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**ZEN BUDDHISM AND AMERICAN RELIGIOUS  
CULTURE: CASE STUDY OF DAISSETZ TEITARO  
SUZUKI (1870- 1966)**

**A THESIS  
PRESENTED FOR THE  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY  
DEGREE  
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## **Abstract**

This work explores the life, works, and role of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966) in the reception of Zen Buddhism in the United States. Particular attention is paid to the major themes that informed Suzuki's presentation of Zen to American audiences: Western mystical-universalist traditions, intellectualism, psychology and Japanese nationalism. These themes, as Suzuki used them, are not part of traditional Zen in Japan; instead they are responses to Western modernity, colonialism, and Orientalist discourses. Suzuki and many of his contemporaries rephrased Zen in order to assert Japanese cultural and religious superiority.

Suzuki was a prolific writer and his books became the primary source for understanding Zen Buddhism in the United States, especially at the height of his popularity in the 1950's and 1960's. From the mid-1960's onward his popularity in American Buddhist circles dwindled due to a shift to practicing Buddhism rather than merely studying it. I argue that while attention has shifted toward practice and away from Suzuki's works, his influence has not completely evaporated; instead he remains an important resource for Buddhists in the United States.

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## Introduction

D.T. Suzuki is often regarded as the man who ‘brought Zen Buddhism to the West.’<sup>1</sup>

Through his more than thirty books written in English (not to mention a hundred more in Japanese) and numerous lectures at universities in the United States during the 1950’s, D.T. Suzuki was clearly one of the most prominent voices in representing Zen Buddhism to United States culture during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His works were avidly consumed by both scholars and everyday people, and are still quoted in a variety of sources.<sup>2</sup> In real ways Suzuki, in response to local and global concerns of modernity and colonialism, created a space called ‘Zen Buddhism.’ This space is defined and bounded by a number of intersecting narratives—how he understood himself as a Japanese citizen around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a scholar, and as an emissary of his religious tradition.

The focus of this work is to identify the predominant features and overall terrain of Suzuki’s representation of Zen through an analysis of his written works, personal history and the cultural context of his life. We will examine the nature and significant characteristics of what Suzuki was representing as ‘Zen Buddhism.’ With this information in hand, this paper will demonstrate ways in which the works of Suzuki have played an important part in the ongoing development of Buddhism in the United States.

D.T. Suzuki was *the* authority on Zen Buddhism for Buddhist sympathizers in the 1950’s

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<sup>1</sup> In almost all references to Suzuki, this mantle of authority is granted to him.

<sup>2</sup> For Example: Wikipedia, *Tricycle* magazine and the current online *Encyclopedia Britannica* that provides the following information: “Japanese Buddhist scholar and thinker who was the *chief interpreter* of Zen Buddhism to the West” (italics added), Accessed: February 19, 2008.

and 60's. Since then his prominence has dwindled, but he is still occasionally quoted and maintains the role of an authorizing voice for current Americans interested in Buddhism. I argue that much of what Suzuki has to say about Zen was informed by his political, religious reformist, and modernist ideologies. Suzuki created a construct called "Zen Buddhism" which was intended for English speaking audiences and emphasized non-traditional aspects of Buddhism. As Robert Sharf notes, the Zen that Suzuki promoted is a unique "Suzuki Zen"<sup>3</sup> representation. This 'Suzuki Zen' was clearly influenced by Buddhist modernist ideologies of Meiji-era (1869-1912) Japan.

Largely a response to colonialism, the goal of Buddhist modernism was to phrase Buddhism as compatible with Western categories of science, reason and Enlightenment values. Japanese Buddhists, such as Shakyu Soen (who was Suzuki's Zen teacher and representative of Zen at the Worlds Parliament of Religions in 1893), developed 'New Buddhism' (*Shin Bukkyō*) as a mechanism by which they could resist colonial occupation by being equally 'modern' and 'civilized' as colonial powers, while at the same time assert the centrality of Buddhism in Japanese society, government, and spiritual life. Thus, New Buddhism or Suzuki Zen was informed by external concerns - political, economic, colonial, and counter-colonial interests - as well as internal reforms of the tradition. Suzuki's Zen was also influenced by his contact with various mystical groups, such as the Theosophists and Swedenborgianists. Suzuki was exposed to these groups through several sources, important among them Paul Carus, who wrote the influential *Gospel of the Buddha* in 1894. Carus understood there to be one essence, or ultimate

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Sharf, *Whose Zen?*

reality behind all religious traditions, which could be discovered through scientific investigation usually termed Monism and religion of science.

All of these various factors - from his personal experiences in Zen monasteries to protection of the homeland - played a part in the subsequent space or representation of Zen that Suzuki was describing. It is also this space that American Buddhists and those interested in Buddhism could draw from to develop their own understanding of Zen. This was especially true from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1970's. In the ensuing decades Suzuki's influence on U.S. Buddhists has diminished. I argue that Suzuki's presence remains an important part of the current dialogues on Buddhism in the U. S.

This exploration of D. T. Suzuki is guided in many ways by the lens of Orientalism. Edward Said's highly influential work, *Orientalism* (1978), contains three major interrelated meanings. The first is the academic study of the orient – the people and cultures of the Middle East, India and Asia. Secondly, “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.”<sup>4</sup> The third meaning, is Orientalism in its most overt form; as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient...a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>5</sup> Together these ideas create a web of meaning which form the backdrop in which conversations about the orient happens. What is essential for Said to establish is not only that this discourse was a central feature of East / West contact historically; but more importantly, that this way of thinking has so shaped the Western view of the East that there is no such

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 2

<sup>5</sup> Said, 3

thing as a non-orientalized version of the East in Western eyes. It is not that the discourse of Orientalism never corresponds to actual people and events in Asia, at certain times and places it does. Rather, the discourse of Orientalism is a self-sustaining mode of thought, which doesn't need to correspond to the actual orient. At its heart, Orientalism is a story told by Europeans and Americans about the Orient, which was written and meant to be consumed by other Europeans and Americans. This story provides the background assumptions which allow socio-economic, political and physical dominance of the West over and against the East.

In the American reception of Zen, we find a strong 'inverted Orientalism'<sup>6</sup> or 'secondary Orientalism'<sup>7</sup>. That is, the East is held as superior to the West in terms of spiritual wisdom and authentic religious experiences. Inversion, however, does not lead to eliminating the Orientalist mindset. In fact, we might even consider how this type of Orientalism is a greater problem because it is more subtle. The more it seems to be a 'fix' to earlier Orientalist tendencies, the more pernicious is its existence. As Faure puts "it would perhaps be hard to decide which version of Zen, the negative (Christian missionary accounts) or the idealized (Suzuki's Zen), is the most misleading."<sup>8</sup> Note that the East is not held as an equal or superior on any other level than the spiritual one. That the West is dominant physically, politically, and economically is still assumed in this version of the narrative. The East is then a reservoir of religious meaning that Americans may draw from *as they see fit and on their terms*. American sympathizers of the Victorian era, the later counter-culture era and European – American converts to Buddhism did not phrase

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Faure, Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Faure, 9

<sup>8</sup> Faure, 8

their interest in Buddhism in these terms. Rather, they were imbedded in the process of Orientalism and took this view point as a given. Sympathizers, by definition, were honestly seeking a real spiritual awakening, but could only do it with the materials and language available to them.<sup>9</sup> The resources available to them are part of the bedrock of the modern Orientalist discourse. As we will later discover for Suzuki, he was both a product of and a producer of this discourse.

As useful as the concepts of Orientalism and counter – Orientalism are, it is not the perfect tool for our task here. To adequately describe the space “Zen Buddhism” and its influence, our thinking has to be more flexible and creative than East-West polarities. The ideologies of Japanese superiority and Zen as the only ‘true religion’ held by New Buddhists of which Suzuki was one of the most important, are largely a response to colonialism and aimed at inverting the Orientalist discourse. However in trying to understand Suzuki, his works, and their role in Buddhism in the U.S., we realize that there are many major factors that influenced him beyond concern and fear of future Western domination only. Suzuki had personal, national, cultural, and religious interests and concerns from a variety of sources. Radical changes in Japanese government from the 1860’s onward affected his family and stimulated Suzuki’s interest in Zen to begin with. The decade he spent in America gave him a first hand impression of the U. S., its people and religious attitudes. Suzuki was also an active Theosophist (what I’ve labeled “Mystic-Universalistic” tradition) as was his wife, Beatrice Lane. The theory of

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<sup>9</sup> We find from Dorte Sölle: “The limits of my language are the limits of my world. The tradition in which I stand bequeathed to me a language that interprets, clarifies, makes transparent and enriches my own experience.” Dorte Sölle, *Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me*, in Observations on the Spiritual Situation of the Age. Ed. Jurgen Habermas. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984) 157-168.

Orientalism is informative, but can't account for all of the influences of just Suzuki's life. If we then consider the role his works played in U.S. culture, and the complex ways it was incorporated into religious practices; it is clear that we can't think in monolithic blocks of 'us' and 'them.' Instead, we will identify main themes and examine areas of intersection—where the concerns of Suzuki were also the concerns of American religious seekers. For Suzuki's works, I have identified four themes: mystical-universalistic, intellectualistic, nationalistic and psychological. In the process of his reception, we examine changing religious and cultural meanings in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America; noting how the emphasis on the self – realization and personal religious meaning (as contrasted with institutional religion) that became popular during this time fit with Suzuki's Zen in surprising ways. Zen, as presented by Suzuki, as ultimately liberating, a valuable personal experience and the true essence of all religious sentiments resonated with what counter-culture religious seekers were looking for. In the intervening decades, these resonances still exist, but are secondary to concerns about correct practice. With practice at the fore, Suzuki is often little more than a footnote today—yet his works are still referred to by Buddhists in the U.S. today as saying important things about the meaning of their religious practices.

## **Section I: Locating Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki: A Biography**

In order to understand the philosophy of D.T. Suzuki, we must understand the context in which he lived and the major influences that gave rise to his particular way of representing Zen Buddhism. Some aspects of this story are: Suzuki's personal biography, the decade he spent in the United States, his extensive writings, and the lectures he gave at American universities in the late 1950's. Other influences include: the changing cultural climates of both America and Japan from just prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the 1960's. This era saw the rise of Japanese nationalism, Japanese colonialism and Meiji-era reforms, along with the World Wars, the Vietnam War, and cultural reactions to these events. One of the major shifts in the religious landscape of the U.S. was a growing sense of disaffection and a criticism of Christianity, which seemed ossified; this led many to alternative religious traditions. They were exposed to these new traditions in a new 'market place' of religiosity which provided an opportunity of unprecedented freedom to pick and choose among aspects of many different traditions.

The goal of this section is to create an informative map of Suzuki's time and the place(s) in which he lived his life; this will provide a useful context for our consideration of the major themes that run through his written works in the next section. We are curious to understand the situation and context in which he lived and worked because, as scholars, we are aware that scholarship is directly and indirectly informed by the place, time, and person(s) which create it. For Suzuki, some of his underlying assumptions include the absolute supremacy of the Japanese people, Zen as 'true' religion, and discourses about the spiritual decay of the West (America and Europe). To guide the discussion, Suzuki's

biography will be examined in four parts: the period of his youth in the context of Japanese religious responses to modernity (1870-1888), his experiences as a student in Japanese Zen monasteries and Japanese Universities (1888-1897), the decade he lived and worked in LaSalle, IL with Paul Carus (1897-1907), and finally his lifelong involvement in mystical and universalistic groups; such as the Theosophical society.

*Suzuki as a Youth and Buddhism in Japan: Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki was born Teitaro Suzuki in Kanazawa, in the province of Kaga, in 1870.<sup>10</sup> A year earlier Japan had begun a process of radical political and social transformation, called the Meiji era (1869-1912). This transformation was largely a response to colonialism. The feudal system was eradicated and replaced with a constitutional monarchy. The Meiji era was also heavily tinted by Japanese nationalism and imperialism. For Suzuki's father, who was a physician and part of the privileged samurai rank in the feudal system, the changes of the Meiji era were disastrous. Suzuki's father lost his status and position during this period, and his death in 1876 pushed Suzuki's family further into "genteel poverty."<sup>11</sup> These factors profoundly affected the young Teitaro Suzuki, such that at the age of "about seventeen or eighteen these misfortunes made me start to thinking about my karma...my thoughts then started to turn to philosophy and religion."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Autobiographical Account*, in *D.T. Suzuki: A Zen Life Remembered*, Masao Abe ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 1989), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1981), 138

<sup>12</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Early Memories*, in *D.T. Suzuki: A Zen Life Remembered*, Masao Abe ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 1989), 3

In this context, it is important to understand the new conceptualizations of Buddhism that developed during the Meiji period, as Suzuki would later be an important voice in these developments. In response to internal and external (Western) criticism of Buddhism, many voices within the Buddhist community developed ‘New Buddhism.’ This new interpretation portrayed Buddhism as being rational, in accord with modern science, and unencumbered by superstition and supernatural powers<sup>13</sup>. As the government instituted more policies that challenged the Buddhist status quo, Buddhists answered with a new phrasing of Buddhism as having modern relevance and as an essential and singular aspect of ‘Japaneseness.’ During the Tokugawa period, immediately before the Meiji, Buddhism had enjoyed state power and support, and in the eyes of critics, had become corrupt, bloated, overly wealthy and guilty of using its political and economic power to victimize its members. Thus, in the Meiji era, Buddhism was intentionally and systematically removed from power—temples were closed, monks and nuns were forced to return to lay status, and Buddhism was replaced with Shinto (*Kaminomichi*; indigenous, local God worship, in which shrines play a central role) ideologies, rituals and holy places. New Buddhism, then, was a response to this suppression of the institutional role Buddhism had played during the Tokugawa period. Kosen Roshi and Shaku Soen were two important voices in this new conceptualization of Buddhism. Soen presented ‘Eastern Buddhism’ (New Buddhism) to the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago. This event marked a turning point of increased interest in Buddhism in the United States and Europe. Many of the speakers, who

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<sup>13</sup> “These writers (Suzuki among others) effectively severed Zen’s links to traditional Buddhist soteriological, cosmological and ethical concerns.” Robert H. Sharf, *Whose Zen?: Zen Nationalism Revisited*. Rude Awakenings. See also Winston Davis.

represented Eastern traditions, Angarika Dharmapala most notably, captured the imagination of the audience. Soen was not as influential as Dharmapala, but his lectures (translated by Suzuki in Japan before his departure for the conference) caught the attention of many people. Suzuki worked closely with both Kosen and Soen as a student with Soen for at least four years, if not more.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Suzuki's primary Zen teachers were at the center of formulating New Buddhism and its first promulgation on Western shores.

