

**BODHIDHARMA CAME FROM THE**  
**EAST:**

**EVALUATING THE LEGACY OF D.T. SUZUKI**

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### *Abstract*

"Prophecy is rash, but it may well be that the publication of D.T. Suzuki's first *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in 1927 will seem in future generations as great an intellectual event as William of Moerbeke's translations of Aristotle in the thirteenth century or Masiglio Ficino's of Plato in the fifteenth. But in Suzuki's case the shell of the Occident has been broken through. More than we dream, we are now governed by the new canon of the globe."<sup>1</sup>

So wrote the prominent historian Lynn White, Jr. in 1956, as the West began its brief but intense infatuation with the work of Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki. Carl Jung famously wrote the foreword to Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. Students and professors filled up lecture halls and listened intently to every word. Philip Kapleau has acknowledged, "it is mainly the writings of Dr. Suzuki that have shaped the West's intellectual understanding of Zen."<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to begin studying Western attitudes towards Zen without coming across Suzuki's immense influence on the field.

Suzuki's insistence that Zen was an experience incomprehensible to the intellect was critical to his success. Suzuki insisted that Zen could only be understood on its own terms. Here, Suzuki said, was an authentic religious tradition that was unconcerned with

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought* ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), xi

<sup>2</sup> Philip Kapleau, "Reminiscences of Dr. Suzuki" in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered* ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 202.

intellectualization. It was fiercely suspicious of any intellectual doctrine, placing complete faith in the individual's ability to work out his or her own salvation. Here, Suzuki said, was a religion that provided meaning without insisting upon belief. Suzuki's charisma and the simplicity of his message--that Zen is a religion aimed at grasping "the central fact of life as it is lived"<sup>3</sup>--resonated deeply in Western circles.

In recent years, scholars have critiqued Suzuki's vision of Zen as a timeless experience of reality. These scholars rightly point out that Suzuki undertook virtually no historical, political, or cultural analysis of Zen, thus creating an idealized version of Zen that glosses over the flaws and contradictions of the tradition. The trend in Zen scholarship today is to take a stance diametrically opposed to Suzuki. Engaging in the same intellectualization that Suzuki abhorred, scholars now critically analyze Zen, and often attempt to reduce Zen's claims to nothing more than a set of historical, political, and cultural factors. For these scholars, Suzuki was nothing more than a Zen apologist whose work should be discounted as a biased rendering of Zen doctrine inconsistent with the historical record of Zen as a social institution steeped in a specific time and place.

In this thesis I argue that a middle path should be charted between these opposing stances. There is no reason why using one approach should mandate the exclusion of the other. Rather, both perspectives should be incorporated into a fuller, more inclusive approach to studying Zen. Suzuki's understanding of Zen, while flawed, should not be dismissed outright. The value of Suzuki's writings is that he managed to cogently interpret Zen's claims of an enlightened experience beyond the realm of

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<sup>3</sup> Suzuki, D.T., *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 14.

intellectualization. While not advocating for the supremacy of Zen as Suzuki did, I maintain that his writings provide valuable insights into the tradition. By acknowledging the value of both perspectives, scholars will be able to undertake a more expansive and nuanced approach to studying Zen.

### ***Introduction***

Two years ago I took a mid-level Zen course. During a discussion on the ritual mummification of Zen masters in China, a student raised her hand and asked a question that must seem very familiar to most college professors who teach on Zen. "All of the Zen masters we're reading say that you can't talk about Zen. It's something you have to know for yourself. You have to experience it." Around the room, heads began to nod. "So why," she asked, "are we just talking about it?" By "just talking about it", the student meant explicating the historical, political, and cultural elements of religion. The student wanted instead to know more about what Zen itself claimed to reveal, the experience of enlightenment, which, we all assumed, was irreducible to words. The student, like most of us, had entered the class thinking that Zen was concerned with a mystical, transcendent experience that couldn't be reduced to a particular time and place. Therefore, we didn't understand the point of engaging with historical, cultural, or political analysis. We wanted to start at the beginning, to know not what a scholar said about Zen, but about what practitioners experienced.

We were all at that time unaware that our fellow student's question cut right to the root of a fundamental debate that has dominated Western understandings of

Zen, a debate echoed in broader intellectual discussions on the study of religions. What elements of the religion should be the primary focus of investigation? Does one attempt to inhabit the worldview of a religion in order to more fully understand it? In other words, should we attempt to understand the religion from the inside out, on its own terms? Or, on the other hand, should the primary focus be historical, political, and cultural analysis that places the truth claims of a text in the context of a specific time and place?

In this thesis I aim to explore the tension between these two approaches to studying religion by examining the life and work of Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki. Suzuki was a Zen practitioner who accepted Zen texts at face value, but he was also widely recognized as an eminent scholar for whom a professorship at Princeton University was named.<sup>4</sup> Suzuki interpreted Zen for a modern Western audience and claimed that Zen evoked a "pure experience" of reality that encompassed all religious truth. Inverting a traditional Zen *koan* aptly illustrates the way in which Suzuki envisioned his own efforts to spread Zen in the West.<sup>5</sup> Referring to Buddhism's origins in the "West", (India) the *koan* asks, "Why did Bodhidharma<sup>6</sup> come from the West?" Suzuki was, in many ways, a modern-day Bodhidharma, engaged in a quest to spread an understanding of Zen in a different culture.

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<sup>4</sup> The D.T. Suzuki Professorship of Buddhist Studies.

<sup>5</sup> A koan is, literally, a "public case" that "refers to enigmatic and often shocking spiritual expressions based on dialogical encounters between masters and disciples that were used as pedagogical tools." Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>6</sup> The legendary founder of Zen (Chi: Ch'an) in China. See Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 85.

Suzuki is arguably the Zen proponent most responsible for instilling in Western culture (and, by extension, in my classmates and I) the notion that Zen was a transcendent mystical experience that couldn't be reduced to the level of historical, political, or cultural analysis. Suzuki engaged in these forms of intellectual analysis very rarely, preferring instead to explicate Zen texts in order to convey, as much as possible, a sense of what he claimed was the experience of Zen. Suzuki's resistance to engaging with historical, political, and cultural analysis stemmed from his own conviction, as a Zen practitioner, that Zen was an ineffable religious experience in which one transcended the boundary between self and other. This experience, Suzuki maintained could not be fully understood by the intellect. Words (and thus, analysis of any sort) could never fully grasp the essence of Zen, which claims to be a transmission of the Buddha's teaching outside of words and letters.<sup>7</sup>

Suzuki recognized that his writings on Zen somewhat contradicted the tradition's claim to evoke an experience irreducible to the realm of language, and that traditional Zen doctrine might condemn him to hell for his "word-mongering."<sup>8</sup> Yet Suzuki persisted nonetheless, writing, "It is not a bad thing to go to hell, if it does some good to somebody."<sup>9</sup> Suzuki was thus concerned first and foremost with writing about Zen in order to make comprehensible, in some limited fashion, the seemingly crazy acts of Zen masters and the apparently illogical nature of Zen texts to a Western audience. In so

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow: Will The Real Zen Buddhism Please Stand Up?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Zen Buddhism posits the existence of numerous realms of existence after death, including various heavens and hells. See Duncan Ryuken Williams, *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Soto Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.

<sup>9</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," *Philosophy East and West*, 3, no.1, (April 1953), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1397362> (accessed April 2, 2010): 38.

doing, he hoped to help his Western readers understand why Zen presented itself in such nonsensical, confusing terms.

However, many scholars today in the field of Zen studies take the opposite approach. They refuse to evaluate Zen on its own terms, preferring to focus on historical, political, and cultural analysis of Zen, thereby engaging in the very intellectualization that Suzuki claimed was counter-productive to understanding Zen's true essence. Rejecting Suzuki's work, these scholars argue that the historical, political, and cultural elements of Zen should be subjected to skeptical intellectual examination, which can reveal the flaws and contradiction of the tradition. These scholars point out that Zen was not, as Suzuki contends, concerned with attaining a transcendent enlightenment, but rather was an institution that carried out ritualistic social functions such as praying for rain or conducting funerals. Some of these scholars also point out that Suzuki's work was crafted to appeal to a Western audience. They further note that his work was biased by a polemical tone and a kind of cultural chauvinism that privileged Eastern people, especially the Japanese, over Westerners.<sup>10</sup>

My thesis proceeds from the assumption that both approaches to studying Zen are needed. Using one perspective should not mandate the exclusion of the other. To uncritically accept Suzuki's view of Zen is to overlook the usefulness of historical, political, and cultural analysis, while to exclusively adopt an approach of historical, cultural, and political analysis like most scholars today is to ignore one of the most

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<sup>10</sup> Suzuki's work and the subsequent cultural tensions it entailed continues to attract scholarly interest, even as recently as April 2010. See Carl T. Jackson, "D.T. Suzuki, 'Suzuki Zen', and the American Reception of Buddhism" in *American Buddhism as a Way of Life* eds. Gary Stornhoff and John Whalen-Bridge (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 39-57.



important elements of the Zen tradition--its own self-perception. To adopt the methods of many scholars of Zen today and exclusively focus on historical, political, or cultural analysis would be similar to a scholar of Christianity attempting to reduce the New Testament to a set of political, cultural, and historically determined factors without exploring the actual claims of the New Testament itself. An understanding of a religion on its own terms is necessary for a more complete perspective to emerge. My thesis moves beyond the rather stagnant opposition between these two perspectives by using both to evaluate Suzuki's work, and argues that while Suzuki's work was marred by a polemical attitude and cultural chauvinism, his core argument--that Zen is concerned with evoking an experience irreducible to intellectual analysis--is a valuable interpretation of certain Zen teachings.

This thesis consists of three steps. The first, chapter 1, undertakes a more detailed and nuanced summary of Suzuki's view of Zen and the opposing view adopted by current scholars of Zen. The second step, chapters 2 and 3, is an overview of Suzuki and his times. Adopting the viewpoint of current Zen scholars, I undertake a historical, cultural, and political analysis of Suzuki's life and work. This analysis demonstrates how the polemical attitude and cultural chauvinism present in Suzuki's work can be traced to his context as a Japanese Zen scholar and practitioner. Suzuki's spiritual and academic education took place during a time when Japan, as a modernizing country, sought to assert itself spiritually as well as politically and economically against Western countries. As part of these efforts, Japanese Zen sought to define itself as superior to Western religions, especially Christianity. Suzuki was thus enmeshed in a broader religious dialogue and debate between Western representatives of Christianity and Japanese

representatives of Zen, a dialogue that was characterized by a polemical tone as well as claims of cultural supremacy on both sides.

The third step, chapters 4 and 5, outlines the strengths and limitations of modern day scholars' views of Suzuki, and then examines Suzuki's work itself in a new light by comparing Suzuki's writings themselves to the Zen texts *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* and *The Zen Teaching of Huang-po*. Huang-po (d. 850 c.e.) was the teacher of Lin-chi (d. 866 c.e) who in turn was the founder of the Lin-chi (Jap: Rinzai) Zen sect, the form of Zen that Suzuki was trained in.<sup>11</sup> Carefully examining these texts and Suzuki's own writings, I conclude that Suzuki's conception of Zen as a transcendental experience irreducible to intellectual analysis is a valuable interpretation of the Zen teachings of Huang-po and Lin-chi. Thus, we can conclude that though Suzuki's work was a flawed product of his time, he did manage to provide a useful understanding of the Zen experience on its own terms, and his work should therefore be understood as valuable in scholarly efforts to more fully understand Zen.

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<sup>11</sup> The dates of death of Huang-po and Lin-chi come from the work of John Blofeld and Burton Watson respectively. See John Blofeld, trans., *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 15.

See also Burton Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), xi.

