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Robert H. Sharf

THE ZEN OF JAPANESE
NATIONALISM

*If I understand this man correctly, this is what I have been trying
to say in all my writings. [HEIDEGGER, referring to D. T. Suzuki]*

I. INTRODUCTION

Zen has been touted as an iconoclastic and antinomian tradition which rejects scholastic learning and ritualism in favor of naturalness, spontaneity, and freedom. According to some enthusiasts, Zen is not, properly speaking, a religion at all, at least not in the sectarian or institutional sense of the word. Nor is it a philosophy, a doctrine, or even a spiritual technique. Rather, Zen is "pure experience" itself—the ahistorical, transcultural experience of "pure subjectivity" which utterly transcends discursive thought. The quintessential expression of Zen awakening, the *kōan*, is accordingly construed as an "illogical" or "nonrational" riddle designed to forestall intellection and bring about a realization of the "eternal present." Furthermore, Zen, as the full and unmediated experience of life itself untainted by cultural accretions, is the ultimate source of all authentic religious teaching, both Eastern and Western.

I would like to express my appreciation to all those who offered comments and criticism on preliminary versions of this article presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Kansas City on November 24, 1991, and at the symposium "The Japanese Imperial System and the Religious Culture of Japan," held at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley on May 2, 1992. Special thanks go to Gustavo Benavides, Tomoko Masuzawa, Donald S. Lopez, and Galen Amstutz, each of whom offered detailed and trenchant suggestions for revision. I am also especially grateful to Harold Henderson for sharing sections of his forthcoming biography of Paul Carus, and to Karen D. Drickamer, Curator of Manuscripts, Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, for making available the Suzuki-Carus correspondence from the Open Court Collection.

Zen is no more Buddhist than it is Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, and as such it is preeminently suited to serve as the foundation for interfaith dialogue.

Elsewhere I have argued that this popular conception of Zen is not only conceptually incoherent, but also a woeful misreading of traditional Zen doctrine, altogether controverted by the lived contingencies of Zen monastic practice.¹ Classical Zen ranks among the most ritualistic forms of Buddhist monasticism. Zen "enlightenment," far from being a transcultural and transhistorical subjective experience, is constituted in elaborately choreographed and eminently public ritual performances. The *kōan* genre, far from serving as a means to obviate reason, is a highly sophisticated form of scriptural exegesis: the manipulation or "solution" of a particular *kōan* traditionally demanded an extensive knowledge of canonical Buddhist doctrine and classical Zen literature.

I do not intend to further belabor this issue here. Rather, I would like to focus on the genesis of the popular view: How was it that the West came to conceive of Zen in terms of a transcendent or "unmediated" personal experience? And why are Western intellectuals, scholars of religion, Christian theologians, and even Catholic monastics so eager to embrace this distortion in the face of extensive historical and ethnographic evidence to the contrary?

In order to arrive at a satisfactory answer to these questions it is necessary to recover the historical and ideological context of contemporary Zen discourse in the West. We must remember that Zen is a relative newcomer to the field of Buddhist studies, and that Zen entered the purview of Western academe primarily through the proselytizing activities of Japanese apologists. This was not the case with most other Buddhist traditions, which were typically introduced to scholarship through the efforts of dedicated Western historians and philologists who edited, translated, and interpreted Buddhist scriptures from classical languages.² By the turn of the century, these Western scholars had produced a wealth of historical and textual studies on Buddhism, supplemented by field reports of Westerners who had lived in Asia and who had the opportunity to observe Buddhist communities firsthand. Yet virtually none of the studies available in the West prior

¹ See my "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 32, no. 1 (1992): 1-31; and T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* (in press).

² On the history of Buddhist studies in the West see esp. J. W. de Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*, 2d ed., Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica no. 33 (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987); and Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

to this century, whether textual or ethnographic, paid any serious attention to Zen.³

Zen was introduced to Western scholarship not through the efforts of Western orientalists, but rather through the activities of an elite circle of internationally minded Japanese intellectuals and globe-trotting Zen priests, whose missionary zeal was often second only to their vexed fascination with Western culture. These Japanese Zen apologists emerged, in turn, out of the profound social and political turmoil engendered by the rapid Westernization and modernization of Japan in the Meiji period (1868–1912). Given the pedigree of these early Zen missionaries, one might have expected Western scholars of Buddhism to approach their high-minded pronouncements with considerable caution, if not skepticism, but such has rarely been the case. Accordingly, we will begin with a brief look at the principal figures responsible for bringing Zen to the West, and at the social context out of which they emerged.

II. MEIJI BUDDHISM AND THE “SOUL OF JAPAN”

The early years of the Meiji were trying times for Japanese Buddhists. Their religion had become the subject of a devastating critique and persecution known as *haibutsu kishaku* or “abolishing Buddhism and destroying [the teachings of] Śākyamuni.” Government ideologues succeeded for a time in censuring Buddhism as a corrupt, decadent, anti-social, parasitic, and superstitious creed, inimical to Japan’s need for scientific and technological advancement. At the same time, Buddhism was effectively rendered by its opponents as a foreign “other,” diametrically opposed to the cultural sensibility and innate spirituality of the Japanese.⁴

The Buddhist establishment in the early Meiji was left reeling not only by the success of anti-Buddhist government policies, but also by the dramatic social changes brought about by rapid modernization,

³ The first generation of Western travelers to explore Japanese culture and religion, including Edward Morse, William Bigelow, Percival Lowell, Henry Adams, Lafcadio Hearn, and Ernest Fenollosa, scarcely mention Zen in their writings. This is particularly striking in the case of Hearn, who wrote numerous essays on the subject of Buddhism (collected in *The Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. Kenneth Rexroth [Santa Barbara, Calif.: Ross-Erikson, 1977]). On the so-called Fenollosa circle see Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle, with Other Essays in Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1962); and Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations*, Contributions in American Studies no. 55 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981), pp. 201–21.

⁴ See James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 55. On *haibutsu kishaku* see also Martin Collcutt, “Buddhism: The Threat of Eradication,” in *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji*, ed. Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 143–67.

industrialization, and urbanization. Buddhist temples had to cope with the expropriation of income-producing temple estates by government authorities. To make matters worse, government persecution, combined with rapid urbanization, led to the collapse of the *danka* (parishioner) system which had guaranteed Buddhist temples the financial support of affiliated "member families" throughout the Tokugawa period.

Rather than concede defeat, a vanguard of modern Buddhist leaders emerged to argue the Buddhist cause.⁵ These university-educated intellectuals readily admitted to the corruption, decay, and petty sectarian rivalries that characterized the late Tokugawa Buddhist establishment. But, at the same time, they insisted that such corruption merely indicated the degree to which Buddhism had fallen from its pure spiritual roots. Accordingly, the problem lay not in Buddhism itself, but rather in the institutional and sectarian trappings to which Buddhism had fallen prey. The solution lay not in continued persecution from without, but in reform from within.

In this defensive strategy one can readily discern the influence of the late nineteenth-century European zeitgeist that permeated university campuses in Meiji Japan. Japanese intellectuals, seeking to bring their nation into the "modern world," were naturally drawn to the European critique of institutional religion—the legacy of the anticlericism and antiritualism of the Reformation, the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment, the romanticism of figures such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and the existentialism of Nietzsche. Some Japanese Buddhist leaders went so far as to argue that the official suppression of Buddhism was in fact a purifying force that would purge Buddhism of its degenerate accretions and effect a return to the original essence of the Buddha's teachings. The result came to be known in Japan as the New Buddhism (*shin bukkyō*), which was "modern," "cosmopolitan," "humanistic," and "socially responsible." This reconstructed Buddhism, under the guise of "true" or "pure" Buddhism, was conceived of as a "world religion" ready to take its rightful place alongside other universal creeds. True Buddhism was in no way opposed to reason; on the

⁵ I have relied heavily on Ketelaar's insightful analysis (see previous note) in the following brief overview of the development of Meiji *shin bukkyō* (New Buddhism). See also Ikeda Eishun, *Meiji no shinbukkyō undō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1976); Murakami Shigeyoshi, *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century*, trans. H. Byron Earhart (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980), pp. 54–58; Kathleen M. Staggs, "'Defend the Nation and Love the Truth': Inoue Enryō and the Revival of Meiji Buddhism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 38, no. 3 (1983): 251–81; Jackie Stone, "A Vast and Grave Task: Interwar Buddhist Studies as an Expression of Japan's Envisioned Global Role," in *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals during the Interwar Years*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 217–33; and William R. LaFleur, "A Turning in Taishō: Asia and Europe in the Early Writings of Watsuji Tetsurō," in Rimer, ed., pp. 234–56.

contrary, Buddhism, once purified of all superstitious accretions, was found to be uncompromisingly empirical and rational, and in full accord with the findings of modern science. According to its defenders, early Buddhism actually anticipated modern scientific discoveries in areas as diverse as physics, astronomy, and psychology.

In their spirited defense of their creed, Buddhist leaders actively appropriated the ideological agenda of government propagandists and the nativist movement. They became willing accomplices in the promulgation of *kokutai* (national polity) ideology—the attempt to render Japan a culturally homogeneous and spiritually evolved nation politically unified under the divine rule of the emperor.⁶ Buddhist priests went so far as to don Shintō robes and preach national ethics under the auspices of the Ministry of Doctrine (*kyōbusho*), all the while insisting that Buddhism was a repository for the sacred values of the Japanese people.⁷ With the emergence of Japan as a military and colonial power in Asia, the “foreignness” of Buddhism became an asset rather than a source of embarrassment: Buddhism’s status as the cultural heritage of all Asia allowed the Japanese to affirm their cultural and spiritual solidarity with the peoples of the Asian continent, while at the same time claiming Japanese spiritual and moral superiority. In making their case, the intellectual leaders of the New Buddhism drew upon Darwinian evolutionary models of religion popular at the turn of the century, and argued that the Buddhism of Japan represents the most evolutionarily advanced form of the Buddha’s teaching. Indeed, some Japanese went so far as to insist that pure Buddhism—the very fount of Asia spirituality—survives only in Japan. Japan was thereby rendered the sole heir to the spiritual and ethical heritage of the East precisely at a time of heightened imperial ambitions and military adventurism.

It is not surprising, then, that this successful Buddhist polemic is adopted and further refined by adherents of Japanese Zen. Zen, we are told, is immune to “enlightenment” critiques of religion precisely because it is not a religion in the institutional sense at all; it is, rather, an uncompromisingly empirical, rational, and scientific mode of inquiry into the nature of things. At the same time, the emergent discourse of a reconstructed Zen is predicated upon, and inexorably enmeshed in, the

⁶ For a fully articulated statement of *kokutai* thought see the *Kokutai no hongi* (fundamental principles of [Japanese] national polity). This spiritualized account of Japanese history, Japanese morality, and Japanese national character, originally drafted by Hisamatsu Sen’ichi in 1937, became a major instrument of government ideological control in the period leading into the Second World War. A complete translation may be found in *Kokutai no hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, trans. Robert Kind Hall and John Owen Gauntlett (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949).

⁷ See the full discussion in Ketelaar, chap. 3.

nativist and imperialist ideology of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. Zen is touted as the very heart of Asian spirituality, the essence of Japanese culture, and the key to the unique qualities of the Japanese race.

As Japan experienced a series of stunning military victories in Asia, notably the defeat of the Chinese in 1895 and the Russians in 1905, and as Japan pushed farther into Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan, the military and cultural accomplishments of the Japanese nation came to be explained with reference to *bushidō* or “the way of the warrior.” This supposedly ancient “samurai code,” exemplified by the heroes of countless popular legends and myths, comprised an ethos of self-discipline, self-sacrifice, single-mindedness, unhesitating obedience to one’s lord, and utter fearlessness in the face of death. The proponents of *kokutai* proffered these qualities as the birthright of all Japanese—*bushidō* was the expression of “Japaneseness” itself. The fact that the term *bushidō* itself is rarely attested in pre-Meiji literature did not discourage Japanese intellectuals and propagandists from using the concept to explicate and celebrate the cultural and spiritual superiority of the Japanese.⁸

The Japanese were not the only ones subject to this romantic ennoblement of the Japanese character. The year 1900 saw the publication in English of Nitobe Inazō’s *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, which, along with Okakura Kakuzō’s *Book of Tea* published in 1906, and Sugimoto’s *Daughter of the Samurai* published in 1925, introduced the English-speaking world to the vagaries of *nihonjinron*—theories concerning the purported uniqueness of the Japanese.⁹ Thus a generation of unsuspecting Europeans and Americans were subjected to Meiji caricatures of the lofty spirituality, the selflessness, and the refined aesthetic sensibilities of the Japanese race. And, most significant, it was during this period that Zen was first brought to the attention of the West at large. As we shall see, the first English language works on Zen emphasized precisely the close relationship between Zen and “the way of the samurai.”

⁸ The Tokugawa *kokugaku* scholar Yamaga Sokō (1622–85) is usually credited as the first to codify the *bushidō* code as part of his attempt to “justify the existence of the samurai as a largely idle, stipendiary class” (H. Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 3d ed. [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984], p. 183). The modern currency of the term, however, clearly dates to the Meiji. On *bushidō* see esp. the discussions in Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1957), pp. 90–98; and Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, Nissin Institute/Croom Helm Japanese Studies Series (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 210–11.

⁹ *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* was reprinted twenty-five times before the war, while *The Book of Tea* and *A Daughter of the Samurai* saw at least fifteen printings each (Richard H. Minear, “Orientalism and the Study of Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 [1980]: 515, n. 14).

