, doughty lads, which of you will dare? We are going to rend the rebels asunder, reduce their rabble to surrender. Just you roar battle cries like thunder. Surely you see no danger there!' 'When I open the gates, all you need do is assist with your bellicose yelling. While my gentle knife that cherishes life will be busily bandits a felling...'

Murderous mettle became the mind to succour mankind, and highwayman's heroism turned instead into rebel-vanquishing valour. Acuity called out in a loud voice: 'Our creed commands, and we monks serve. If there be any among you who dare to help me repel the rogues, come out to the bottom of the hall.' In a trice, there were nearly three hundred men down at the end of the hall, all holding their white staffs and their 'no-killing' knives, and responding to his call with the words: 'We are willing to follow you, sir bonze, and fight to the death!'

(Sings) Submit them to your careful scrutiny: there is Dharma Acuity, a sight to be seen! Bristling brow, grim air, and grotesque mien. His buffalo shoulders are spacious, his tiger loins long and thick. He grasps a three-foot sabre and wields an iron stick. Mounted on his charger stout, he

looks a living icon, with its teeth knocked out! He has only a tunic of padding to wear, no helmet or armour of iron-plate. He is a strapping eight-footer of heroic might, like some swashbuckler Zilu turned cenobite, or some Vajrapāṇi with tonsured pate. And his followers ... over two hundred, all bearing weaponry odd and unique. Men with deepset burning eyes, of limber limbs and fierce physique. Some grasp a kitchen salad-knife, some hold a pastry rolling-pin. They thump their great temple-drums like thunder, their dinner-bells clang with resounding din. Armourless, they wrap round them instead altar banners, baldachin banderoles, and for helmets, they pop on the top of their head their clerical begging bowls! (Some untoured novices, with wild flowing hair, don iron-brown cassocks, the sole iron they wear!) They march away from their beadsman cells, measureless valour in their air revealed, and declare: ' We gladly volunteer to war with might and main upon the battlefield.'<sup>26</sup>

Although very vividly represented in this ballad, the violent outcome is the same as that described in the skilful means scenarios in the Ratnakūṭa. It is of course impossible to prove a direct literary influence from Buddhist text to literary ballad. Such a link is not necessary. There is certainly in the ballad an awareness of the contradiction inherent in the notion of a "warrior monk", and there does seem to be a general awareness of the precedents for violence in the Buddhist tradition. Storytellers and dramatists were certainly aware of the dramatic potential of such material.

In one sense of course the link between the passages in the Ratnakūṭa and the popular dramatic ballad quoted above, is tenuous. One could argue that the elite soteriological concerns of the texts have no resemblance to a literary piece written for entertainment. The supposedly real incidents concerning Tsukahara Bokuden and Kami-idzumi ise no Kami Hidetsuna could also be said to be totally different from the hypothetical or fictive scenarios described in the Buddhist texts; the latter being intended for spiritual and moral edification. Such differences cannot in reality be maintained. The theoretical distinction between "elite" and "popular" becomes difficult to maintain when a religion and its values and key images are examined in context. As we have seen, even when considering Buddhist texts as mediums for teaching Dharma, popular imagery, dramatic effects and entertainment value are important factors in determining the popularity of the text as a teaching medium. The human imagination and response are far too complex to be categorised into simple units such as "elite/popular" or "soteriological/communal". Popular images, motifs and

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<sup>26</sup> W. Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama*, London, 1976, 36–8.

concerns pervade Buddhist texts, and such material certainly influenced the style of teaching Buddhism in the Chinese context. The *pien wen* (transformation texts), studied recently in such detail by Mair, demonstrate how themes such as magical and supernatural intervention interweave in popular Buddhist moral tales.<sup>27</sup> Though designed as much for popular entertainment as for moral and spiritual edification, these *pien wen* were important vehicles for the transmission of Buddhist teachings to ordinary people.<sup>28</sup>

Against the objection that the stories of Bokuden and Hidetsuna are real events, and cannot be compared to the hypothetical illustrations in the Buddhist texts, it should be pointed out that throughout most of the history of the transmission of these texts, the incidents described in them would have been understood as real by their hearers or readers. The warrior incidents from the history of Japanese swordmanship quickly entered Japanese martial lore and became instructional vehicles in their own right. They, and the many stories like them, are used even today to demonstrate the skill, subtlety, heroism and moral uprightness of the true martial artist. As such, they reappear in modern movies such as those of Kurasawa and Lee, dramatically re-enforcing the same moral and martial message.