## ***Chapter I: An Overview of TZN and HCC***

Before moving on to an examination of Suzuki's life, we must more fully examine both Suzuki's approach to Zen and the contrasting approaches of current Zen scholars who focus on historical, political, and cultural analysis of Zen. Steven Heine, a current scholar of Zen, has provided useful terminology to characterize the divide in Zen studies between those Suzuki's approach and that of most current scholars. Heine labels Suzuki's approach the "Traditional Zen Narrative", or TZN. The approach of current scholars is labeled in turn, "Historical-Cultural Criticism", or HCC.

According to the Traditional Zen Narrative, the Buddha's enlightened mind has been passed down from mind to mind in an unbroken chain of Zen masters. The Zen text *Five Records of the Lamp* recounts that Sakyamuni Buddha assembled his disciples for a sermon. Once they had gathered, he silently held up a golden lotus blossom. The sole disciple to understand was Mahakasyapa, who smiled. The Buddha then announced, "I possess the True Dharma Eye, the Marvelous Mind of Nirvana. I entrust it to Mahakasyapa."<sup>12</sup> Since then, TZN maintains, the indescribable enlightenment of the Buddha has been passed down from Zen masters to disciples throughout the ages. TZN contends that this enlightened state, by its very nature, cannot be fully described by

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<sup>12</sup> Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, 8.

words. Though a set of scriptures, especially *koans*, has sprung up as central elements of Zen practice, these texts are understood as tools to awaken enlightenment, rather than accurate descriptions of enlightenment itself. To focus excessively on the words and scriptures of Zen, according to TZN, is to go against the purpose of Zen, which is to transmit the wordless enlightenment of the Buddha. According a Zen source from 710 c.e.: "This transcendent enlightenment is transmitted by the mind [in a process that] cannot be described. What spoke or written words could possibly apply?"<sup>13</sup>

This distrust of language is why the Chinese Zen teacher Ta-hui burned Zen scriptures, claiming that they would divert the attention of practitioners and therefore hold them back from attaining enlightenment<sup>14</sup>. Suzuki, whose work exemplifies the TZN approach, wrote that Zen scriptures were meant to serve only as tools: "the reasoning faculty is not considered final or absolute. On the contrary, it hinders the mind from coming into the directest [sic] communication with itself...for this reason all the scriptures are merely tentative and provisory; there is in them no finality."<sup>15</sup> The significance of Zen's distrust of words is important because it correlates to a larger distrust of intellectualization. Suzuki argued that words were linked to deluded ways of seeing the world as dependent upon intellectual concepts. According to this view, Zen attempts to break up our tendency to analyze and define the world by using words in strange ways, not as answers in and of themselves, but as means to awake an intuitive, non-intellectual way of understanding the world. Suzuki writes that the purpose of *koan*

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<sup>13</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin Zen Marrow*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> John Daido Looi, *Two Arrows Meeting in Mid-Air: The Zen Koan* (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc, 1994), xxvii.

<sup>15</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 14.

practice is to bring about a new way of understanding in which language becomes a tool to express the non-intellectual nature of Zen awakening:

"This breaking up of the tyranny of name and logic is at the same time spiritual emancipation...hitherto we have been looking at things in their contradicting and differentiating aspect...but this has been revolutionized, we have at last attained the point where the world can be viewed, as it were, from within. Therefore, 'the iron trees are in full bloom', and 'in the midst of pouring rain I am not wet'."<sup>16</sup>

According to Suzuki, a nonsensical statement--"the iron trees are in full bloom"--is used in the Zen tradition to undercut a practitioner's conventional understanding of language. The ability to logically analyze and categorize is blown apart by such language. Suzuki wrote, "The reason why Zen is so vehement in its attack on logic...is that logic has so pervasively entered into life as to make most of us conclude that logic is life and without it life has no significance...Zen wants to live from within...hence its illogical, or rather superlogical, statements."<sup>17</sup> Hence we see that at the core of the distrust for language is a distrust for logic, an insistence that Zen could only be understood by a mind no longer obsessed with categorizing or analyzing--in short, a religion completely unsuited for scholarly analysis. As Suzuki wrote, "Zen is not explainable by mere intellectual analysis. As long as the intellect is concerned with words and ideas, it can never reach Zen."<sup>18</sup>

It is ironic that Suzuki defined Zen as beyond words, but then devoted his life to writing about Zen. He recognized the incongruity of his stance, writing, in an article responding to a critique from the Chinese historian Hu Shih that while, strictly speaking,

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<sup>16</sup> Suzuki, 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," 26

his writings could not fully capture the indescribable nature of Zen, he could perhaps show his audience a glimmer of what Zen offered:

"The Zen master, generally speaking, despises those who indulge in word or idea-mongering, and in this respect Hu Shih and myself [as academics engaged in idea-mongering] are great sinners, murderers of Buddhas and patriarchs; we both are destined for hell. But it is not a bad thing to go to hell, if it does some good to somebody."<sup>19</sup>

Suzuki therefore recognized the contradiction inherent in his attempts to write about the indescribable nature of Zen, but hoped that his efforts would at least help readers begin to have an understanding of the Zen experience. He felt that his enlightenment experience as a Zen practitioner (which will be explored later on) qualified him to write on Zen: "it is only by those who have this experience [of Zen practice] that any provisional system of thought can be produced on the basis of it."<sup>20</sup> Suzuki believed that one could not understand Zen through analysis alone; one had to "experience" Zen in order to fully understand it.

### *THE HCC SCHOOL*

Suzuki's message has drawn heavy criticism from many current scholars in the Zen field. These scholars subject Zen to same intellectual analysis that Suzuki charges only obscures Zen's essence. Steven Heine has labeled this approach of intellectual analysis the Historical-Cultural Criticism school, or HCC. Hu Shih, a contemporary of Suzuki's, can be considered perhaps the first HCC scholar to critique Suzuki for failing to sufficiently analyze the political, historical, and cultural elements of Zen. Hu Shih, a Chinese historian, sought to fill in the perceived gap in Zen studies by providing a historical analysis of Zen's political context in China. In recent years, following in Hu

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<sup>19</sup> Suzuki, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih", 30.

Shih's footsteps, scholars of Zen such as Bernard Faure, John McRae, Robert Sharf, and Duncan Williams have pointed out that Suzuki's image of Zen fails to incorporate the tradition's historical, political, and cultural contexts and functions. The HCC school skeptically views Suzuki's argument that Zen's essence cannot be reduced to historical or cultural analysis. In the view of these scholars, this claim simply protects Zen from criticism and analysis that would reveal important, hitherto unknown elements of the tradition. Heine sums up the HCC opinion of Suzuki:

"Apologists [like Suzuki] deliberately cloak Zen in a shield of opaqueness. This is done to avoid or to claim immunity from the careful scrutiny of historical examination, which would disclose inconsistencies, contradictions, and even flaws in the character of Zen as a social institution conditioned by the flux of everyday events and the turmoil of worldly affairs." f

For these critics, Zen is a historically grounded religion, as susceptible to contradictions and inconsistencies as any other social institution. Brian Victoria, himself a Zen priest, has, through careful historical research, documented the avid war-mongering rhetoric of Zen institutions in Japan during World War II.<sup>21</sup> John McRae, another scholar in the HCC mold, notes how the traditional Zen notion of "mind to mind transmission" often served as a polemical device to "establish the superiority of Chan<sup>22</sup> over all other schools."<sup>23</sup> Bernard Faure crafts perhaps the most balanced version of an HCC approach, attempting to integrate both a respect for Zen's self-perception with a critical academic viewpoint. He writes: "My aim...is to intertwine and cross-graft these various types of

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<sup>21</sup> Though Victoria's method is a good example of the HCC approach, due to space limitations I omit further exploration of Zen's militarism. For further exploration, see Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen at War*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO.: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Japanese Zen first originated in China, where it was called "Ch'an". Thus, many of Zen's sacred texts relate the teachings of Chinese masters.

<sup>23</sup> John McRae, *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5.

discourse, in the hope that they might enhance each other."<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, however, Faure views the Zen tradition critically, as indicated by the subtitle of *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*. Faure's critique of Suzuki, taken together with the similar critique of Robert Sharf, are excellent examples of the insightful (but ultimately limited) exclusive adoption of an HCC approach.

Drawing on ethnographic and historical research, Robert Sharf points out that Zen was historically a highly ritualistic phenomenon--"among the most ritualistic forms of Buddhist monasticism"<sup>25</sup> Sharf notes that Suzuki's view of Zen does not take into account this ritualistic dimension of Zen. Duncan Williams, a relatively new scholar in the HCC mold, has drawn upon recently discovered temple records to argue that Zen served as an important social institution in Japan. As Williams argues, Zen priests, by and large, were not concerned solely with attaining enlightenment, but also played key social roles--"praying for rain, healing the sick, or performing exorcistic and funerary rites"<sup>26</sup> The field of Zen studies no longer hews to Suzuki's definition of Zen as "the antipode to logic, by which I mean the dualistic mode of thinking...whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind...Zen defies all concept-making."<sup>27</sup> These contemporary scholars are skeptical of Suzuki's claim that Zen cannot be categorized or intellectually understood. Rather, they view Zen exclusively through cultural, historical, and textual analysis.

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<sup>24</sup> Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Robert A. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" in *Curators of the Buddha* ed. Donald Lopez (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 107-8.

<sup>26</sup> Duncan Williams, *The Other Side of Zen* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>27</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 8-12.



The above examples indicate that the field of Zen studies no longer hews to Suzuki's message and the larger TZN narrative. While Suzuki claims that "Zen has...no ceremonial rites to observe"<sup>28</sup> or that "Zen is the spirit of all religions and philosophies"<sup>29</sup> or that Zen is "illogical and contrary to common sense"<sup>30</sup> these contemporary scholars point out that Zen, in fact, is a religion that served specific social and cultural functions and was inextricably linked to historical and political trends. They reject outright Suzuki's claim that "History may tell much about Zen in its relation to other things or events, but it is all about Zen and not Zen in itself"<sup>31</sup> These critics hold that historical and cultural analysis is essential to understanding Zen.

Having a clearer understanding of the approaches of the TZN and HCC, we can now move on to examining Suzuki's life and times. Adopting an HCC perspective, I argue in the following two chapters that Suzuki's polemical outlook stemmed from his own position as a Japanese Zen intellectual and practitioner who came of age during Japan's period of modernization. Suzuki received his academic and spiritual education during a broader religious dialogue and debate between Christianity and Zen that was heavily influenced by a subtly polemical tone, in which both sides claimed their religion was the "universal" essence of religion and thus religion's most valid form. Thus, Suzuki's polemical tone and cultural chauvinism can be contextualized as part of a larger intellectual climate.

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<sup>28</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Suzuki, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Suzuki, 28.

<sup>31</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," 39.

## *Chapter 2: Suzuki's Life and Influences*

Suzuki's spiritual education took place just as Japanese Buddhism was asserting itself in the West. Even while Japanese Buddhists and Western Christians were voicing their belief that their two religions were expressions of a worldwide religious spirit, both sides were convinced of the supremacy of their respective faiths. Thus, a subtle polemicism couched in universalist rhetoric prevailed. This tension was to surface in Suzuki's work as well. Suzuki attained his spiritual awakenings and embarked on his academic career during a time when Japan was beginning to modernize and reshape its national identity with a strange mix of both admiration and antagonism towards the West. Just as Suzuki's intellectual polemicism was influenced by the polemical nature of religious exchanges at the time, so too the culturally chauvinist hue of his work can be seen as part of a broader Japanese nationalism that was pushing back against the ingrained prejudices of Westerners.