*A Youthful D.T. Suzuki Prior to Working and Living in the United States*

Returning now to the eighteen year old Suzuki in spiritual crisis, we find he had turned to religion and philosophy. He sought answers from the local Rinzai priest, with whom his family had a strong affiliation. Suzuki was not impressed with the priest who he felt lacked key textual knowledge such as knowledge of the *Hekigan Roku* ("Blue Cliff Records").<sup>15</sup> Nor was Suzuki swayed by the Christian missionaries with whom he came into contact, or his friend who converted to Protestant Christianity. He saw many of the Biblical stories as illogical. Suzuki already at this young age shows a primary concern with textual sources and holds a philosophical mindset as essential to his framing of the world. Suzuki is clearly an intelligent person who is textually inclined, as he taught himself English from the books available to him at the time.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Early Memories*, 8

<sup>15</sup> "He (the Zen priest) did not know very much. In fact he had never even read the *Hekigan Roku* (The Blue Cliff Records)." D.T. Suzuki, *Early Memories*, in *D.T. Suzuki: A Zen Life Remembered*, Masao Abe ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 1989), 4

<sup>16</sup> Fields, 137

Suzuki first seriously grappled with Zen while still in school, as a result of reading *Orategama* (“My Little Kettle”) which his mathematics teacher circulated among the student body. This prompted Suzuki to travel to Kokutaiji temple and ask the Zen master, Setsumon Roshi, questions about the text. Upon arriving at the temple, Suzuki was told by the resident monks that the *roshi* (teacher) was away, but provided him basic instruction on how to practice *zazen* (meditation) and a small room in which to practice. After a day or two, the *roshi* arrived at the temple, and Suzuki experienced his first *sanzen*, or private meeting with the teacher. Setsumon Roshi, in typical Zen master fashion, criticized Suzuki for asking shallow questions, and sent him away. Suzuki then was left to practice *zazen*, and the monks largely ignored him. After four or five days of this, Suzuki, who had grown homesick, left the temple in what he describes as “a most ignoble retreat.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Suzuki’s first experience in a Zen monastery was disheartening and difficult for him. It raised more questions in his mind than it provided answers. As a student at Waseda University in Tokyo he became more directly involved in Zen training, under Kosen Roshi at Engakuji temple. From his time at Engakuji, Suzuki would carry a lasting fondness and attachment for the temple and his time there. Kosen gave him the koan *Sekishu* (“the sound of one hand”<sup>18</sup>). This proved a stumbling block for Suzuki. However Suzuki was impressed by the presence and the unique qualities of the *roshi*, such as “directness and simplicity and, of course, something more which cannot be specifically described.”<sup>19</sup> At this time Suzuki is 21; the year is 1891.

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<sup>17</sup> *Early Memories*, 5

<sup>18</sup> *Early Memories*, 6

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 7

In 1892 Shaku Soen took on the role as head abbot of Engakuji after Kosen's death. In so doing, he also became Suzuki's teacher. Later, Soen gave him the lay-Buddhist title Daisetz, "Great Simplicity," in acknowledgment of his *satori* experience and satisfactory resolution of the *Mu* koan<sup>20</sup>. However, Suzuki didn't arrive at his *satori* experience overnight. He spent four years examining the koan, during which time he translated the lectures Soen was to give at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Paul Carus, who would become one of the strongest American supporters of Buddhism, attended the lectures that Soen gave and asked if he could translate his recently published, *The Gospel of the Buddha*, into Japanese. Soen suggested Suzuki for the job, and the collaboration between Carus and Suzuki would come to greatly influence the establishment of Zen in the United States.

It also took Suzuki four years to transcend the *mu* koan because of a self-acknowledged "weakness of willpower."<sup>21</sup> After completing the translation of Carus' book Suzuki was invited to work in LaSalle, Illinois, translating the *Tao Te Ching*. Realizing that the winter *sesshin* (intensive meditation period) might be his last one with Soen, Suzuki threw all his energy into resolving the koan. In the final days of the week-long period, Suzuki "identified with *mu*, so that there was no longer the separateness implied by being conscious of *mu*."<sup>22</sup> In this moment Suzuki gained *samadhi* (a non-dual state of consciousness), and when awakened from this state by the ringing of a bell, he saw with *pranja* (wisdom), the true nature of *samadhi*. It is this experience that Suzuki identifies as *satori* (awakening). Later that evening, as Suzuki walked back to his quarters, he

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<sup>20</sup> Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1981), 138.

<sup>21</sup> *Early Memories*, 9

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 11

found himself looking at trees in the moonlight, and felt as if “they looked transparent and I was transparent too.”<sup>23</sup>

There are many interesting and suggestive elements of Suzuki’s formative years that we have explored so far. Clearly he is an intelligent and academically inclined person who, because of the political and economic changes of Japan around the turn of the century, turned to religion at a difficult time in his life. Due to the connection that his family already had with Rinzai Zen, he sought out Zen masters. His mother was a strong and regular supporter of the local Rinzai temple and practiced some esoteric Buddhist practices, namely *hijibomon*,<sup>24</sup> which use visualization practices to see oneself as a celestial Buddha. Due to his abilities with English, Suzuki found himself working closely with some of the leading figures of the modern Buddhist movement in Japan, such as Shaku Soen and Kosen Roshi. Suzuki but did gain a degree of realization in the tradition. He was given a title in recognition of the depth of his *satori*, but must also note that it is a lay-Buddhist title, and doesn’t mark Suzuki as renowned master within the tradition. “D.T. Suzuki ...lacked formal transmission in a Zen lineage, and (his) intellectualized Zen is often held in suspicion by Zen traditionalists.”<sup>25</sup> He did not become a dharma-heir to Soen, or recognized as a teacher of Zen within the traditional Zen system.

Another important influence on Suzuki during this time and throughout his life is his friendship with Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945) and the Kyoto School of philosophy. Kitaro, like Suzuki, was scholarly and interested in Western fields of academic inquiry.

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<sup>23</sup> *Early Memories*, 11

<sup>24</sup> *An Autobiographical Account*, 15

<sup>25</sup> Robert Sharf, *Whose Zen?* 43

After rigorously studying Western texts for a number of years, Kitaro and others in the Kyoto school developed an interesting synthesis of Western and Buddhist philosophy. Kitaro, like Suzuki, strove to use Western categories while maintaining the centrality of a Buddhist understanding of the world. Kitaro's influence on Suzuki (and vice versa) is hard to identify explicitly, but they clearly both share the idea that the essential realization is 'pure experience' – "Pure experience is the intuition of facts just as they are and it is devoid of meaning,"<sup>26</sup> which is very close to Suzuki's idea of "directly pointing to the soul of man."<sup>27</sup>

Suzuki was about to embark for the United States for the next decade, and we must now explore what kind of America Suzuki was exposed to and what impressions of the West he formed that would come to shape his subsequent writings.

#### *Suzuki's Decade in America (1897-1907): Monism and Zen*

Suzuki arrived in San Francisco at the end of February, 1897. He was met by Paul Carus, a key figure in the growing American interest in Buddhism<sup>28</sup>. Carus, a German-American philosopher, was both a producer and subject of the shifting religious ideologies that were sweeping America around the turn of the century. He keenly felt the "intellectual forces such as Darwinism, biblical criticism, and comparative religion, and social forces such as industrialization, urbanization and immigration (that) were

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<sup>26</sup> Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, trans. *An Enquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University press, 1921), 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> "Carus probably was more influential in stimulating and sustaining American interest in Buddhism than any other person living in the United States." Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 65

combining to produce a “spiritual crisis.”<sup>29</sup> Turn of the century Americans were open to new religious ideas and the 1893 World Parliament of Religion had made Buddhism a ‘live option’ for them. Carus, as editor of *Open Court* press, provided a forum where many important figures in America’s early interest with Buddhism, including Dharmapala, Henry Steel Olcott, and Marie deSouza Canavarro (Sister Sanghamitta)<sup>30</sup> could reach an interested American audience. Much like his peers, Carus worked toward a synthesis of Buddhism and American culture—“to harmonize Buddhism with some fundamental features of the leading religion and dominant culture.”<sup>31</sup> His *Gospel of the Buddha* was an important step in this direction—it was popular and widely read not only in America, but also, thanks to Suzuki’s translation, in Japan where it was used by Japanese Pure Land Buddhists for instruction.<sup>32</sup> Carus, who had been raised in an conservative Protestant home, was primarily concerned with “applying reasoning and scientific thought to the problem of religion;”<sup>33</sup> and felt that Buddhism and Hinduism were compatible with his universalist model of religion. Primary reasons for this were speakers like Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who represented Hinduism at the Parliament, and stressed that all traditions were ultimately one. For Vivekenanda, Hinduism was the most sensitive to true and ultimate reality. He stated in his speeches that, “In the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to this Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna, "I am in every region as the thread through a string of pearls. And wherever thou sees extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and

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<sup>29</sup>Tweed, 26

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, 57

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 111

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, 38

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, 66

purifying humanity, know ye, that I am there."<sup>34</sup> Carus and other rationalist sympathizers like him were not interested in converting to Buddhism; rather they examined Buddhism and other religious traditions, to find the “true essence of religion, (a) kernel of religious truth that remained after the dogmatic and superstitious elements were removed.”<sup>35</sup>

Under the surface of this construction, we find strong currents of an Orientalist mindset. Buddhism was understood as available for the Western intellectual to borrow, edit and modify it best suited their particular spiritual purposes. In writing the *Gospel of the Buddha*, Carus intentionally “cut off most of (the) apocryphal adornments of the Mahayana tradition;”<sup>36</sup> thus projecting his own understanding of Buddhism over and against how Buddhism was actually practiced by the vast majority of Buddhists in Asia. Underpinning and directing this editing process were social Darwinism and Social Gospel ideologies. America was imagined as the ‘New Zion’ in which a “universal, nonsectarian, and rational religion”<sup>37</sup> would flourish and come to inform the whole world.

D.T. Suzuki, who wouldn’t write his major books on Zen in the English language until twenty years after his time at Open Court, clearly shared or learned much of the underpinning ideologies of Carus and similar Buddhist sympathizers that frequented LaSalle. Most notably, his presentation of Zen as an life-transforming ‘immediate experience,’ - an essence that was universal and the true heart of religions and the arts - has much in common with how rationalist sympathizers, like Carus, described Buddhism.

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<sup>34</sup> [www.ucalgary.ca/~hexham/courses/courses-2008/rels-205/readings/vivekananda.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/~hexham/courses/courses-2008/rels-205/readings/vivekananda.html), accessed 4/5/08.

<sup>35</sup> Tweed, 67

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 67

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 67

It is easy to overstate this influence that Carus had on Suzuki—it is equally likely that Suzuki influenced Carus to a great extent. The most significant source of Suzuki’s understanding of Zen as something essential was most likely his teachers and experiences while studying Zen as a student. Carus didn’t teach Suzuki monism, rather Suzuki fit these ideas into the understanding he already had.

During his time in America, Suzuki came to conclude that the US was lacking - “particularly in the areas of philosophy and religion.”<sup>38</sup> He admired and valued the material, scientific and technological achievements of the West, but worried that these benefits carry a dangerous “attitude of indifference toward the value of the individual.”<sup>39</sup> The West is concerned with individuals in a legal or political sense, and the “real unbounded creativity of mankind is destroyed.”<sup>40</sup> In an interesting move of reverse-Orientalism, Suzuki posits Zen and the religions of Japan as superior to that of the West. In this reversal the East is superior in important ways, ways that are not available to Western science and reason.

In this phase of Suzuki’s development, we find a great deal of interesting terrain. Suzuki’s Buddhism was shaped a great deal by his experiences and associations in the environment of LaSalle at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One major pathway was the ‘religion of science’ ideologies of Carus and other rationalistic sympathizers. His feelings of “western sickness<sup>41</sup>” may also come from this same group, who were more or

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<sup>38</sup> *An Autobiographical Account*, 24

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 25

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 24

<sup>41</sup> See *An Autobiographical Account*, In which Suzuki critiques the West for too great a focus on technological, scientific, and material gains. These advantages are bought at the expense of a religiously mature person and creates a situation where “the unbounded creativity of mankind is destroyed.” p.25

less disillusioned with the dominant culture of which they were part or they wouldn't have become sympathizers in the first place. Suzuki, who had come from the nationalistic Meiji Japan, developed these ideas of illness into a means of criticizing the West and turning the tables on the classical Orientalism discourse.