III. ZEN AND THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI

The first book to appear in English on the subject of Zen was published in 1906 under the title *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* by Shaku Sōen (1859–1919).¹⁰ Sōen Rōshi came to play a pivotal role in the export of Zen to the West, not only through his own efforts—his participation at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, his subsequent lecture tour of America and Europe, and the English publication of his lectures—but also through the efforts of some of his students, notably D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and Nyogen Senzaki (1876–1958). Given Sōen's role in the transmission of Zen to the West, it is important to note that Sōen was far from a typical Zen master or *rōshi*: he was a university-educated intellectual who traveled extensively through much of America, Europe, and Asia. Moreover, Sōen was an avowed religious reformer who devoted much of his mature career to training Buddhist laymen rather than Zen priests.

Sōen's modernist outlook reflects in part the influence of his own teacher, Kōsen Sōen (better known as Imagita [or Imakita] Kōsen, 1816–92), the highly respected if somewhat unorthodox Rinzai leader who served as chief abbot (*kanchō*) of Engakuji from 1875 until his death in 1892.¹¹ Kōsen Rōshi was himself a widely educated man of letters interested in Chinese and Western philosophy, who served the Meiji government in a number of different capacities including that of “national evangelist” (*kyōdōshoku*) under the Ministry of Doctrine in the 1870s.¹²

¹⁰ On Shaku Sōen see especially Furuta Shōkin, “Shaku Soen: The Footsteps of a Modern Zen Master,” trans. Kudo Sumiko, *Philosophical Studies of Japan* 8 (1967): 67–91; and Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro, *Imakita Kōsen* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1946).

¹¹ Kōsen Rōshi was ordained at age twenty-five under Daisetsu Jōen (1807–1855) at Shōkokuji in Kyoto, and went on to study under Gisan Zenrai (1802–78) at Sōgenji in Okayama Prefecture. After receiving dharma transmission from Gisan, and prior to his appointment to Engakuji, Kōsen served as abbot of Eijōji in Yamaguchi Prefecture, where he counted among his students the feudal lord of Iwakuni and many of the latter's samurai retainers (Miura Isshū and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust: The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Lin-chi) Zen* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966], p. 224; see also Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, vol. 2, *Japan*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter, *Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture* [New York: Macmillan, 1990], pp. 406–9).

¹² The institution of national evangelists formed a part of the “great promulgation campaign” (*taikyō senpu undō*) carried out between 1870 and 1884, primarily under the direction of Shintō leaders. These evangelists—whose ranks included not only Shintō and Buddhist priests, but also entertainers, preachers of national learning, and representatives of various new religions—were charged with promulgating national ideology under the rubric of the “three standards of instruction” (*sanjō kyōsoku*), namely, (1) to comply with the commands to revere the kami and love the nation, (2) to illuminate the principle of heaven and the way of man, and (3) to serve the emperor and faithfully obey the will of the court (Ketelaar, p. 225; Murakami, p. 29). For a description of the inglorious role of the Ministry of Doctrine and the national evangelists in the 1870s see Ketelaar, pp. 96–122; and Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 42–48.

Kōsen was very much part of the early Meiji Buddhist reform movement briefly discussed above, and as such he was an enthusiastic advocate of “nonsectarian,” “universal,” and “socially engaged” Buddhism. Kōsen actively encouraged lay participation in Buddhist practice, opening the newly constructed Zen hall at Engakuji to lay students wishing to practice Zen meditation.

Sōen had been ordained as a novice at the age of twelve, and had already studied Zen at Myōshinji in Kyoto and Sōgenji in Okayama before he came to train in Kamakura. In Kamakura Sōen finished his formal training under Kōsen at Engakuji, and received *inka-shōmei* (certification of the seal [of dharma transmission]) at the remarkably young age of twenty-four. He then took the unusual step of entering the prestigious Keiō University in Tokyo, a university established in 1866 primarily for the study of Western culture.¹³ Upon graduation in 1885, while still in his twenties, Sōen traveled to India and Ceylon to pursue his study of Buddhist languages. He returned to Japan after two years of Pali studies in Ceylon (1887–89), and was installed as chief abbot of Engakuji following his master’s death in 1892. As abbot, Sōen continued his teacher’s practice of welcoming lay Zen practitioners into the monastery confines. Sōen also revived a *zazen* society in Tokyo established by Kōsen exclusively for the training of lay men and women.¹⁴ D. T. Suzuki reports that “the number of people, monks and laymen alike, who came for *sanzen* [private instruction] with Sōen Rōshi during that time was amazing.”¹⁵

In 1893 Sōen became the first Zen master to travel to America, where he made a favorable and lasting impression as the representative of the Zen school at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions. The English translation of Sōen’s address to the World Parliament had been prepared by the then unknown D. T. Suzuki (with the help of the writer Natsume Sōseki), and following the World Parliament Sōen arranged for Suzuki to travel to America to study with Paul Carus (1852–1919,

¹³ According to D. T. Suzuki, Sōen attended Keiō University against the advice of Kōsen Rōshi (see Abe Masao, ed., *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered* [New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1986], p. 8), but this is contradicted by other biographers.

¹⁴ Kōsen founded the Ryōmō-kyōkai—a *zazenkai* or “meditation society” for lay practitioners—in the early Meiji, and it was later revived by Tetsuō Sōkatsu (also known as Shaku Sōkatsu, 1870–1954) at the behest of Shaku Sōen. Tetsuō Sōkatsu and his student Sasaki Shigetsu (better known as Sōkei-an, 1882–1945), were among the handful of pioneers who first took Zen practice to America, and soon after their arrival in California they established a “branch” of the Ryōmō-kyōkai on Sutter Street in San Francisco (Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* [Boulder, Colo.: Shambala, 1981], p. 177). The Ryōmō-kyōkai may have been the first Zen center in modern Japan explicitly dedicated to teaching meditation to laypersons, and it became the model for the urban lay meditation centers that were so influential in the propagation of Zen practice in the West.

¹⁵ Abe, ed., *A Zen Life*, p. 19.

see below). In retrospect, Suzuki may well have been Sōen's greatest contribution to the spread of Zen in the West.

Sōen also made tours of the Japanese colonial territories on the Asian continent, traveling first to Manchuria during the early months of the Russo-Japanese war as a chaplain to the army.¹⁶ Following the Japanese victory he embarked on a circumambulation of the globe, lecturing on Buddhism and Zen in America, England, France, Germany, Italy, Ceylon, and India. Upon returning to Japan in 1906 Sōen refused to take up an abbot's post for many years, choosing instead to devote his full energies to teaching Zen to laymen. Consequently, he spent several years traveling throughout Japan giving lectures and instruction in Zen practice. In 1912 Sōen traveled once again to Manchuria and Korea at the invitation of the Southern Manchurian Railways Company, where he lectured on Zen and Japanese culture to members of the Japanese colonial administration.

Sōen's approach to Buddhism was typical of the new breed of cosmopolitan and intellectual religious leaders emerging in the Meiji period. His address to the World Parliament in 1893 was ecumenical in spirit, portraying Buddhism as a "universal religion" in harmony with other world faiths, as well as with science and philosophy.¹⁷ But the collection of sermons delivered during his second trip to America betrays Sōen's sympathy for the nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments characteristic of the time. Indeed, the title of his 1912 series of lectures delivered in Korea and Manchuria—"The Spirit of the Yamato Race"—speaks for itself. Nor were his nationalist leanings kept secret from his Western admirers—the collection of essays published in *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* concludes with three short pieces that, while deploring the grisly horrors of war, defend the honor and justice of Japanese military aggression in Manchuria: "War is not necessarily horrible, provided that it is fought for a just and honorable cause, that it is fought for the maintenance and realization of noble ideals, that it is fought for the upholding of humanity and civilization. Many material human bodies may be destroyed, many humane hearts be broken, but from a broader point of view these sacrifices are so many phoenixes consumed in the sacred fire of spirituality, which will arise from the smoldering ashes reanimated, ennobled, and glorified."¹⁸

¹⁶ Sōen's trip to Manchuria was by no means unusual; rather, it was part of a general policy spanning all the major Buddhist sects to "[uphold] Buddhism's reputation as 'protector of the country'" and to provide chaplains to minister to the troops (Murakami, p. 54).

¹⁷ Furuta, p. 80.

¹⁸ Shaku Soyen, *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot: Addresses on Religious Subjects*, trans. D. T. Suzuki (New York: Weiser, 1971), pp. 211–12. This text, originally published in 1906, was taken from a memorial address delivered in Manchuria for those who died in the Russo-Japanese war. There is ample documentation of Sōen's support for the Japanese

In addition to Sōen's concern to justify Japanese military aggression, his Western lectures on Buddhism also reveal an interest in a quintessential *nihonjinron* theme, the difference between "Oriental" and "Occidental" mentalities. Westerners, we are told, are noisy, restless, boastful of their possessions, wasteful of their energies, and generally unsuited to the mystical teachings of the East. Orientals, on the other hand, are raised with a "strong emphasis placed upon the necessity of preserving the latent nervous energy and of keeping the source of spiritual strength well fed and nourished." The Oriental's ideal "is to be incomprehensible, immeasurable, and undemonstrative even as an absolute being itself," and thus, claims Sōen, the Oriental is naturally drawn to meditation.¹⁹ Sōen's musings on the Japanese ethnos are of a type with those of other early *nihonjinron* theorists, including Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960), Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941), D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), and Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962). All these men were moved to extemporize on the gap between the Oriental and the Occidental during or following their sojourns in the West. I shall return to this point below.

The second English book to appear on Zen was entitled *Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan*, authored by Nukariya Kaiten (1867–1934), a Sōtō priest, university professor, and personal friend of D. T. Suzuki.²⁰ Nukariya wrote *Religion of the Samurai*, which appeared in 1913, while living and lecturing at Harvard University. Here we learn that only in Japan is Buddhism still alive, that Zen is an ancient, if not the most ancient, form of Buddhism (pp. xviii–xix), that "pure Zen" can be found only in Japan (p. 1), that the ideas of Zen are "in harmony with those of the

war effort. See, e.g., the letter of February 5, 1904, written to Zen'eki Kitamura at the very start of the Japanese-Russian conflict: "Now that the relation between Japan and Russia has changed from diplomatic negotiations to military actions, we have apparently crossed the crucial juncture. The nation's future for 100 years depends entirely on this venture. In such an emergency, we Japanese should not idle about even for a moment. Relying neither on the Cabinet, nor on the Army, we have to face this emergency with the united loyalty of the people. It may be the inevitable destiny of this world that it has to go through such human savagery repeatedly in the future, too, for the sake of the ultimate peace of the world. As we have to turn our daily training to account on such occasions, our colleagues are now to work out both directly and indirectly" (cited in Furuta, pp. 79–80). One might also note the following statement by Sōen, quoted by Tolstoy in an anti-war essay published in 1904: "Even though the Buddha teaches not to take another's life, he also teaches that all sentient beings through the exercise of infinite compassion will be united and thereby obtain final and ultimate peace. As means toward the harmonizing of the incompatible, killing and war are necessary" (cited in Ketelaar, p. 171).

¹⁹ Shaku, pp. 153–54.

²⁰ Nukariya Kaiten, *Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan*, Luzac's Oriental Religions Series, vol. 4 (London: Luzac, 1913).

New Buddhists" (p. xix, n. 2), and that Zen is an ideal doctrine for a newly emergent martial Japan: "It is Zen that modern Japan, especially after the Russo-Japanese War, has acknowledged as an ideal doctrine for her rising generation" (p. xxii). Nukariya further argues that the spirit and ethic of Zen is essentially identical with that of the samurai (pp. 35–40), and he waxes poetic on the great generals of old Japan, whose "loyalty, wisdom, bravery, and prudence are not merely unique in the history of Japan, but perhaps in the history of man" (p. 43).

After the Restoration of the Mei-ji the popularity of Zen began to wane, and for some thirty years remained in inactivity; but since the Russo-Japanese War its revival has taken place. And now it is looked upon as an ideal faith, both for a nation full of hope and energy, and for a person who has to fight his own way in the strife of life. Bushidō, or the code of chivalry, should be observed not only by the soldier in the battle-field, but by every citizen in the struggle for existence. If a person be a person and not a beast, then he must be a Samurai—brave, generous, upright, faithful, and manly, full of self-respect and self-confidence, and at the same time full of the spirit of self-sacrifice. We can find an incarnation of Bushidō in the late General Nogi, the hero of Port Arthur, who, after the sacrifice of his two sons for the country in the Russo-Japanese War, gave up his own and his wife's life for the sake of the deceased Emperor. He died not in vain, as some might think, because his simplicity, uprightness, loyalty, bravery, self-control, and self-sacrifice, all combined in his last act, surely inspire the rising generation with the spirit of the Samurai to give birth to hundreds of Nogis. [Pp. 50–51]

This eloquent eulogy to General Nogi, in an introductory book on Zen published in 1913, is telling indeed. Less than a year had passed since Nogi Maresuke (1849–1912), Japanese war hero and mentor to the future Showa Emperor, shocked the nation by committing *seppuku* with his wife during the funeral ceremonies for Emperor Meiji. Despite some praise in the foreign press for this spectacular display of *bushidō* spirit, news of Nogi's suicide was met with considerable confusion and distress by intellectuals in Japan, who felt that the practice of *junshi* (following one's lord into death) was outmoded, unduly theatrical, and an embarrassment to a nation seeking international recognition as a modern world power.²¹

Yet Nukariya, for one, does not hesitate to laud Nogi's suicide. This should not surprise us. Nogi himself was known to have taken an interest in Zen practice, receiving instruction and *kōan* training from the celebrated master Nantenbō (1839–1925). In his personal remembrances, Nantenbō Rōshi, himself a staunch nationalist and partisan to

²¹ See the discussion in Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 221–27.

the Japanese military, recalls instructing Nogi on the meaning of Zen. The essence of Zen, explained Nantenbō, lies in the single word *jiki* (direct), which has three distinct but interrelated meanings: (1) going forward without hesitation, (2) direct mind-to-mind transmission, and (3) "the spirit of Japan" (*yamatodamashii*).²² It clearly served the interests of late Meiji Zen apologists to identify the "essence of Zen" with both the "spirit of *bushidō*" and the "spirit of Japan," notions then replete with connotations of imperial conquest and unconditional obedience to the emperor.²³

IV. D. T. SUZUKI AND THE RELIGION OF SCIENCE

The notion that Zen is somehow related to Japanese culture in general, and *bushidō* in particular, is familiar to Western students of Zen through the writings of D. T. Suzuki, no doubt the single most important figure in the spread of Zen in the West. But while Suzuki is frequently cast as a "man of Zen," we must remember that he remained a layman throughout his life, and that most of his formal Zen training took place between the years 1891 and 1897 while he was a university student in Tokyo. Suzuki's Zen training was squeezed into weekends and school vacations, when he would commute to Kamakura to practice under the aforementioned Imagita Kōsen and Shaku Sōen.²⁴ Suzuki is thus very much a product of Meiji New Buddhism—just a decade or so earlier it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for a middle-class layman to receive the kind of instruction available to Suzuki at Engakuji, which included *sanzen* and *kōan* instruction.