Suzuki's perspective was inextricably linked to the modernizing trends of his own era. He was born in Kanazawa, Japan, in 1870, two years after the Meiji Restoration,

which ushered more democratic laws and began the frantic rush towards modernization.<sup>32</sup> The Meiji government, eager to adopt the ways of Western countries, was dissatisfied with Buddhism, which was popularly viewed as a vestige of the old feudal system, an out-of-date tradition whose monks would be a burden in the industrialized society to come. Judith Snodgrass describes how the country began to view Zen as an economic hindrance: "Pragmatists argued that the nation would be better served by melting the temple bells and images to make cannon and by conscripting the priests into secular activities"<sup>33</sup> In 1869, a governing body of Zen institutions, the Association of Buddhist Sects, undertook to modernize Zen. In keeping with this spirit, Zen priests began to travel abroad in order to obtain better knowledge of the Western views on religion and how to best modernize and "update" Buddhist practices.<sup>34</sup>

These efforts eventually succeeded in crafting a form of Buddhism in keeping with the modern era. The "old" Buddhism melted away, and *shin bukkyo*, or "New Buddhism" emerged. *Shin bukkyo* was an attempt by Zen institutions to revitalize the religion. Snodgrass writes that this new form of Buddhism was tailored to meet the needs of the new era at hand: *shin bukkyo* was "a philosophical, rationalized, and socially committed interpretation of Buddhism...the New Buddhism of Japanese modernity [was] formed in an intellectual climate in which the West was recognized as both model and measure of modernity."<sup>35</sup> This emphasis on crafting a new religion in harmony with the modern world was to be a hallmark of the presentation of Japanese Zen to the West. One

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<sup>32</sup> Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 115.

<sup>33</sup> Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 117.

<sup>34</sup> Snodgrass, 119.

<sup>35</sup> Snodgrass, 115.

of the most striking changes to the traditional form of Zen was the emphasis on including lay people, especially intellectuals. Zen masters actively promoted Zen through engagement in public forums. Zen was now no longer reserved for a privileged elite, but was part of the broader intellectual conversation.<sup>36</sup> This willingness to include Zen in the circles of academia created a climate in which Suzuki was one of many scholars who would feel that Zen could be discussed through public debate and writings. With this understanding of the intellectual climate of Meiji Japan and the "rational" form of "new Buddhism" (*shin bukkyo*), we can move on to an analysis of how exactly Suzuki came to claim Zen as his own religion, and how his spiritual education influenced his later writings on Zen.

#### *SHAKU SOEN*

Suzuki had a difficult childhood. His father died when Suzuki was 6, and his older brother within the next year. Suzuki advanced far enough in his studies to become a primary school teacher at the age of 18.<sup>37</sup> Without his father, Suzuki was at a significant disadvantage. Looking for consolation and a sense of purpose, he turned to religion. As he recounted in an article titled "Early Memories":

"To lose one's father in those days was perhaps an even greater loss than it is now, for so much depended on him as head of the family--all the important steps in life such as education and finding a position in life afterwards...it was natural that I should look to Zen for some of the answers to my problems."<sup>38</sup>

From the very start, Suzuki was interested in Zen not solely a subject of academic study, but also a way to address the tragedy of his father's death and the consequent

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<sup>36</sup> Snodgrass, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Suzuki, D.T. "Early Memories", in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 3-12.

<sup>38</sup> Suzuki, 3.

difficulties he faced. After the equally grievous death of his mother, Suzuki resolved to find some spiritual path to guide him in life. He began to attend university classes in philosophy while also participating in retreats at the Zen monastery Engakuji, which was headed by the Zen master Shaku Soen, one of the leading figures of the *shin bukkyo* movement. Soen was a prominent Zen figure and had studied Western thought and culture at Keio University, an unusual step for a Zen master. He believed that the future of Zen lay in pointing out to Westerners that Zen exhibited the uplifting and universal qualities of a religion without insisting upon unscientific superstitions. Soen was a priest in the Rinzai tradition, which claimed as its founder the charismatic Chinese master Lin-chi, who taught that Zen was inaccessible to words and intellectual concepts. This was a view that Suzuki would later make the hallmark of his own efforts to spread Zen in the West.

#### *THE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS*

In 1893, while Suzuki was studying at Engakiju, the World's Parliament of Religions convened in Chicago. The Parliament was a gathering of dozens of religious viewpoints from around the world. Representatives from various countries attended to give lectures on the merits of their own religion, and offer their thoughts on how each religion compared to the others.

Shaku Soen was one of the Japanese Zen delegates. Before departing, he asked his student Suzuki to translate his presentations into English<sup>39</sup>. An understanding of the Parliament is key to situating the historical and intellectual context of Suzuki's formative

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<sup>39</sup> Margaret H. Dornish, "Aspects of D.T. Suzuki's Early Interpretations of Buddhism and Zen" *Eastern Buddhist*, 3, no.1, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001341496&site=ehost-live50> (accessed March 22nd, 2010), 50.

years both as a Zen scholar and practitioner, and his later efforts to spread Zen in the West. The Parliament perfectly demonstrated how scholars and intellectuals of the time, from both Japan and America, spoke glowingly of cross-cultural religious truth while simultaneously advocating the supremacy of their own religions. As Larry Fader describes, the astounding diversity of delegates gave the impression of a widespread ecumenical sentiment: "flights of imagination predominated...noble dreams of religious dialogue and expressions of the unanimity of human spiritual purpose."<sup>40</sup> But these universalist ideals only thinly glossed over the polemical outlook of the delegates.

For the first time, Soen and his fellow Japanese Buddhists in the *shin bukkyo* mold were able to speak directly to a Western, largely Christian audience. They had an opportunity to present the supremacy of Buddhism, and they would not let it pass by. As Snodgrass writes, "The delegates believed that Buddhism, the Buddhism of the Meiji revival, was the one area of knowledge in which Japan was not just equal to the West but superior to it."<sup>41</sup> The young Suzuki, translating Soen's address while remaining in Japan, was already becoming acquainted with the tactics of spreading Zen to a foreign audience.

It would be a difficult task. Despite the fact that the Parliament's Protestant Christian organizers had invited non-Christian representatives, their intent was undoubtedly to integrate other faiths into a Christian whole. Though the stated aim of the Parliament was "To inquire what light each religion has afforded, or may afford to other religions of the world", the Chairman of the Parliament, Reverend John Barrows

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<sup>40</sup> Larry A. Fader, "Zen in the West: Historical and Philosophical Implications of the 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions" in *Eastern Buddhist*, 15, no.1, (1982)<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000922500&site=ehost-live> (accessed April 5, 2010), 122.

<sup>41</sup>Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 2.

reassured his colleagues that "the non-Christian world...has nothing to add to the Christian creed."<sup>42</sup> Referring to the delegates of Asian religions, Barrows said, "The very best which is in them, the very best which these well meaning men have shown to us, is often a reflection of Christianity, and that which they lack...is what the Christian Gospel alone can impart."<sup>43</sup> While the Parliament ostensibly was meant to showcase tolerance (a newspaper covering the event proclaimed "Men of all Faiths: Triumph of Liberalism"<sup>44</sup>), in fact the goal was to incorporate these other faiths underneath an overarching Christian framework. Snodgrass described the underlying motivation of the Parliament's Protestant Christian organizers: "The guiding principle of the Parliament, in which the majority of organizers and delegates was of the dominant Protestant groups, was that all the religions of the world would find their completion and fulfillment in the spiritual values of Protestant Christianity."<sup>45</sup> Like their Japanese Zen counterparts, Protestant Christians at the Parliament were intent on demonstrating the supremacy of their own faith. Henry Harris Jessup, a Presbyterian, claimed: "We who are made in the image of God should remember that all men are made in God's image...we owe to our fellow men to aid them in returning [to] the glory of God and the beauty of holiness..."<sup>46</sup> The accounts of other Christian addresses at the Parliament were replete with similar missionary rhetoric.

Soen, and later Suzuki, were faced with the task of not only countering the agenda of their Christian counterparts, but also with addressing deep-rooted Western academic misunderstandings of Buddhism. Since the 1820s, when Hegel defined Buddhism as "a

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<sup>42</sup> Snodgrass, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Snodgrass, 55.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 51.

<sup>45</sup> Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Seager, 80.

cult of nothingness", Western academics had interpreted Buddhism to be a nihilistic religion, aimed at "the obliteration of consciousness, toward the annihilation of thought itself."<sup>47</sup> Because of the dearth of adequate translations of Buddhist texts, Western scholars saw Buddhism as profoundly pessimistic. This "nothingness" was also taken to mean that Buddhism was an "atheist" religion, the antithesis of the life force, an Asiatic nihilism that stood opposed to the loving God of Christianity. As Roger Pol-droit points out, Western Christians were concerned about Buddhism becoming a potential threat. In the increasingly scientific modern world, the idea of God had become open to debate, and Buddhism began to pose a threat, offering the possibility of religion without God:

" [Buddhism] began to resonate, in a manner that was both worrisome and unforeseen, with the decline in Christianity then in process: the already perceptible death of God...the figure of the Buddha--spiritual, even mystical, but purely human--was easily capable of transforming itself into a menacing presence."<sup>48</sup>

The World's Parliament of Religions was, in many ways, the Christian response to this new uncertainty. Christian intellectuals realized that they could not simply ignore the looming threat that foreign religions posed to the Christian God. In order to support their faith during the changing times, some Christian clergy and intellectuals decided to adopt the mood of the modern age and present a new rationale for accepting Christianity. Riding the coattails of Darwin, the Christian organizers of the convention adopted an "evolutionary" view of religion. As Snodgrass summarizes: "Spiritual development was assumed to accompany social evolution in general"<sup>49</sup> According to this view, all religions, in varying degrees, expressed the truth of God; yet Christianity, as evidenced

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<sup>47</sup> Roger Pol-Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 60-61

<sup>48</sup> Pol-Droit, 163.

<sup>49</sup> Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 196.



by the dominance of the intellectually and politically dominant West, had attained to the ultimate truth. As Judith Snodgrass notes,

"The Parliament was, for all its undoubtedly sincere rhetoric of fostering universal brotherhood and international goodwill, an arena for the context between Christians and the 'heathen', with all that that implied in terms of late nineteenth-century presumptions of evolution, civilization, and the natural right of the West to dominance over the East."<sup>50</sup>

It was in this spirit that Christian organizers convened the World's Parliament. Christianity was the measuring stick, and the foreign religions "on display" were seen as mere reflections of the all-encompassing Christian God. As Snodgrass writes, Christianity was assumed to be the fullest fledged form of religion, "implying that other religions are but a dim reflection of the Christian Light of the World."<sup>51</sup> The prevalent notion of a universal religious experience was best summed up by the Methodist missionary George Candlin, who asserted: "The inward and true intent of every faith the world has known has been the worshipful recognition of the divine; that is the sure and sufficient ground on which to rest the claim for union."<sup>52</sup> But of course, the fact that Zen does not recognize any concept of the "divine" in a theistic sense necessarily meant that Candlin's vision of unity, however sincere, was simply not broad enough. Like most of the Christian speakers, Candlin ultimately viewed the universal religious essence as a uniquely Christian inheritance: "The great we have only begun...it is a bright new dawn of Gospel morning for the world, for all the world."<sup>53</sup>

Because the Christian speakers at the Parliament defined their religion as the fullest form of the universal religious spirit, Soen did the same, but substituted Zen in the

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<sup>50</sup> Snodgrass, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Seager, 98.

<sup>53</sup> Seager, 99.

place of Christianity. This was a polemical tactic that Suzuki later exhibited in his own work. Suzuki, like his mentor Soen, was forced to react against an already-present discourse that presented religion as a universal spirit that attained its fullest form in whatever given religion one decided to elevate above all others.

Soen and his fellow Japanese delegates were aware that the scientific outlook highly prized in some Western circles presented a threat the truth of the Christian worldview. As Snodgrass writes, "Aware of the perceived conflict between orthodox Christianity and nineteenth-century developments in scientific thought, they hoped to convince this domestic audience [at the Parliament] that Buddhism was the most appropriate religion for the modern world."<sup>54</sup> Soen propounded Zen in much the same manner as his Christian counterparts advocated for Christianity--using a Darwinian view of evolution in which one given religion was seen as the highest attainment of a universal religious spirit.