### *Esoteric Buddhism Involvement: 1908 and Beyond*

The next moment in Suzuki's biography is perhaps the most interesting and the least examined in the material available-- his involvement with Theosophy, Swedenborgianism and esoteric practices in general. After leaving America in 1907, Suzuki, who was 38, traveled throughout Europe. He ended up in London, translating *Hell and Heaven* for the Swedenborg Society. This society was founded in 1810<sup>42</sup> to promote the ideas and writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Swedenborg was a classical enlightenment thinker, who studied a variety of scientific disciplines-- especially engineering. In later life he experienced a series of dreams and visions. These experiences, plus his already existing interest in Hebrew and Biblical interpretation led him to write Christian theology with mystic and esoteric aspects. This theology became a formative element, a hundred years later, in the thinking of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). Blavatsky, along with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. The society combined spiritualist movements with selected Hindu and Buddhist ideas.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.swedenborg.org.uk/>, accessed December 2007.

Their underlying ideology was a universalist, or monist, concept of all religions: that they all share a common core, a common message that is found once all ‘corruptions’ of the true message are peeled away. This mindset allowed Blavatsky and Olcott to ‘correctly’ interpret Buddhism for living Buddhists in Sri Lanka.<sup>43</sup> Suzuki was an active member of Japanese Theosophical societies, and there is dispute as to where his interest originated. It is unclear because Suzuki is close to silent in his own writings about his Theosophical involvement. One possible source was his wife, Beatrice Lane, who was actively involved in Theosophy before meeting Suzuki – Suzuki also fails to mention her either. Even those writing memoirs of him in *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered* don’t mention either of these topics.

What is clear is that Suzuki was interested and directly involved with both Theosophy and Swedenborgianism. In 1911 he married a Theosophist named Beatrice Erskine Lane, and both were actively involved in theosophical societies in Japan. Furthermore, Shaku Soen discusses Swedenborg in his introduction to Suzuki’s 1895 translation of *The Gospel of the Buddha*.<sup>44</sup> Suzuki was still a student of Soen at this time, and very well could have come into contact with western esoteric practices from him. Thus, these early encounters with esoteric practices were further fueled by his spouse and his friendship with Theosophists and Swedenborgianist. Albert Edmunds is an example of one such friend. Edmunds was “a British – American Buddhist sympathizer who attended spiritualist séances and celebrated “psychic phenomena;”<sup>45</sup> who practiced a hybrid Buddhism of Western occultism and Buddhism. He met with Suzuki while in LaSalle,

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<sup>43</sup> See Olcotts’, *Buddhist Catechisms*—in a question / answer format, Olcott rejects many fundamental aspects of Buddhist practice.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 257

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Tweed, *American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism*, 251.

and the two corresponded regularly. In a review of one of Edmunds's books, Suzuki announces "it was he who initiated the present writer into the study of Swedenborgian mysticism."<sup>46</sup>

Beatrice Lane was a Radcliff graduate who held a masters degree from Columbia. They were married in Yokohama and spent most of their married life in Japan. They both joined the Tokyo International Lodge in 1920, an active Theosophy group. D.T. Suzuki acted as president, and Beatrice served on the Lodge committee.<sup>47</sup> After their move to Kyoto they established the Mahayana Lodge, often using their home for lodge meetings. Suzuki often addressed the meetings and translated Theosophical treaties into Japanese.<sup>48</sup> Beatrice died in 1939, but Suzuki's interest in esotericism continued and informed his writings in interesting ways.

Another set of important events to consider in Suzuki's biography are his post WWII lectures, publications and involvement with psychology. Before discussing this, however, we need to understand some of the important events happening in Asia and America in the 1920's - 40's. From the 1900's until the end of WWII, colonial rule of Asian countries and India dissolving. Japan had adopted a strong imperialist stance and had undertaken rapid modernization to thwart attempts of colonial control. This mindset was informed by the linking of national uniqueness and superiority with religion and Zen in particular, to create a Japan that was free of the West and equally as modern as the West. In so doing Japan became a colonial power in its own right<sup>49</sup>. In this narrative of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, reprinted from 1922

<sup>47</sup> Adele S. Algeo, Beatrice Lane Suzuki: An American Theosophist in Japan, Adyar Archives of the Theosophical Society, 2

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>49</sup> Take the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, for example.

Japanese history Zen was linked to *bushido* or “the way of the warrior.”<sup>50</sup> This code of the samurai provided the symbolism, authenticity and constellation of meaning around which a national identity could be formed.

We also find a sharp rise in the American political and economic exclusion of Japanese-Americans with the passage of the Oriental Exclusion Act in 1924, which denied citizenship for Japanese immigrants and limited their land holdings. The bombing of Pearl Harbor only intensified American fears of Japan and Japanese people, resulting Executive Order 9006 of 1942, which allowed for the forced interment of over 100,000 Japanese- Americans.

The post-WWII contact that the U.S. had with Japan was a profound conduit through which a popular reception of Zen was created. During the post-war restructuring of Japan, many thousands of Americans saw Japan and Japanese people first hand for the first time. This sparked popular interest in Asian customs and religion. By 1965, the exclusionary laws against the Japanese were lifted, allowing Asian Buddhist masters to visit, lecture and establish *zendos* in America. This new interest also stimulated Suzuki to publish more than twenty books in the years from the end of the war until his death in 1966.

After the end of WWII, Suzuki’s reputation had expanded to such an extent that he was popularly recognized as an expert on Zen Buddhism and highly sought after as a lecturer for both the emperor and at American universities. Suzuki’s popularity developed mainly because he was the only Japanese person with an affiliation with Zen who was writing in

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<sup>50</sup> Robert H. Sharf, *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism*, in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, Donald Lopez ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 111

English. As a result he gains a much larger and more diverse following. Suzuki, who was seventy-five when the war ended, traveled to Hawaii to speak at the Second East-West Philosophers' Conference. Robert Aitken and Philip Kapleau, both of whom became major figures in the establishment of Buddhist practice in America, attended these lectures and were shaped by their acquaintance with Suzuki. Throughout the 1950's Suzuki lectured regularly at Columbia University, as a visiting professor. In September of 1953, he moved to New York. He was also a frequent lecturer at Claremont College, Princeton, Harvard, Chicago, Yale, Cornell, Northwestern and Wesleyan Universities, under the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation. This fostered interaction with a diverse set of people, from Alan Ginsberg, to the potter Bernard Leach and progressive theologian, Paul Tillich. A variety of individuals representing a broad range of backgrounds and interests attended Suzuki's lectures. It is from also these lectures and Suzuki's writings that the counter-culture largely came to know and delve into Zen, one offshoot being 'Beat Zen.'

Another important student of Suzuki's was Erich Fromm, the founder of the humanistic psychology movement, who worked closely with Suzuki at Columbia and, later on, in Mexico. Suzuki had also met with Carl G. Jung in 1953. Their meeting developed into frequent correspondence, and led Jung to write an introduction for Suzuki's 1964 *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. In 1957, Suzuki spent a summer in Cuernavaca, Mexico with Erich Fromm and was the featured speaker at a conference of Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis.<sup>51</sup> From these early associations, western psychology

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<sup>51</sup> Fields, 205

would come to utilize Zen meditation practices in the form of stress reduction techniques and mental well-being.

### *Conclusions*

In this section, we have explored the history and context of D. T. Suzuki. He was clearly an avid consumer and creator of the written word, publishing more than 130 works in both English and Japanese before his death in 1966. He had a degree of realization within the Zen tradition as it existed in Japan in his youth. Through his lectures and publications, Suzuki brought U.S. attention to Zen. Many of the students sitting in his lectures in the 1950's would later become major figures in the development of American Zen Buddhism. A few would go on to establish successful and thriving schools of their own. Most of Suzuki's students went on to be successful each in their own way; all were both subtly and overtly informed by Suzuki's Zen.

Suzuki was an essential key to the transmission of New Buddhism to Western audiences. His Zen teachers (Soen and Kosen) were leaders in the rephrasing of Buddhism in response to the Meiji reforms – which were a reaction to orientalism and colonialism; and Suzuki was clearly a good student. He was pro-Japanese and accepting of the form of Zen Buddhism his teachers were creating. The essential role he played early on was as a translator for Soen's lectures for the World's Parliament of Religion, later as one of only a few Japanese practitioners of Zen writing in English for English audiences.

## Section II: Major Themes in the Works of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki

Within academic circles D.T. Suzuki is most often used as an example of bad scholarship—letting too much of his own personal agenda inform his treatment of his object of study. *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1959), an expanded version of a 1938 piece (*Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*), is often used as a notorious example of a secondary (or reverse) Orientalist discourse—posing Eastern religions as superior and deeper than Western traditions. There is no doubt that Suzuki holds Zen as the pure essence of all religions<sup>52</sup> including Buddhism and the very foundation of Japanese culture arts and the code of the Samurai, called *budhido*. Moreover, from his early works to his most infamous he pushes the idea of the uniqueness and superiority of Zen, which is hallmark rhetoric of a nationalistic discourse.

However, there is much more going on in the pages of Suzuki's works than just cultural imperialism. Often, we can find Suzuki answering critics of Buddhism and correctly calling into question Western misconceptions. Suzuki also contributed a fair amount of good scholarship, especially in his works on the *Lankavatara Sutra* (1930). Moreover, Suzuki's works are quite readable—the great bulk of his writings consist of interesting stories of Zen masters of the past and his presentation, along with the language that he employs, is accessible to a Western audience. It is this quality, more than any other, which provided readers and a popular reception for his works. His works are intentionally entertaining; they are not directly aimed at the scholarly community, but

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<sup>52</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Practical Methods of Zen Instruction*.

rather at the educated middle class layman who is interested in dabbling in a little Buddhism.

As we delve into the works of Suzuki, a significant factor must be kept in mind; he was most popular and most widely read in the U.S. from the end of World War II through the 60's and 70's, around twenty years after his works were originally written. Suzuki was the most active and productive during the first phase of *The Eastern Buddhist*, from the early 1920's up to 1939 (it has been continued on by others after Suzuki's death). All of his major essays were written during this time, often to be collected into book form (all three of the *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, for example). However, it wasn't until the efforts of Christmas Humphreys, of the Buddhist Society in London, immediately after the end of World War II, that Suzuki's works were 'discovered' all over again for European and American audiences. We draw attention to this long lag between the publication of Suzuki's works and his popular reception in European and American culture in order to discuss and notice important differences between the pre and post war cultural locations. At the time when most of Suzuki's works were first published, from 1921 to 1940, late-Victorian era interest in Buddhism had dried up,<sup>53</sup> along with Victorian culture itself. There was more interest in Suzuki's works in various European Buddhism societies, but it was only after the direct encounter with Japanese culture that American interest was again piqued. During the war years Suzuki continued to write and live in Kyoto, but only in Japanese and only intended for a Japanese audiences. Four years after the end of the war, Suzuki attended the second

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<sup>53</sup> See Postscript: Buddhism in America after 1912 in: Thomas Tweed, *American Encounters with Buddhism: 1844-1912*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 157 – 162

East-West Philosophers Conference at the University of Hawaii. It was in the next decades that Suzuki and his writings would again be popular for a new generation of iconoclasts. We therefore have an interesting situation. Suzuki was writing for and in response to the shifting cultures of the early to mid-1900's, yet was read by and formed an important part of the counter-culture, at least two decades later.

One major feature of Suzuki's works is the profusion of stories of Zen masters of the past. Basically, large parts of all of his works contain numerous stories of Zen masters, their sayings and doings. Often, the stories are a dialogue between a master and a disciple. The disciple asks a question, to which the master responds in a non-rational way—a strange saying, obtuse gesture or striking the inquisitor. These stories function in a number of important ways. Primarily, they provide Suzuki's works with authenticity and legitimacy by linking his word with those of past masters. Secondly, for Buddhist sympathizers reading Suzuki, these stories were perceived as the true nature of Zen Buddhism. These stories were attractive, strange, and one of the main reasons readers would pick up another of Suzuki's works—in short they were entertaining.

Within D.T. Suzuki's works, we can identify four major themes, among others, that inform the way Suzuki discusses Zen Buddhism. His works are clearly not confined to these four concepts, but they are clearly heavily informed by them. These four concepts are: a) psychology, b) philosophy / intellectualism, c) nationalism, and d) mysticism; we will discuss each in turn.

Each of Suzuki's works is laden with the language of psychology - the experience of Zen is expressed in Western psychological categories and cast in the model of the psyche, complete with cathartic release and sharing much with Jungian individuation. Alongside

an academic interest, Suzuki met, on at least one occasion, with Carl G. Jung and worked very closely with Eric Fromm, the creative force behind the development of humanistic psychology.

Even as a young person, Suzuki had a strong intellectual interest and was clearly an avid reader with a concern for texts. Therefore it is no surprise to find him carrying this framework into his explanation of Zen. Suzuki often states that the intellect, as understood in Western sense, is a discriminative and dualistic way of thinking. It is inherently flawed and to be overcome by enlightenment. In this regard, he is not much different from his contemporaries who were spreading Buddhism to America. Again and again Suzuki expounds Bodhidharma's well known description of Zen as "a special transmission outside of the Scriptures, no dependence upon words and letters."<sup>54</sup> Yet his whole body of work is written and intended for an intelligent and well-read audience, and he himself understands and speaks through a rational/intellectual viewpoint. Suzuki himself is aware of the paradox, often noting that the famous masters in his stories were well versed in Buddhist literature, yet 'had no dependence on letters.' I argue that this situation is not a paradox at all, when considered in the context of the impact that Suzuki's works had for Americans. What Suzuki is ultimately doing is criticizing Western scholasticism and intellectual traditions, while at the same time offering 'Zen' as true philosophy and the real mechanism toward true intellectual wisdom.

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<sup>54</sup> Albert Welter, *Ch'an Slogans and the Creation of Ch'an Ideology: 'A Special Transmission Outside the Scriptures'*, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion by November, 1995.

Suzuki's nationalistic leanings have been clearly identified by many others, most notably Robert Sharf and Brian Victoria.<sup>55</sup> Here we explore how Suzuki's politics relate to his cultural location. In so doing, we get the clear sense, from him of Japanese superiority and Zen as the highest form of Japanese culture. This is not so surprising considering that Japan had launched its own colonialist campaign against its neighbors as Suzuki was busy writing away in Kyoto.