A great deal has already been written on the life of D. T. Suzuki, and despite the fact that much of the writing is hagiographical in nature, I will confine myself to the briefest overview of his early career in order to focus on his Zen.²⁵ Suzuki was born in Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture) in 1870, and first became interested in Zen in high school through the influence of his mathematics teacher Hōjō Tokiyuki (1858–1929), a lay disciple of Kōsen Rōshi. Around the same time (i.e., 1887) Suzuki met Nishida Kitarō—a student at the same school—and the two

²² Kasumi Bunshō, *Zen ni ikiru ketsusō: Nantenbō* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1963), p. 168; my thanks to T. Griffith Foulk for this reference.

²³ Foulk reports seeing a portrait of Nogi in the mid-1970s outside the *sanzen* room at Kaiseiji, a temple in which Nantenbō served as abbot from 1902 until the end of this career.

²⁴ After his return from America in 1909, Suzuki recommenced *sanzen* with Sōen Rōshi, commuting to Kamakura from his job in Tokyo. He continued until Sōen's death in 1919 (Abe, ed., *A Zen Life*, p. 21).

²⁵ For English sources on the life of D. T. Suzuki see esp. Abe, ed., *A Zen Life*; Bandō Shōjun, "D. T. Suzuki's Life in La Salle," *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 2, no. 1 (1967): 137–47; and Margaret H. Dornish, "Aspects of D. T. Suzuki's Early Interpretations of Buddhism and Zen," *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 3, no. 1 (1970): 47–66.

would become lifelong friends. In 1889 Suzuki was forced to leave school owing to financial difficulties, and after a stint as a primary school English teacher he entered Waseda University in 1891. Soon thereafter Suzuki transferred to Tokyo Imperial University, and at the same time began to commute to Engakuji to study first with Kōsen Rōshi, and, following Kōsen's death, with Shaku Sōen. Suzuki reports that Sōen Rōshi started him on the *mu kōan*, which he "passed" with a *kenshō* experience at *rōhatsu sesshin* (a week of intensive Zen practice commemorating the Buddha's enlightenment) in 1896.

Suzuki's life changed dramatically when, in 1897, he moved to La Salle, Illinois, to study with Paul Carus, editor of the journal *The Open Court*. He was to spend a total of eleven years in La Salle, earning his keep as a translator and proofreader at the Open Court Publishing Company.²⁶ In addition, Suzuki took time off in 1905 in order to serve as Sōen Rōshi's translator and assistant during the latter's tour of America. The importance of Suzuki's tenure in La Salle for his intellectual development cannot be underestimated—at the very least it should be noted that his tutelage under Carus was in many ways as intensive and as sustained as his formal Zen training in Japan. It would appear that historians of contemporary Zen have utterly neglected the extent and nature of Carus's influence on the young D. T. Suzuki, an influence that began even before Suzuki left Japan. As we shall see below, this may be due in part to the fact that Suzuki himself, in what appears to be a deliberate attempt to understate his relationship with Carus, would later misrepresent the circumstances that led him to La Salle.

In order not to wander too far afield I will limit myself to the briefest sketch of Paul Carus. Carus was born in 1852 in Ilsenburg am Harz in Germany, the son of a prominent Reformed minister.²⁷ He received an

²⁶ On Suzuki's time with Carus in La Salle see esp. Bandō; and Larry A. Fader, "Zen in the West: Historical and Philosophical Implications of the 1893 Parliament of Religions," *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 15, no. 2 (1982): 122–45.

²⁷ On Paul Carus see esp. Donald Bishop, "The Carus-James Controversy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 3 (1974): 509–20; William H. Hay, "Paul Carus: A Case-Study of Philosophy on the Frontier," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 4 (1956): 498–510; Harold Henderson, *Catalyst for Controversy: Paul Carus of Open Court* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993); Carl T. Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West: The Case of Paul Carus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29, no. 1 (1968): 73–92; Donald H. Meyer, "Paul Carus and the Religion of Science," *American Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1962): 597–607; James Francis Sheridan, "Paul Carus: A Study of the Thought and Work of the Editor of the Open Court Publishing Company" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1957); D. T. Suzuki, "A Glimpse of Paul Carus," in *Modern Trends in World Religion*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1959), pp. ix–xiv; Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 65–67; *Dictionary of American Biography* (1928–36), s.v. "Carus, Paul"; and the collection of commemorative articles in the September 1919 issue of *The Open Court*.

excellent German education, completing a Ph.D. in Tübingen in 1876 before emigrating to America in 1884. Carus, apparently attracted to America by the promise of religious and intellectual freedom, settled in La Salle, where he edited and wrote for two journals, *The Open Court* and *The Monist*. The former published its first issue in 1887, and was devoted to the Religion of Science, which included both "the scientific study of religion and the religious study of science." The latter journal, which began publishing shortly thereafter, was intended to carry more philosophical and scholarly articles on the same theme.

The Religion of Science was promoted by Carus on the belief that there is no essential difference between scientific and religious truth, and religious "faith" is precisely trust in this unified truth.²⁸ In the preface to *The Religion of Science*, the first volume in a series of the same name, Carus set out his agenda: "The work of The Open Court Publishing Company . . . is to propound, develop, and establish the Religion of Science. . . . In order to establish the Religion of Science it is by no means necessary to abolish the old religions, but only to purify them and develop their higher possibilities, so that their mythologies shall be changed into strictly scientific conceptions. It is intended to preserve of the old religions all that is true and good, but to purify their faith by rejecting superstitions and irrational elements, and to discard, unrelentingly, their errors" (p. iii). Carus elucidated the philosophical foundation of his Religion of Science under the rubric of "monism" or "positivism," by which he meant the essential oneness of the material and the immaterial, noumena and phenomena. All truth belongs to a unity that can be arrived at through rational scientific investigation, and the discovery of this truth will yield a solution to all human problems. But Carus was adamant in his rejection of the materialism, atheism, and agnosticism that had come to be associated with empiricism and positivism.²⁹ Accordingly, Carus did not hesitate to speak of God, the soul, and immortality, and he insisted that only a religious approach to science would yield truth.³⁰

By the mid 1890s Carus had come to consider Buddhism the religious tradition closest in spirit to his Religion of Science. Buddhism was both essentially positivistic and scientific; it "propounded a consistent Monism . . . [which] radically ignored all metaphysical assumptions and philosophical postulates, founding . . . religion on a

²⁸ Paul Carus, *The Religion of Science*, 2d ed., revised and enlarged (Chicago: Open Court, 1896), pp. 6–7. This title was originally published in 1893.

²⁹ See Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," p. 79.

³⁰ See, e.g., Paul Carus, *God: An Enquiry into the Nature of Man's Highest Ideal and a Solution of the Problem from the Standpoint of Science* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1943); as well as Carus's *The Religion of Science*, pp. 33–62.

consideration of the pure facts of experience. . . . In Buddhism, theory is nothing, and facts are everything."³¹ The Buddha himself was, in Carus's view, "the first positivist, the first humanitarian, the first radical freethinker, the first iconoclast, and the first prophet of the Religion of Science."³² Carus's almost unbounded respect for Buddhism reflects in part the impact of the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, which he attended and celebrated in the pages of *The Open Court*.³³ Carus actively befriended many of the Asian representatives to the parliament, and he spent the next decades trying in various ways to keep the spirit of the parliament alive.³⁴ Shortly after the parliament Carus compiled *The Gospel of Buddha*, a selection of retranslations from available scholarly sources which was, much to Carus's consternation, panned by Buddhist scholars at the time.³⁵ Nevertheless, *The Gospel of Buddha*, originally published in 1894 as number 14 of the Religion of Science Series, went through at least thirteen editions and was translated into Japanese (by Suzuki), Chinese, German, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Urdu, among other languages.³⁶ It seems that Carus's presentation of Buddhism as a "religion which knows of no supernatural revelation," based "solely upon man's knowledge of the nature of things, upon provable truth,"³⁷ held a strong appeal to Buddhist modernists in general, and the Japanese proponents of New Buddhism in particular. Shaku Sōen himself praised Carus for presenting Buddhist *nirvāṇa* "as relating to this life and as real, positive, altruistic, and rather optimistic,"³⁸ and Sōen even suggested that Carus's compilation was better

³¹ Paul Carus, *The Open Court* 10 (March 19, 1896): 4853; cited in Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," p. 80.

³² Paul Carus, "Buddhism and the Religion of Science," *The Open Court* 10 (March 12, 1896): 4845; cited in Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," p. 80.

³³ Carus's interest in Asian religion may in fact be traced to the mathematician Hermann Grassmann, with whom Carus studied at the gymnasium in Stettin. Grassmann is well known among mathematicians for his work on *Ausdehnungslehre*, or the calculus of extension, but he was also a scholar of Sanskrit who was known in his time for his work on Vedic literature (*Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda* [Stettin, 1872]; see Hay, pp. 505–7; and Meyer, pp. 599–600).

³⁴ Carus was a major figure in a series of organizations formed in the 1890s and 1900s in the hope of keeping alive the kind of interfaith dialogue that characterized the parliament. He also tried to form a "lay church" that would embody the ecumenical religious ideals of the parliament, but in the end all such projects ended in failure (see Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," pp. 86–87).

³⁵ Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," p. 84.

³⁶ Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha* (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1915), pp. vi–vii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

³⁸ Letter from Sōen to Carus, May 17, 2554 (1894), the Open Court Papers, Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (hereafter cited as Open Court Papers).

suited for Japanese students of Buddhism than the Buddhist canon itself!³⁹

Carus also used the pages of his journal to propound a form of religious Darwinism: "The law of the survival of the fittest holds good also in the domain of spiritual institutions."⁴⁰ Carus thought missionary movements beneficial, as the rivalry between various proselytizing groups contributed to the health of religious institutions. "A competition between the different religions spurs their adherents on to develop the best qualities and to be watchful in their own conduct."⁴¹ The outcome of competition would be religious unity, or, in other words, the Religion of Science.

Carus's view of the evolutionary development of religion, the unity of religion and science, and the progressive nature of Buddhism would have been attractive to a young Japanese student of Western philosophy and Zen Buddhism such as D. T. Suzuki. Indeed, not long after Suzuki translated *The Gospel of Buddha* he wrote to Carus to introduce himself and to complement Carus for "rightly comprehend[ing] the principles of Buddhism."⁴² Carus sent Suzuki a reply on April 11, 1895, accompanied by copies of some of his books including *The Religion of Science*. Then, on December 17 of the same year, Sōen wrote to Carus on Suzuki's behalf:

Now I have something to ask your kind consent relating to the person of Suzuki Teitaro, whom you know as the translator of your "The gospel of Buddha." . . . He tells me that he has been so greatly inspired by your sound faith which is perceptible in your various works, that he earnestly desires to go abroad and to study under your personal guidance. If you will be kind enough to sympathise with his ambitious intention and to consent to take him under your patronage, he will willingly obey to do everything you may order him, as far as he can.⁴³

Carus responded to Sōen immediately, extending to Suzuki a most courteous invitation to come to the United States: "I hope that his visit will be profitable to him, and that thereby his services to religion and

³⁹ Sōen comments that "the sacred books of Buddhism are so numerous that its beginners are at loss how to begin their study," and thus Carus's book fills a real need (letter from Sōen to Carus, November 7, 1894, Open Court Papers). Moreover, according to a letter from Ohara Kakichi of Omi, Japan, of December 26, 1894, Open Court Papers, both the Jōdō and Jōdōshin organizations adopted *The Gospel of Buddha* into their curriculums.

⁴⁰ Paul Carus, *Buddhism and Its Christian Critics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1897), p. 11.

⁴¹ Paul Carus, *The Open Court* 13 (December 1899): 760; quoted in Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," p. 88.

⁴² Letter from Suzuki to Carus, March 10, 1895, Open Court Papers.