Soen attempted to define Buddhism as in keeping with the scientific values of the times. His two addresses to the Parliament--"Arbitration Instead of War" and "The Law of Cause and Effect as Taught by the Buddha"--, while addressing different topics, both advocated the view that the world's religions should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Yet Soen also challenged the rationality of Christian belief. Calling into question the Christian view of heaven and hell ("God did not provide you with a hell, but you yourself"), Soen based his arguments for Zen on rational grounds, proclaiming that moral authority derived not from God but from the abstract law of causality (which carried a pleasing "scientific" ring). Soen exclaimed: "In Buddhism the source of moral

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<sup>54</sup> Snodgrass, 2.

authority is the causal law. Be kind, be human, be honest, if you desire to crown your future. Dishonesty, cruelty, inhumanity will condemn you to a miserable fall."<sup>55</sup> Soen presented Zen as eminently rational, because it did not depend upon a belief in God. Rather, Soen argued, Zen rested upon a rational insight into reality. Lecturing on the concept of cause and effect, Soen asserted: "Our sacred Buddha is not the creator of this law of nature, but he is the first discoverer of the law who led thus his followers to the height of moral perfection."<sup>56</sup> By linking Zen to a "causal law" (and not any *a priori* belief in God), Soen subtly but unmistakably implied that Zen was more rational and scientific than Christianity.

Buddhism as presented by Soen was founded upon common sense and reason rather than blind belief. Soen therefore sought to prove to his Christian counterparts that Buddhism was more suited than Christianity to the modern and scientific spirit of the times. At first glance, it may seem that Suzuki's later claim that Zen could not be reduced to the level of intellectual analysis logically pitted Zen *against* science and reason; but Suzuki would avoid this dilemma by insisting that Zen was in fact "radically empirical".<sup>57</sup> Suzuki would use the tactics of his teacher Soen in order to argue for the supremacy of Zen. Zen, Suzuki would argue, could not be reduced to intellectual analysis, and therefore enjoyed supremacy over Christianity, whose doctrines (like the creation of humans in the Garden of Eden) Suzuki implied were clearly irrational and at

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<sup>55</sup> Fader, "Zen in the West", 126.

<sup>56</sup> Fader, 126.

<sup>57</sup> Due to space limitations the question of contradiction is merely noted but not explored further. Suzuki attempted to resolve the contradiction by writing, "Taking it all in all, Zen is emphatically a matter of personal experience. If anything can be called radically empirical, it is Zen." D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 102.

odds with science. Suzuki's second mentor, Paul Carus, was to provide him with yet more rhetorical tools to enhance his argument for the superiority of Zen.

### *PAUL CARUS AND THE RELIGION OF SCIENCE*

While at the Parliament, Soen made the acquaintance of a man who would also figure prominently in Suzuki's spiritual and academic environment. Dr. Paul Carus was editor of the popular magazines *The Monist* and *The Open Court*. Carus believed that all superstitious elements of religions should be cast off in order to reveal the universal religious essence beneath. He was convinced that the world's religions were compatible with each other and with scientific progress. One of Soen's letters to Carus, congratulating his efforts to establish an organization modeled on the World's Parliament, aptly sums up their joint understanding of the new unitary concept of religion:

"This 19th century of ours is the preparatory stage for a religious reformation...Now is the time for us to try conclusions with old conventional religions, with the spirit of philosophy and science as our shield, and the motto of universal benevolence and brotherhood as our halberd. Before the truth there should never be such discrimination as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, much less the differences of race, customs or languages. I ardently wish the success of this new organization, and hope that the day will come shortly when all religions in the world will be united together."<sup>58</sup>

Carus saw Buddhism as the religion that came closest to his ideal of a Religion of Science. He wrote that the Buddha was "the first positivist, the first humanitarian, the first radical freethinker, the first iconoclast, and the first prophet of the Religion of Science."<sup>59</sup> After translating, at Soen's request, Carus' book *The Gospel of Buddha* into Japanese, Suzuki wrote to Carus to commend him for "rightly comprehend[ing] the principles of Buddhism."<sup>60</sup> The young Suzuki was evidently inspired by Carus' attempts

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<sup>58</sup> Dornish, "Aspects of D.T. Suzuki's Early Interpretations of Buddhism and Zen", 50.

<sup>59</sup> Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism", 118.

<sup>60</sup> Sharf, 119.

to justify Buddhism on rational and scientific grounds. He would later adopt Carus' universalist rhetoric, yet also maintain Soen's position that Zen was the fullest expression of the universal religion spirit.

### *SUZUKI THE ZEN STUDENT*

Even while translating Carus' work and learning the rhetoric of universalism, Suzuki was rigorously trained in the traditional forms of Rinzai Zen under his mentor Shaku Soen. His self-described enlightenment experience, or *satori*, would provide him with the firm conviction that Zen was the authentic path to religious insight. Suzuki's time as a student would ground him in the Rinzai Zen tradition, and he would come to see other religions as valuable only in the ways in which they approached the *satori* experience of Zen. He would combine this conviction of personal insight into the experience of Zen with the rhetorical styles he learned from Soen and Carus.

Suzuki's personal conviction in Rinzai Zen was the cornerstone of his later writings. Rinzai Zen claims the enigmatic Chinese master Lin-chi as its founder. This sect of Zen focuses heavily on *koan* practice. John Strong describes how *koan* practices were meant to awaken in the practitioner a *satori* experience, and how the tradition understands *satori*:

"One of the features of a certain form of Zen meditation is the koan...an apparently enigmatic account of the sayings or actions of some previous Zen master. In the context of training, koans are typically assigned by Zen masters to their students in an effort to provide some concrete images that students can focus on as they wrestle with Buddhist concepts in the hopes of reaching some level of realization. That realization or awakening, called *satori*, is often communicated to and confirmed by one's teacher in the context of a personal interview."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John S. Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 327.

*Koan* practice therefore is meant to bring about a kind of realization or awakening called *satori*. In the Rinzai tradition, this *satori* was conceived of as a sudden event.<sup>62</sup> Suzuki would later come to formulate *satori* as a "pure experience" in which one transcended intellectualization and the divide between subject and object in order to directly perceive reality.<sup>63</sup>

Suzuki's chief task as Soen's student was to ponder the *mu koan*. According to the *koan*, a monk asked the Ch'an master Chao-chou, "Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?" to which Chao-chou replied, "*mu*", or "no"<sup>64</sup> This "not", or "no" was meant to become a complete point of focus for the practitioner. The thirteenth-century Zen Master Hui-k'ai urged monks who were assigned this *koan* to focus all of their energy upon Chao-chu's reply:

"Concentrate upon this NO: day and night hold it in your hand...it must be a red-hot iron ball you have swallowed...cast aside all your old misperceptions and mistakes slowly, naturally, purely, the inner and outer become of a single piece...how do you concentrate on the no? With every bit of your strength. If you do not falter, you will light a lamp of the Law to benefit the entire world."<sup>65</sup>

Hui-k'ai ended his commentary with the following verses:  
"The dog: the Buddha nature:  
Stern implacable command:  
If you fall into yes and no  
Dead man."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> For a detailed analysis of the "sudden" vs. "gradual" debate on the nature of *satori* in Ch'an/Zen history, see Peter N. Gregory, ed. *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987)

<sup>63</sup> *Satori* is a concept quite similar or identical to *kensho* ("seeing the buddha-nature"). For this reason, *satori* alone is used in this paper to refer to the purported sudden insight into reality brought about by Zen practice. See Griffith T. Foulk, "The Form and Function of Koan Literature" Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40.

<sup>64</sup> Foulk, "The Form and Function of Koan Literature", 37.

<sup>65</sup> Strong, "The Experience of Buddhism", 327.

<sup>66</sup> Strong, 327.

Contemplation of Chao-chu's "*mu*" was meant to erase concepts of "yes" and "no". As T. Griffith Foulk notes, the *koan* is used to strip the practitioner of ordinary thinking:

"The word 'not' is said to be ideal as a starting point for the practice of contemplating phrases because it quickly frustrates discursive reasoning about the meaning of the case and enables the meditator to enter into a state of intense mental concentration. When, after an extended period of effort, the mind freezes in a single, all encompassing 'ball of doubt' that is focused on the word 'not', conditions are ripe for a sudden flash of insight into Chao-chou's intent, which is to say, the awakened mind from which Chao-chou's reply 'not' originally emerged."<sup>67</sup>

Suzuki's task was to think continuously upon this *koan* and the curt answer of Chao-chou, and to therefore awaken a way of understanding that was not tied to conventional use of words or "discursive reasoning". This task entailed a protracted spiritual effort. As Suzuki recounts in "Early Memories", "There followed for me four years of struggle, a struggle mental, physical, moral and intellectual. I felt it must be ultimately quite simple to understand *mu*, but how was I to take hold of this simple thing?"<sup>68</sup> The *koan* began to dominate Suzuki's daily life. He writes: "All the time the *koan* was worrying at the back of my mind...I remember sitting in a field leaning against a rice stack and thinking that if I could not understand *mu*, life had no meaning, for me."<sup>69</sup> In his fourth year of pondering *mu*, Soen asked Suzuki to go to the United States to help Carus translate the Tao Te Ching. Suzuki realized that he had only one remaining retreat session to solve the *koan* before his departure. He applied himself to the task with desperation:

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<sup>67</sup> Foulk, 37.

<sup>68</sup> Suzuki, D.T. "Early Memories", in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986) 9.

<sup>69</sup> Suzuki, "Early Memories", 10.

"I realized that the rohatsu sesshin that winter might be last chance...I must have put all my spiritual strength into that sesshin...Up till then I had always been conscious that *mu* was in my mind. But so long as I was conscious of *mu* it meant that I was somehow separate from *mu*, and that is not a true Samadhi. But toward the end of that sesshin, about the fifth day, I ceased to be conscious of *mu*. I was one with *mu*, identified with *mu*, so that there was no longer the separateness implied by being conscious of *mu*."<sup>70</sup>

Suzuki entered into a highly concentrated state, called *samadhi*, that eventually enabled him to dissolve any separation between himself and the object of his thought, *mu*.<sup>71</sup> This was an experience in which the bridge between subject and object (between Suzuki and *mu*) dissolved. As Suzuki elaborated, "There is in *satori* no differentiation between subject and object. What is perceived is the percipient itself, and the percipient is no other body than the perceived; the two are in a perfect state of identification."<sup>72</sup> The unification of subject and object in *satori* was, for Suzuki, a way of understanding that was fuller and more complete than what the intellect could provide. *Satori* was

"The Zen way of reaffirming our experience, not indeed from the partial and therefore inevitably distorted point of view as engendered by the intellect, but from the totalistic point of view in which reality is grasped not only in its atomic and disconnected aspects but also as the undifferentiated, undetermined continuum."<sup>73</sup>

Suzuki understood himself to have attained a type of understanding that surpassed the intellect's capacities. His academic career would be based off of his insistence that the *satori* experience was crucial for anyone who wished to understand Zen. This perspective will be echoed in the traditional Zen texts we examine later on. But first, we must more fully explore how this experience influenced Suzuki's own academic career. Suzuki's *satori* experience, I argue, gave rise to his insistence that Zen was

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<sup>70</sup> Suzuki, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Strong, 304

<sup>72</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Satori" in *A Zen Life*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 31.

<sup>73</sup> Suzuki, "Satori", 31



incomprehensible to the intellect, and could not be fully explained by an HCC approach. Historical analysis (the treasured realm of the HCC school of Zen scholars) was, Suzuki held, of secondary importance as compared to the viewpoint that his Zen practice had given him.

### *Chapter 3: Suzuki's Writings*

#### *HISTORY AS SECONDARY*

In 1897, after passing his *koan*, Suzuki traveled to LaSalle, Illinois, to work as translator and assistant to Paul Carus. Two years into his ten-year stay, Suzuki had begun his first major book, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*. Finally published in 1908, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* revealed how Suzuki saw history as of secondary importance in understanding Zen.