One particular incident in Asian history which does seem to conform to the textual precedents, and particularly to Asaṅga's understanding of them, is the assassination of king gLang dar rna of Tibet by the monk dPal gyi rdo je in 842. The king was violently persecuting the Buddhist Saṅgha, so the monk, who was an advanced yogi, rode past on horseback armed with bow and arrow and killed the king with a single shot. He is celebrated by Tibetan Buddhists as a great hero and defender of the Dharma. The justification for his action was that it was necessary to save the Dharma in Tibet and to save the king from the consequences of further evil actions.

When we consider the ideas and images presented in the above texts, we can better understand how Zen Master Takuan (1573–1645) could see such a close relationship between central elements of Buddhist practice, the arts of swordmanship and the demands of the warrior life. Contrary to what is sometimes supposed, there are important moral dimensions in Takuan's thought.<sup>29</sup> These are in part addressed with a blend of Buddhist and Confucian ethics which

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<sup>27</sup> V.H. Mair, *T'ang Transformation Texts*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, ch. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Their role in influencing Chinese dramatic styles and Chinese fiction has been discussed by Dolby, *op. cit.*, 11–13.

<sup>29</sup> J.P. Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts: A Yogācāra Critique of Mushin (no-mind)", *JJRS*, 16, 1989, 285–9.



are typical of many Chinese and Japanese masters. They are clearly articulated in his treatise “The Clear Sound of Jewels” (*Reiroshu*).

Right mindedness is a name added temporarily when it manifests itself in human 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.<sup>30</sup>

As one would expect of a teacher of samurai, Takuan does seriously address issues of life and death, action and response in conflict. Here, his ideas take on a more obviously Zen and Taoist frame and quality. But even here, when confronting issues of life and death or killing and non-killing, his notions of effectiveness and direct action are similar to those in some of the skilful means scenarios described in the texts and classic sources mentioned above. In his treatise on the “Sword of Taia” (*Taiaki*), Takuan addresses the issues of killing and being killed and how a warrior performs his duties. Even in this treatise, there is a sense that the warrior should kill only when necessary, and that sympathy (compassion) should guide his actions.

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.<sup>31</sup>

Takuan’s teachings are of course soteriologically oriented. As the teacher and spiritual advisor of the powerful Yagyū family, he was placed in the position of teaching men who were committed from birth to the warrior life. The methods he uses in addressing fundamental Zen teachings and practices could themselves be seen as forms of skilful means. He was teaching his Zen students in language and concepts related to their own experience, and advocating practices which were possible for warriors to follow. Because of the images and methods used, Takuan has become a major influence on Japanese traditions of swordsmanship

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<sup>30</sup> W.S. Takuan, *The Unfettered Mind: Writings of the Zen Master to the Sword Master*, Tokyo, 1987, 54–5.

<sup>31</sup> Takuan, *op. cit.*, 81.

and martial arts in general. Many lose sight of the fact that he was a Zen monk and Roshi (Master) not a swordsman. It is highly unlikely that he ever systematically trained in swordsmanship. He is using descriptions of the use of the sword in action, and the quality of mind required for mastery, as an extended analogy for the operation of the mind in meditation. He is certainly not advocating sword-mastery as a necessary or indispensable part of Zen training. Having said this, the influence of his writings on those who wish to develop the spiritual and meditative dimensions of martial arts has been immense. I shall finally turn to the issues involved in my fifth category.