⁴³ Note that Sōen's correspondence with Carus at this time was usually translated into English, if not actually composed, by Suzuki himself, and this letter is in Suzuki's own hand.

to the further development of Japan will become more effectual. I myself anticipate much pleasure from meeting him, and shall be glad to assist him in his studies whenever I can be of use to him."⁴⁴

This account is seriously at odds with Suzuki's version of events—dating to the late 1950s—in which Suzuki claims to have been sent to America in response to Carus's request for a translator of Chinese.⁴⁵ It would seem that by the 1950s Suzuki was intent upon framing his mission in La Salle as that of collaborator to Paul Carus and resident authority on things Oriental at the Open Court Publishing Company, rather than as a young Japanese philosophy student traveling abroad to study the Religion of Science with a rather eccentric German-American essayist. Yet all evidence indicates that, in the words of Harold Henderson, "Suzuki was first drawn to the United States . . . not by a translating job, but by Paul Carus's philosophy."⁴⁶

In the small mining town of La Salle Suzuki earned his keep as general assistant and houseboy for Paul Carus, and we may assume that he continued to imbibe Carus's philosophical monism, his belief in the essential unity of all religions, and his view of pure Buddhism as essentially rational, empirical, and scientific. This ethnographically, historically, and philosophically naive characterization of Buddhism, coming from the pen of an eminent German doctor of philosophy living on the American frontier, was identical in many respects to the view advanced by proponents of Meiji New Buddhism. But this is, perhaps, not surprising: Carus, like his Meiji freethinking counterparts, could not accept the dogmatic truth claims of traditional religious systems, and yet recoiled from the specter of a godless relativistic universe. Holding to the promise of epistemological certainty attained through a thoroughgoing monism which dogmatically posits the unity of mind and matter—the unity of the realm of spirit and the realm of scientific truth—Carus hoped to usher in a new universal scientific religion which would unite the peoples of the world. And this was precisely the hope of the Meiji

⁴⁴ Letter from Carus to Sōen, January 17, 1896, Open Court Papers.

⁴⁵ I would like to thank Harold Henderson for bringing the discrepancy between the two accounts to my attention. Suzuki's account, written some sixty years after the events took place, runs as follows: "When *The Gospel of Buddha* was finished, Dr. Carus continued to be interested in things Oriental, and he began to translate the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao-tzu. For this task he needed someone who could read Chinese with him, and he wrote to Shaku Sōyen, asking him to recommend someone. That is how I came to La-Salle in 1897, exactly sixty years ago" (Suzuki, "A Glimpse of Paul Carus" [n. 27 above], p. xi). The surviving correspondence provides no support for Suzuki's version, but rather confirms the fact that Carus believed Suzuki was coming to study philosophy. In response to a later letter from Sōen expressing concern for Suzuki's economic welfare, however, Carus did reply by offering Suzuki remuneration for assistance in Chinese translation.

⁴⁶ Henderson (n. 27 above), p. 102.

Buddhist intellectuals who touted “pure Buddhism” as the scientific and nondualistic teaching required in the modern age. There was, however, one important difference between the religious unity espoused by Carus and that espoused by the Meiji New Buddhists: to the Japanese, the notion of a “unity among peoples” all too readily translated into support for the ongoing military program to unite East Asia under the spiritually enlightened rule of the apotheosized Japanese emperor.

Upon returning to Japan in 1909, Suzuki held a series of lectureships in English at Gakushuin (1909–21) and Tokyo Imperial University (1909–14). In 1921 he moved to Kyoto to take a position as professor of Buddhist philosophy at Otani University, where he launched the journal *Eastern Buddhist*. This journal was no doubt inspired, at least in part, by *The Open Court* and *The Monist*, as is evident from Suzuki’s editorial comment in the second issue: “Our standpoint is that the Mahayana ought to be considered one whole, individual thing and no sects, especially no sectarian prejudices, to be recognized in it, except as so many phases or aspects of one fundamental truth. In this respect Buddhism and Christianity and all other religious beliefs are not more than variations of one single original Faith, deeply embedded in the human soul.”⁴⁷

It would take us too far afield to chronicle Suzuki’s long and fascinating career, which included extended stays in Europe and America and the authorship of literally dozens of books in Japanese and English. It will suffice our purposes here to draw attention to the fact that Suzuki’s exegetical agenda—his strategy for presenting Zen to lay audiences in Japan and the West—was influenced as much by the Western currents of thought to which he was exposed as a philosophy student in Tokyo and as assistant to Carus as it was by his necessarily limited involvement in Zen training as a lay practitioner at Engakuji.

V. THE ZEN OF D. T. SUZUKI

Suzuki’s first books contain remarkably little on the subject of Zen. They are, rather, polemics on Mahayana Buddhism, responses to the Western scholarship Suzuki confronted during his time in America. The early generation of European “Orientalist” scholars (in Said’s polemical sense of the term) all too often held “true” or “pure” Buddhism to be “early Buddhism,” which they implicitly or explicitly believed to be long dead in Asia. Specifically, early Buddhism was identified with the Buddhism of the Pali Canon, and the prevailing tendency among Western scholars was to view the Mahayana of East Asia as degenerate, syncretic, and corrupt. Suzuki, who must have encountered this bias early on during his stay in America, devoted his energies in La Salle to the

⁴⁷ D. T. Suzuki, Editorial, *Eastern Buddhist* 1, no. 2 (1921): 156.

elucidation and defense of Mahayana. His first major English publication, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, published in 1907 as he was about to leave La Salle, makes no mention of Zen whatsoever.⁴⁸ In fact, up to this time, of the nine books he authored or jointly authored, only a couple of tracts composed in collaboration with Shaku Sōen contain any discussion of Zen at all.⁴⁹ Nor is there any particular emphasis on experience per se. This absence of any discussion of religious experience is notable not only because the experience of *satori* would become the hallmark of Suzuki's later Buddhist exegesis, but also because Suzuki, according to his later recollections, had had a *satori* experience during his last *rōhatsu sesshin* at Engakuji shortly before he left for America.⁵⁰

What we find instead is a rambling and highly idealized introduction to Mahayana doctrine—a curious blend of scholarship and apologetics—that effectively renders Mahayana fully commensurate with Carus's Religion of Science. Like other exponents of Japanese New Buddhism, Suzuki insists that Buddhism is not a dogmatic creed but rather a "mysticism" that responds to the deepest yearnings in man and yet remains in full accord with the findings of modern science: "It is wonderful that Buddhism clearly anticipated the outcome of modern psychological researches at the time when all other religious and philosophical systems were eagerly cherishing dogmatic superstitions concerning the nature of the ego" (p. 40). Not only is there no fundamental discord between Buddhism and science, but there is no ultimate conflict between the teachings of Christ and those of the Buddha: "My conviction is: If the Buddha and the Christ changed their accidental places of birth, Gautama might have been a Christ rising against the Jewish traditionalism, and Jesus a Buddha, perhaps propounding the doctrine of non-ego and nirvāṇa and Dharmakāya" (p. 29); and "Those who are free from sectarian biases will admit without hesitation that there is but one true religion which may assume various forms according to circumstances" (p. 365, n. 1). This profession of faith in the unity of religious truth, written at the end of Suzuki's long apprenticeship with Carus, could have come from the pen of Carus himself.

⁴⁸ D. T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Luzac, 1907).

⁴⁹ These include Suzuki's *Seiza no susume* (Tokyo: Kōyōkan, 1900), which was written in collaboration with Shaku; and Shaku's *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (n. 18 above).

⁵⁰ On Suzuki's *kenshō* experience at Engakuji in 1896 see his "Early Memories" in Abe, ed., *A Zen Life* (n. 13 above), p. 11. Note that this short piece originally appeared in D. T. Suzuki, *The Field of Zen* (London: Buddhist Society) in 1969, seventy-three years after the event took place. Suzuki opens his 1949 essay entitled "Satori" with the characteristically blunt assertion "To understand Zen, it is essential to have an experience known as *satori*, for without this one can have no insight into the truth of Zen" (Abe, ed., *A Zen Life*, p. 27).

Upon returning to Japan by way of Paris and the Tun-huang manuscript collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Suzuki became increasingly interested in Japanese Zen and Pure Land thought. Suzuki also began to publish a series of studies and translations of the works of Swedenborg in 1913, an interest that would continue over the next several years. This was in addition to his increasing output of apologetic works on Zen and Pure Land, philological studies on Zen-related scriptures such as the *Lankāvatāra*, and studies and editions of manuscripts recovered from Tun-huang bearing on early Ch'an history. But many years would pass before Suzuki would elevate the "Zen experience" to the status it achieved in his later work. In fact, the emphasis on religious experience, which forms the basis of Suzuki's later approach to everything from Buddhist *prajñā* (wisdom) to *kōan* literature, seems to have been directly inspired by the writings of Suzuki's personal friend, Nishida Kitarō.

The publication in 1911 of Nishida's first major work, *Zen no kenkyū* (a study of the good), was the beginning of a new phase in Japanese philosophy.⁵¹ Not only did it give rise to an indigenous Japanese philosophical movement drawing upon both Occidental and Asian resources (later known as *Kyōto gakuha* or the "Kyoto school"), but it also served as the foundation for a new mode of Japanese Buddhist exegesis that would privilege "pure" or "unmediated" or "nondual" experience over either ritual performance or doctrinal learning. Nishida would also provide the philosophical inspiration for a new generation of *nihonjinron* thinkers, who, ever eager for novel intellectual models with which to articulate the differences between Japanese and non-Japanese peoples, would assert that the Japanese are racially and/or culturally inclined to experience the world more directly than are the peoples of other nations (see below).

⁵¹ *Zen no kenkyū* has been republished as vol. 1 of the nineteen-volume edition of Nishida's collected works (Nishida Kitarō, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* [Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1965–66]). There are now two complete translations into English, one by V. H. Viglielmo entitled *A Study of Good* (Tokyo: Japanese Government Printing Bureau, 1960); and another by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives under the title *An Inquiry into the Good* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Of the many studies of Nishida's thought see esp. D. A. Dilworth, "The Initial Formations of 'Pure Experience' in Nishida Kitarō and William James," *Monumenta Nipponica* 24, no. 1–2 (1969): 93–111; D. A. Dilworth, "Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945): The Development of his Thought" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1970); James W. Heisig, "The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17, no. 1 (1990): 52–81; Thomas P. Kasulis, "The Kyoto School and the West: Review and Evaluation," *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 15, no. 2 (1982): 125–44; John C. Maraldo, "Translating Nishida," *Philosophy East and West* 39, no. 4 (1989): 465–96; and Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

Nishida's lifework revolved around the elucidation of the notion of pure experience (*junsui keiken*) introduced in the opening paragraph of his first philosophical monograph:

Experience means to know reality exactly as it is. It is to know by entirely abandoning the artifices of the self and by following reality. Since usually those who discuss experience actually conjoin thought of some sort to the idea, "pure" means precisely the condition of experience in itself without the admixture of any thinking or discrimination. For example, it means, at the instant of seeing color or hearing sound, the experience prior not only to thinking that it is the function of an external thing or that it is my feeling, but before even the judgment of what this color or sound is, has been added. Therefore pure experience is identical with immediate experience. When one immediately experiences a conscious state of the self, there is still neither subject nor object; knowledge and its object are entirely one. This is the purest form of experience.⁵²

In this and later works, Nishida would continue to develop the concept of pure experience and the related notion of *jikaku* or "self-awareness." Although Nishida struggled against the "psychologism" latent in these terms, the philosophical value Nishida placed on the "unmediated experience of the world as such" would help Nishida "[resist] the self-understanding being urged on Japan from the outside world: the understanding of self and world in terms of scientific theories of knowledge or philosophical ontology."⁵³ And it was this ability to appropriate key concepts from the West, while at the same time appearing to challenge the cultural hegemony of Western modes of thought, that was so appealing to proponents of the New Buddhism. In short order, "direct experience" was being touted as the characteristic feature of Eastern spirituality in general, and Zen in particular. Given the importance placed on "religious experience" in the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, Joachim Wach, William James, and other leading Western scholars of religion around the turn of the century, it is no wonder that Western enthusiasts, seeking alternatives to their own seemingly moribund religious institutions, would find the emphasis on personal, unmediated, veridical experience the single most attractive feature of Zen.⁵⁴

The irony of this situation is that the key Japanese terms for experience—*keiken* and *taiken*—are rarely attested in premodern Japanese texts. Their contemporary currency dates to the early Meiji period,

⁵² Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 1:9; the translation is by Dilworth, "The Initial Formations," pp. 95–96.

⁵³ Heisig, p. 57.

⁵⁴ On the Western notion of religious experience see Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

when they were adopted to render Western terms for which there was no ready Japanese equivalent. *Keiken*, which I have been unable to locate in any premodern Chinese or Japanese source, became the common translation for the English "experience," and, while *taiken* is occasionally found in Sung Neo-Confucian writings meaning "to investigate firsthand,"⁵⁵ its modern currency can be traced to its use as an equivalent for the German *erleben* and *Erlebnis*. As Leslie Pincus has pointed out, this latter neologism proved to be particularly mischievous: the fact that the compound *taiken* incorporates reference to the physical body "made it easier for Japanese theorists to embed experience in nature, and thus remove it from the reach of critical thought."⁵⁶

Similarly, although the term *jikaku* is occasionally found in classical Chinese Buddhist scriptures, including the literature of Ch'an, the term does not carry the epistemic or phenomenological sense of the modern Japanese vernacular; it simply means to be "personally awakened," or "to awaken oneself," as opposed to awakening others.⁵⁷ In fact, one searches in vain for a premodern Chinese or Japanese equivalent to the phenomenological notion of "experience." Nor is it legitimate to interpret such technical Zen terms as *satori* (to understand) or *kenshō* (to see one's original nature) as denoting some species of unmediated experience in the sense of Nishida's *junsui keiken*. In traditional Chinese Buddhist literature such terms are used to denote the full comprehension and appreciation of central Buddhist tenets such as *śūnyatā*, Buddha-nature, or dependent origination. There are simply no a priori grounds to conceive of such moments of insight in phenomenological terms. Indeed, Chinese Buddhist commentators in general, and Ch'an exegetes in particular, tend to be antipathetic to any form of phenomenological reduction.