During the beginning of the twentieth century, Western scholars of Zen were most interested in the Theravada tradition.<sup>74</sup> Western scholars saw the Theravada as a purer and more original form of Buddhism than the Mahayana because of its closer link to India through its sacred Pali and Sanskrit texts.<sup>75</sup> This attitude is exemplified in the words of Max Muller, a prominent Western scholar who characterized Japanese Buddhism as "a corruption of the pure doctrine of the royal prince [the

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<sup>74</sup> Theravada Buddhism is found throughout Southeast Asia. Roughly speaking, the Theravada idealizes the *arhat*, a practitioner committed to attaining individual enlightenment. See Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), 6.

<sup>75</sup> T.W. David Rhys, the founder of the Pali Text Society, was another prominent western scholar who elevated the Theravada tradition as the purest form of Buddhism. See Charles Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the study of Theravada Buddhism" in *Curators of the Buddha* Donald Lopez, Jr., ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 36.

Buddha]...[depending on] degraded and degrading Mahayana tracts."<sup>76</sup> The fact that the Japanese Buddhist scholar Bunyio Nanjo had been assigned to translate Sanskrit and Pali texts rather than Mahayana texts during his stay at Oxford indicated that Western scholars were more interested in the Theravada tradition than in Japanese Buddhism or the Mahayana in general.<sup>77</sup> *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* was meant to address the dearth of research in Western circles on Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>78</sup> Some preliminary work had been done in this respect by Suzuki's colleague Takakusu Junjiro, who had presented to the Japan Society in London on Japanese Buddhism.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, little was known about the Mahayana and it was generally viewed as a corrupted form of the Theravada tradition.

Suzuki wanted to overturn the negative view that Western scholars held of Mahayana Buddhism. Suzuki was determined to prove Mahayana Buddhism was in fact a more evolved form of the older Theravada. Positing that true religion is characterized by constant growth, Suzuki wrote: "It admits of no doubt that religion, as everything else under the sun, is subject to the laws of evolution."<sup>80</sup> Characterizing Mahayana Buddhism as a "Living Faith", Suzuki proposed that Mahayana had left behind the peripheral elements of Hinayana Buddhism in order to preserve its living spirit: "Mahayanism...is an ever-growing faith and ready in all time to cast off its old garments as soon as they are

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<sup>76</sup> Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 110.

<sup>77</sup> Snodgrass, 119-120.

<sup>78</sup> The Mahayana was a later development of Buddhism that idealizes the *bodhisattva*, a practitioner who attains awakening but refrains from entering nirvana (freedom from the cycle of rebirth) in order to compassionately aid other beings in attaining enlightenment. See Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Snodgrass, 120.

<sup>80</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1908), 23.

worn out...as far as its spirit is concerned, there is not room left to doubt its genuineness."<sup>81</sup> This attitude was undoubtedly picked up from his ten years spent as an assistant of Paul Carus, who believed that the most essential elements of a genuine religion could transcend any particular place and time. Old practices and beliefs could be abandoned in order to preserve its underlying truth. At the core of Suzuki's writing here is a view of the historical context--the specific culture, the politics of the time, the current religious systems in place--as secondary to the "core" meaning of the message a certain religious figure preaches.

For Suzuki, while historical factors did play their part in shaping a given religion, the defining element of any religion itself was a kind of universal religious essence that it shared with all other religions, no matter the time or place of their origin. Suzuki went so far as to posit: "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 nirvana and Dharmakaya."<sup>82</sup> Suzuki acknowledged that, as human beings, these religious figures were defined by their time--"They were nothing but the concrete representative of the ideas and feelings that were struggling in those times against the established institutions"<sup>83</sup> but he also insisted that their messages transcended the historical context: "At the same time those ideas and sentiments were the outburst of the Eternal Soul, which occasionally makes a solemn announcement of its will, through great historical figures or through great world

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<sup>81</sup> Suzuki, 15.

<sup>82</sup> D.T. Suzuki, 29.

<sup>83</sup> Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, 29.

events."<sup>84</sup> Suzuki's reluctance to admit any need for historical analysis in understanding Zen thus stemmed not only from his view of Zen as an indescribable experience, but also from his conviction that that experience cannot be encapsulated in any one place or time. This view, which held that the essence of religion remains the same even while its various manifestations take different forms in different cultures, was very much in keeping with the philosophy of Paul Carus, and was a prevalent notion at the World's Parliament of Religions.

#### *A MISSIONARY MESSAGE*

Suzuki began his academic career by arguing, like Soen, that Buddhism was better suited for the needs of the modern era than Christianity. This approach was in large measure a response to the hostile view that many Christian scholars held towards Buddhism, and may have been inspired by the views of his employer Paul Carus, whose view of Christianity and Buddhism is aptly summarized by Fader:

"In Christianity, as [Carus] interpreted it, the myth occupies a place of primary importance; Buddhism, on the other hand, while rich in mythology, does not insist on its literal interpretation as the basis of truth. One could strip Buddhism of its mythological elements without losing its essential teaching...Christianity, he believed, could never divest itself of its nonscientific elements, since they are too central to Christian teachings."<sup>85</sup>

Just as Christian delegates at the World's Parliament were most concerned with propounding the supremacy of Christianity, Suzuki's was concerned first and foremost with asserting the superiority of Zen over other religions. He used Carus' notion that Buddhism could be stripped of its unnecessary elements in order to place Zen above

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<sup>84</sup> Suzuki, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Fader, "Zen in the West", 135.

Christianity. In chapter 1 of *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Suzuki began with a rather harsh attack on Christian doctrine:

"Buddhism does not recognize the existence of a being, who stands aloof from his 'creations'. This conception of a supreme being is very offensive to Buddhists. They are unable to perceive any truth in the hypotheses, that a being like ourselves created the universe out of nothing and first peopled it with a pair of sentient beings; that, owing to a crime committed by them...they were condemned by him to eternal damnation; that the creator in the meantime feeling pity for the cursed, or, suffering the bite of remorse for his somewhat rash deed, dispatched his only beloved son to the earth for the purpose of rescuing mankind from universal misery, etc., etc."<sup>86</sup>

That Suzuki opened his first chapter in a work on Buddhism with an attack on Christian doctrine may seem strange, until we consider that he was attempting to push back against the dominant Christian conception of religion that dominated current academic discourse. For Zen to be taken seriously as a religion, Suzuki needed to argue that a belief in God was not a necessary element of a religion. Fader notes that definitions of religion, in Western circles, took for granted the concept of an individual soul and of God: "Christian scholars...would not admit that there could be a religion which lacked the concepts of an eternal soul or a personal God."<sup>87</sup> However, Zen Buddhism lacks these concepts. Thus, Suzuki argued that religion should not be defined in terms of a soul or of God, but in a broader terminology. Religion, Suzuki held, should be understood as "the inmost voice of the human heart that under the yoke of a seemingly finite existence groans and travails in pain."<sup>88</sup> Suzuki argued that because God is not essential to religion, that Buddhism was just as valid a religion as Christianity in that it met the needs of this "inmost voice of the human heart."

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<sup>86</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, 31.

<sup>87</sup> Fader, "Zen in the West", 145.

<sup>88</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1908), 24.

Suzuki then proceeded to describe the similarities he discerned between Buddhism and modern science, similarities that, Suzuki implied, proved that Buddhism was more suited than Christianity for the modern scientific era:

"Karma is the formative principle of the universe. It determines the course of events and the destiny of our existence. The reason why we cannot change our present state of things as we may will, is that it has already been determined by the karma that was performed in our previous lives, not only individually but collectively."<sup>89</sup>

Comparing karma to the laws of the conservation of energy, Suzuki then claimed that, if energy is preserved in all material reactions, it follows that moral repercussions are preserved in all human interactions:

"This doctrine of karma may be regarded as an application in our ethical realm of the theory of the conservation of energy...a deed once performed, together with its subjective motives, can never vanish without leaving some impressions either on the individual consciousness or on the supra-individual, i.e., social consciousness...the doctrine of karma must be considered thoroughly valid."<sup>90</sup>

Through this analogy, Suzuki attempted to define karma as a scientific concept, in contrast to the Christian doctrines that Suzuki dismissed as unscientific. This apologetic tone of Suzuki rings out loud and clear throughout the rest of Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*.

The radical contrast between the ecumenical tone of the introduction, and the curt dismissal of literal Christian belief as taking "poetry for actual fact" demonstrates how Suzuki had used the rhetoric of universalism to advocate for Zen. Relying upon Carus' belief that religion should be in accord with science, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* sought to critique literal belief in Christian doctrine as incompatible with a scientific outlook ("[Buddhists are] unable to perceive any truth in the hypotheses, that a being like

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<sup>89</sup> Suzuki, 33.

<sup>90</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1908), 35.

ourselves created the universe out of nothing."<sup>91</sup>) Suzuki's case for what one might call the "rehabilitation" of the Mahayana rested upon his argument that religion was an organic, constantly evolving phenomena, the core of which was a universal individual experience irreducible to political, historical, or cultural pressures. Fader notes that this theme was to pervade all of Suzuki's work: "He developed a theory of organic growth and a philosophy of religion as subjective experience which he was to advocate without significant modification throughout his career."<sup>92</sup> The concept of religion as experience would become a stronger element in Suzuki's thought, and eventually define his strategy in positing Zen's supremacy as the most authentic religion.

#### *ZEN AS EXPERIENCE*

Suzuki's middle years of productivity during the 1920s were marked by his efforts to create a solid foundation upon which to articulate his vision of Zen. Suzuki, at this time of his life, was not as concerned with favorably contrasting Zen against Christianity, as he had earlier with his work *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*. Suzuki became more interested in articulating a positive construction of Zen using philosophical frameworks congruent with his own *satori* experience. He had returned from his ten years in America with Paul Carus, and had begun working as an English instructor and professor in Japan. Suzuki was to find inspiration through the work of a close contemporary colleague, the philosopher Nishida Kitaro who integrated William James' vision of "experience" into terms that Suzuki would use to present his view of Zen as inaccessible to the intellect. In a chapter titled "The Koan Exercise", Suzuki endeavors to write about the nature of the discipline he practiced as a lay student decades before under Shaku Soen: "There is a

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<sup>91</sup> Suzuki, 30.

<sup>92</sup> Fader, "Zen in the West", 53.

noetic quality in mystic experiences that has been pointed out by [William] James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and this applies also to the Zen experience known as *satori*.<sup>93</sup> Nishida based much of his career on an elucidation of this notion of "experience" inspired by James, and Nishida's vision was remarkably influential on Suzuki's own work.

For Nishida, a pure experience was one untainted by any dualism. Reading Nishida, one is quickly reminded of Suzuki's self-described *satori* experience evoked by his contemplation of the *mu koan* as a student of Shakyu Soen. Suzuki, as earlier described, had temporarily attained what he described as a non-duality between subject and object, the "percipient and perceived".<sup>94</sup> Nishida provided a philosophical concept--"pure experience"--that was, for all intents and purposes, identical to the state of Suzuki claimed to have attained. As Nishida wrote in his 1921 work *An Inquiry in the Good*, "Pure experience is identical with direct experience...When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object".<sup>95</sup> Though Nishida would go on to develop a highly sophisticated philosophy based around this concept of "pure experience", Suzuki would take adopt the term to frame an understanding of how Zen worked to unbind the egoic sense of self. As Robert Sharf notes, "Suzuki seized upon Nishida's notion of pure experience and made it the central element in his exposition of Zen."<sup>96</sup> Suzuki wrote that the subject-object division was

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<sup>93</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider and Company, 1949) vol. 2, 16.

<sup>94</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Satori" in *A Zen Life*, 31.

<sup>95</sup> Nishida Kitaro, *An Inquiry into the Good* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 3-4.