### *Magical and ritual empowerment*

It is my view that the magical or apotropaic dimensions of Buddhist belief and engagement are too easily ignored in textually orientated Buddhist scholarship. The use of Buddhist rites, chants, artifacts and personnel for magical empowerment and medical/supernatural protection accounts for the major part of Buddhist belief and practice in traditional “Buddhist” countries and communities. Discussions of Spiro’s distinction between Nibbanic, Kammatic and Apotropaic forms of Buddhism in Burma often ignore the last category altogether.<sup>32</sup> Historically, it seems that a large part of the appeal of Buddhism both in China and Japan was the ability of the monks to offer greater magical power and protection to individuals and the state than the indigenous methods. The reputations of many of the early Dharma teachers in these countries lay in their abilities as healers, rainmakers and exorcists.<sup>33</sup> The monk Fo T’u Teng’s influence with the barbarian “Emperors” of North China in the early fourth century is well documented, and seems to have relied as much on his magical powers, and his ability to predict drought or rainfall and prevent epidemics, as on his skill in expounding Dharma.<sup>34</sup> The demonstration of the efficacy and power of Dharma, through the mastery of magic, is a discernible feature of Buddhism in India and China. The famous statement attributed to the Buddha in the *Divyādāna* represents an early expression of the fusing of expediency with magic, “A magical feat quickly wins over the minds of worldlings.”<sup>35</sup> Note also Kumarajiva’s reputed ability to swallow needles.<sup>36</sup> Apart from providing popular entertainment and material for magical tales and hagiographies, such powers, or the belief in them, also have a serious role in protection and healing rites. The

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<sup>32</sup> M.E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, London, 1971.

<sup>33</sup> Kao Seng Chuan, T 50, 383–95; K.K.S. Ch’en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, Princeton, 1973, 271–76.

<sup>34</sup> A. E. Wright, “Fo T’u Teng: A Biography”, *HJAS*, 11, 1948, 339–44.

<sup>35</sup> *Divyāvadāna*, quoted in Ch’en, *op. cit.*, 272.

<sup>36</sup> Ch’en, *op. cit.*, 273.

ritual/magical power of key *sūtras* was employed by the rulers of China and Japan to ensure the protection of the state. The chanting of the *Fan Wang Ching/Bommō-kyō* and other *sūtras* was an institutionalised and officially sanctioned use of Dharmic or magical power. In addition, for centuries, Chinese and Japanese military forces, including the infamous *sohei* (monk-soldiers) of Mount Hiei, have employed Buddhist symbols, banners, *mudrās* and *mantras* to empower their military exploits and intimidate their opponents.<sup>37</sup> As space is limited, I reproduce here a passage translated by Naquin in her fine study *Shantung Rebellion*. The text is from the Grand Council's interrogation records made in 1774, containing the testimonies of captured followers of the rebel leader Wang Lun.

“We ordinary citizens, all received imperial benevolence. This year in Shou-chang and the other places, there were crops to be harvested. It was not a year of dearth or of poor harvest. It was that we ordinarily followed Wang Lun and studied boxing, fencing and meditation. He said that just now we were encountering the kalpa. One had to be able to go without food if one was to pass through the kalpa. He said that he was the Master of the Return to the Origin, the True Tzu-wei Constellation. We saw that he could go for many days without eating and that his boxing and fencing were also very good, so we all believed in him, and followed him to the death in the rebellion. Although the chants that Wang Lun taught us included the words “the guns will not fire,” in fact this was not true. Many of our men were wounded, including Wang Lun. Although on the day we attacked Lin-ch'ing Wang Lun said that there had been women in red clothing on the city wall who had broken the power of his spells, we never saw them. Finally, after he was surrounded, he himself was burned to death. You can see that he was completely fooling people.”<sup>38</sup>

I suspect that many of the stories of styles and techniques originating with Buddhist monks or Taoist priests represent attempts to invest these styles with