As we have seen, Suzuki was interested in, and informed by, theosophical and universalistic religious ideologies. He describes Zen as "speculative mysticism."<sup>56</sup> Suzuki was primarily influenced by ideas of universal essences of all religions and a monistic viewpoint. Furthermore, when Suzuki is discussing the experience of Zen, his language is often very similar to how mystical experiences were described in turn of the century America. More than any of the other major concepts which informed his writings, the universalistic and theosophical elements are least noticed by Suzuki himself. Importantly this framework operates unquestioned in Suzuki's writings; therefore it requires special attention to tease out and explore its ramifications. Let us now examine each of these major concepts in greater depth and attempt to draw out some solid conclusions about the overall nature of the collected works of D.T. Suzuki.

### *Psychological Frame*

One of the primary themes that we find running through the works of D.T. Suzuki, from his early works to his last book, is the use of psychological language and concepts in his presentation of Zen Buddhism. Suzuki is not alone in this, or even the

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<sup>55</sup> Brian Victoria, *Zen at War*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Suzuki, *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*, Forward, pg. 1

first to do so. Many contemporaries of Suzuki were also interested in presenting Buddhism as modern and scientific. The new science of psychology provided an excellent platform for doing so.

There is also long and established history of Buddhist psychology, in which Suzuki is clearly rooted. The *Lankavatara Sutra*, one of Suzuki's first major projects, is largely about psychology and self-realization in a Buddhist fashion and contemplation of the mind and its states lie at the heart of a great deal of Buddhist literature. The important difference is Suzuki took Western psychological terms and applied them to seem *as if* they were identical to the Buddhist psychological categories he was applying them to. Suzuki modified both Western categories of psychology and Buddhist psychology to make each fit with the other. At the end of the day, however, Suzuki doesn't see Western psychology as complete enough-- "he was critical of the limitations inherent in the analytic method of psychology."<sup>57</sup>

As early as 1906, we find Suzuki stating that "what it (*dhyana* – ultimate wisdom) purposes to accomplish is to make our *consciousness* realize the inner reason of the universe which abides in our *minds*."<sup>58</sup> In 1911, "it is the object of Zen, therefore, to save us from going *crazy* or being crippled"<sup>59</sup> and discussing the subconscious along with the loss of mental equilibrium. As late as 1960, six years before his death, Suzuki published

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<sup>57</sup> Fields, 205

<sup>58</sup> (Italics added). D. T. Suzuki, *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*, in *Studies in Zen*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1955), 42.

<sup>59</sup> (Italics added) D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series* (London: Rider & Company: 1949), 13. See footnote one of this work, Suzuki states that the introduction developed from lectures he gave in 1911.

*Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, in collaboration with Eric Fromm,<sup>60</sup> the noted humanistic psychologist. Almost all of Suzuki's published works contain the words: 'mind,' consciousness,' 'unconsciousness,' or other similar psyche-related language. Eric Fromm came to know Suzuki through the latter's lectures at Columbia University in the 1950's. From this grew a strong working relationship, resulting in their collaboration on a book and two separate month-long workshops. Suzuki was the featured speaker at the 1956 and 1957 conference on Zen and Psychoanalysis, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Suzuki spent both the summer of 1956 and 1957 with Fromm in Mexico. Suzuki had a life-long interest in psychology and he clearly used this framework in his exposition of Zen.

Suzuki's use of Western psychological thinking seems to have been largely shaped by Jungian and Freudian psychological theories. Suzuki's ideal of *satori* is more aligned with Jung's goal of individuation. This is also supported by the fact that the two met at least once, in 1953, at the Eranos Conference in Switzerland.<sup>61</sup> The two corresponded with one another, at least in regards to the introduction Jung wrote. Suzuki demonstrates that he is also familiar with Freudian ideas of (often clashing) psychodynamic forces and links them to a Mahayanist view of the psyche.<sup>62</sup> Overall, Suzuki's writings are not, on the surface, directly concerned with psychological theory; rather he uses Western categories freely in his writings as background assumptions. Suzuki's exposure to psychological ideas (while at either Waseda or Tokyo Imperial

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<sup>60</sup>Eric Fromm was at the forefront of the humanistic phrasing of psychology, in which the patient is understood holistically and as an agent in overcoming their own psychological problems.

<sup>61</sup>Masao, Abe, *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, 213.

<sup>62</sup>“When a tendency is thus in the beginning given a strong impetus, it gains momentum, opening up its own course of movement.” *The Lankavatara Sutra* in *The Eastern Buddhist*, March 1929.

University) provided words, concepts and categories that Suzuki could use to describe Zen, in English, to European and American audiences. Suzuki's linkage of Zen Buddhism and psychology - especially when the Zen experience is represented as calming an overwrought western mind - played an important role in the understanding of Zen by Americans. At a basic level, Zen was understood to be in accord with Western theories of the psyche and, more importantly, a mechanism by which Americans could achieve mental harmony.

### Satori

Let us now examine a specific example which demonstrates how psychology framed much of Suzuki's works. *Satori*, most often translated as 'enlightenment,' is the very heart of Zen and Buddhism as a whole. This ultimate of realizations has been described in a number of ways and brought about by a great number of practices.<sup>63</sup> Suzuki describes this experience through the language and categories of psychology; as it was understood by his contemporaries. For example, "the individual shell in which my personality is so solidly encased explodes at the moment of satori."<sup>64</sup> In a particularly Jungian fashion,<sup>65</sup> "satori is to realize the Unconscious which goes beyond the opposition

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<sup>63</sup> Across the vast diversity of Buddhism, the means of achieving enlightenment and the language describing such means is extremely diverse. In the context of the present discussion a few points are important to make. First, modern scholarship has emphasized that 'awakening' would be a more accurate translation of nirvana and satori. Translating it as 'enlightenment' was more attractive to scholars around the turn of the century. Also, in a traditional Buddhist context, this term would have more to do with the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*). Finally, Buddhist Modernists, like Suzuki, visualize it as more 'grasping reality with bare hands' or 'seeing things as they really are.'

<sup>64</sup> D.T. Suzuki, Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series, Third printing, (Essex: Anchor Brendon Ltd, 1985), 36.

<sup>65</sup> In Jungian psychology, the unconscious is likened to the vast bulk of an iceberg, an overwhelming expanse of collective and personal psychic phenomenon—as compared to one owns consciousness, the little pinnacle of ice visible jutting out of the water.

(between two opposing conscious restrictions in the individuals' mind)."<sup>66</sup> Beyond just an individual psyche, Suzuki also considers "racial psychology of the Japanese people"<sup>67</sup> which allowed Zen to penetrate more deeply into Japanese culture than the Indian culture of its birth. Clearly, Suzuki holds that such categories as consciousness, unconsciousness and the psyche are useful ways of describing Zen, and that Zen acts in accord with these categories.

"The experience (*satori*) may thus be treated wholly as a psychological event"<sup>68</sup>. Not just the experience itself, but also how it comes about and the end goal is described as a psychological process. In a typical exposition on *satori*, Suzuki usually begins by noting that in the stories of masters, and their students who suddenly gained *satori*, it is a simple, often commonplace, gesture or action that brings about the awakening. Due to the simplicity of the act itself, it alone is not enough to bring about the deep realization that follows. Therefore, "we naturally presume some deep-seated psychological antecedents which are thereby abruptly brought to maturity."<sup>69</sup> These antecedents are characterized by a 'general uneasiness of mind'<sup>70</sup> and a strong desire for ultimate truth. This leads one to a "mental *impasse*, accompanied by a steady, untiring and wholehearted 'knocking' (or searching)."<sup>71</sup> It is in this highly charged state that a simple gesture or saying by a master (who is a master because he can assess when a student is

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>67</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1959), 21. Also Suzuki mentions "racial psychological idiosyncrasy" of the Chinese (they always had a concern for practical and worldly matters) which brought about the "transformation of Indian Buddhism into Zen Buddhism." See p. 3

<sup>68</sup> *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series*, 66

<sup>69</sup> *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series*, 40

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 60, Italics in original

ready and intuitively knows just the right action to take) can bring “the searching mind...up to an apex (where) it breaks or explodes and the whole structure of consciousness assumes an entirely different aspect.”<sup>72</sup> This experience is like mentally “leaping or throwing oneself down the precipice” producing a state of “no-thought (acitta).”<sup>73</sup> “We can no longer describe this state of consciousness in terms of logic or psychology.”<sup>74</sup>

Throughout this description of *satori*, not only does Daisetz use the language of psychology, he also mirrors modern Buddhist concerns and the understanding of psychology of his day. We notice that this sudden shift from a consciousness that is fragmented and in opposition with itself to a undifferentiated mind in a sudden cathartic release, is very similar to the goal of *individuation* in Jungian psychology, in which an individual arrives at a true understanding of themselves through a correct understanding of the personal and collective unconscious factors of their psyches. Very often these unconscious elements will ‘erupt’ into consciousness through dreams or sudden insights.<sup>75</sup> There are some important differences between Suzuki’s *satori* and Jung’s *individuation*. First, the process for Jung is much longer and piecemeal- whereas *satori* happens all at once and results in a total transformation. Secondly, in *individuation*, unconscious elements erupt into consciousness, often causing mental anguish until the content is worked through, whereas *satori* is something sought after. Despite these differences, however, these two processes share a number of things in common. It is the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 61

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 62

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 62

<sup>75</sup> For example, “unconscious contents that cannot be reproduced voluntarily...can be inferred from the spontaneous irruption of subliminal contents into consciousness.” *Phenomenology of the Self*, in *The Portable Jung*, Joseph Campbell, ed. (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1971), 141

same sense of mental anguish<sup>76</sup> that pushes one into the satori experience, or to seek out a psychotherapist to come to terms with unconscious elements. Also, at the end of both processes, consciousness is fundamentally and irreversibly altered. There is more than enough correspondence between psychology and the Zen of Suzuki to demonstrate that Suzuki was at least familiar with the psychological texts of his day, and employed the language and conceptualizations of psychology in his writings.

### *Intellectual Frame*

As we learned in section one, Suzuki was of an intellectual mindset. He was interested in texts, languages and scholarly pursuits in general. Therefore, we should not be overly surprised to find his works framed by a high degree of intellectualism and philosophy. Through these categories Suzuki makes distinctions between ways of thinking. In his early works we find him drawing a distinction between Chinese, Indian and Japanese intellectual forms. India is largely disregarded; China understood as fertile ground for the development of Zen as a particular form of Buddhism. Finally the Japanese intellect is described as the place in which Zen could flower to its full glory. In later writings, he draws distinctions between the East and the West. He is critical of the overly rationalistic and analytic styles of thinking in the West, while supporting Eastern style of remaining connected to nature and able to “really touch the ground of Reality.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This is the job of the Koan—an insoluble riddle that forces one to transcend typical thought patterns to resolve.

<sup>77</sup> Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series, 57

These distinctions have much more to do with Japanese nationalism and ideas of racial superiority than actual historical or societal differences.

Suzuki also wrestled with the issue of the role of intellectualism or learning in a tradition that he also espousing to be “outside the scriptures.”<sup>78</sup> He struggles to balance the idea of *satori*, which is achieved as a result of a personal, spontaneous awakening which isn’t brought about by learning, and masters that were clearly intelligent, and often well versed in traditional Buddhist sutras. In all the stories of masters that Suzuki loves to give, none of the students were awakened by studying a sutra - but rather from a strange gesture, comment, or commonly a physical assault by the master (a slap or strike with a stick) or, as in the case of Suzuki, the sound of a bell. However, the masters’ response to students’ questions often demonstrates a deep knowledge of Buddhist canon and can only be understood in the context of Buddhist practice.

On the most straight - forward level, Suzuki is clear that the Zen experience is: “not at all the outcome of intellectual reflection, but simply the statement of direct perception in which the mind grasps the true nature of existence without the intermediary of logic.”<sup>79</sup> He also critiques “ordinary books of philosophy...because they are no more than philosophy; whatever truth philosophy teaches is exhausted within itself and fails to open up a new vista for the student.”<sup>80</sup> Yet, in other places in his writings we find that ‘the Zen experience is largely intellectual’<sup>81</sup> and “the Zen monasteries were almost

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<sup>78</sup> The “four statements” of Zen: “A special transmission outside the Scriptures; No dependence upon words and letters; Direct pointing to the soul of man; Seeing into one’s nature and the attainment of Buddha hood” Essays in Zen Buddhism, First series, 20

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>80</sup> Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series, 57

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 55

exclusively the repository of learning and art.”<sup>82</sup> How then, can Zen both be ‘non-logical’ and ‘largely intellectual’? Suzuki answers that the intellect of Zen is of a different order than a person’s regular intellect and only after one has reached *satori* can ‘Zen intellect’ be correctly understood. This latter kind of intellect is more intuitive and direct; more akin to artistic works and produces “Zen masters (who) may not make good philosophers, but they are very frequently fine artists.”<sup>83</sup>

Thinly veiled behind this kind of assertion, we find Suzuki critiquing Western intellectual traditions. The West, for all its deep intellectual probing and technological superiority, has not or cannot use intellect in this non-discriminatory way. The West is still at the ‘hair-splitting’ analysis stage and hasn’t yet made this intellectual leap. “Comparatively speaking, there was much in the West that was superior (technical and scientific) and which had to be introduced into Japan. Nevertheless, there was much that Japan—or the Orient—had to make known to the West, particularly in the areas of philosophy and religion.”<sup>84</sup>

Here again we see some of the nationalistic leanings of Suzuki influencing his writing. He wrote the last line here quoted in 1961, sixteen years after the end of WWII. At this time Japan was still going through post-war restructuring at the hands of European and American hands. By asserting that the Japanese people, and their religion, were superior to Western philosophy and religion, Suzuki can maintain the superiority of Japan over the allied powers. While Americans had clearly dominated the Japanese through force and

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<sup>82</sup> *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 28

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 30

<sup>84</sup> Masao Abe, ed. *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 24

technological innovation, these styles of thinking are shallow compared to the Japanese Zen master who has plumbed the depths of the mind and grasped reality with bare hands.