It would appear that Nishida's interest in experience—unmediated or otherwise—is better traced to contemporary Western philosophical sources, particularly to the writings of the American philosopher William James, whose works were introduced to Nishida by D. T. Suzuki in the early years of this century.⁵⁸ Yet Nishida turns the notion of

⁵⁵ The term is found in the writings of Ssu-ma Kuang (1019–86) and Chu Hsi (1130–1200). See the *Tz'u-yüan*, which glosses *t'i-yen* as equivalent to *t'i-ch'a*.

⁵⁶ Leslie Pincus, "The Allure of Difference: 'Iki' no *kōzō* and the Construction of the Japanese Spirit" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1989), p. 69.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., the *Chin-kang san-mei ching*, where the term *jikaku* refers to the personal awakening of the Tathāgata (*Taishō daizōkyō* [Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932], 273:9.366c25). See also Kumārajīva's translation of the *Saddharmapundarika-sūtra* (*Taishō daizōkyō*, 262:9.11a14, 19b26) for similar usage. In Ch'an and Zen texts the term *jikaku* is usually implicitly or explicitly opposed to *takaku*, "to awaken others" (*Zengaku daijiten* [Tokyo: Daishūkan, 1985], p. 417).

⁵⁸ Dilworth, "The Initial Formations," p. 102.

pure experience into precisely the kind of idealism that James sought to critique—an ontological ground capable of guaranteeing epistemological certainty—which would, in short order, serve as the intellectual foundation for a new school of Japanese philosophy, as well as for a revamped Zen mysticism.⁵⁹

Despite the fact that Nishida and his Kyoto school followers played a crucial role in the construction of contemporary Zen discourse, I will forgo a detailed analysis of Nishida's philosophy here; it is simply too large and complex a topic. It is, however, important to note that Nishida was himself guilty of the most spurious forms of *nihonjinron* speculation. We find, for example, repeated attempts to characterize Japanese culture as a culture of "pure feeling," which is more emotional, more aesthetic, and more communal than Occidental cultures. In contrast, Occidental cultures are more intellectual, more rationalistic, and more scientific.⁶⁰ Moreover, Nishida, caught up in the nationalistic vision of a unified and politically supreme *kokutai*, aligned his musings on the metaphysical differences between East and West with the ideology of Japanese New Buddhism and its pretensions of evolutionary superiority. In 1938, as political and military tensions in the region were rapidly escalating, Nishida wrote: "That the Japanese alone in the Orient, though sharing in these cultural influences [i.e., ones in

⁵⁹ See Dilworth, "The Initial Formations," p. 99; and Dale (n. 8 above), p. 224, n. 21. James had a very specific problem: the intractable dualism that resulted from the kind of substance ontology that continued to infect classical empiricism, saddled as it was with the reification of mind and object. He sought to overcome this problem by a *functional* account of the field of experience that avoided the reification of either subject or object. For James, thoughts and things are ontologically homogeneous when subject to analysis from the perspective of pure experience. James's project was very far removed from that of the young Nishida, who was attempting to integrate his interest in Japanese Zen with Western philosophical notions shorn from their historical and intellectual context. In the end, Nishida turns pure experience into a hypostatized ontic ground—the ground of "absolute nothingness" as opposed to the ground of "being." Despite his protestations, there is little doubt that Nishida's notion of pure experience skirts the edges of idealism: "For many years I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality. . . . Over time I came to realize that it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience. I thus arrived at the idea that experience is more fundamental than individual differences, and in this way I was able to avoid solipsism" (Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. xxx).

⁶⁰ See, e.g., the final section of *Tetsugaku no konpon mondai*, where we learn that Japan is a culture founded on the notion of nothingness, as opposed to the West, which is founded on the notion of being. As a consequence, the "special characteristic [of Japanese culture] lies in being an emotional culture. It does not look to the eternal beyond. It moves immanently from thing to thing, without transcending time. It acts within time. This is the reason why Japanese culture may be thought to be a monsoon culture" (Nishida Kitarō, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and the Dialectical World*, trans. David A. Dilworth [Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970], p. 247). See also the comments on Nishida's nationalism in Ichikawa Hakugen, *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1970), pp. 225–53; Ichikawa Hakugen, *Nihon fashizumu shita no shūkyō* (Tokyo: Enuesu shuppan, 1975), pp. 101–6; and Maraldo, p. 486 ff.

common with India and China], have gone forward to absorb Occidental culture and have also been considered the creators of a new Oriental culture, is due, is it not, mainly to that same Japanese spirit, free and unfettered, which 'goes straight to things'?"⁶¹ And just a year before his death, in the midst of the horrors of war, Nishida would write:

Present-day Buddhists have forgotten such a true meaning of the Mahayana. Eastern culture must arise again from such a standpoint. It must contribute a new light to world culture. As a self-determination of the absolute present, the national polity (*kokutai*) of Japan is a norm of historical action in such a perspective. The above mentioned true spirit of the Mahayana is in the East preserved today only in Japan. . . .

It would be a great mistake if people should hold that religion is merely a matter of individual peace of mind, and therefore is unrelated to the question of nation. The world of the absolute present is always historical and formative as the self-determination of form. This must be called national. Nations are the forms of the self-formation of the historical world. National polities (*kokutai*) are such forms of individuality. Our selves must be national in the sense of always being historical and formative as individuals of the world of the absolute present. True obedience to the nation should be derived from the standpoint of true religious self-awareness. Mere seeking one's own peace of mind is selfish.⁶²

Nishida and Suzuki were major influences upon one another, with Nishida drawing on Suzuki for his understanding of *prajñā*, Zen, and Pure Land,⁶³ and Suzuki drawing on Nishida for his notions of pure experience and absolute nothingness. In fact, Suzuki saw Nishida as propounding a "Zen philosophy" inaccessible to those lacking Zen insight: "Nishida's philosophy of absolute nothingness or his logic of the self-identity of absolute contradictions is difficult to understand, I believe, unless one is passably acquainted with Zen experience. . . . [Nishida] thought it was his mission to make Zen intelligible to the West."⁶⁴ Not only did Suzuki share Nishida's emphasis on experience—with the result that only those privy to a legitimate *kenshō* experience are qualified to speak of Zen—but Suzuki, like Nishida, placed

⁶¹ Nishida Kitarō, "The Problem of Japanese Culture," trans. Masao Abe and Richard DeMartino, in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, ed. Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 859. This is a selection from *Nihon bunka no mondai*, originally delivered as a series of lectures in 1938, republished in Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 12:275–384.

⁶² Nishida Kitarō, "Towards a Philosophy of Religion with the Concept of Pre-established Harmony as Guide," trans. David A. Dilworth, *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 3, no. 1 (1970): 36, 45 (originally published as "Yoteichōwa o tebiki toshite shūkyōtetsugaku e" in 1944; reprinted in Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 11:114–46).

⁶³ Nishida, "Towards a Philosophy of Religion," p. 146.

⁶⁴ From D. T. Suzuki's preface to Viglielmo's translation of Nishida's *Zen no kenkyū* (*A Study of Good*), pp. iii–vi.

his reading of Buddhist history and exegesis in the interests of the most specious forms of *nihonjinron*.

Suzuki's preoccupation with nativist and *nihonjinron* themes—notably the concern to demarcate the innate spirituality of the Japanese in contradistinction with the Occident—began in earnest in 1935, with a series of Japanese books that appeared over a period of some thirty years dealing with Buddhism, Zen, and the Japanese character. The titles alone are revealing: *Zen and the Character of the Japanese People* (1935),⁶⁵ *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1940),⁶⁶ *Oriental Oneness* (1942),⁶⁷ *More on Zen and Japanese Culture* (1942),⁶⁸ *Religious Experience and Reality* (1943),⁶⁹ *Japanese Spirituality* (1944),⁷⁰ *Building a Spiritual Japan* (1946),⁷¹ *The Awakening of Japanese Spirituality* (1946),⁷² *The Spiritualizing of Japan* (1947),⁷³ *East and West* (1948),⁷⁴ *The Revival of the East* (1954),⁷⁵ *The Oriental Outlook* (1963),⁷⁶ and *The Mind of the Orient* (1965).⁷⁷ And no one can accuse Suzuki of hiding his *nihonjinron* musings from the purview of his English-speaking audience. In 1938 he published a series of lectures delivered two years previously in England and America under the title *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, which was later revised and republished in 1959 as *Zen and Japanese Culture*. This latter title, published under the prestigious imprint of Princeton University Press and the Bollingen Series, was to become the classic English statement on the identity of the Japanese spirit, the spirit of the samurai, and Zen Buddhism.⁷⁸

The details of Suzuki's Zen exegesis, with its emphasis on *kenshō* and *satori*, are well known. In short, according to Suzuki, "to study Zen means to have Zen experience, for without the experience there is no Zen one can study."⁷⁹ Moreover, the Zen experience is not merely

⁶⁵ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen to nihonjin no kishitsu* (Tokyo: Nihon bunka kyōkai, 1935).

⁶⁶ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen to nihon bunka* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1940).

⁶⁷ D. T. Suzuki, *Tōyōteki ichi* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1942).

⁶⁸ D. T. Suzuki, *Zoku zen to nihon bunka* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1942).

⁶⁹ D. T. Suzuki, *Shūkyō keiken no jijitsu* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1943).

⁷⁰ D. T. Suzuki, *Nihonteki reisei* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1944); English translation by Norman Waddell as *Japanese Spirituality* (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and Japanese Ministry of Education, 1972).

⁷¹ D. T. Suzuki, *Nihonteki reiseiteki jikaku* (Kyoto: Ōtani kyōgaku kenkyūsho, 1946).

⁷² D. T. Suzuki, *Reiseiteki nihon no kensetsu* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1946).

⁷³ D. T. Suzuki, *Nihon no reiseika* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1947).

⁷⁴ D. T. Suzuki, *Tōyō to seiyō* (Tokyo: Tōri shoin, 1948).

⁷⁵ D. T. Suzuki, *Yomigaeru tōyō* (Tokyo: Yomiuri shinbunsha, 1954).

⁷⁶ D. T. Suzuki, *Tōyōteki na mikata* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1963).

⁷⁷ D. T. Suzuki, *Tōyō no kokoro* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1965).

⁷⁸ In *Zen and Japanese Culture* we find the chapters "Zen and the Samurai," "Zen and Swordsmanship," "Love of Nature," etc..

⁷⁹ D. T. Suzuki, "An Interpretation of Zen Experience," in *The Japanese Mind: Essentials of Japanese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Charles A. Moore (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967), p. 123.

the foundation for Zen understanding, or even of Buddhist understanding; Zen is the foundation of all authentic religious insight, both Eastern and Western: "The basic idea of Zen is to come in touch with the inner workings of our being, and to do this in the most direct way possible, without resorting to anything external or superadded. . . . Zen professes itself to be the spirit of Buddhism, but in fact it is the spirit of all religions and philosophies. When Zen is thoroughly understood, absolute peace of mind is attained, and a man lives as he ought to live."⁸⁰ But while Zen experience is the universal ground of religious truth, it is nonetheless an expression of a uniquely *Japanese* spirituality. This notion that Zen is somehow essentially and uniquely Japanese necessitated a particularly convoluted logic, since Suzuki was, of course, thoroughly familiar with the Chinese origins of Zen. Indeed, Suzuki's exegetical writings draw upon the recorded sayings of Chinese masters at virtually every turn. Yet, as Suzuki would have it, "Buddhism is not primarily an imported religion, I feel that neither Zen nor Pure Land possesses a foreign nature. Of course, Buddhism did come from the continent . . . but what entered was Buddhist ritual and its trappings."⁸¹

According to Suzuki's analysis in *Japanese Spirituality*, the difference between Chinese and Japanese Zen is that in China Zen did not permeate the everyday life of the people: "For the Chinese, guided by the thought and feeling of a northern people, a doctrine of good actions leading to good rewards, which has about it a logical nature, would probably be more effective than the Zen-type thought of the south" (p. 22). This situation is very different in Japan:

Zen typifies Japanese spirituality. This does not mean Zen has deep roots within the life of the Japanese people, rather that Japanese life itself is "Zen-like." The importation of Zen provided the opportunity for Japanese spirituality to ignite, yet the constituents themselves which were to ignite were fully primed at that time. Zen arrived in Japan riding the wave of Chinese thought, literature, and art, but Japanese spirituality was by no means seduced by these trappings. It was nothing like the entrance of Buddhist literature and thought that took place during the Nara period (646–794). The Buddhism of the Nara and Heian [794–1185] periods was merely tied conceptually to the life of the upper classes, whereas Zen put down its roots in the midst of the life of the Japanese samurai. It was cultivated and it budded in that which existed at the depths of the samurai's *seishin*. These buds were not foreign clippings but developed from the very life of the Japanese warrior. I said it put down roots, but that is not quite the correct expression. It would be better to say that spirituality of the samurai was on the verge of breaking through to the surface, and that Zen removed all the obstacles from its path. . . . Thereupon, although the Zen Sect of Japan was

⁸⁰ D. T. Suzuki, "A Reply from D. T. Suzuki," *Encounter* 17, no. 4 (1961): 44.