<sup>96</sup> Robert H. Sharf, "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion" in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7, No.11-12, (2000)



obliterated during *satori*, which enabled a new understanding of oneself to emerge, an understanding that was framed as a kind of release from existential worries, an arrival "at the destination". As Suzuki wrote in *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in 1949,

"Satori is thus a form of perception, an inner perception, which takes place in the most interior part of consciousness...the experience indeed is my own but I feel it to be rooted elsewhere. The individual shell in which my personality is so solidly encased explodes at the moment of satori. Not necessarily that I get unified with a being greater than myself or absorbed in it, but that my individuality, which I found rigidly held together and definitely kept separate from other individual existences, becomes loosened somehow from its tightening grip and melts away into something indescribable...the feeling that follow is that of a complete release or a complete rest--the feeling that one has arrived finally at the destination."<sup>97</sup>

Suzuki saw *satori* as a form of perception in which the personality, the sense of self, or "subject" dissolves and is replaced by a new understanding of the interconnectedness of self and world, subject and object. This concept of "pure experience" in which duality dissolved was central to Suzuki's understanding of Zen.

The notion of Zen as "pure experience" was attractive to Western audiences, especially intellectuals who, influenced by the work of philosophers such as Schleiermacher, Otto, and James, were looking for ways to somehow preserve the sacredness of religion while embracing the freedom of thought that characterized the modern era. Values of rationality and progress, while an improvement over the superstition of the pre-Enlightenment era, failed to offer the comforts of narrow religious belief. Traditional forms of Western religions seemed intellectually unfeasible in light of scientific progress, but scientific progress and humanist ideals were not enough to provide meaning. As Sharf notes,

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<http://buddhiststudies.berkeley.edu/people/faculty/sharf/documents/Sharf1998,%20Religious%20Experience.pdf> (Accessed April 14, 2010), 275.

<sup>97</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider and Company, 1949) vol. 2, 17-19.

"Schleiermacher, Otto, and James.... 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."<sup>98</sup>

The notion of recuperating the existential solace of religion by relying on a concept of a "pure experience" seemed to be a plausible middle path between the extremes of a narrow religious fundamentalism on the one hand and an existentially hollow humanism on the other. As Andrew Feenberg writes,

"The concept of experience lay at the center of many of these attempts at spiritual regeneration...it promised a specifically modern link to culture, tradition, and the religious and moral heritage. The move from rational to experiential justification seemed to preserve cognitive freedom, the essence of modernity, without sacrificing values."<sup>99</sup>

In short, Suzuki's vision of Zen preserved "cognitive freedom" by ostensibly not relying upon irrational dogma, yet also provided a means for existential solace by positing a "pure experience" of religion that remained out of the reach of science and the intellect (thus preserving the sacredness of religion). And while Suzuki's message of a "direct experience" inaccessible to the intellect did coincide fortuitously with the spiritual dilemma some Westerners faced, his message also was grounded in his own direct experience of Zen as a traditional student years before.

It's important to note that, while Suzuki's message was appealing to Westerners, it also carried with it heavy overtones of cultural bias against Western thought and Western spiritual capacities. Like Suzuki's polemical tone towards Christianity in his earlier years, this bias against the West must be analyzed in light of his own historical, political, and cultural context as a Japanese Zen scholar attempting to assert his own tradition

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<sup>98</sup> Sharf, Robert A. "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism", 135.

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Feenberg, "Experience and Culture: Nishida's Path to 'Things in Themselves'" in *Philosophy East and West* 49, No. 1, (January 1999) <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/expcult.html> (accessed April 1, 2010)

against a lingering Orientalism. Suzuki's solution to Orientalism, a kind of "Occidentalism" which inverts the traditional values of Orientalism, appears in many of his works, but most especially in his work *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* that, interestingly enough, was specifically written for a Western audience.

#### *AN INTRODUCTION TO ZEN BUDDHISM*

*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, one of Suzuki's most popular works, had its roots in the earlier part of his career. During World War I, Suzuki wrote a series of articles for the *New East*, an English-Japanese publication. They attracted little attention it seems, until 1934, when the articles were reprinted by the Eastern Buddhist Society<sup>100</sup> as *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. This work, perhaps one of the most concise and lucid versions of Suzuki's approach to Zen, was reprinted many times, most notably in 1964 when it appeared with a foreword by Carl Jung.

*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* demonstrates Suzuki's Occidentalist approach, by which he inverted the meaning of Orientalist discourse in order to privilege the East over the West. This was a more sophisticated recycling of Suzuki's earlier intellectual polemics against Christianity, but now applied more broadly to Western thought which was, conveniently, taken to be a vague, monolithic whole dominated by a restrictive "logical" perspective that prevented one from experiencing the transcendent Zen reality that was the source of all true religion. Writing, during World War I, Suzuki chose to adopt the language of Orientalism to suit his own needs and privilege Japan as culturally superior to the West. Bernard Faure describes how Suzuki inverted Orientalist discourse to privilege Zen and Japan: "Suzuki relied heavily on the categories of nineteenth century

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<sup>100</sup> Dornish, ""Aspects of D.T. Suzuki's Early Interpretations of Buddhism and Zen", 59.

Orientalism. He simply inverted the old schemas to serve his own purposes--to present Zen as the source and goal of all mystical experiences...presented by Suzuki as a specific product of Chinese culture brought to fruition in the context of Japanese culture."<sup>101</sup>

As Edward Said demonstrated in his 1978 work *Orientalism*, the assumed inferior status of the East to the West has dominated academic traditions in Europe for hundreds of years. Said notes: "A very large mass of writers...have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories"<sup>102</sup> Though Said focused his outline of Orientalism to describing the Western view of the Arab world, his observation on the popularity of using the "East/West" divide is equally applicable to Suzuki's own work.

Like the Orientalist scholars of earlier centuries, Suzuki maintains the assumed split between the East and West, but inverts the respective values associated with both. The "Oriental" is still more or less mystical, and the Westerner is still "rational", as Said describes<sup>103</sup>. Yet for Suzuki, the mysticism of the Oriental, traditionally seen as a weakness, becomes strength, because it allows one to more readily access Zen. In turn, the purported rationality of the Westerner becomes a weakness. By making use of the Orientalist "split" between East and West and then reversing the value placed on their respective characteristics, Suzuki elevates the mystical intuition of the East over the rationality of the West.

Eastern thought, writes Suzuki, is "synthetic in its method of reasoning; it does not care so much for the elaboration of particulars as for a comprehensive grasp of the

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<sup>101</sup> Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 2.

<sup>103</sup> Said, 40.

whole, and this intuitively."<sup>104</sup> For Suzuki, the East is intuitive and mystical. In contrast, the Western mind, for Suzuki, is characterized by logic. This is a weakness rather than strength, for it means that the West has difficulty understanding the Eastern (or Oriental) mind. Suzuki writes that: "mysticism in its very nature defies the analysis of logic, and logic is the most characteristic feature of Western thought."<sup>105</sup> The Western mind, suited only to logical thought, has difficulty penetrating this mysterious "Oriental mind", which, according to Suzuki, operates on an altogether different plane.

Having thus elevated Eastern "mysticism" over Western "logic", Suzuki goes on to explain the relationship between Zen and other religions. Suzuki implies that other religions are only smaller movements within Zen's universal essence. "Zen professes itself to be the spirit of Buddhism, but in fact it is the spirit of all religions and philosophies"<sup>106</sup>. And later, "[Zen] has nothing to do with any sectarian spirit. Christians as well as Buddhists can practise Zen just as big fish and small fish are both contentedly living in the same ocean."<sup>107</sup> Characterizing Christianity and Buddhism as fish in ocean of Zen, Suzuki essentially reduces these religions to smaller elements of Zen's larger, all-encompassing reality. As Bernard Faure writes, this positing of Zen as an all-encompassing reality clearly privileges Zen over Christianity: "Suzuki's view of Zen's 'oceanic nature' reveals the extent of the exorbitant privilege that he confers on his own interpretation. The patent sectarian motivation behind this apparently open-minded 'dialogue' between Zen and Christianity allows us to see it as a paradigmatic case of

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<sup>104</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Suzuki, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 14.

<sup>107</sup> Suzuki, 15.

'militarist comparativism.'"<sup>108</sup> Thus, Christianity is reduced to expressions of the overriding Zen spirit.

Even as Suzuki characterizes Zen as unfathomable to the Western mind, he also maintains that Christians and by extension, some Westerners, can practice Zen; not because of some innate capability, but because Zen itself encompasses all humanity-- "Zen is the man"<sup>109</sup>. Suzuki thus accentuates the universality of Zen; it is everywhere, it is existence. He writes, "Zen is thunder and lightning, the spring flower, summer heat, and winter snow"<sup>110</sup> Suzuki makes Zen an inescapable part of human existence; the only difference between the East and West, as Suzuki earlier implied, is that Easterners can have access to this universal essence, while Westerners, so long as they retain their native mode of logical thought, cannot. While Western mystics (such as Meister Eckhart) did occasionally access Zen's "spiritual insight", this was "sporadic, isolated, and unexpected".<sup>111</sup>

*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* quite clearly put forward a vision of Zen as a unique form of mysticism that was superior to all others in its ability to awaken in its practitioners an ultimate understanding of reality. It is clear that Suzuki did have a generally pessimistic view of Western abilities to understand Zen. The following recorded conversation between Suzuki and his colleague Hisamatsu Shin'ichi in Suzuki's later years in 1958 makes clear Suzuki's negative view of Western abilities to understand Zen:

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<sup>108</sup> Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversight*, 62.

<sup>109</sup> Suzuki, 15.

<sup>110</sup> Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* 15.

<sup>111</sup> Suzuki, 4.

*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."<sup>112</sup>

Thus we see that, even though Suzuki wrote in English with a Western audience in mind, he was not at all optimistic that his efforts would bear much fruit. Sharf rightly notes,

"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."<sup>113</sup>

Having now examined Suzuki's intellectual polemicism and Occidentalism, I now turn to examining the criticism that the HCC school has leveled at his approach to Zen. I begin with the scholar who may be labeled the first Zen scholar of the HCC school, a Chinese historian named Hu Shih, who insisted that Zen could in fact be understood through rational and historical analysis.

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<sup>112</sup> Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism", 130.

<sup>113</sup> Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism", 131.

#### *Chapter 4: HCC Criticism*

Suzuki's insistence on the incomprehensibility of Zen to the intellect certainly did not go unchallenged, even when his message was about to gain widespread popularity. In 1950, an article appeared in the journal *Philosophy East and West*, entitled: "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method", in which the Chinese historian Hu Shih dissented with Suzuki's presentation of Zen. Hu Shih, who had studied at Columbia under John Dewey, questioned Suzuki's contention that Zen defied intellectual analysis:

"My greatest disappointment has been that, according to Suzuki and his disciples, Zen is illogical, irrational, and therefore, beyond our intellectual understanding...it is this denial of the capability of the human intelligence to understand and evaluate Zen that I emphatically refuse to accept."<sup>114</sup>

Suzuki's presentation of Zen left out historical analysis, which, as a historian, Hu Shih found unacceptable. Hu Shih insisted that Zen should be understood through the study of its historical context:

"Any man who takes this unhistorical and anti-historical position can never understand the Zen movement or the teaching of the great Zen masters...the best he can do is to tell the world that Zen is Zen and is altogether beyond our logical comprehension. But if we restore the Zen movement to its 'space-time relations', that is, place it in its proper historical setting, and study it and its seemingly strange teachings as 'historical facts', then, but not until then, an intelligent and rational understanding and appreciation of this great movement in Chinese intellectual and religious history may yet be achieved."<sup>115</sup>

In his article, Hu Shih undertakes a study of the emergence and eventual dominance of the Southern school of Ch'an and the doctrine of "sudden enlightenment" in order to demonstrate that a historical analysis can provide a rational explanation for the

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<sup>114</sup> Hu Shih (1953) "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method", *Philosophy East and West*, 3, no.1, (1953) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1397361> (accessed March 12, 2010), 1

<sup>115</sup> Hu Shih, 2.



emergence of certain Ch'an doctrines.<sup>116</sup> Hu Shih writes that the emergence of the doctrine of "sudden enlightenment" was part and parcel of an "internal reformation or revolution in Buddhism, a movement that had been fermenting and spreading throughout the eighth century in many parts of China."<sup>117</sup> While Suzuki suggests that "All that we can therefore state about Zen is that its uniqueness lies in its irrationality or its passing beyond our logical comprehension"<sup>118</sup> Hu Shih asserts that Zen and its doctrines should be understood as products of a specific time and place. The doctrine of sudden enlightenment and the traditional suspicion of authority and written texts, according to Hu-Shih, came about as a political reformation within Zen itself. Therefore, Hu Shih argues, a great deal is to be gained from undertaking historical analysis of the tradition.