### *Nationalistic Discourses*

Nationalistic discourses are characterized by assertions of the distinctiveness and superiority of one's own culture and nation as over and against all others. They often go hand in hand with Orientalist discourses which seek to create the foil of 'the other' against which one can favorably expound one's own cultural norms. Thomas Tweed<sup>85</sup> and Bernard Faure<sup>86</sup> remind us of how these Orientalist and nationalistic discourses were both challenged by and adapted to those to whom they are directed. In the wake of the colonial period, we find ongoing Western representations of the East, and people of the East both directly challenging and adapting to these representations.

Suzuki is clearly a participant in this kind of discourse, and it is clear that he holds Japanese culture, as informed by Zen, as the highest rung of human culture. Suzuki's Orientalism and nationalism are but one voice in the overall Modern Buddhist response to European Orientalism and rapid colonialism in India and numerous East Asian countries. As the Dutch, French and British continued to dominate more and more Asian countries, those still outside of direct colonial control felt the pressure to modernize and thus thwart being overrun. Modernization happened on many levels at once, from

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D.T. Suzuki, and Translocative History*, in *The Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 2: 249-281

<sup>86</sup> Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

technological and industrial advances, to rephrasing traditional religious and cultural practices along the lines of science, reason and disregarding ‘arcane’ ritual and belief. Soyen Shaku, Suzuki’s longtime teacher, along with a handful of other Japanese Buddhists, was at the forefront of rephrasing Buddhism such that it would both be an equal to Enlightenment religious ideals of Europeans and provide an entirely unique and ‘non-European’ religious practice, around which the Japanese people could rally and build a strong nation that could successfully throw off colonial attempts at control. This vanguard of early Modern Buddhist thinking was very successful, and paved the way for the Japanese to become a colonial power in their own right —invading China and setting up a number of ‘puppet’ governments under the movement known as the ‘Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.’”

Suzuki was an inheritor and creator of this nationalistic phrasing of Buddhism as modern, scientific, and reason-based; while also continuing to be meaningful and the true purveyor of the original and essential teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. For Suzuki this meant: “they (the two schools of Zen in Japan) are in a stage of transition from a medieval, dogmatic and conservative spirit to one of progress, enlightenment and liberalism.”<sup>87</sup> We find that all of these 19<sup>th</sup> century concerns and voicing of Buddhism were represented as coming from the mouth of the masters themselves, not from 19<sup>th</sup> century monks who are announcing them. Let us now turn to the ‘history’ that Suzuki provides for the development of Zen to understand how he, in particular, participated in the Orientalist debate.

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<sup>87</sup> *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*, 20

Suzuki emphasizes the story that the Buddha transmitted his deepest spiritual wisdom to an adept, Mahakashyapa, by holding forth a flower to his congregation of followers.<sup>88</sup> In this wordless teaching, the most important part of Buddhism was made transmittable for a long line of patriarchs, the last of which founded Zen in Japan. Despite the fact that the Buddha lived and taught in India exclusively, the practice of Zen, “though long inactive and almost dead in its land of birth, is still flourishing in Japan.”<sup>89</sup> Suzuki notes that “Buddhism became thoroughly naturalized in China. It discarded its Hindu garb, borrowed and ill-fitting, and began to weave its own, entirely with native materials.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, for Suzuki, Zen may have, almost accidentally, began in India but really bloomed within Chinese culture, losing its ‘ill-fitting Hindu garb.’ However, this is not the end of the story. “The Zen sect was introduced into Japan in its perfected form...which now thoroughly permeates every fibre of Japanese life and civilization.”<sup>91</sup> Zen died a slow death in China, becoming overly scholastic and ossified, such that “all the important temples and monasteries now existing in the Middle Kingdom belong to the Zen Sect, though the Sect as a living faith is as good as dead.”<sup>92</sup> Finally, even in Japan where true Zen flourished, it is only the Rinzai school that qualitatively strong, and removed from the quietism of the Soto school.<sup>93</sup>

An average reader of Suzuki then would be left with the impression that the Rinzai school of Zen in Japan is the only and greatest reservoir of true Zen. This has a two-fold effect. First, it places Suzuki (who is in the Rinzai School), as an authoritative

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<sup>88</sup> *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*, 12

<sup>89</sup> *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*, 15

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 19

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 34-5

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 19

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 20

voice of Zen— in fact, the only voice that still carries the deep meaning of the original teachings of the Buddha. Second, it places Japanese culture, which is permeated with ‘real’ Zen as superior to its Asian neighbors. The more U.S. sympathizers found faults with their own culture, the more attractive this imagined story of Japanese culture and ancient meanings are attractive. As a result of this nationalistic discourse, then, the already romanticized and idealized ideas of Japan (from the Victorian period) and its religions were further inflated; spawning a whole new round of Western Orientalist discourses and imaginings in response.

### *Mystical - Universalist Theme*

In examining the biography of Daisetz Suzuki, we have seen that he had a sustained interest in organizations which fall under the label of mystical or esoteric, such as the Theosophical Society and Swedenborg Society. Both of these groups are mystical in that they promote the idea that an individual can have direct apprehension of a higher power (usually called God) by means of the ‘right’ or hidden knowledge, and thus esoteric. Importantly, Suzuki clearly shares with these groups the idea that on a primary level, all religions and philosophies share the same basic teachings; a universal ‘essence’ of religion; which Zen reflects the most clearly. Suzuki married Beatrice Lane, a Theosophist in 1911, and was president of a Theosophical group in Kyoto from 1920 - 21.<sup>94</sup> While practices in these societies and within the mystical movements as a whole were extremely diverse, there are basic factors that Suzuki clearly shares in common with

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<sup>94</sup> Adyar Archives of the Theosophical Society.

them. For Suzuki, Zen is clearly the ‘master key,’ or “Eye of the wonderful Dharma, which is Nirvana, the Mind, the mystery of reality and non-reality...this Eye, which looks into the deeps of the Dharma”<sup>95</sup> and allows one to see reality as it is.

Paul Carus clearly had an effect on the younger Suzuki during the decade they worked together in LaSalle. Carus held, what he described as ‘Religion of Science’ ideology, in which “reasoning and scientific thought were applied to religion.”<sup>96</sup> Buddhism, as understood by Carus, was compatible with his ideas. Carus, however, was not interested in developing a history of Buddhism, but rather finding “the kernel of religious truth that remained after the dogmatic and superstitious elements were removed.”<sup>97</sup> Carus shared in the Enlightenment ideal of creating a ‘master narrative’ of natural laws that would account, in a scientific way, both material and spiritual forces<sup>98</sup>.

Suzuki met many other Theosophists, mystics, academics, and romantics during his time at LaSalle, who shared Carus’s ideas. One of the most notable of this group is Albert J. Edmunds. Edmunds regularly attended séances and participated in other occult ‘psychic phenomena’ activities, as well as actively studying and promoting Buddhism.

For Suzuki, “Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion.”<sup>99</sup> Not only is Zen the true heart of all traditions, but also “what makes all these religions (Christianity, Mahommedanism, Taoism and positivistic Confucianism) and philosophies vital and

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<sup>95</sup> *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*, 1906 in *Studies in Zen*, 1955

<sup>96</sup> Tweed, 66 first published in a journal of the Rationalist Press Association, of London.

<sup>97</sup> Tweed, 67

<sup>98</sup> Tweed, 66

<sup>99</sup> First Series *Practical Methods of Zen Instruction*, 268

inspiring, keeping up their usefulness and efficiency, is due the presence in them of what I may designate as the Zen element.”<sup>100</sup>

For many readers of Suzuki’s books who were looking for something that could provide the position from which to critique their own culture and were interested in mystical and spiritual experiences (sometime with the help of drugs), found the kind of mystical language that Suzuki used very attractive.

### *Conclusions*

In a final summary of the works of D.T. Suzuki, we can make some important observations. The four major themes that run through the works of Suzuki often act as background assumptions that he is working from, not directly addressing. The ideologies of mysticism along with universalistic religious ideas are combined with Japanese cultural superiority to form Suzuki’s basic assumptions. He was intellectual by disposition, while wrestling with a tradition that claims to be beyond intellectualization and outside of texts and language. Yet he lived an entire lifetime with the goal of making Zen intelligible for European and American audiences. Suzuki, more consciously, used the language of psychology to explain Zen, and largely understood enlightenment in psychological terms. However, there are also other threads running through his numerous articles and books.

One is the role his wife played in his life and ideas. Suzuki, and those that wrote about him after his death, make little or no mention of his wife. Beatrice was a Radcliffe

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 268

graduate, who had studied under William James,<sup>101</sup> and co-edited *The Eastern Buddhist* from its inception to her death in 1939. In the two autobiographical accounts that Suzuki wrote, *An Autobiographical Account* (1961) and *Early Memories* (1964), not once is his wife mentioned, even when he discusses the journal. Suzuki was a product of his environment, and in scholastic circles of his time, it was convention not let personal language enter one's works - everything was 'abstracted' away from the writer. Possibly Suzuki was trying to remain an 'unattached' observer to his own autobiography. This, however, isn't water tight; he spends a paragraph discussing his mother's involvement in occult Buddhist practices.<sup>102</sup> It seems more likely that late in his life, when Theosophical movements had largely ceased to be, he was distancing himself from such movements. It is unclear exactly why Suzuki would choose to distance himself from his involvement with Theosophy: if he grew disinterested, if some problem developed, and / or if mysticism had become outdated and ridiculed. It is likely this last element that influenced Suzuki to sever his association with mystical movements and involvement with people like Paul Carus.

In the case of Carus, Suzuki mentions his translation of the "Gospel of the Buddha" into Japanese in 1907, but ends there. He phrases the situation as one in which he was merely a translator for texts and didn't necessarily have much to do with Carus, personally. However, in the decade that they lived and worked together, more than a casual acquaintance must have formed. Also, Carus would have sent Suzuki home around 1908 or 09 because all of the translation work was finished (Suzuki stayed on in

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<sup>101</sup> An early pioneer of the Theosophical movement and widely read in Religious Studies courses.

<sup>102</sup> "Hijibomon," See: *An Autobiographical Account*, 15

order to translate the *Tao Te Ching* into English), if Suzuki was merely a translator.

Another interesting clue that Suzuki was trying to distance himself from Carus is the one paragraph review provided for the 1929 reprint of the *Gospel of the Buddha*.<sup>103</sup> The review states “it may be said that it tries to present the essential teachings of the Buddha in a popular style without losing any of their rationality and moral discipline. In fact the bulk of it are free translations of the old Buddhist Canon.” No where is it mentioned that they very editor of the journal this review appears, translated this work, knew the author or that the book is even worth reading.

The second issue relates to something that we *don't* find in Suzuki's works, that is discussion of god(s), ritual or supernatural powers. He clearly shares with Carus, Olcott and others is the premise that supernatural and superhuman elements are not part of 'true' Buddhism. In contrast to “classical Zen (which) ranks among the most ritualistic forms of Buddhist monasticism,”<sup>104</sup> Suzuki's Zen is largely free of ritualism. Suzuki's focus is on the Zen experience as primarily a psychological change in perception and awareness; which is not brought about through ritual practice. When Suzuki does talk about the meditation hall and monks actual practice, he focus on how they are unique and different—the policy of 'no work, no eating' and “something...peculiarly Zen in the table manners of the monks.”<sup>105</sup> Suzuki focuses on how Zen is unique and a more authentic embodiment of reality than on the central role of ritual in the tradition. That, in short, ritual is a cultural commodity that can be shorn rather than an important part of the Zen experience.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 5, no. 1, March 1929, 124-25

<sup>104</sup> Robert H. Sharf, *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism*

<sup>105</sup> *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 323

The third and final issue that will lead us into our next section on the reception of the works of Suzuki in American culture is the intended audience Suzuki wrote for. His presentation is clearly aimed at a fairly well educated and middle-upper middle class Buddhist sympathizer. Moreover, Suzuki seems to be imagining an audience that does not exist. Throughout all his lengthy expositions on Zen, nowhere does he explicitly state that Westerners are capable of true Zen insight. For all its wonderfulness, Zen isn't necessarily or explicitly available for actual Americans. Unlike American converts, like Philip Kapleau, who clearly intended for Americans to begin the actual practice of *zazen* (meditation); Suzuki seems more aloof. It is clear that Zen is a wonderful, transforming experience, what isn't clear is if Americans are capable of having the same experience as their Japanese neighbors. Without a doubt, many of Suzuki's readers weren't concerned with this detail and read him for instruction on making Zen a part of their lives.

### **Section III: D.T. Suzuki's Role in the American Reception of Buddhism**

Now that we are acquainted with the personal history and works of D.T. Suzuki, set within the context of their local histories, we can now broaden our inquiry to examine the role of his works in the general reception of Buddhism in America. Our task is to understand three interrelated components. The first is the history of Buddhists and Buddhism in American culture. We will examine the history of contact between Chinese, Japanese and other Asians cultures with U.S. culture. Second is the representation and 'image' of Buddhism that the majority of potential practitioners encountered, and how the received image influenced its uptake in culture. An important feature of American Buddhism is the many thousands of people who incorporate what were originally Asian Buddhist practices into their own repertoire of religious practice. They 'sympathize,' as Thomas Tweed calls it, with Buddhism and represent many levels of commitment. This cohort of Buddhists is more difficult to measure than official Buddhist members, but an extremely important element of Buddhist and American religious history. One major source of information in the modern age for this group of Buddhist sympathizers is the internet, leading to development of well financed and remarkable sites where people can find information and discuss in real time questions about their Buddhist practice. In the final component, we examine Suzuki's role in each of these sites of conversation, and demonstrate ways in which his influence can still be felt. It has clearly diminished since its peak in the 1960's and 70's, and has been dismissed in many circles - especially in academic works. However, we can still find traces of Suzuki in many places.