⁸¹ Suzuki, *Japanese Spirituality*, p. 18.

content to allow the supremacy of Chinese literature, the Zen life of the Japanese came to full flower in Japanese spirituality. [Pp. 18–19]

In order to decipher this passage it is necessary to isolate the individual and sometimes incongruent items on Suzuki's agenda. First, Suzuki wants to argue that prior to the arrival of Buddhism there was no authentic "spirituality" in Japan: "Although the sects of Shintō might be regarded as transmitters of Japanese spirituality, Japanese spirituality does not appear there in a pure form. Those traditions labeled Shrine Shintō, or Ancient Shintō, being fixations of the Japanese people's primitive conventions, did not touch spirituality" (p. 18). Second, while Buddhism was brought to Japan from the continent, it was only in Japan that Buddhism would find its ultimate expression: "Buddhism . . . is really a manifestation of Japanese spiritual awakening" (p. 59). Third, the forms of Japanese Buddhism that predate the Buddhism of the Kamakura period (1185–1333) were devoid of "authentic spirituality." Suzuki confidently informs us that "the whole of the Heian era did not produce a single man who can be said to have had a spiritual existence or religious character. Even such men as Dengyō Daishi [Saichō (767–822), the founder of Japanese Tendai Buddhism] and Kōbō Daishi [Kūkai (774–835), the founder of Japanese Shingon Buddhism] did not have sufficient contact with the earth" (p. 43). This was because "the Heian period had nothing derived from the earth" (p. 45). In fact, it was only when Chinese Ch'an met the samurai culture of the Kamakura that one finds the blossoming of "authentic spiritual insight," since the samurai, "who had immediate connections to the peasantry," represent a culture "coming from the earth" (pp. 44–45).⁸²

In the final analysis, Japanese Zen constitutes not only the essence of Buddhism, but also the essence of the Japanese spirit. It is the key to everything authentic, sacred, and culturally superior in Japan: "Today, seven hundred years after [the blossoming of Zen, Zen] has come in substance to be the basis for the Japanese character, thought, religious faith, and esthetic tastes. With it, I believe in the future there can be constructed something new of world-wide significance. Such is the mission of today's Japan" (p. 46). At the same time, Zen spirituality emerges from the ground of the *human* soul, not merely the Japanese soul. The natural question is, If Zen is so closely identified with Japanese spirituality, and

⁸² The resulting claim that Zen and Zen alone constitutes the heart of Japanese spirituality presented somewhat of a problem for Suzuki, implying as it did that the "essential spirituality" of the Japanese nation did not emerge until the Kamakura period. It is hard to imagine the sense in which this spirituality is essential to the Japanese, given its relatively late date. Suzuki's somewhat ad hoc solution to this dilemma is to assert that Japanese spirituality was "germinating" in the Nara and Heian periods, but only "blossomed forth" in the Kamakura in the form of samurai culture and Zen (*Japanese Spirituality*, pp. 46 ff.).

if it is at the same time the foundation for all religious insight, are non-Japanese capable of comprehending Zen? While Suzuki is hesitant to deny the possibility outright, he does claim that the Japanese have an evolutionary advantage: "A people cannot awaken to spirituality until they have proceeded a certain degree up the cultural ladder. In a certain sense, the existence of spirituality cannot be denied even in the consciousness of a primitive people, though it would have to be of an extremely primitive nature. It would be a mistake to regard it as the same as genuine and refined spirituality itself. Even after a culture has advanced to a certain point, it still cannot be said that its people as a whole have awakened to, and are in possession of, spirituality" (p. 16).

Thus, while not all Japanese are in full possession of "genuine spirituality," it is nonetheless their birthright: "When the 'bright and pure heart' of the Japanese ceases to work on the surface of consciousness and begins to move submerged in its deepest parts, when it is moving unconsciously, with non-discrimination, without thought, then Japanese spirituality can be understood" (p. 22). Occidentals, on the other hand, are at a distinct disadvantage: "The only thing we can state here about Zen is that it is an altogether unique product of the Oriental mind, refusing to be classified under any known heading, as either a philosophy, or a religion, or a form of mysticism as it is generally understood in the West. Zen must be studied and analyzed from a point of view that is still unknown among Western philosophers."⁸³

And after over fifty years of proselytizing in Europe and America, Suzuki remained pessimistic concerning the spiritual potential of the West; Zen, it would seem, was simply too much for the Western mind. Suzuki's view is made abundantly clear during a private conversation with Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (see below), recorded at Harvard in 1958:

Hisamatsu: Among the many people you've met or heard of (in the West) is there anyone who you think has some understanding of Zen?

Suzuki: No one. Not yet anyway.

Hisamatsu: I see. Not yet. Well then, is there at least someone you have hope for? (*Laughter*)

Suzuki: No. Not even that.

Hisamatsu: So, of the many people (in the West) who have written about Zen there aren't any who understand it?

Suzuki: That's right.

Hisamatsu: Well, is there at least some book written (by a Westerner) which is at least fairly accurate?

Suzuki: No. Not to my knowledge.⁸⁴

⁸³ Suzuki, "An Interpretation of Zen Experience," p. 141.

⁸⁴ From "Zen in America and the Necessity of the Great Doubt: A Discussion between D. T. Suzuki and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu," *FAS Society Journal* (Spring 1986), pp. 19-23. This article consists of excerpts from a recorded conversation between Suzuki and Hisa-

Over half a century had passed since a youthful Suzuki had praised Carus for "rightly comprehend[ing] the principles of Buddhism." Having lived through the military humiliation of Japan at the hands of the "culturally inferior" Occidental powers, Suzuki would devote a considerable portion of his prodigious energies tantalizing a legion of disenchanted Western intellectuals with the dream of an Oriental enlightenment. Yet all the while Suzuki held that the cultural and spiritual weaknesses of the Occident virtually precluded the possibility of Westerners' ever coming to truly comprehend Zen. One is led to suspect that Suzuki's lifelong effort to bring Buddhist enlightenment to the Occident had become inextricably bound to a studied contempt for the West, a West whose own cultural arrogance and imperialist inclinations Suzuki had come to know all too well.

VI. HISAMATSU AND THE ZEN OF JAPANESE ART

The evolution of Zen "occidentalism," which was in part a Japanese response to the "orientalism" of the West, culminates in several respects in the figure of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889–1980), Suzuki's partner in the dialogue recounted above. Although Hisamatsu is not nearly as well-known in the West as is Suzuki, this charismatic and multi-talented man attracted a host of highly educated and influential disciples and associates from both Japan and abroad. With Hisamatsu we have the full synthesis of (1) the philosophy of Nishida with its rhetoric of "pure experience," (2) the notion that Zen is the essence of all religious teachings, and (3) the evolution of a fully laicized form of Zen practice.

Hisamatsu was born in Gifu prefecture and raised in a devout Shin Buddhist family, but abandoned his faith in high school upon being introduced to "scientific knowledge." He writes of this event as "a conversion from the naive, medieval form of religious life which avoids rational doubt, to the critical attitude of modern man that is based on autonomous rational judgment and empirical proof."⁸⁵ He studied philosophy under Nishida at Kyoto University, and it was Nishida who directed him to the Zen teacher Ikegami Shōzan Rōshi (1856–1928) of Myōshinji. Following what appears to be a pattern in the biographies of modern lay Zen masters, Hisamatsu writes that he had *kenshō* during

matsu in the winter of 1958 when Hisamatsu was visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School. The translation, by Jeff Shore, uses both the original tapes and the edited Japanese transcript found in Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, *Hisamatsu Shin'ichi chosakushū* (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1969–80), 8:538–59.

⁸⁵ Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "Gakkyū seikatsu no omoide," in *Tōyōteki mu* (originally published in 1969), reprinted in *Hisamatsu Shin'ichi chosakushū*, 1:418; English translation from Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "Memories of My Academic Life," trans. Christopher A. Ives, *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 18, no. 1 (1985): 11.

his very first *rōhatsu-sesshin* with Shōzan.⁸⁶ Hisamatsu went on to teach philosophy at Kyoto University and to instruct a small but influential group of followers in tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) and Zen practice. On April 8, 1944, with the war turning perilously against the Japanese, Hisamatsu and several students from Kyoto University founded the *Gakudō-dōjō*, a Zen group that would become the forerunner of the F.A.S. Society. This group met regularly to discuss religious issues and conduct intensive Zen retreats (*sesshin*) in Reiun-in, a temple within the Myōshinji compound.

The F.A.S. proper was founded in 1958 by Hisamatsu after he returned from travels in America, Europe, the Middle East, and India. This society had little formal organizational or institutional structure, and it is best treated as a loose fraternity of scholars and intellectuals united by a common commitment to a rather abstract and idealized conception of Zen. "The name of our society—F.A.S.—refers to the three dimensions of human life, namely self, world and history as an inseparable whole. 'F' stands for the Formless self awakening itself, 'A' for taking the standpoint of All humankind, and 'S' for creating Supra-historical history."⁸⁷

Since Hisamatsu's death in 1980, the F.A.S. has continued to conduct occasional retreats and weekly meetings, and to publish periodicals in Japanese and English, although with less energy and direction. Those with direct or indirect ties to the F.A.S. include the preeminent Zen historian Yanagida Seizan and Abe Masao, who has been particularly active in interfaith dialogue in Europe and America.

Hisamatsu and his followers in the F.A.S., following a strategy largely derived from Nishida and Suzuki, were intent on depicting Zen as a transcultural truth that is nevertheless the unique property of the Japanese. This was accomplished through a polemic that treats Zen not as religion per se, but rather as the noncontingent, transcultural, non-dual spiritual gnosis that underlies all authentic religious inspiration. Abe Masao is unequivocal in this regard: "The true *kenshō* experience in Zen transcends historical and ethnic differences. It is identical in all times and in all people."⁸⁸ The use of the term "Zen" by Hisamatsu, Abe, and company is structurally analogous to Otto's use of "the holy" or "numinous": in each case the agenda includes legitimizing one's own particular tradition by claiming direct access to that which transcends particularity. Thus Hisamatsu insists that Zen "is nothing 'particular'. It

⁸⁶ Hisamatsu, "Memories of My Academic Life," pp. 25–26.

⁸⁷ "FAS *gakudō no shiori*," translated by Jeff Shore as "The F.A.S. Society," *FAS Society Journal* (Autumn 1987), p. 18.

⁸⁸ Abe Masao, "Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening," trans. Christopher A. Ives, *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 14, no. 1 (1981): 33.

is, in the ultimate sense, non-particular, totally undifferentiated; what, again in the true sense, never becomes an object never can be objectified. Zen is the Self that is ultimately and wholly beyond objectification; in brief, Zen is the Self-Awareness of Formlessness."⁸⁹ Abe Masao concurs: "[Hisamatsu] did not choose Zen as one religious denomination among others, or as the way of practice of a particular Buddhist sect. As one who had rejected the standpoints of both theocentric, heteronomous faith and anthropocentric, autonomous reason, he sought a religion without a god, an atheistic religion—a standpoint of absolute religious autonomy that transcends yet does not run contrary to rational autonomy."⁹⁰

To corrupt a traditional metaphor, Zen is not a finger pointing to the moon, but rather the moon itself. This rhetorical strategy has the unfortunate effect of turning everything it touches into Zen. Elsewhere, I have discussed the nature of this form of "rhetorical hegemony," which in various different guises enjoys a long and noble history in Chinese Mahāyāna and Ch'an.⁹¹ Here I need only note that this rhetoric need not be reductive when understood in the full context of traditional Buddhist monastic practice. Dialectical subtleties tend to be lost, however, when the same rhetoric is wrenched from its institutional context and used in the interests of a dubiously nationalistic agenda.

Hisamatsu's nationalism—specifically his belief in the spiritual and cultural superiority of the Japanese—is unmistakable, for while non-dualistic Zen truth may have been experienced by a few Occidental religious saints in the past, this truth, according to Hisamatsu, could never be fully accommodated in the excessively discursive cultures and religions of the West. Ultimately, according to Hisamatsu, whether due to an innate spiritual faculty, cultural conditioning, or even the syntactic features of the Japanese language, the Japanese alone possess the aesthetic and intellectual sensibility required to fathom Zen. Accordingly, Hisamatsu will refer to this truth as "oriental nothingness" (*tōyōteki mu*), insisting all the while on its universality: "I have long spoken of 'Oriental Nothingness' . . . I qualify it as Oriental because *in the West such Nothingness has never been fully awakened*, nor has there been penetration to such a level. However, this does not mean that it belongs exclusively to the East. On the contrary, it is the most profound basis or root source of man; in this sense it belongs neither to

⁸⁹ Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, *Zen and the Fine Arts*, trans. Gishin Tokiwa (Tokyo: Kodan-sha, 1971; originally published in 1957 as *Zen to bijutsu*), p. 48.

⁹⁰ Abe, "Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening," p. 34.

⁹¹ See my discussion, "Buddhist Rhetorical Hegemony," in "The *Treasure Store Treatise* (*Pao-tsang lun*) and the Sinification of Buddhism in Eighth-Century China" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1991), pp. 88–93.

the East or West. Only as regards the actual Awakening to such a Self, there have been no instances in the West; hence the regional qualification 'Oriental' " (emphasis added).⁹²

According to Hisamatsu, nowhere is the exalted spiritual sensibility of Zen (or "oriental nothingness") more apparent than in the traditional arts of Japan, which are rendered expressions of truth itself. Hisamatsu shares with Suzuki the dubious honor of popularizing the notion that Zen is the foundation of virtually all of the Japanese fine arts. Thus in *Zen and the Fine Arts*, following the lead of Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture*, we learn that everything from Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy to garden design and Noh drama are expressions of the Zen experience. Unfortunately, many Western scholars have uncritically accepted this Zen appropriation of the finest artistic products of Japan despite the fact that it is blatantly ideological and historically dubious.

It is true that the medieval organization of government-sanctioned Zen monasteries, known as the "five monasteries" (*gozan*) system, was one of the primary vehicles for the importation of Chinese literati culture during much of the medieval period. Generous aristocratic and shogunal patronage of *gozan* temples turned them into flourishing centers for the cultivation of Chinese arts. Because of the close ties that existed between the *gozan* temples and the elite class that patronized them, a relationship emerged between many of the Chinese arts and Zen doctrinal themes. Thus we find influential masters of Noh, tea, calligraphy, and other fine arts, including such luminaries as Zeami (1363–1443) and Sen no Rikyū (1522–91), turning to Mahayana doctrine in their attempts to formulate the aesthetic principles of their craft. Throughout much of medieval Japanese history Zen temples continued to be associated with aristocratic breeding and refined taste.