Hu Shih describes Shen-hui, the Cha'n master who initiated the reforms, as "a political genius who understood the signs of the time and knew what to attack and how to do it. So he became the warrior and the statesman of the new movement and fired the first shot of the revolution."<sup>119</sup> According to Hu Shih, Shen-hui's political ingenuity is the reason why Ch'an became highly individualistic and skeptical of relic-worship and the "outward" signs of piety. In short, the seemingly "anti-intellectual" bent and alleged suspicion of texts in Zen can, Hu Shih contends, can be traced to a specific historical moment.

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117 Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method", 12-13. 117 For a detailed analysis of the "sudden" vs. "gradual" debate on the nature of *satori* in Ch'an/Zen history, see Peter N. Gregory, ed. *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987)

118 Hu Shih, 1.

119 Hu Shih 13.

Hu Shih writes that what seems to be irrational, illogical behavior by Zen masters was in fact a sophisticated means for instructing students in iconoclastic ideals while avoiding the wrath of worldly authorities. He theorizes that the unusual practice of shouts and blows that Ch'an masters employed can be understood as a means to communicate the radical teachings of Zen without offending political institutions:

"Ch'an masters of the mountains were often called to head large city monasteries. They had to perform or officiate at many Buddhist rituals of worship demanded by the public or the State even though they might sincerely believe that there were no Buddhas or bodhisattvas. Were they free to tell their powerful patrons, on whom the institution had to rely for support, that 'the Buddha was a murderer who had seduced many people into the pitfalls of the devil?'...all these new situations, and probably many others, led to the development of a pedagogical method of conveying a truth through a great variety of strange and sometimes seemingly crazy gestures, words, or acts. I-hsuan was probably the first to introduce these techniques, for he was famous for beating his questioner with a stick or shouting a deafening shout at him."<sup>120</sup>

For Hu Shih, the seemingly illogical nature of Zen masters can be rationally explained. While Suzuki holds that shouting or striking the disciple is meant to induce a non-rational, transcendental state of mind, Hu Shih contends that these methods in fact were attempts to force the student to come to his or her own understanding of Zen without relying upon the master: In this respect, Suzuki and Hu Shih do not seem so far apart. For Hu Shih, the nonsensical responses of Ch'an masters ("What is the Buddha like? A piece of dung") were meant to frustrate the student to the point where he travels on foot from master to master, and hence moves from a desire for quietistic meditation to a full-out engagement with everyday life:

"He begs all the way for his food and lodging...he suffers the severities of nature and sometimes has to bear the unkindness of man...then, one day, he hears a chance remark of a charwoman, or a frivolous song of a dancing girl, or smells the quiet fragrance of a nameless flower--and suddenly he understands! How true, 'the Buddha was like a piece of dung!'...the miracle has happened. And he travels long distances

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<sup>120</sup> Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method", 20.

back to his old master, and with tears and with gladness at heart, he gives thanks and worships at the feet of his good teacher, who never made things easy for him."<sup>121</sup>

Like Suzuki, Hu Shih saw the purpose of Zen practice to awaken an abrupt and sudden "pure experience" of reality that awakens *satori*: "[he] smells the quiet fragrance of a nameless flower--and suddenly he understands!" But Hu Shih and Suzuki differed sharply in their conception of Zen. For Hu Shih, Ch'an was shaped by the times; its iconoclastic teachings were in effect a backlash against an earlier ideology, and the seemingly nonsensical methods of Ch'an masters were in fact rationally employed pedagogical devices.

Suzuki responded with an article titled, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih". Suzuki opened his paper with the contention that "Zen must be understood from the inside, not from the outside...Hu Shih, as a historian, knows Zen in its historical setting, but not Zen in itself."<sup>122</sup> For Suzuki, Hu Shih's argument that the Zen doctrine of sudden enlightenment can be understood as a backlash against earlier teaching is incorrect, even as a form of historical analysis:

"Hu Shih does not seem to understand the real significance of 'sudden awakening or enlightenment' in its historical setting...this is the very essence of Buddhist teaching, and all the schools of Buddhism...owe their origin to the Buddha's enlightenment-experience, which he had under the Bodhi tree by the River Nairanjana so many centuries ago. Buddha's enlightenment was no other than a 'sudden enlightenment.'" <sup>123</sup>

For Suzuki, the doctrine of sudden enlightenment was not merely the product of an iconoclastic trend in China, but rather reflected the Buddha's original enlightenment experience. Suzuki also takes issue with Hu Shih's contention that the seemingly

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<sup>121</sup> Hu Shih, 23.

<sup>122</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," *Philosophy East and West*, 3, no.1, (April 1953) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1397362> (accessed April 2, 2010): 26

<sup>123</sup> Hu Shih, 26-27.

nonsensical words and actions of Zen masters are in fact pedagogical devices. Rather, for Suzuki, they are expressions of the master's enlightened state: "These are the Zen masters' attempts to express what goes beyond words or what cannot be mediated by ideas...the more they try to express themselves, the more enigmatic they become. They are not doing this with any special pedagogic purpose. They are just trying to give expression to what they have in mind."<sup>124</sup>

Suzuki then moves beyond a simple repetition of the views that Hu Shih had taken issue with, and begins to illustrate how exactly Hu Shih's approach cannot fully illuminate Zen. Suzuki argues that the viewpoint of the historian is inadequate to understanding Zen, for it entails a split between subject and object, which, Suzuki argues, is antithetical to the nature of Zen.

We may remember here the commentary of Hui-k'ai on the *mu koan* which Suzuki struggled with for so long--"If you fall into yes and no/Dead man." In Suzuki's view, the historian depends upon a logical analysis of certain historical factors and takes each individual to be a separate agent, yet this approach cannot encompass Zen, which rises above all dualities. While acknowledging that Zen certainly did arise in a certain time and place, Suzuki insists that Zen itself cannot be reduced to such an analysis: "History may tell much about Zen in its relation to other things or events, but it is all about Zen and not Zen in itself...Zen is, in a way, iconoclastic and revolutionary, as Hu Shih justly remarks, but we must insist that Zen is not that alone; indeed, Zen still stands outside the frame."<sup>125</sup> For Suzuki, it is not enough to point out that Zen masters were reacting against earlier systems; we must also try and pinpoint the teachings as they stand

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<sup>124</sup> Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method", 31.

<sup>125</sup> Hu Shih, 39.

on their own, outside of historical influences: "We cannot say that Zen followers wanted to be merely destructing and to go against everything that had been traditionally established."<sup>126</sup> For Suzuki, the iconoclastic nature of Zen comes from a religious understanding in and of itself: "The masters are not to be detained with such idle discussions as to whether a thing is conventionally tabooed or not. Their objective is not iconoclasm, but their way of judging values comes out automatically as such from their inner life."<sup>127</sup> The method of Hu Shih does not do justice to the Zen tradition, Suzuki asserts. Zen in itself, he says, can only be understood on its own terms.

*HCC: The Disciples of Hu Shih*

In the spirit of Hu Shih, HCC scholars have analyzed both the Zen tradition itself, and Suzuki's representation of the tradition. Yanagida Seizan, a Japanese scholar, undertook a somewhat critical view of Zen historiography in the 1960s.<sup>128</sup> More recent scholars such as Bernard Faure have followed in Seizan's steps by pointing out the contradiction in Zen's insistence on evoking an "immediate" awakening even while adopting a medial and gradualist method of practice through its reliance on texts and rituals.<sup>129</sup> John McRae's work, *Seeing Through Zen*, adds to the HCC body of scholarship by questioning Zen Buddhism's claims of lineage to the historical Buddha.<sup>130</sup> Other scholars have also begun to address the dearth of historical and cultural analysis of Zen. In separate works both Albert Welter and Morten Schlütter have argued that Zen masters

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<sup>126</sup> Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method", 39.

<sup>127</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih", 41.

<sup>128</sup> Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 107.

<sup>129</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)

<sup>130</sup> John McRae, *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)

in China often formulated doctrines suited to please "secular elites", thus renewing Hu Shih's perspective that Zen and politics were closely intertwined.<sup>131</sup>

A relatively new scholar to the field, Duncan Williams, has used historical research to argue that most Zen practitioners in Japan were less concerned with achieving an ultimate religious insight than with addressing every-day worries: "The lived religion of the vast majority of Soto Zen temple priests and their parishioners centered around practical benefits to live in this world."<sup>132</sup> From researching recently discovered temple records, Williams finds that many Zen Buddhists believed that the quality of their afterlife was determined by their monetary contributions to the local temple and that, even in the nineteenth century, Buddhist priests were often in higher demand than doctors to cure medical ailments.<sup>133</sup>

In works particularly relevant to this thesis, Bernard Faure and Robert Sharf undertake studies of Suzuki's life and writings. Faure and Sharf take an exclusively HCC approach to evaluating Suzuki's work, an approach I argue is too narrow to adequately evaluate the merit of Suzuki's work. Bernard Faure argues that Suzuki's Occidental presentation of Zen, paradoxically, made Zen all the more attractive to his Western audience:

"For all its rhetoric, the success of Suzuki's work was not related to its literary or philosophical qualities; it was rather the result of a historical conjuncture that prompted the emergence in the West of a positive modality of Orientalist discourse, which found in the image of Zen fostered by Suzuki a particularly appropriate object."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)  
Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute Over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008)

<sup>132</sup> Duncan Williams, *The Other Side of Zen 2*.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, 29, 87.

<sup>134</sup> Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 54.

Faure thus saw the success of Suzuki's work as stemming not from its intrinsic merits (which he doubts) but rather from a certain historical context. Faure further argues that Suzuki's work was shaped by specific rhetorical goals: "As a 'popularizer' of Zen, Suzuki was acutely aware that the 'sudden teaching' [his presentation of *satori* as sudden] was elitist and had to be adapted if it was to reach a wider audience."<sup>135</sup> Faure therefore finds Suzuki's presentation of Zen to be altogether untenable, biased as it was by Suzuki's attempts to popularize an Occidental (and yet strangely attractive) version of Zen.

Robert Sharf writes that Suzuki's attempt to shield Zen from historical or scientific inquiry because it transcends such concepts is in no way validated by readings of Zen texts:

"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 *kensho* (to see one's original nature) as denoting some species of unmediated experience...there are simply no a priori grounds to conceive of such moments in phenomenological terms."<sup>136</sup>

In Sharf's view, Suzuki's version of Zen was exclusively suited to meet the needs of the modern era, and entirely removed from the Zen tradition: His article, "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion", like Faure, embodies an exclusively HCC approach to assessing Suzuki's work:

"[Suzuki's] approach to Zen, with its unrelenting emphasis on an unmediated inner experience, is not derived from Buddhist sources so much as from his broad familiarity with European and American philosophical and religious writings...castigated as primitive, idolatrous, and intellectually benighted, Asian religion was held responsible for the continent's social, political, and scientific failings. This is the context in which we must understand the Asian appropriation and manipulation of the rhetoric of experience.... Men like Radhakrishnan [a Hindu contemporary of Suzuki] and Suzuki would not only affirm the experiential foundation of their own religions traditions,

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<sup>135</sup> Faure, 59.