This discussion is centered on the ‘sympathizer’ or ‘night-stand’<sup>106</sup> and convert Buddhist communities who are predominantly populated by well-educated, middle class, Caucasians, of both genders,<sup>107</sup> for two main reasons. This is the community most likely to still be influenced by and quote Suzuki, and because by studying the fuzzy boundaries of conversion and the complex religious identities of peoples and groups engaged in religious seeking, we discover important and information in the pursuit of studying religion. We also add ‘cybersangha’ as another element of night-stand and sympathizer forms of interest in Buddhism, because the internet has opened entirely new means of creating and maintaining religious communities and as a mechanism for providing information for both the moderately interested and fully committed individual and forms a major source of information for the curious and committed Buddhist.

Unfortunately, by focusing on convert communities only, the much larger communities of ethnic or ‘cradle’ Buddhists, who as a result of immigration have brought their Buddhist practices with them, are almost completely ignored. Although it is useful to make this division into ‘parallel communities’ of Buddhists in America, it is also problematic and ultimately doing a great disservice to millions of Americans whose cultural heritage includes Buddhism. The works of Suzuki play almost no part in immigrant communities, because very few immigrant communities are Zen practitioners; they practice other forms of Buddhism. The story of second or third generation Americans, who are still grappling with adapting traditional Buddhism with a pluralistic America, is as important as the story of a white Protestant from the mid-west who begins

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas Tweed, *Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents and the Study of Religion in American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*.

<sup>107</sup> James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: Some Empirical Findings*, in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, 98

attending meditation sessions in college, with little intention of making a long-term commitment in the overall contours of American Buddhism.

Convert communities generally focus more on meditation practices - with attention to ones' own practice. Ethnic communities are more interested in continuing the social, cultural, and religious traditions as best they can thousands of miles from home, for both themselves and the next generation. Moreover, sympathizers are open to hybrid and plural religious identities to a greater extent than most ethnic communities. It is not a radical statement for an ethnic Buddhist to take on Buddhist practice, but, at certain times, being a Caucasian convert was a rather radical means of asserting ones own freedom from 'the system' - and all that was perceived by non conformists to be elitist hegemony. This also points to the various political, cultural and counter – cultural ends that Buddhism has served (or been made to serve) both at home, and in the West.

Buddhism has both served as an agent of Japanese nationalism<sup>108</sup> and as a means to radically challenge this collusion of state power and Buddhist training. In the United States, Buddhism has often been used to critique Western society as being overly materialistic, power and money hungry.

However, both ethnic and convert communities share an essential affinity for Buddhism and wish to see it grow, or a 'spreading of the dharma.' Ethnic communities have a much longer history in America than their convert siblings; they can speak volumes about the ups and downs of learning to being a Buddhist, and adapting their practice, in the cultural location of America—clearly important and necessary information for any burgeoning Buddhist group.

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<sup>108</sup> Victoria, 55.

A remarkable feature of the American Buddhist landscape is its diversity—every major branch of Buddhism has established itself in the United States and its similarities—a more ecumenical sense of a common ‘Buddhism’ shared among these various traditions and diverse adherents. One important feature of the growth of Buddhism in America, especially in popular culture, is a more cohesive sense of “Buddhism,” as an umbrella term under which the plethora of traditions is considered together. The common perception is of a singular entity, under which differences of sects and groups are largely ignored. For the average person, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are “Buddhists” that speak for and practice the same sort of Buddhism. Buddhism in America has been shaped by this normative and hegemonic idea of Buddhism, for both bad and good. For example, the first North American dharma heir of a Soto teacher - Richard Baker - maintained secretive love affairs<sup>109</sup> with female students and this affected not only the Berkeley Zen Center which he led, but also Vajrayana groups on the East coast; in so far as the average person understood both to be “Buddhism.”

In recent decades, many Buddhist organizations, both domestically and abroad, have become deeply engaged in humanitarian work, a remarkable new phase in Buddhist history. Centered on environmental, social and health issues, these “contemporary manifestations of Asian Buddhism as vehicle of social and political activism”<sup>110</sup> are adding new facets to the multifaceted Buddhist tradition. Being engaged in the welfare of others is nothing new to the Buddhist traditions, what is new is an increased sense of engaging in issues of the *here and now*—getting involved in political, social and judicial

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<sup>109</sup> See footnote 129.

<sup>110</sup> Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, ed. Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia. (New York: State University of New York Press 1996), Preface, 9.

affairs directly and in the present. Most interestingly, this largely American manifestation of the dharma has, in turn, been exported back to Buddhists around the world and become an important part of the Buddhist cause world-wide. This new sense of mission, concern, and the establishment of international Buddhist associations of activists have changed the Buddhist landscape in important ways. Importantly, this new direction is largely away from the areas in which Suzuki was most influential, as we will discover.

### *Arrival of the Swans<sup>III</sup>: Historical Overview*

The earliest antecedents for American contact with Buddhism, lies in European interest in “the East.” From traveler and missionary accounts, of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>112</sup>, lay some of the first romanticized and demonized accounts of the Orient. Asia and India, among many others, were desired and feared as ‘the other’ - of which European culture could represent and understand in a variety of ways, without that representation or understanding corresponding to the actual lives and cultures of Asians and Indians. From tales of sultry nights in the sands of Arabia, to 18<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit priests describing the motivation for the monks they observed in meditation as: “obviously to stifle the remorse of their conscience.”<sup>113</sup> The important factor is that Western powers built up images of the Orient, both negative and positive, which weren’t connected to, bound by, or informed by the actual place or people that the images

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<sup>111</sup> A play on the title of Rick Fields book; [How the Swans Came to the Lake](#).

<sup>112</sup> Bernard Faure, [Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition](#), (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1993) 16-17.

<sup>113</sup> Faure, quoting Louis Frois (1528-1563), 18

represented. In this way, the European ‘story’ of Buddhism developed in such a way as to represent Buddhism in primarily negative terms. “(Buddhism) is unalloyed atheism, it “reduces everything to a confused void with a simple nothing as its beginning and end; and...considers that perfection consists in perfect indifference, apathy and an undisturbed quietude.”<sup>114</sup>

From the texts that these missionaries and travelers brought back with them, grew an entire field of European academic interest. Scholars ‘discovered’ Buddhism through the translation and examination of a small set of texts.<sup>115</sup> These texts were of Indian origin, written in Sanskrit, and from within the Theravada tradition. Study of these texts grew into a concentration by European scholars on the Theravada tradition and largely a rejection of the later and ‘more polluted’ Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, as the understood it. These scholars, due to their training and overarching goals, were mostly concerned with the philosophical and metaphysical aspects of Buddhism; they largely rejected ritual, magical or supernatural elements as later ‘perversions’ added to the original teachings of the Buddha, as these scholars understood it to be.

Overall, before Americans had any contact with Asian Buddhists, there was a longstanding image of who and what they were, as result of the aforementioned developments in scholarship and the popular reception of Arnolds’ *The Light of Asia* on both side of the Atlantic. “This hypostatized object, called “Buddhism,” because it had been created by Europe, could also be controlled by it, and it was against this Buddhism

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<sup>114</sup> Rick Field, quoting Noel Alexander’s *Apology of the Dominican Missionaries of China*, 1700.

<sup>115</sup> Especially, the papers of Eugene Bernouf, 1837.

that all of the Buddhisms of the modern Orient were to be judged and to be found lacking<sup>116</sup>.”

The first actual Buddhists arrived in the United States in the middle decades of the 1800's. Chinese immigrants arrived in large numbers during the Western expansion of America, playing an important role in the construction of the transcontinental railroad and settlement of the West Coast. “By 1860, one of every ten Californians was Chinese.”<sup>117</sup> These mostly male workers brought their religion with them, and by 1853 the first temple to serve them was established in San Francisco, by the Sze Yap Company.<sup>118</sup> While there were a number of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists living and practicing in America from the middle of the 1800's onward, they didn't play as significant part of the American narrative, and therefore were minimized, ignored or outright attacked.<sup>119</sup> The most provocative example of this may be the famous picture of the golden spike being driven to complete the transcontinental railroad by the well dressed, trimmed, clean and white president of Union Pacific. While many thousands of Chinese laborers did the work to make this event possible, they are not included anywhere in the picture. There is, however, a dog present on the lower right hand side of the photograph. Nor are Asian laborers present in the most famous picture of the event, with two trains facing each other and a hundred or so people gathered around. They were not part of the narrative of America's Manifest Destiny, and thus had 'no part' in important historical events. The Chinese Exclusion act of 1882 is one example of a dark,

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<sup>116</sup> Donald S. Lopez, jr. *Curators of the Buddha*, 7

<sup>117</sup> Fields, 70.

<sup>118</sup> Fields, 73

<sup>119</sup> Fields notes, among other anti-Chinese events, the deportation of the entire Chinese population of Tacoma, Washington in 1884, 71

recurring theme; outright political and economic exclusion of Asian immigrants. The most maligned manifestation of anti-Asian sentiments was the forced imprisonment of many thousands of Japanese and Chinese in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Before examining that, however, we turn to one of the most important events in the American history of Buddhism, the 1893 World's Parliament of Religion, held in Chicago.

The Parliament came at an important moment in both Japanese and American history. Both cultures were modernizing at an extraordinary rate, with deep changes in the modes of production. Due to the constant dialectic of religions and culture, this was also a time of shifting religious identities and formations of new narratives which included, to a greater or lesser degree, 'traditional' teachings that were rephrased in ways to conform to Enlightenment and Victorian-era values, sensibilities and worldviews. Science and reason, as they were understood in this time period, arose to be the primary themes of the Enlightenment narrative. They informed essential understandings of the origins of people, articulated by the ideas of Social Darwinism; understanding the relationships between cultures in Darwinian terms of most fit to survive and natural selection. In this model, Western culture (European and American) was by nature superior to other cultures. It is within this framework of meaning that the Parliament was called "to promote and deepen the *spirit* of human brotherhood among religious *men* of diverse faiths,"<sup>120</sup> and essentially, to promote "Western Protestant Christianity as a model for the role of religion in modern society."<sup>121</sup> The Parliament was built (both constructed and imagined) around an assumed sense that American (and especially American

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<sup>120</sup> Italics added, Judith Snodgrass, Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 55

<sup>121</sup> Snodgrass, 3

religious traditions) were inherently superior. Essentially, Enlightenment ideals of ultimate truth and universal meaning shaped the very nature of the event, from who was invited, what was admissible, which traditions were represented and the very existence of the event to begin with.

Japan and Japanese society had a similar sense of itself, as the most advanced and ‘pure’ nation, with the duty to enlighten its corrupted neighbors, and the world. The Parliament happened in a pivotal moment as Buddhist leaders were defending and redefining their tradition to be more aligned with the Japanese state, which had, just a few decades earlier, forcibly laicized thousands of monk and nuns, closed many thousands of temples and aligned itself with Shintoism as part of the Meiji reforms. Integral to the response of Buddhists to these reforms was their familiarity with Western philosophy, science and government. Most of the major figures of the New Buddhism reforms had spent time in European universities and were acquainted with Western ideas.

In this new phrasing Buddhism was modern, rational, and scientific; more importantly, represented an essential ‘essence’ that constituted all things Japanese. In this context, the amazing level of self-sacrifice and fighting spirit exhibited by Japanese soldiers in the Sino-Japanese and both World Wars, was explained as *Bushido*—the code of the warrior, which only Buddhism could properly instill in society at large. Moreover, Buddhism, and Zen in particular was described by New Buddhists as containing an original essence, which had been transmitted from the Buddha himself, through generations and was still available today. This essence was also understood as the ‘real’ reason that Japanese soldiers were so fierce and loyal, Japanese culture so refined, and why Japanese society was superior to all others. In response to these ideas, many New Buddhist monks felt a

missionary zeal, “they had a ‘spiritual burden’ of enlightening the benighted world.”<sup>122</sup> The ‘benighted world’ was addressed to both the parts of Japanese society that challenged their phrasing of Buddhism, other Asian nations and the West in general. Thus, by way of successfully gaining appeal in Western culture, the New Buddhists would have more leverage in Japanese society and politics.

With this narrative, Shaku Soen, Hirai, Angarika Dharmapala and others, arrived in Chicago armed to both defend against Western critiques of Buddhism, and to describe a situation in which the West was found lacking and the East superior. These ideas intrigued and impressed the audiences. The ideas of these representatives affected some of the audience quite profoundly, as we saw with Paul Carus,. From this time onward there is an increase in literature that carries this idea as an underlying assumption—that the religions of the East can provide missing meaning from ossified local traditions such as Judaism, Protestantism, and Catholicism. This posits Buddhism as either equal to (or superior to) these other traditions yet are also foreign and intriguing. From this ‘equal other’ standpoint sympathizers had the ability to critically examine, reject, hybridize and explore alternative ideas and spiritualities.

Shaku Soen represented Zen Buddhism at the Parliament, his lectures translated by Suzuki. Soen was not the most memorable of speakers (that fell to Dharmapala and others) but he felt a strong sense of mission. “The Japanese delegates were convinced that Mahayana Buddhism was exactly what the West needed...Westerners were saturated with material comforts but were sadly lacking in the life of the spirit.”<sup>123</sup> In 1905, Soen

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<sup>122</sup> Victoria, 15

<sup>123</sup> Victoria, 15

would return to America, to teach and give talks. He was also “the only Zen master in Japan with any interest in teaching foreigners.”<sup>124</sup> While no more than a handful of people joined him in *zazen*, Soen set a precedent for reaching out to and including European Americans in his missionary activities.