But traditional Chinese literati pursuits are as Confucian or Taoist as they are Buddhist. So called "Zen gardens," to pick a single example, are essentially Japanese versions of Chinese landscape gardens that were popular among the Sung aristocracy. Such gardens came into fashion among the elite patrons of *gozan* temples, but there is no evidence that, prior to the modern period, they were ever considered to be expressions of Zen thought or Zen enlightenment. Indeed, the earliest reference to the notion that the "dry-landscape gardens" associated with Zen temples are manifestations of Zen realization is found in an English-language guide to Kyoto gardens written in 1935 by Loraine Kuck, a one-time neighbor of D. T. Suzuki.⁹³ Similarly, the cultivation

⁹² Hisamatsu, *Zen and the Fine Arts*, p. 50.

⁹³ A discussion of the origins of the Zen interpretation of Japanese landscape gardens may be found in Wybe Kuitert, *Themes, Scenes and Taste in the History of Japanese*

and enjoyment of calligraphy, painting, poetry, and tea was the common heritage of Chinese literati irrespective of their religious or institutional affiliations. It is not surprising that the highly educated and culturally refined Chinese Buddhist priests proselytizing in Japan should have sought to promote their native cultural heritage among their Japanese patrons and disciples.

This is precisely why we should be suspicious when we hear modern Zen apologists insist that the arts of Japan are manifestations of the Zen experience. Given the particularly nationalistic tendencies of the Japanese in the early part of this century, Japanese intellectuals were not predisposed to emphasize the tremendous cultural debt they owed to China. By emphasizing instead the role of Zen they reoriented the discussion away from the Chinese origins of Japanese high culture toward their origins in a spiritual gnosis that transcends national boundaries. In doing so they simultaneously elevated these art forms from mere hobbies of the leisure class to manifestations of ultimate truth. By claiming a deep connection between Japanese high culture and Zen, Japanese scholars managed to apotheosize the nation as a whole.⁹⁴

As we have seen above, this project was facilitated by rendering Zen an "experience" logically independent from any particular form in which it might be expressed. The social and intellectual circumstances in Japan that gave rise to this interpretation of Zen are similar in many respects to those found in the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wayne Proudfoot has traced the origins of the European interest in "religious experience" to the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, who "sought to free religious belief and practice from the requirement that they be justified by reference to nonreligious thought or action and to preclude the possibility of conflict between religious doctrine and any new knowledge that might emerge in the

Garden Art, Japonica Neerlandica, Monographs of the Netherlands Association for Japanese Studies, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1988), pp. 150–60. According to Kuitert, prior to Kuck's English-language guide there is simply no reference to garden design as an expression of Zen philosophy or Zen consciousness. Indeed, there is no evidence that the craftsmen responsible for the design and construction of such gardens had any schooling in Buddhism at all. The earliest reference to "Zen-style gardens" in Japanese (*zenteki teien*) is found in Hisamatsu's *Zen to bijutsu* of 1957 (Kuitert, p. 153).

⁹⁴ This claim is implicit or explicit in writings too numerous to enumerate here. We have already mentioned two classics available in English: Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture* and Hisamatsu's *Zen and the Fine Arts*. A more recent and considerably more informed study is *Zen to nihon bunka* by the Zen scholar Yanagida Seizan (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1985). Western reiterations of the notion that Japanese arts are essentially "Zennish" abound; see, e.g., Helmut Brinker, *Zen in the Art of Painting*, trans. George Campbell (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987; first published as *Zen in der Kunst des Malens* [Berne and München: Barth, 1985]); and Richard B. Pilgrim, *Buddhism and the Arts of Japan* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima, 1981).

course of secular inquiry.”⁹⁵ Nishida, Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and their followers, like Schleiermacher, Otto, and James before them, were reacting to the onslaught of Enlightenment values. They sought to reframe our conceptions of the religious such that a core of spiritual and moral values would survive the headlong clash with secular philosophy, science, and technological progress. They were thus led to posit an “essential core” of religion, conceived of as a private, veridical, ineffable experience inaccessible to empirical scientific analysis.

VII. ZEN AND *NIHONJINRON*

We have seen that the men most responsible for laying the intellectual foundation for Zen in the West did not emerge from traditional Zen monastic settings. Rather, they were educated proponents of post-Meiji New Buddhism, concerned with rendering Buddhism and Zen socially and intellectually respectable. While a number of these men received permission to enter training monasteries and engage in intensive retreats, they were largely laypersons who elected not to follow the monastic vocation.⁹⁶ Instead, they sought to realize Zen within themselves so that they might take it with them when they left *sesshin*. Of necessity, their Zen had to transcend the institutional and ritual forms with which Zen had always been associated. These reformers were more than a little self-serving when they argued that Zen was not the possession of the ordained priesthood alone.

Moreover, many of the Japanese proponents of Zen in the West were university graduates who successfully pursued academic careers in their own country. The universities in which they were trained and later taught were modeled on systems largely imported from the West. As students they were introduced to Western secular thought in general and European philosophy in particular, and as teachers they actively sought to formulate a Japanese response to the challenge posed by Western culture, science, and technology. This response took the form of identifying and defending a spiritual sensibility which they felt to be uniquely Japanese, or at least uniquely Asian. Like other Japanese intellectuals in the early twentieth century, they were deeply concerned with the place and future of Japan in the modern world and sought to defend indigenous cultural institutions from the onslaught of Western civilization. In short, their agenda was a species of *nihonjinron*—a

⁹⁵ Proudfoot (n. 54 above), p. xiii.

⁹⁶ Suzuki had no formal Zen disciples—indeed, he was in no position to take on students, having never received any official sanction himself. Of Hisamatsu's students, the only one to enter the priesthood appears to have been Hirata Rōshi, now of Tenryūji. Hirata was an early member of the *Gakudō dōjō* group, and he was directed to the monks' hall by Hisamatsu.

popular discursive enterprise devoted to the delineation and explication of the unique qualities of the Japanese, which invariably touts the cultural homogeneity as well as the moral and spiritual superiority of the Japanese vis-à-vis other peoples. But while other *nihonjinron* thinkers would turn to the climate, language, architecture, or the landscape of Japan in order to explain Japanese mores, these men turned to Zen. They argued that the roots of Japanese culture, Japanese spirituality, Japanese morality, and Japanese aesthetics are all to be found in the Zen experience.

Nishida's philosophical exposition of "pure experience," in which there is no duality between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, set the stage for a series of newfangled *nihonjinron* theories, all based on the dubious notion that the Japanese mode of experiencing the world is somehow more immediate, or direct, or nondualistic than that of others. Thus Suzuki was by no means alone when he insisted that Japanese spirituality is characterized by "directness" or "going-straight-ahead-ness" that establishes a connection with "highest reality without the intervention of some intermediate condition."⁹⁷ But while Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and other Zen apologists would emphasize the dominant role of Zen in determining Japanese modes of cognition, others would focus on everything from language and family structure to climate and architecture.

Yukawa Hideki is one who, drawing on the work of Watsuji Tetsurō, saw the Japanese climate as engendering a sense of unity between man and nature: "The Western mode of human living is characterized in a broad sense, by confrontation with external environments, whereas the Eastern mode is characterized by adaptation to them."⁹⁸ This is because the Japanese live in isolation in a mild climate: "[Western attitudes] are those of hostility to and reconciliation with Nature. But, in Japan, there was originally no such thing as alienation between man and nature."⁹⁹

The writer Tanizaki Junichirō popularized an alternative explanation based on the nature of the Japanese language. This line of reasoning is later adopted by Kishimoto Hideo:

It is not necessary in Japanese to specify the subject by explicitly stating whether "I" am feeling lonesome, or the scenery is lonesome. . . . Analytically, the sentiment is the result of the collaboration of the subject and the object. . . . One of

⁹⁷ Suzuki, *Japanese Spirituality* (n. 70 above), p. 21.

⁹⁸ Yukawa Hideki, "Modern Trend of Western Civilization and Cultural Peculiarities in Japan," in Moore, ed. (n. 79 above), p. 54. Yukawa's emphasis on the cultural effects of climate was derived from Watsuji Tetsurō's *Fudō ningengakuteki kōsatsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1939).

⁹⁹ Yukawa, p. 55.

the characteristics of the Japanese language is to be able to project man's experience in its immediate and unanalyzed form. . . . The syntax of Western languages requests, in their construction, more distinct and full indication of the subject-object relation than does the Japanese. So, a full statement of the subject-object relation is expected in English, while the Japanese language is more closely connected with man's immediate experience.¹⁰⁰

Japanese writers have even argued that the Japanese predisposition to experience the unity of subject and object make the Japanese better scientists, since they are more "at one" with the world of nature.¹⁰¹ It should be clear by now that the rhetoric emanating from Zen apologists concerning the relationship between Japanese character, Japanese culture, and the nondual experience of Zen is but a variation on a popular theme. But it is a theme with a dark underside: the notion of the unity of subject and object readily lent itself to *kokutai* ideology, with its emphasis on the essential unity of individual and state—of private and public interests.¹⁰²

Nihonjinron is in large part a Japanese response to modernity—the sense of being adrift in a sea of tumultuous change, cut off from the past, alienated from history and tradition. Since the Meiji reforms, Japanese intellectuals have been confronted with the collapse of traditional Japanese political and social structures, accompanied by the

¹⁰⁰ Kishimoto Hideo, "Some Japanese Cultural Traits and Religions," in Moore, ed., pp. 110–11. Suzuki also flirted with linguistic explanations. In his autobiographical memoir, for example, he suggests that the deficiency in Western thought is built into the very structure of the English language: "[In teaching English] we always translated everything absolutely literally, and I remember being very puzzled by the way one says in English 'a dog *has* four legs,' 'a cat *has* a tail.' In Japanese the verb to have is not used in this way. . . . Sometime afterwards I developed the idea that this stress in Western thought on possession means a stress on power, dualism, rivalry which is lacking in Eastern thought" (Suzuki, "Early Memories" [n. 50 above], p. 6).

¹⁰¹ In *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (n. 8 above) Peter Dale discusses the *nihonjinron* polemics surrounding Japanese primatology, where the claim is made that, since the Japanese do not distinguish sharply between subject and object, Japanese primatologists are able to identify closely with monkeys, unlike Western scientists who cannot tell one monkey apart from another without tattooing them (pp. 191–98). In the words of Umesao Tadao, "The development of primatology in Japan is due to the intimacy which subsists here between man and monkey. For Europeans, of course, there is an unbridgeable gap between man and the animal kingdom" (cited in Dale, p. 193). Thus, the Japanese have no need for a theory of evolution because "in Japan, man and monkey form a continuous link . . . therefore our thought pattern was so inherently evolutionist as not to require a formal theoretical elaboration" (Kamishima Jirō; cited in Dale, p. 193).

¹⁰² See the discussion in Dale, pp. 209–10. A constant refrain in the *Kokutai no hongī* is the essential oneness of the individual and the nation: "Our relationship between sovereign and subject is by no means a shallow, horizontal relationship such as implies a correlation between ruler and citizen, but is a relationship springing from a basis transcending this correlation, and is that of 'dying to self and returning to [the] One,' in which this basis is not lost" (*Kokutai no hongī*, trans. Robert Hall and John Gauntlett, in Tsunoda et al., eds. [n. 61 above], p. 788).

insidious threat posed by the hegemonic discourse of the West. In response, the Japanese would formulate a conception of Japaneseness that would, in part, insulate themselves from Western universalizing discourse. This was accomplished through insisting that the essence of Japanese character lay in a uniquely Japanese *experience* of the world, an experience that was thus conveniently out of the reach of foreigners. This experience, in turn, is responsible for an interrelated set of uniquely Japanese aesthetic, spiritual, and moral values, invariably defined in contradistinction to everything the Japanese found most contemptible and threatening about the West.

Ironically, the vanguard of *nihonjinron* theorists consisted of a select group of Japanese intellectuals and writers who lived and studied, often for extended periods of time, in the West. In her study of one such figure—Kuki Shūzō—Leslie Pincus notes that “it was often in Europe that Japanese artists, writers and thinkers first surrendered to the spell of their own ‘far away island country.’ To put it boldly, Kuki and others reappropriated Japan from Europe as an exoticized object. . . . Whether tangible or intangible, the artifacts of Japanese culture had become indelibly marked by the accents of Europe’s fascination with (or depreciation of) its cultural other.”¹⁰³ D. T. Suzuki then joins the ranks of Okakura Kakuzō, Watsuji Tetsurō, Kuki Shūzō, and Tanabe Hajime, all of whom encountered the tremendous cultural arrogance of the Occident, dangerously coupled with a vast technological and military superiority. While living abroad these men came to conceive of the Japanese ethnos as the very antithesis of everything they detested most about the West: the crass materialism, the inauthenticity brought about by the technologies of mass production, the crude democratization and vulgarization of aesthetic taste and value, and the pervasive mood of spiritual alienation. Nonetheless, they articulated their renewed appreciation of “Japanese values” in a rhetoric appropriated largely from their Western mentors. In particular, a generation of Japanese would borrow the language and methods of phenomenology from Heidegger—attracted by a discourse that promised the disclosure of reality through the contemplation of experience. Yet the Japanese, unlike Heidegger, would attempt to wrest experience away from history.¹⁰⁴

Nihonjinron thought is distinguished precisely by its thoroughly ahistorical character. Individual artifacts of culture are isolated, stripped of their historical context, and raised to the status of icons of

¹⁰³ Pincus (n. 56 above), p. 83.