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<sup>37</sup> Documented cases of such uses can be found in excellent studies by Demiéville, 1973, *op. cit.*, 261–99, and by S.R. Turnbull, 1977, *The Samurai*, London, 27–35; S.R. Turnbull, *Ninja: The True Story of Japan's Secret Warrior Cult*, London, 1991, 114–20. Scholars such as C. Suzuki, *Chūgogoku ni okeru kakumei to shūkyū*, Tokyo, 1974, 68–78, 196–206; D. Overmeyer, “Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society”, *Modern China*, 7, 1981, 167–69; and S. Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion*, New Haven, 1981, 37–61 and “The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China”, in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. by D. Johnson et al., Berkeley, 1985, 255–91, have discussed the more militant sectarian movements in Ming and Ch'ing China, which incorporated Buddhist and Taoist images, concepts and practices with martial training and a “mystique” of martial and ritual prowess and empowerment.

<sup>38</sup> S. Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion*, 166–67.

authority and legitimacy, by providing an impressive “romantic” genealogy and investing the art with an aura of magical and mystical power. In “popular” understanding in traditional China, Buddhist and Taoist functionaries were regarded as having the most sophisticated and powerful magical techniques. To invest one’s art with an association with such powers and authority, was a sensible move tactically, psychologically and commercially. It is well known that for centuries Chinese rebel leaders, like Wang Lun, have trained their followers in meditation, internal control (*nei kung*), magic and martial arts to provide resistance to enemy weapons and ensure military success. In more peaceful times, if one was teaching martial arts professionally, or one’s reputation as a master was at stake, then it did no harm at all for prospective students as well as rivals and enemies to believe that you had magical ritual powers. One of my research students, Nigel Sutton, is currently engaged in work on just such a master of martial arts, magic and healing in a Chinese community in southern Malaysia. Most people give him a wide berth, unless they are his students. It is fair to say that despite his low status socially and economically, he is one of the most powerful and feared men in the town. Amos’ observations of Shen da (Spirit fighter) boxers in the New Territories are also relevant here.<sup>39</sup> Attempts to identify martial skills and techniques with institutions or individuals which carried moral, magical and spiritual power and authority are not surprising. On the phenomenon of personal protection from physical and magical threats, anthropologists report similar moves amongst new healing and exorcism cults in Africa and South America. These frequently ally themselves to or borrow the symbols and language of the most powerful Christian church in the particular region.<sup>40</sup> In a sense, the more marginal the individual or group practising the art or cult, the greater the need for the legitimacy provided by a fictive genealogy. One of the best known examples of this process in Chinese martial arts is the “myth” of Chang Seng-feng, the early Ming dynasty Taoist sage, an immortal and “founder” of T’ai Chi Ch’uan, who in the most popular version of the story had the complete system revealed to him in a dream. In reality of course no real evidence exists for T’ai Chi Ch’uan as now understood before the mid-eighteenth century, but the myth and its resulting “fictive genealogy” exerts a powerful influence and adds considerable credibility to the appeal of the style to many Chinese practitioners.

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<sup>39</sup> D.M. Amos, “Marginality and the Hero’s Art: Martial Artists in Hong Kong and Guangzhou”, Los Angeles, 1983.

<sup>40</sup> J.W. Fernandez, “The Arguments of Images and the Experience of Returning to the Whole”, in V.W. Turner & E.M. Bmner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience*, Urbana, 1986, 166–78.

Of course Buddhist teachings, with notions of rebirth, spiritual lineage and kinship, facilitate sophisticated refinements of “fictive genealogies” and associations. Some of the best examples of this can be seen in the Sung Chiang Chen ritual procession/exorcism and martial arts troupes of southern Taiwan. These troupes are the subject of my most recent research and field work. Sung Chiang is the leader of the 108 heroes of Liang Shan Po, as depicted in the 16th-century epic novel *Shui Hu Chuan* (*Water Margin*). Each of the 108 bandit/heroes, who have taken refuge at Liang Shan Po, is the reborn soul of a star god. Such beings possess powerful magical properties and are particularly effective in exorcism. The Sung Chiang Chen troupes of Taiwan are transplanted survivals of similar community protection brotherhoods and exorcism groups which flourished on the Mainland in Fukien province. When Chinese immigrants settled in Taiwan in the 17th/18th centuries, they brought their rituals, gods and social institutions with them.