His lectures were later collected into *Zen for Americans, Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot*, by D.T. Suzuki in 1913, who “put the thoughts in a more conventional and comprehensible form *for the benefit of the American public*.”<sup>125</sup> Soen’s most radical move, that would have profound influence for both adherents and teachers, was imagining that America was the next step in the unfolding of the dharma. Whereas the majority of his contemporary Japanese teachers largely discounted the West’s ability to correctly understand and practice Buddhism, Soen rearticulated this position as the perfect opportunity to establish and grow New Buddhism. Best articulated as ‘beginners mind’<sup>126</sup> by Shunryu Suzuki, who established Zen Center<sup>127</sup> in Berkeley in the early 60’s, Americans were understood as free from the preconceptions about Buddhism than people of Japanese and Chinese cultures. Americans had a non-dual ‘beginners mind’ because

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<sup>124</sup> Fields, 194

<sup>125</sup> Soyen Shaku, D.T. Suzuki, trans. *Zen for Americans, Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot*, (LaSalle: Open Court Publishing, 1906), Translator’s preface, v, (italics added).

<sup>126</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, Trudy Dixon, ed. *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, (New York: Weatherhill, 1970), 21.

<sup>127</sup> The history of this center is worth a study all its own, but space limits that discussion here. Shunryu Suzuki was the first Japanese teacher to make an American his Dharma heir, namely Richard Baker. Zen Center boomed, establishing a successful restaurant, farm and retreat around the San Francisco area. However, in the early 1980’s, it came to light that over the years, he had engaged in a number of sexual relations with female students and used a large portion of revenue to purchase exotic gifts for himself, including a new BMW. It was not the lavish gifts or relationships which damaged Zen Center the most; rather it was Baker’s secrecy about the affairs that proved to be the most damaging. Baker left Zen Center in 1983, and established a new center in Creststone, Colorado.

they had yet to be exposed to Buddhism; where as Asian counties had been practicing Buddhism for many generations, and it had become part of the fabric of culture.

As World War II consumed Europe, fear and hostility toward Asian American (and importantly they were citizens, many second or third generation) continued to grow. It developed into such a state of paranoia from justified and imagined fears, that in 1942 Roosevelt signed Executive order 9066.<sup>128</sup> The mission of this order was to ‘relocate’ the tens of thousands of Japanese—regardless of citizenship or political alliance, to internment camps, where many spent the remainder of the war. By 1943, 110,000 people had been moved, largely from the West coast, into compounds surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. Among the interred Japanese, 61,719<sup>129</sup> were Buddhist, many others were Protestant. In this moment, we can see some of the most extreme effects of an Orientalist discourse—especially the ways in which the ideologies of an evil other come to define similar others who have no relationship to those who actually carried out and planned hostilities. Pearl Harbor fueled American images of Japanese people as dangerous; this in turn was applied to actual second and third generation Asians living in the United States.

This event shaped Buddhism in a variety of ways. Directly, Jodo Shinshu, (a Pure Land school) changed its American missionary institutions to the Buddhist Church of America<sup>130</sup>, created a system of elected officials who were called priest and bishops and began to worship on Sundays. Also, a number of these camps were in the Midwest, Colorado, Utah and Nevada. After internment many Japanese Americans dispersed,

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<sup>128</sup> Fields, 193

<sup>129</sup> Fields, 195

<sup>130</sup> Richard Hughes Seager, Buddhism in America, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 58

some settling in these states other moving eastward to establish new communities. Through this process, Buddhist communities sprung up in more places than ever before. Indirectly, the interment experience shaped how Buddhists understood themselves in relation to the government. There were notable moves toward greater and intentional acculturation, while also forging strong alliances of “Buddhists” as a group,<sup>131</sup> to gain greater political power. I argued some of the appeal of Buddhism comes from this disenfranchisement of Japanese Americans and Buddhism. For the next generation, living through their own war, representing Buddhism as *not* mainstream America was an important reason for them to seek it out.

The most profound effect that World War II had on Buddhism’s arrival abroad was quite simple—for the first time many thousands of Americans, serving in the armed forces and deployed overseas, came into direct contact with Japan and Japanese culture. Of course, due to the circumstances of their presence, this was rarely a friendly or desired encounter. The Japanese were an enemy to be feared and were represented as a ‘yellow devil.’ Despite this, the curiosity of many hundreds of troops was aroused, and as they returned home they told family and friends of the mysterious and exotic east. These ideas and interests were largely shaped with an essential negativity towards Japan; yet in important ways, this exposure introduced a great deal of interest in Buddhism into American popular culture. This interest, while still fairly minor, would be the starting point for sympathizers of the next phase; that of Vietnam-era culture and counter culture.

Whereas sympathizers of the Victorian era knew of Buddhism almost exclusively through texts, in the 1950’s and 60’s, Americans also had Japanese, Chinese,

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<sup>131</sup>Seager, 55

Vietnamese, Korean and Tibetan teachers from whom to learn. Texts, D.T. Suzuki's at important moments, were still the major conduit of learning of Buddhism, but there were also a number of centers which an interested person could visit. In short, small groups of Americans began to practice meditation with the guidance of an instructor. From these beginnings, a specifically American style of Buddhism planted its first seeds and continues to grow.

The 1960's were marked by civic protests and rallies against the war in Vietnam and in support of civil rights for all Americans. In important ways, a generation of young people in the 60's felt that the conservative and rigid family norms and institutional policies of the cold war-era, largely based on conservative Christian values; were largely to blame for the unequal treatment of African-Americans and the root cause of an unjust war in jungles on the other side of the world. "They broke out of old social mores and explored sexual freedom, drug use and the so called "new morality"...the rebellion amounted to a repudiation of conventional middle-class life."<sup>132</sup> In so far as they rejected the civic-Protestantism of their parents and society, members of this generation sought a *counter-culture*; that is a source of meaning that was *not* the culture they were familiar with. Moreover, this counter-culture would be one in which they could effectively criticize and change their own cultural landscape. Within this context many well educated, affluent, and mostly white youths sought out new spiritual meaning for themselves, underpinned by sense of personal fulfillment as the most important goal and "away from social roles toward a more inner-developed, more psychological view of the

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<sup>132</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boomer Generation*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 38

self.”<sup>133</sup> In many ways, New Buddhism appeared to be just the remedy needed. It was phrased in psychological, modern terms. Also, it was presented as a remedy for the overly materialistic and power-hungry West—a view point that most of the counter-culture would share. Most importantly however, Buddhism was offered free of ‘cultural baggage’ (Asian culture) and available to any interested person to utilize for their own personal growth. Philip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen* in 1965 is clearly framed with this purpose in mind—one doesn’t need to wade through the “dearth of written information on what zazen is and how to begin to carry it on;”<sup>134</sup> rather, one can flip right to chapter nine, examine the diagrams and picture of how to sit correctly and begin, right away practicing *zazen* (meditation).

### *Image*

What middle-class, mostly white and well educated Americans who began practicing (alone and with monks from abroad) understood Buddhism to be, was still largely the same as what had interested sympathizers fifty years before them. It was largely shaped by the same creative images of what Buddhism was and could be. This in turn, shaped what the future of Buddhism could be for them. Overall, the Orientalist imaginings of the East were not burst; rather some deflated while others expanded. This ‘image’ of Buddhism seems to be close to identical with much of the “New Buddhism” ideologies of Suzuki and his contemporaries.

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<sup>133</sup> Roof, 44

<sup>134</sup> Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 3

Buddhism was understood by sympathizers of the 1960's as in accord with modern, scientific worldviews—rejecting spirits, ghosts and gods. Buddhism and its practice were largely about states of mind; the goal being the development of a free and clear mind-- “seeing into your True-nature”<sup>135</sup> and “opening the Mind’s eye.”<sup>136</sup> Most importantly, this spiritual and mental quality was understood to be something essential, which was lacking in Western traditions and available through the practice of Zen. Another factor of 1960's attraction to Zen and, Buddhism in general, was a sense of other-ness; a tradition that was outside their cultural context. By intentionally identifying with this ‘other’ tradition, they could more readily call into question, criticize, or ‘drop out’ of the values of dominate culture. An important part of the image of Buddhism, which was largely created by this generation of adherents, was that Buddhism can and should be socially and politically active. Suzuki had a charismatic and engaging personality and writing style which caused many adherents to search him out for a personal encounter.

*Eyebrows like the Root of the Dharma*<sup>137</sup>—Suzuki’s Personal Involvement with American Sympathizers

The influence of Suzuki was not limited to his published works or lectures alone; he also personally met with a number of sympathizers—in some cases, people who later in life would become important participants in the development of American Buddhism.

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<sup>135</sup> Kapleau, 54

<sup>136</sup> Kapleau; in index, under heading: “enlightenment,” used as a synonym (along with “Self-Realization”). Also notice parallels to Suzuki’s 1906 *The Zen Sect of Buddhism*: “I am the owner of the *Eye of the wonderful dharma*...which looks into the deeps of Dharma,” 12

<sup>137</sup> How Jack Kerouac described Suzuki at one of their meetings.

None of the teachers or writers that Suzuki met with adopted his model of Zen wholesale, they were equally (or more) influenced by their own teachers and other personal influences. However, many did first learn of Buddhism through his printed works and respected him as an authority figure.

Within the realm of popular culture two of the most recognized “Beat” writers—Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac—learned of Buddhism through the works of Suzuki. Around 1953, Ginsberg began “to familiarize myself with *Zen Buddhism* thru a book by one D.T. Suzuki (outstanding 89yr. old authority now at Columbia who I will I suppose go see for interesting talk.)”<sup>138</sup> What most impressed the young poet was the discussion of *satori*, as it seemed to identify an experience he had five years earlier. Likewise, Jack Kerouac, “also came to Buddhism in a library.”<sup>139</sup> Moreover, on the day *Dharma Bums* was published, Kerouac made an impromptu visit to Suzuki, on a way to a party, along with Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky.<sup>140</sup> At this meeting Kerouac calls Suzuki “Doctor Suzuki” whose eyebrows made Kerouac think of “the solid root of the Dharma.”<sup>141</sup> Due to the popularity of Kerouac’s works, ideas such as “Zen lunatics” (used to describe himself and other Beat poets) entered the popular culture lexicon. “Many of Kerouac’s books after 1954 contain references to Buddhist terms and doctrines.”<sup>142</sup>

Another important figure is Alan Watts who contributed an essay in memory of Suzuki after his death for the *Eastern Buddhist* and held Suzuki as an exemplar for his own works and conception of Zen. “I first read his *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in mid-

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<sup>138</sup> (Italics in original) Fields, 210

<sup>139</sup> Fields, 210

<sup>140</sup> Fields, 223

<sup>141</sup> Fields, 223

<sup>142</sup> Ann Charters, ed. The Portable Jack Kerouac, (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 582

adolescence, and in the years that followed read everything he wrote with fascination and delight.”<sup>143</sup> Throughout the books that Watts would write in later years, almost all have a reference or quote of Suzuki’s. For example, his very popular *The Way of Zen* (1957) has six references—in each case “Professor” Suzuki is quoted as an authority to support Watts’s points. Suzuki and Watts met at the World Congress of Faiths, held in London in 1936 when Watts was only twenty years old.

Suzuki’s personal influence was not only disseminated by writers in popular culture; he also directly influenced some of the most prominent first generation European-American Buddhist teachers. Gary Snyder, who was both a beat writer and popular environmentalist, was captivated by Suzuki’s works. In a meeting between Snyder and Kerouac, the latter noticed “he had a slew of orange crates all filled with beautiful scholarly books...all the great sutras, comments on sutras, *the complete works of D.T. Suzuki*, and a fine quadruple-volume edition of Japanese haikus.”<sup>144</sup> Part of what excited Snyder was “the convergence that I really found exciting was the Mahayana Buddhist tradition wisdom-oriented line as it developed in China...a very precise cultural meeting;”<sup>145</sup> the same kind of ideologies that we’ve identified as part of Suzuki’s secondary-Orientalism at work. Philip Kapleau, the founder of Rochester Zen Institute, sought out Suzuki while he studied and practiced in Japan. Kaplaeu also quotes or mentions Suzuki in his own works quite often—four times in *Three Pillars of Zen* and once in his piece on vegetarianism.

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<sup>143</sup> Alan Watts, *The “Mind-less” Scholar*, in Abe, 189

<sup>144</sup> Fields, 214

<sup>145</sup> Fields, 213

Robert Aitken, founder of Diamond Sangha in Honolulu, met with Suzuki during the Second East – West Philosophers conference, held in Hawaii in 1949. Suzuki wrote a recommendation for Aitken, as a result he spent a year studying in Japan and practicing at Enjakuji—the beginning of his life as a Zen priest.

*Suzuki's Contribution: "Professor Suzuki"*

The "Professor Suzuki" image of D.T. Suzuki was his most visible and unique role in the incorporation of Zen into mainstream American culture and the reason it is important to understand his role more completely. Suzuki was, and, still is for many sympathizers, seen as a unique authority figure. He was Asian, from within the tradition, fluent in both Western and Eastern intellectual categories and fluent in English. Suzuki's popular image was as a good scholar of Buddhism and a Zen master, who could speak with authority—the same image that those at the Columbia lectures were so impressed with. He was granted more authority than European-American converts and sympathizers because he was Japanese and had studied Zen in a traditional monastery. As a side note; it is interesting to note here that many individuals that came to Zen in the 60's and 70's ended up doing a lot more actual practice than many of the Asian 'authorities' of the time. Philip Kapleau, who is both respectful and critical of Suzuki<sup>146</sup> in his highly influential *Three Pillars of Zen*, spent far more time in Japanese temples than Suzuki ever did.