<sup>136</sup> Sharf, Robert A. "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism", 125

but... would turn around and present those traditions as more intuitive, more mystical, more experiential, and thus 'purer' than the discursive faiths of the West."<sup>137</sup>

Sharf certainly is right to point out how Suzuki used the notion of "experience" as a means to advance Zen as a "purer" religion. However, both Faure and Sharf's analyses of Suzuki's work are incomplete. It is certainly important to note that Suzuki's success was attributable to the West's uncritical eagerness for an "unmediated inner experience". It also should be recognized that Suzuki's writings is marred by Occidentalism and a polemical attitude that posits the supremacy of Zen over all other religions. Unlike Suzuki, I do not completely embrace his insistence that scholars of an HCC bent are not entitled to say anything about Zen, for quite clearly the task of the scholar of Zen is to analyze and interpret, a task altogether opposed that the work of a Zen practitioner who looks to attain a state beyond intellectualization. At the same time, it is clear that the HCC school, and Faure and Sharf in particular, have overlooked the importance of Suzuki's work. The following examination of the traditional Zen texts *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* and *The Zen Teaching of Huang-po* will demonstrate how Suzuki's insistence on the indescribable nature of Zen is a valuable interpretation of Zen teaching.

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<sup>137</sup> Sharf, "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion", 275.



## *Chapter 5: Lin-chi, Huang-po, and Suzuki*

Having practiced under Shaku Soen, who was a Zen priest in the Lin-chi (Jap: Rinzai) sect, Suzuki was certainly familiar with the teachings of Lin-chi, a revered Chinese master. Suzuki often quoted Lin-chi often alongside other Zen masters. Though he used these ancient sources rather casually (one page from *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* contains sixteen quotations in no apparent order)<sup>138</sup>, a rigorous examination of Lin-chi's work does support the conclusion that Suzuki did present a message in keeping with the spirit of Lin-chi's teachings.

*The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* relates the life and sayings of a Ch'an master born between 810 and 815 C.E. From a small temple in northern China, Lin-chi expounded a teaching that undercut the Mahayana's traditional teachings of spiritual hierarchies and various levels of attainment. Lin-chi instead attempted to awaken in his largely monastic audience a realization of the oneness of all things, undercutting all distinctions, even the notions of spiritual hierarchies or attainments. At the core of this approach was a belief that true religious awakening was to be found in one's own consciousness. As Burton Watson notes,

"The message of Lin-chi's sermons, with wearisome persistence, is that his followers are allowing all this talk of goals and striving, of buddhas and patriarchs, to cloud their outlook and block the path of understanding....again and again he exhorts them to put aside all such external concerns and to turn their gaze within, where the Buddha-nature inherent in all beings is to be found."<sup>139</sup>

Working within a very specific cultural context and speaking to a very select group of highly motivated monks and nuns (and the occasional assembly of lay people), Lin-chi's argued that the obsession with attaining enlightenment, and the subsequent

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<sup>138</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 47.

<sup>139</sup> Burton Watson, trans. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, xxiv.

intellectual reification of Buddhism that this obsession entails, led one backwards rather than forwards on the quest for enlightenment. Like Suzuki, Lin-chi insisted upon the incomprehensibility of Zen. Speaking to community of highly dedicated practitioners struggling to subdue the grasping tendencies of the intellect, Lin-chi insisted again and again that any reification of enlightenment prevents spiritual progress. Lin-chi declared to his followers:

"What is this thing called Dharma... it is in operation right before our eyes. But because people don't have enough faith, they cling to words, cling to phrases. They try to find the Dharma of the buddhas by looking in written words, but they're as far away from it as heaven is from earth."<sup>140</sup>

To rectify this unhelpful tendency, Lin-chi advocated a soteriology in which the immediacy of experience, removed from concepts or words--be it hearing a sudden shout or slap or harsh words--awakened enlightenment, in much the same way as Suzuki himself understood it as a "pure experience" inaccessible to the intellect.

According to *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, a monk approached Lin-chi and asked "What is he like--the True Man of no rank?"<sup>141</sup> The text relates that: "The Master got down from his chair, seized hold of the monk, and said, 'Speak! Speak!' The monk was about to say something, whereupon the Master let go of him, shoved him away, and said 'True Man of no rank--what a shitty ass-wiper!'"<sup>142</sup> Lin-chi was attempting to make his disciple realize the spiritual worthlessness of any intellectual concept, even the concept of a "True Man with no rank". For Lin-chi, the key to becoming enlightened was to cease analyzing and creating distinctions: "Don't try to do

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<sup>140</sup> Burton Watson, trans. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1993), 30.

<sup>141</sup> An enlightened person

<sup>142</sup> Watson, 13.

something special, just act ordinary. You look outside yourselves, going off on side roads hunting for something, trying to get your hands on something...you keep trying to look for Buddha, but Buddha is just a name, a word"<sup>143</sup>. It was Lin-chi who famously proclaimed, "If you meet a buddha, kill the buddha"<sup>144</sup>--a call to destroy any intellectual concepts that might prevent a seeker from realizing his own inherent capability to attain enlightenment

*Huang-po and the Indescribable Nature of Zen*

Lin-chi was not the only Zen master to espouse this view. Huang-po, the teacher of Lin-chi, also emphasized that intellectualization could not encompass Zen. In the text *The Essentials of the Transmission of Mind*, the literati Pei Xiu records his remembrances of Huang-po's teachings. John McRae, himself an HCC scholar, writes that the text repeatedly insists on the indescribable nature of Zen practice.

"From beginning to end it repeatedly espouses a single vision of religious training: one's own mind, just as it is and without any qualification whatsoever, is the Buddha. And to be a Buddha is to act in constant recognition of that fact, without ever generating any thoughts, intentions, or inclinations based on selfish dualistic conceptualizations."<sup>145</sup>

For Huang-po, any attempt to understand Zen is harmful: "So you students of the Way should immediately refrain from conceptual thought...any mental process must lead to error."<sup>146</sup> And later, "If you can only rid yourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything."<sup>147</sup> Clearly, Suzuki is right to say that Zen defines itself

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<sup>143</sup> Burton Watson, trans. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 29.

<sup>144</sup> Watson, 52.

<sup>145</sup> John McRae, trans. *The Essentials of the Transmission of Mind* ed. Mayeda Sengaku *Zen Texts* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005), 5.

<sup>146</sup> John Blofeld, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 42.

<sup>147</sup> Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind*, 33.

as "a state of inner consciousness, about which we cannot make any logical statement... words are only an index to this state; through them we are enabled to get into its signification, but do not look to words for absolute guidance."<sup>148</sup> Suzuki's interpretation clearly rings true.

#### *Other Zen Accounts of Zen's Indescribable Nature*

For more evidence of the valuable insight of Suzuki's interpretation, we can look to other accounts of Zen teachings. The Zen master and contemporary of Lin-chi, Pai-chang, decided to test his disciples' understanding of Zen by placing a water jug in front of them and asking "If you can't call this a water jug, what do you call it?" The disciple Kuei-shan kicked the jug over and walked away, "thus revealing his enlightened state"<sup>149</sup> Direct action, not words, was the means to attain and express enlightenment.

A similar example is the case of Nan-ch'uan who came across his disciples arguing over a cat. Nan-ch'uan grabbed the cat and declared, "Monks, if you can say a word of Zen, I will spare the cat. If you cannot, I will kill it!" No answer was provided. That evening, the disciple Chao-chou returned and, when he had heard of the master's challenge, he put his sandal on his head and walked off. Nan-ch'uang lauded this answer, which unfortunately, came a bit too late for the cat.<sup>150</sup> Suzuki accurately summarizes this method, a pedagogical approach that uses bizarre means to force the disciple to realize a state of mind inaccessible to the intellect: "The Zen method generally consists in putting one in a dilemma, out of which one must contrive to escape, not through logic indeed, but

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<sup>148</sup> Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 24.

<sup>149</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin *Zen Buddhism: A History*, 215.

<sup>150</sup> Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, 167.

through a mind of a higher order."<sup>151</sup> Again and again, Suzuki insists that Zen's essence cannot be comprehended by the intellect. "The idea of Zen", he writes, "is to catch life as it flows."<sup>152</sup> No intellectualization, no abstract theories, no attachment to words or letters--this is why Lin-chi demands,

"Fellow believers, what are you looking for? This man of the Way who depends on nothing, here before my eyes now listening to the Dharma--his brightness shines clearly, he has never lacked anything...if your mind differentiates, its nature and its manifestations become separated from one another. But so long as it does not differentiate, its nature and manifestations do not become separated."<sup>153</sup>

Suzuki's stubborn insistence on defining Zen as an experience inaccessible to the intellect is clearly consistent with the representation of Zen in the texts *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* and *The Essentials of the Transmission of Mind*.

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<sup>151</sup> Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 39.

<sup>152</sup> Suzuki, 45.

<sup>153</sup> Burton Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 45.

## ***CONCLUSION***

In evaluating Suzuki's legacy, I have drawn upon HCC-style methods to analyze Suzuki's life and work in its historical, political, and cultural context. Evidently, Suzuki's work was tinged with certain biases, most notably his polemical attitude and his Occidentalism. These elements of Suzuki's work are linked to his own historical context as a Japanese scholar coming of age during an intellectually adversarial era whose spirit was epitomized by World's Parliament of Religions. As a Japanese Zen practitioner beginning his academic career during the Japan's modernization, Suzuki was out to prove the superiority of Zen, much like the Japanese delegates to the World's Parliament of Religions.

Suzuki's polemical tone, especially in *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, can also be understood as Suzuki's attempts to push back against the biases of Christian and Western scholars against Mahayana Buddhism (and, by extension, Zen). Suzuki's Occidentalism, it is clear, was not a bias of his own creation but rather was an inversion of Orientalist discourse. Suzuki's work also was made more popular by its reliance on Western sources. Suzuki's notions of "experience" as central to realizing an enlightened state inaccessible to the intellect was influenced by his colleague Nishida, who in turn drew upon William James. Suzuki adopted this concept and crafted it to appeal to a West that was struggling to find religious solace without compromising its ideals of rationalism and freedom of thought.

In all of these findings, I have drawn upon the valuable work done by scholars in the HCC mold such as Bernard Faure and Robert Sharf. I have also noted the valuable insights into the Zen tradition itself by other HCC scholars such as John McRae and

Duncan Williams. However, I also have demonstrated that, even though Suzuki's work was flawed, that it also is a valuable interpretation of Zen teachings. The exclusively HCC approach adopted by Sharf and Faure, which focuses solely on the historical context of Suzuki, is ultimately too narrow to fully evaluate Suzuki's life and work. Even though Suzuki's work was biased and certainly a product of his time, there still is value in his interpretation of Zen.

Suzuki's work provides a valuable perspective into the Zen tradition's own self-representation. His dogged insistence on the incomprehensibility of Zen, and his stubborn affirmation of the necessity of "direct experience" to awaken enlightenment is echoed in the Zen texts *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* and *The Essentials on the Transmission of Mind*. To dismiss Suzuki outright for his flaws, as Sharf and Faure do, is to neglect the importance of understanding the Zen tradition (or any tradition, for that matter) on its own terms. In my Zen class two year ago, we decided to take a vote on Zen, or, more specifically, how one should study it. Should we, the professor asked, understand it from the inside out, in the mold of Suzuki, or take an HCC-style approach? An overwhelming majority voted for the former, citing the need to understand Zen's own self-perception without reducing it to historical, political, or cultural factors. I myself raised my hand for both approaches, reluctant to choose one side to the exclusion of the other. The field of Zen studies has swung from Suzuki's approach in the first half of the twentieth century to an HCC approach today. Perhaps, as the field progresses, there will be a growing recognition of the need to chart a middle path that uses HCC scholarship in combination with Suzuki's insights, creating a wider and more inclusive perspective for the study of Zen.

Dooley

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