Each member of a Sung Chiang Chen troupe takes on the role of one of the 108 heroes (today most of the troupes have thirty-six members, though there are still seventy-two member troupes). To be admitted to the troupe, the applicant must approach the divine patron Tian Tu Yuan Shuai (formal title: Lei Hai Ch’ing) in the temple and use moon blocks to ask the god’s permission. If he is of good character and is approved by the god, he will be initiated, and will train in the weapons and martial arts style appropriate to the hero he is selected to represent. He usually remains in that role for his entire career with Sung Chiang Chen. My own troupe, the Hsia T’ou Chueh, contains some very fine martial artists. They train individual forms, two man combat forms, weapons and empty hand sparring. Their most important role, however, is the performance of complicated thirty-six or seventy-two man forms at important festivals such as renewal (*chiao*) festivals or the birthdays of important gods. Their traditional role is, as exorcists, to drive out evil forces from the community in the course of the festival procession.<sup>41</sup> They are also available to perform house and temple purification (exorcism) rituals. In full costume, make-up, fully armed and trained, an experienced Sung Chiang Chen troupe is said to be capable of defeating the most powerful spirit army. There are dangers attached to such exorcism procedures. My own informants told me of a house exorcism five years ago which went seriously wrong. The troupe attempted the exorcism despite the fact that they were well short of the full compliment of thirty-six. When the chief exorcist Li K’uei (double axe bearer) entered the house flourishing his axes to confront the troublesome ghosts, he went insane. He was only cured by a visit to

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<sup>41</sup> For a brief account and classification of Sung Chiang Chen in the context of festival procession troupes, see D.S. Sutton, “Ritual Drama and Moral Order: Interpreting the Gods’ Festival Troupes of Southern Taiwan”, *JAS*, 49, 1990, 535–554.

the temple and special offerings to Tian Tu Yuan Shuai. Significantly, this was the last individual house exorcism that the Hsia T'ou Chueh troupe has attempted. This style of exorcism by Sung Chiang Chen seems to have declined over the last two or three decades. My own findings, in comparison with those of my friend Tong Fan Wan in southern Taiwan twenty years ago, seem to confirm this.<sup>42</sup> Few troupes today have the opportunity to put their full ritual power to the test. One reason for this appears to be that people are less troubled by ghosts and spirits than in the past. This is not a straightforward piece of evidence for secularisation. People in rural Taiwan generally still believe in ghosts and spirits, but they are not seen as being as threatening and disruptive as in the past. This could of course be attributed to better health and living standards. Plagues and malaria are no longer a threat in Taiwan, though the plague god festivals are still enthusiastically celebrated in the south. It is at festivals such as these that the performance rituals of Sung Chiang Chen receive most public attention and admiration. In fact, the core members of the troupes continue to train in the long intervals between festivals. Another pattern evident in some areas is the teaching of regular Shao Lin martial arts to public classes by senior practitioners. My own troupe, the Hsia T'ou Chueh Sung Chiang Chen, insisted that this was a departure from tradition and are only prepared to teach martial arts to initiated members of the troupe.

As a form of Taiwanese popular religion, the Buddhist dimensions of Sung Chiang Chen belief and practice would not be immediately obvious to those who only acknowledge soteriological or “Nibbanic” expressions of Buddhism. But without the notions of *karma* and rebirth, the notion of the 108 stars reborn as heroes could not have come about. Although all Sung Chiang Chen training and performance is preceded by *pai fo* (worship of Buddha), this is often understood as a generalised offering to all the gods, including the Buddha. All the members of my troupe said they believe in Buddhism, but as they also believe in Taoism, such claims do not make them Buddhists in a strong sense. The character of Tzu Chih (Lu Da), the bandit monk of Liang Shan Po is important in every troupe. He is interesting, not least because he is similar in character and role to Dharma Acuity in the dramatic ballad quoted earlier. His use of Shao Lin pole techniques is given particular importance in the troupe, and a good martial artist is always chosen for this role. The Sung Chiang Chen members take particular pride in the Shao Lin origins of their martial training. They all unequivocally accept the traditional version of the origins of Shao Lin martial arts and the role of Bodhidharma. They are also proud of their weapons,