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<sup>146</sup> Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*. (Random House, Anchor Books, 2000), (First edition, 1965) 95 and 96. Mostly Kapleau is critical of Suzuki for not devoting enough attention to the practical aspects of practicing *zazen*.

Also, Suzuki had this ‘authoritative monk’ image, unlike most of the actual teachers of Zen who trained converts. These teachers did great work in impacting the people and local culture of the places in which they established *zendos* (meditation training centers) but didn’t have much of a voice outside of their local area. Suzuki, however, was recognized and understood as an authority by more people in more places.

Suzuki is not alone in having the image of the ‘oriental monk’<sup>147</sup> thrown over him; no Asian monk who came to this country could escape it—“we have encountered him (the oriental monk) under different names and guises: as Mahatma Gandhi and as D.T. Suzuki; as the Vietnamese Buddhist monk consumed in flames.”<sup>148</sup> Americans had a preconceived idea of who and what an Asian should be, as is to be expected in a highly Orientalist discourse. To a greater or lesser degree, these teachers challenged and adapted to this mold. Suzuki was comfortable in this role<sup>149</sup>, often consciously accommodating much of the image, as his “New Buddhist” peers had been doing since the 1893 Parliament. Soen, Dharmapala and others had great success in exploiting the idealized image that European-Americans held to further their own causes of spreading ‘the Dharma.’ The important difference lies in the authoritativeness given to Suzuki’s works by sympathizers, as contrasted with the overall idea of the Oriental monk as Iwamura uses it. Suzuki operated through the idealized image to establish his works as the primary resource for English-speaking converts. He was an authority whose works conveyed the truth of Zen.

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<sup>147</sup> Jane Iwamura’s term, from *The Oriental Monk in Popular Culture*, in Religion and Popular Culture in America, Bruce Forbes and Jeffery Mahan, ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>148</sup> Iwamura, 27

<sup>149</sup> “He was interviewed on television, profiled in the *New Yorker*, even featured in *Vogue*...it was Dr. Suzuki’s character above all else that impressed those who met him.” Rick Fields, 204

The “Professor Suzuki” image did not pass away with the death of Daisetz Suzuki, but it has diminished over time. Many of his works are still in print and quoted in a variety of sources. From Introduction to World Religion textbooks<sup>150</sup> to many top rated websites about Buddhism on the internet and as the subject of the film documentary, *A Zen Life* (2007), Professor Suzuki is still with us today. On a popular level, for those who know of him, Suzuki is still seen as this luminary figure who ‘brought Zen to the West,’ with the authority of being able to speak *for* Zen.

Within the confines of scholars interested in Asia and Asian religious traditions, Suzuki is often used as an example of dangerous manipulation of ideas to fit preconceived notions. Faure, Sharf, King and many others have done excellent work in demonstrating the ‘secondary Orientalism’ of much of the New Buddhist rhetoric. A number of ideologies and interests informed this response. Many of the authors of New Buddhism were from within the institution of Zen. Many, including the founders of Harada-Taustani school,<sup>151</sup> eventually left official Zen institutions; others like Suzuki were outside of it all together. They created a “free-floating Zen (that) could be used to lend spiritual legitimacy to a host of contemporary social, philosophical and political movements.”<sup>152</sup> The primary use of this legitimacy was to prove Buddhism and the Japanese as equal, or superior to the West. These goals were, to their authors, the natural and almost unstoppable flowering of the dharma. They also have high political and social stakes. Proving Buddhism was superior to Western religions was not *just* a response to colonialism, Christian missionaries and Christianizing efforts in Japan; it was also important for New Buddhists

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<sup>150</sup> Roy C. Amore and Julia Ching, *The Buddhist Tradition*. In A Concise Introduction to World Religions, 381 and 433.

<sup>151</sup> Founders of the most popular meditation practice among Euro-American converts.

<sup>152</sup> Sharf, *Whose Zen?*

to assert themselves as ‘true’ Buddhists as compared to other schools and lineages. Winning over the West, would do much for securing Zen’s place in Japan as the premier religion and foremost sect of Buddhism. Brian Victoria’s *Zen at War* is the most pointed in drawing out the nationalistic and controversial aspects<sup>153</sup> of Suzuki’s part or involvement in Japanese imperialism, especially Zen’s intentional association with the sword, Samurai and Bushido.

*Living on in the Footnote: On-Line References to D.T. Suzuki*

Despite the criticism that is leveled at Suzuki from various quarters both deserved and not, his spirit lives on often in the form of a footnote. From a number of online resources—from more serious and well established sites such as *Tricycle* and *BuddhaNet.net* to various individual, unique, contributions on “Buddhism”—there are many references to D.T. Suzuki’s works, along with a fair number of quotes. Most importantly, he is referenced by current authors and Buddhists still as a valuable resource. Often he is referred to as an authority figure—Zen master<sup>154</sup>, Doctor<sup>155</sup>, and Buddhist Scholar<sup>156</sup>. Also, quotes from Suzuki are used to back up arguments, sometimes, for the reader to reflect on.

*Tricycle* is a popular and well respected resource for a variety of Buddhist sympathizers.

No less than twice in the past year (Sept. 19 and Feb. 27), quotes from Suzuki have

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<sup>153</sup> “Dr. Suzuki’s writings are said to have strongly influenced the military spirit of Nazi Germany.” Brian Victoria, *Zen at War*, 111

<sup>154</sup> From BuddhaNet—search of term “monk,” footnote in which Suzuki’s *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, Koyama, 1934; is referenced. Accessed Jan 18 2008.

<sup>155</sup> From the web site of Philip Kapleau’s organization; Rochester Zen Center

<sup>156</sup> In reference to the ‘Zen Studies Society’ founded in 1956 ‘to aid Suzuki’ in his publishing efforts. After Suzuki’s passing, it became a *zendo*, (practice center) and retreat.

appeared in their newsletter, *The Daily Dharma*. From *BuddhaNet*, there are no less than twenty-four mentions of Suzuki. Many are passing mentions of Suzuki, while eleven use Suzuki as a reference to back up an argument. In one example from Philip Kapleau, who is making the case for becoming a vegetarian, we find “Dr. D.T. Suzuki, the well known Buddhist philosopher, would agree.”<sup>157</sup> From a variety of blogs and personal web pages, the following from *KBS Wiki* gives a good sense of the general standing of Suzuki today:

#### “Introduction to Zen Buddhism - D.T. Suzuki

This is not actually a great introduction to Zen Buddhism, although it is a classic of the literature. D.T. Suzuki trained in the Rinzai tradition, which is markedly clear in the book, and he was an academic, which is also clear in his writing style. Not really an easy book, although he was a very good writer and if you are sincerely interested, you will learn a lot from it.

It really was my first introduction to Zen Buddhism, though, and it reeled me in pretty well. Suzuki is still respected as a godfather of American Buddhism because of books like this. While academic in nature, his writing style is very clear and engaging, and not to mention thorough. If you've read the Zen-pop primers and you want a more in-depth look at a fascinating Buddhist tradition, try this book on for size. What you find might surprise you.”<sup>158</sup>

#### *Conclusions*

Overall, the works and personage of D.T. Suzuki are still called upon as an important and relevant voice in the American Buddhist’ conversation.<sup>159</sup> He is not the primary resource, but a classic which provides a “more in-depth look.”

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<sup>157</sup> Philip Kapleau, *To Cherish All Life: A Buddhist View of Animal Slaughter and Meat Eating*.

<sup>158</sup> <http://kimboosan.wikidot.com/introduction-to-zen-buddhism>, last updated June 18, 2007, accessed Jan 18, 2008.

<sup>159</sup> See especially Jeff Wilson; is a contributing editor to *Tricycle*, a Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In this capacity, Suzuki is no longer directly speaking to audiences in the same way as he was forty or fifty years ago but he is still relied on as an authority. He is not the most often quoted—that honor tends towards Shuryu Suzuki’s 1965, *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama. Rather, Suzuki lives on in the footnotes. His works are not the most read or the most popular but still offered as an important and worthwhile resource.

It is clear that for sympathizers, the works of D. T. Suzuki can function as a reservoir of important information about Zen that can add to their understanding of Buddhism. At his zenith of popularity, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Suzuki was the uncontested authority of Zen Buddhism for most American audiences. The Beat writers sought him out, as did some important young American converts: Philip Kapleau, Gary Snyder and Robert Aitken. His works were praised in popular media and scholars alike and his charismatic image featured “on television, profiled in the *New Yorker*, even featured in *Vouge*.”<sup>160</sup>

With the passage of time Suzuki has been displaced by others as the most important authority of Buddhism in the United States; primarily the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. Suzuki still persists at the periphery of sympathizer interest, his works still referred to and drawn upon as sources of authority.

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<sup>160</sup> Fields, 204.

### **Conclusions: Role and Place of D.T. Suzuki in American Buddhism**

There are many important intersections between Buddhists in the United States today, the past, and Zen Buddhism as presented by D.T. Suzuki. If we picture all of the output of D.T. Suzuki as representing a space or area called “Zen Buddhism” and we relate this to the history of Buddhist sympathizers in the U.S, a number of features come into relief: Buddhism as modern, an experience of ultimate truth and something essential that the West lacked. The continued presence and importance of Suzuki’s works in the current dialogues of Buddhist sympathizers and converts in the United States is significant; if we examine his works for larger themes and we realize that much of what Suzuki described as Zen Buddhism was informed by concerns of his times as much as his effort to explicate Zen from a traditional standpoint.

Suzuki’s space (or Suzuki’s Zen) includes his personal history and is part of the larger space of the East and West Orientalist dialogue. Suzuki was born into and experienced a radical shift in his culture as a young man in Meiji-era Japan; he was shaped by Buddhist modernist reformers, especially his Zen teachers Kosen Roshi and Shaku Soen. He spent four years in a Zen monastery as a part-time practitioner and was recognized by Soen for overcoming the *Mu* koan, although he never became a full-time monk at any point in his life. His personal interest and involvement in Theosophical groups and friendships with Paul Carus, Albert Edmunds, and Beatrice Lane informed his writing and understanding of Zen, positioning him toward a more universalistic and essentialist view of religion. His writing seek to demonstrate that Zen is the true essence and highest mystical realization of transforming proportions. Moreover, this space is a

highly intellectual one, where reason and intuition prevail and no supernatural forces or gods are present. Suzuki also framed his presentation of Zen with the language of Western psychological categories made to cover Buddhist psychology.

All of these features of Suzuki's Zen reflect concerns and popular ideas of his day and operated largely as background assumptions for Suzuki. On the surface, his works appear to the average reader to be a balanced and scholarly explication of Zen by a Zen master steeped in the tradition. Suzuki gains this authority through the telling of stories of Zen masters of the past; thereby importing the undisputed authority of these great masters of the past into his own documents.

Buddhist sympathizers in the United States were largely unaware of the background issues that informed Suzuki's writings—instead they took Suzuki at face value. Therefore, during the two decades of his greatest popularity in mid-century, these background assumptions of Suzuki more readily informed the practice of Buddhism in the United States. Suzuki's Zen and Buddhist practice in the U.S. have never been identical; but they were the most similar during this time. Many of the now questionable elements of Suzuki's Zen were taken as fact—Gary Snyder, for example, being impressed by the (created) history of Zen as only truly flowering in Japan. Suzuki was a charismatic figure who took advantage of the 'oriental monk' image to dominate the discussion of Zen in both popular and academic circles. This remained true for the understanding of Buddhism in the United States for as long as interest in Zen remained largely confined to the printed word.

However, there was an important shift which largely ended Suzuki's central role—the establishment of Zen practice centers in the U.S. After 1965, when the U.S.

changed its immigration policies, a variety of teachers and practitioners from every major branch of Buddhism established practice centers, many in California. What these teachers encouraged was direct experience and the practice of Buddhism. Figures such as Shunryu Suzuki, one of the first and most prominent Buddhist teachers to establish a Zen center in San Francisco, instructed his students “Don’t just do something, sit there!” (i.e. practice meditation). In this way sympathizers were encouraged to see for themselves what Zen was all about based on their own realizations through intensive practice. Due to the availability of teachers and their emphasis on practice, Buddhism in the U. S. shifted from discovery through books to discovery through practice.

This shift diminished the central role that Suzuki held, but did not end the participation of his works in the dialogue of Buddhist sympathizers. As we discovered, Suzuki has been shifted in the conversation from *the* authority to an important footnote for further reading. We should stress that his works are still understood as saying important things about Zen Buddhism - a more ‘in-depth look.’ Thus, it is not that current sympathizers have ‘seen through’ Suzuki and discovered flaws; rather his works have been superseded by other works that focus on the actual practice of *zazen*—how to sit correctly and see for ones’ self. Reading about Buddhism has always and continues to be an important part of Buddhist practice, and Suzuki’s works are still a part of the library of Zen Buddhism in the U.S.

The person and message of D.T. Suzuki has and still does play important roles in the development of a uniquely American form of Zen Buddhism. Through this examination we have seen the fascinating ways in which cultures and people have informed one another—often within the context of Orientalism. That Suzuki’s works

have been displaced demonstrates the emphasis on practice by current Buddhist sympathizers. That they have not completely evaporated demonstrates that Zen Buddhism as understood in the U.S. is still similar enough to his explication for his works to have continuing meaning and value. More than forty years after his death Suzuki is still at his task of making Zen “more conventional and comprehensible for the benefit of the American public.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> D.T. Suzuki, Translator’s preface to Zen for Americans, (LaSalle: Open Court Publishing, 1906), v.

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## **Vita**

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