¹⁰⁴ Among the Japanese who studied with Heidegger in the 1920s were Watsuji Tetsurō, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, and Kuki Shūzō (Steven Heine, “The Flower Blossoms ‘Without Why’: Beyond the Heidegger-Kuki Dialogue on Contemplative Language,” *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 23, no. 2 [1990]: 61).

the Japanese spirit. No shifting semiotic field is invoked in the analysis of a temple garden, a tea bowl, or a ritual suicide. Rather, these cultural products are offered up as vivid manifestations of the timeless and unchanging Japanese character. Such a radically ahistorical stance is a convenient means of concealing the very real historical situation—the threat posed by rapid technological and industrial modernization, imperialist aspirations, and diplomatic failures—in which *nihonjinron* rhetoric flourished.

Nowhere is this desire to step outside the contingencies of history more apparent than in the rhetoric that would render Zen “pure experience” free of mediating discursive structures. Indeed, Japanese Buddhists would turn to the myth of an unbroken mind-to-mind patriarchal transmission to support their claim as to the universality and transcendence of Zen experience. Yet this would not discourage them from identifying anything and everything Japanese as the expression of this experience. Not only would this serve to glorify Japanese culture, but by explicating the particularities of Japanese culture and the Japanese mind in terms of a *sui generis* religious experience the Japanese could repudiate the enormous cultural debt they owed to China.

VIII. THE ALLURE OF ZEN

The assertions made by men such as Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and Nishitani for the transcultural nature of the Zen experience continue to be reiterated by Western writers on the topic. It is perhaps surprising that the Zen claim to have direct access to universal truth was taken seriously by intellectuals in the West, considering their ready rejection of similar fundamentalist claims associated with other religious traditions. But it is even more surprising that these same intellectuals failed to recognize the *nihonjinron* polemics that lie behind such claims. Note that such a failure cannot be attributed to linguistic barriers alone: in substantiating my argument I have intentionally referred to material readily available in English, rather than to untranslated works in Japanese by Suzuki and his confederates. The extensive corpus in Japanese is, as one might expect, even more forthright in its cultural chauvinism.

It is undeniable that Suzuki's brand of Zen held a strong appeal to intellectuals in the West. Philosophers and scholars of religion were attracted to Zen for the same reason that they were attracted to the mysticism of Otto, James, and Underhill: it offered a solution to the seemingly intractable problem of relativism engendered in the confrontation with cultural difference. The discovery of cultural diversity, coupled with the repudiation of imperialist and racist strategies for managing cultural difference, threatened to result in the “principle of arbitrariness,” the notion that there is no necessary reason for us to

conceive of the world one way rather than another.¹⁰⁵ In mysticism intellectuals found a refuge from the distressing verities of historical contingency and cultural pluralism; by invoking a *sui generis* nondiscursive, unmediated experience they could gracefully elide problems of ontological reference.

Zen appeared on the scene at precisely the right historical moment. The allure of Zen lay in the fact that it seemed to confirm the theories of mysticism propounded by Otto and his intellectual descendants, for here was an authentic mystical tradition of considerable antiquity that clearly articulated the crucial distinction between (1) unmediated mystical experience *per se* and (2) the culturally determined symbols used to express it. The purported anti-intellectualism, antiritualism, and iconoclasm of Zen were ample evidence that Zen had not lost touch with its mystical and experiential roots.

The much-touted spiritual vibrancy of Zen was particularly attractive to a vanguard of Catholic monastics interested in revitalizing their own contemplative practice. These Catholic monks willingly accepted the notion that Zen was not a religion *per se*, but rather a “spiritual technology” capable of inculcating the mystical experience that lay at the source of all authentic religious insight. This would allow them to practice Zen meditation under the direction of Asian masters, confident in their belief that they were not compromising their Christian faith.

The irony, as we have seen above, is that the “Zen” that so captured the imagination of the West was in fact a product of the New Buddhism of the Meiji. Moreover, those aspects of Zen most attractive to the Occident—the emphasis on spiritual experience and the devaluation of institutional forms—were derived in large part from Occidental sources. Like Narcissus, Western enthusiasts failed to recognize their own reflection in the mirror being held out to them.

As it turned out, the seemingly felicitous convergence of Eastern and Western intellectual and spiritual agendas prevented those on both sides from recognizing the historical mischief entailed in the radical decontextualization of the Zen tradition. Asian apologists, convinced that Zen was making significant inroads in the West, failed to recognize the degree to which Zen was “therapeutized” by European and American enthusiasts, rendering Zen, from a Buddhist point of view, part of the problem rather than the solution. And Western enthusiasts systematically failed to recognize the nationalist ideology underlying modern Japanese constructions of Zen.

¹⁰⁵ The phrase “principle of arbitrariness” is borrowed from Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 121.

IX. CONCLUSION

There are many related issues that, for lack of space, had to be omitted from the discussion above. I have not, for example, dealt in any detail with Nishitani Keiji, a student of both Nishida and Heidegger, whose many translated works continue to exert a considerable influence on Western students of Japanese philosophy, theology, and "Zen thought." And while I have focused on the construction of Zen rhetoric in the West, I have avoided a discussion of the particularly Western understanding of Zen practice. Suffice it to say that, just as the writings of Suzuki and Hisamatsu are not representative of traditional (i.e., pre-Meiji) Zen exegetics, the style of Zen training most familiar to Western Zen practitioners can be traced to relatively recent and sociologically marginal Japanese lay movements which have neither the sanction nor the respect of the modern Rinzai or Sōtō monastic orthodoxies.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, the one feature shared by virtually all of the figures responsible for the Western interest in Zen is their relatively marginal status within the Japanese Zen establishment. While Suzuki, Nishida, and their intellectual heirs may have shaped the manner in which Westerners have come to think of Zen, the influence of these Japanese intellectuals on the established Zen sects in Japan has been negligible. At this point it is necessary to affirm that Japanese Zen monasticism is indeed still alive, despite the shrill invectives of some expatriate Zen missionaries who insist that authentic Zen can no longer be found in Japan. The three major Japanese Zen sects together operate some sixty-six monks' halls, where *unsui* (novice priests) continue to endure the rigors of intensive Zen practice. As of 1984 there were a total of 23,657 ordained Zen priests in Japan, each of whom had completed a minimum of two or three years in monastic training, and who collectively staffed the 20,932 registered Zen temples scattered throughout the country.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ It is true that some of the earlier teachers active in the West were in the Rinzai line of Kōsen Rōshi, including two dharma heirs of Shaku Sōen who taught in California: Tetsuō Sōkatsu and Senzaki Nyogen. Moreover, Shaku Sōkatsu's disciple, Sasaki Shigetzu (Sōkei-an), founded the First Zen Institute of America in New York in 1931. But far more influential were teachers in the line of Harada Daiun (1870–1961) and Yasutani Hakuun (1885–1973), including Yamada Kōun (1907–89), H. M. Enomiyā-Lassalle (1898–1990), Philip Kapleau (1912–), Robert Aitken (1917–), Maezumi Taizan (1930–), and Eido Tai Shimano (1932–). Yasutani, who dedicated himself almost exclusively to training laypersons, severed his affiliation with the Zen establishment of his day in order to found his own Zen sect called the Sanbōkyōdan (Three Treasures Association), to which most of his spiritual descendants belong. I intend to present a full analysis of the Sanbōkyōdan and its influence on Western constructions of Zen in a future article. Suffice it to say that the Zen practices taught by these teachers are oriented toward lay practitioners and diverge significantly from the training offered in traditional Zen monks' halls (*sōdō*).

¹⁰⁷ These figures, compiled by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō), are distributed among the three major Zen sects as follows: the Rinzai school accounted

The vast majority of these functioning Zen priests have little knowledge of, or interest in, the musings of intellectuals such as Suzuki, Nishida, or Hisamatsu, whom they regard as academics and outsiders who lack the proper training and credentials required of legitimate Zen masters (*rōshi*).

It is unfair to suggest that all Western observers have uncritically accepted the nationalistic construction of Zen spirituality as taught by the self-appointed "representatives" of Zen to the West. By the early 1960s we already find warnings against the nascent chauvinism and nationalist tendencies in the Zen being packaged for export. Arthur Koestler, in a droll article that elicited sharp responses from D. T. Suzuki, Christmas Humphreys, and Carl Jung, lambasted those who would uncritically accept the obfuscations and confusions that were proffered forth by Suzuki as Zen wisdom, and mockingly suggested that Suzuki's work may be an elaborate "hoax" intended to confuse Western intellectuals.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile Paul Demiéville and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky offered more sober critiques of Suzuki in their reviews of his works; both scholars were particularly disturbed by the manner in which Suzuki placed Zen above all moral considerations.¹⁰⁹ Demiéville, perhaps the greatest scholar of East Asian Buddhism of his day, decried the manner in which Suzuki attempted to embrace the whole of Japanese culture under the banner of Zen, and the facile comparisons between Western and Eastern mentalities of which Suzuki was so fond.

for thirty-eight monks' halls, 5,754 temples, and 6,196 priests; the Sōtō school had twenty-six monks' halls, 14,718 temples, and 16,705 priests; and the Obaku school had two monks' halls, 460 temples, and 756 priests; see T. Griffith Foulk, "The Zen Institution in Modern Japan," in *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, ed. Kenneth Kraft (New York: Grove, 1988), p. 158.

¹⁰⁸ After citing a rather convoluted argument by Suzuki on the relationship between Zen, swordsmanship, and tea, Koestler remarks: "There is one redeeming possibility: that all this drivel is deliberately intended to confuse the reader, since one of the avowed aims of Zen is to perplex and unhinge the rational mind. If this hypothesis were correct, Professor Suzuki's voluminous *oeuvre* of at least a million words, specially written for this purpose, would represent a hoax of truly heroic dimensions, and the laugh would be on the Western intellectuals who fell for it" (Arthur Koestler, "A Stink of Zen: The Lotus and the Robot (II)," in *Encounter* 15, no. 4 [1960]: 24; reproduced in Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot* [London: Hutchinson and Co., 1960], p. 255). See also the replies by Christmas Humphreys ("No Stink of Zen: A Reply to Koestler," *Encounter* 15, no. 6 [1960]: 57–58); Carl Jung ("Yoga, Zen, and Koestler," *Encounter* 16, no. 2 [1961]: 56–58); and Suzuki ("A Reply from D. T. Suzuki" [n. 80 above], pp. 55–58).

¹⁰⁹ See Paul Demiéville's review of *Zen and Japanese Culture*, by D. T. Suzuki, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 61, no. 1–2 (1966): 92–94, reprinted in his *Choix d'études Bouddhiques* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), pp. 496–97; and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Some Observations on Recent Studies of Zen," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, edited by E. E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1967), pp. 317–35.

Yet the cautionary note sounded several decades ago has, for the most part, gone unheeded. Western scholars and lay enthusiasts alike continue to represent Zen Buddhism in particular, and Asian culture in general, as rooted in an experience of oneness with all things. As recently as 1990 Heinrich Dumoulin, widely regarded as an authority on Zen, would reaffirm that "Eastern people grasp the universe as a whole in motion and experience themselves as inserted into the flowing stream of the whole, whereas Westerners strive after a goal that defines the meaning of their lives and which is inscribed in the texture of the world that surrounds them and the duties it imposes."¹¹⁰ It would seem that we are a long way from divesting ourselves of the *nihonjinron* theories of our Japanese mentors.

The influence of the Zen missionaries and apologists examined above has made a significant impact not only on the study of Buddhism and Japanese culture, but also on a host of related fields, including the history of religions, comparative religion, and the study of mysticism. These disciplines were founded not so much on a base of ethnographic research as on a dialogue that took place at the turn of the century between Western scholars, most of whom were Christian, and various "representatives" of Asian cultural traditions. All too often these representatives, who were invariably the products of European-style educations, formulated their understandings of their respective traditions in a European intellectual context. Rammohan Roy (1772 [or 1774]–1833), to cite an early but influential example, the founder of the Hindu reform movement Brāhmo Samāj (Society of the Worshipers of God), evolved his notion of Hinduism as a "universal" and "humanistic" religion which rejects idolatry and advocates social activism, in continuous dialogue with his English missionary teachers. And both Vivekānanda (1863–1902) and Dharmapāla (1864–1933), the principal representatives of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism, respectively, at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, were very much the products of their English missionary educations. In addition, Dharmapāla had a close connection with the Theosophical Society, as did a number of other non-Christian delegates to the Parliament, including a Japanese Buddhist representative, Hirai Kinzō (founder of the Kyoto branch of the Theosophical Society), and the Hindu delegate G. N. Chakravarti (an active member of the Indian Theosophical Society). (In this connection, it is notable that the representative of Islam, Alexander Russell Webb, was a Western convert to the religion as well as a Theosophist.)¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the 20th Century*, trans. Joseph S. O'Leary (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1992), p. viii.

¹¹¹ On the Theosophical presence at the conference see Jackson, *The Oriental Religions* (n. 3 above), pp. 251–52.

Like the Japanese proponents of Meiji New Buddhism, these Western-educated Asian intellectuals were all too ready to present their own spiritual heritages as paragons of enlightened, scientific, rational, humanistic, and universal religious creeds grounded in the direct experience of divine truth.¹¹² The modern notion of religion as an appropriate cross-cultural object of scholarly investigation emerged directly out of this complex dialogue, in which Western investigators were ever encouraged to find their own romanticized notion of true or essential religion mirrored back to them by their Asian protégés. This raises serious questions as to the very foundation of the secular study of comparative religion in the West, but a full exploration of this larger topic will have to be deferred to a later report.

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¹¹² In this regard we should also note Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), the Indian counterpart to Nishida Kitarō, whose writings were in part an attempt to bring Indian religious thought into the sphere of Western philosophical discourse.