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<sup>42</sup> Fan Wan Tong, “A study of Sung Chiang Chen in Southern Taiwan”, unpublished M.Th. dissertation, Taiwan Theological Seminary, 1972.

which are seen as having magical powers in their own right. The weapons are stored at secret locations (usually in temples) and are frequently moved. Ordinary members of the troupe do not usually know where they are at any time. I was told that during the Japanese occupation, the invaders confiscated Sung Chiang Chen weapons, and so effectively disbanded the troupes, but many masters hid their weapons and continued to train and teach secretly. The reason for the Japanese action was that stories came to Taiwan about Sung Chiang Chen members taking guerilla action against Japanese troops in Fukien. I have been unable to corroborate such accounts, but the seniors of the Dong Kang Sung Chiang Chen troupe retold this story with evident pride. There is a close affinity between traditional Southern style Opera troupes and Sung Chiang Chen. They have the same divine patron, and Sung Chiang Chen always salute the opera stage and its performers at festivals. There is sometimes considerable rivalry between different Sung Chiang Chen troupes. There are stories of local and territorial conflicts leading to real fights erupting in temple processions. These are now rare and the last documented fatality occurred in 1961. The nature of the earlier conflicts reflect the possible origins of Sung Chiang Chen as community protection groups. In southern China during the 18th and 19th centuries, such groups almost invariably had ritual and magical dimensions. Those which persisted, soon took on all the features of sworn brotherhoods. The ease with which such groups could transform and adapt from local self defence troops to ritual enactment and exorcism troupes, is well documented and discussed by Wu in his excellent study of temple fairs and festivals.<sup>43</sup>

It became clear to me that there are still political, ideological and territorial dimensions to the practice of Sung Chiang Chen. All were vehemently and proudly Taiwanese, and supported Taiwanese independence. I could find no case of a Sung Chiang Chen member who was a “mainlander” (i.e., post-1949 pro-Kuomintang settler) or descendant thereof. More significantly, though many Taiwanese do support the Nationalist Government, I could find no such support amongst the Sung Chiang Chen membership. Sometimes, the stories of oppression and resistance against the Japanese occupation merged into stories of resistance against the present occupiers. Drinking sessions after training were invariably opportunities to tell such stories and sing patriotic songs. Although obviously not economically marginal to the extent of many of Amos Kung Fu and Shao Lin brotherhoods in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, the Sung Chiang Chen members were marginal politically in relation to the ruling elite of Taiwan.

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<sup>43</sup> Cheng-han Wu, “The Temple Fairs in Late Imperial China”, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton, 1988, 130–137.

They were also socially marginalised by city dwellers to the north. Some “middle class” residents of Taipei were astonished at my interest in such groups.

Even some practitioners of “elite martial arts” from Mainland lineages, usually T'ai chi ch'uan and internal arts, were surprised at my interest in Sung Chiang martial arts, which were perceived as crude and only practised by farmers and lower class people. This of course only made me more interested in them. None of these critics had actually seen any Sung Chiang martial arts either in training or in demonstrations.

### *Conclusion*

My conclusion at this point is inconclusive. I have engaged two main themes in this paper, the role of Buddhist ethical notions in Sino-Japanese martial traditions, concentrating on skilful means, and secondly, the role of magic and ritual empowerment. The influence of these ideas and their associated images on Far Eastern thought and culture is powerful and pervasive. There can be few historical certainties when addressing such questions. It does seem that the notion of skilful means, and the ways it is expounded in Buddhist texts and teaching, have helped to contribute to the moral climate and conditions in which notions of direct action and developing martial traditions could emerge with a partly Buddhist identity. It also seems that the themes and images present in textual accounts of skilful means have been intentionally invoked in the legends and myths of the origins of Shao lin Ch'uan Fa to provide some form of Buddhist legitimation. Such concepts, their vivid illustrations in Buddhist texts, and the legends and romantic traditions surrounding them seem to have been conflated in some popular literary and dramatic works, and further promoted the appeal of monk warriors and fighting Bodhisattvas to the Chinese and Japanese popular imagination.

On a metaphorical level, the image of the warrior king is an obvious if not archetypal way of representing ideas of spiritual power and supremacy. On an elite level such associations are present in Buddhist texts and traditions in the close association between the notion of Buddhahood and the image or ideal of the Cakravartin.

The idea became an unquestioned part of Imperial ideology in most traditional Buddhist Kingdoms. It is possible to see the image of the spiritual warrior or martial monk as a popular appropriation of the same archetype. Such an appropriation relies more specifically on the association of physical, magical, tactical and spiritual prowess, which is often identified with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Notions of such prowess were particularly celebrated and valued in popular or folk expressions of Buddhism. In China, such ideas and images are enhanced and supplemented by the ancient and persistent image of



the Knight Errant. This image of the playful, individualistic hero who intervenes on the side of righteousness is celebrated in Ssu-ma Chien's "Historical Record" in the first century BC,<sup>44</sup> and persists in the popular imagination, down to the latest Run Run Shaw movie or Taiwan TV sword drama. They have held a fascination for Chinese storytellers, dramatists and novelists for centuries. As we have seen, they have also nurtured tendencies to dissent and sometimes outright rebellion, particularly against the foreign rulers of the Ch'ing dynasty. The Knight Errant and the Warrior Monk have taken on the role of "root metaphors" in Chinese popular culture. As Victor Turner points out, the value of such root metaphors is their potency and ability to suggest and give rise to radical alternative visions, and may even give rise to complex philosophical systems.<sup>45</sup> It could be argued that the philosophy and ethics of the Mohist Knights of Warring States in China represent an active revolt against state violence and wasteful ritual expenditure, giving rise to a comparatively sophisticated ethical and political philosophy. The use of the image of the Knight Errant and Warrior Monk may also have inspired an alternative vision and sanctioned the urge to rebel. Turner also points out that powerful root metaphors carry fundamental risks. They may become so powerful and persuasive that they attain metaphysical status and turn into dangerous self-certifying myths.<sup>46</sup> It could be argued that the justification of criminal triad activities in terms of an association with the Five Ancestors and the former Ming patriots is one such example of the translation of a potent root metaphor into a self-certifying myth.<sup>47</sup>

It could be argued that the Sung Chiang Chen troupes of southern Taiwan also perpetuate such self-certifying myths, through their continuation of symbolic resistance against a perceived oppressive, colonial, hostile power. I do not personally subscribe to such a view. Sung Chiang Chen, and its associated practices, represent a living tradition where the popular imagination, ritual and supernatural beliefs, heroic and literary motifs of Knight Errantry, along with notions of territorial pride and symbolic resistance, all find a place. The high esteem conferred on Sung

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<sup>44</sup> B. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, New York, 1961, vol. 2, 452–459.

<sup>45</sup> Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, Ithaca & London, 1974, 26–33.

<sup>46</sup> V. Turner, *op. cit.*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> I am not here suggesting that all Triad organisations are criminal in nature. The evidence produced by Amos suggests that their criminal orientation has been exaggerated, and that the H.K. police and even social scientists have not been sophisticated enough in identifying different kinds of groups (D.M. Amos, *op. cit.*, ch. 6).

Chiang Chen practitioners within their local communities, and the continuing respect for their ritual performances and martial skills, reflects something of the continued importance of these ideas and practices. Even among less traditional groups of martial artists, many of the same themes and features can be detected, albeit on a more informal level. It seems to me that the relationship between these martial traditions, the beliefs and values that they embody, and their place in contemporary popular cultures, both East and West, are of great interest and importance. There has been no space in this paper to examine the role of these traditions and themes in the Western appropriation of Eastern martial arts. Some of my future research will focus specifically on these issues.