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The History and The Practice of Contemporary American Convert Zen Buddhism

When G. Victor Sogen Hori, a Japanese Rinzai monk who had spent thirteen years within the Japanese Zen monastic system, returned to the United States in the late 1990s, he was confused by what he found was representing Zen in America. He wrote that, "although it was possible to continue *koan* training under a Zen roshi at the North American Zen center, I did not feel at home in the Zen center itself."[1] What was it that made this Zen monk feel so uneasy within an institution that was supposedly directly transplanted into America by Japanese Zen masters themselves only a few decades earlier? What would account for the apparent incongruence between these two presumably closely related traditions?

Within the following essay, I will trace America's involvement with Japanese Zen Buddhism historically. I will begin with the West's discovery and classification of early Indian Buddhism as "true" or "pure" Buddhism, whereas lived Buddhist traditions were seen as degenerate and corrupted versions of this original purity.[2] I will then show how a group of Western-educated Japanese intellectuals, most prominently Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, exploited this concept of "true" Buddhism in their quest to establish the cultural superiority of Japan in the late 19th and into the 20th centuries, arguing that Japanese Zen embodied the post-Enlightenment ideal of a highly rational, scientific religion, devoid of ritual and superstition, in much the same way that Western scholars had touted early

Indian Buddhism.[3]

These Japanese intellectuals created a new kind of Buddhism, called *shin bukkyo*, literally translating as "New Buddhism," which was highly commensurate with the Western philosophical tradition that they had studied in newly formed Japanese universities, and it was this form of Zen that would that they would present to America and the West beginning with the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. I will argue that Contemporary American Zen Buddhism is largely a product of this tradition, as Suzuki was the chief emissary and proponent of Zen in America. The fact that Suzuki was a widely read philosopher who combined many different religious traditions into an essentialist ideal of Zen as the heart of all religions is also something that is reflected in the American tradition.

After discussing Suzuki's work in America, beginning with his relationship with the German born philosopher and philologist Paul Carus, I will turn to a variety of contemporary articles to offer a very brief sketch of how Zen is currently being practiced in America as a result of this history. I will include "traditional" Japanese Zen monk G. Victor Sogen Hori's critique of American Zen, as well the work of a number of American scholars concerning the impact of Western psychology and egalitarianism on the tradition, in order to show how it has been shaped by this history while it has also been coming into its own as a distinctly American phenomenon.

The study of Philology and European Protestant Universalism

As is now well documented, the Western study of Buddhism was, in its inception, largely concerned with its study as a textual tradition. This was due to the fact that, while it had been absent from India as a lived tradition for centuries, its written legacy was discovered presumably intact. As Tomoko Masuzawa explains, "The very essence of this newly recognized religion was in the hands of European learned society…One might say that Buddhism as such came to life, perhaps for the very first time, in a European philological workshop."[4] Western scholars were fascinated by the philosophy and insights they found in the early Buddhist texts, and it was not long before parallels were drawn with Christianity. Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, quickly became acknowledged as something like an Indian Luther, a religious reformer who courageously stood in opposition against the powerful and corrupt, ritual-obsessed Brahmans.[5] Buddhism was seen as the first truly universal religion, beating Christianity to the punch by half of a millennium.

Because the Western study of Buddhism was solely focused on the early texts of the tradition, completely divorced from any actual lived tradition, scholars were able to create their own version of Buddhism which largely reflected their own fantasies of a highly rationalized, philosophical religion, lacking ritual trappings and superstition, that they would find fully commensurate with a post-Enlightenment embodiment of modern, evolved religion. In short, Buddhism was more or less constructed in terms of its largely perceived affinity with an idealized, modern form of Protestant Christianity as well as its romanticization as an exotic, Oriental religion. This idealized presentation was hard to compete with, and the fact that a good number of Christian advocates took it upon

themselves to continuously defend Christianity against Buddhism is evidence that Buddhism was considered a threat to European ethnocentrism. In fact, it was widely feared, or hoped for by some, that Buddhism would reveal itself as a literal historical precursor to Christianity, proving its inherent superiority as the original universal faith of mankind.[6]

As immanent as these threats to Christianity seemed, however, they were to some extent tempered by the fact that "true" or "pure" Buddhism, that is, the type of Buddhism that arose solely from the textual analyses of Western scholars, was no longer to be found anywhere on earth. The lived Buddhist traditions, as they were found in contemporary Asia, were seen as corrupted forms of the tradition, barely comparable to the pristine, original glory of "true" Buddhism.[7] "True" Buddhism, like the Orient itself, was treated as a blank canvas upon which Western intellectuals could paint anything they desired. And what they desired above all was an essential, universal religion, which was highly philosophical, ahistorical and purified of all superstition and ritual. And it is through the doorway created by this fantasy reflection of Protestant Christian universalism that Japanese Zen Buddhism would come to work its way into the heart of modern American religious sentiment.

New Buddhism and Japanese Nationalism

D.T. Suzuki, who would become the foremost emissary of Zen to America, would often describe Zen Buddhism as follows:

> Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion. Every intellectual effort must culminate in it, or rather must start from it, if it is to bear any

> practical fruits. Every religious faith must spring from it if it has to prove at all efficiently and livingly workable in our active life. Therefore Zen is not necessarily the fountain of Buddhist thought and life alone; it is very much alive also in Christianity, Mohammedanism, in Taoism, and even positivistic Confucianism. What makes all these religions and philosophies vital and inspiring, keeping up their usefulness and efficiency, is due to the presence in them of what I may designate as the Zen element.[8]

The fact that this definition, essentialist to the core, is what would come to be accepted in the West as Zen, has a lot to do with the above discussion of Protestant Christian universalism. In order to make sense of this connection, let us begin with a brief sketch of the life of D.T. Suzuki and the creation of *shin bukkyo*, or New Buddhism, in Japan.

Suzuki was a layman throughout his life, never an ordained priest or Dharma holder, whose Zen training largely took place while he was a university student, between the years of 1891 to 1897. As Robert Sharf explains, his "Zen training was squeezed into weekends and school vacations, when he would commute to Kamakura to practice…"[9] In spite of this, Suzuki is said to have attained *satori,* or enlightenment, in 1896, during *rohatsu,* an intensive training week commemorating the Buddha's enlightenment. Avoiding a judgment of whether or not this experience was authentic, there is no doubt that it was certainly good timing, as Suzuki would travel as a missionary of Zen to America only a few months later. Suzuki's teachers in Zen, Imakita Kosen and his successor Shaku Soen, were both greatly concerned with the propagation of Buddhism in the West, perhaps, as we shall see, as much as they had been with defending Buddhism in Japan.

At the onset of the Meiji period in 1868, when Japan entered into the international community and began to industrialize and modernize at an astounding rate, the Japanese government began to persecute their native Buddhist institutions under the charge that they propagated "a corrupt, decadent, anti-social, parasitic, and superstitious creed, inimical to Japan's need for scientific and technological advancement."[10] The Japanese government dedicated itself to the complete eradication of the tradition, which was seen as a foreign "other," incapable of fostering the nativist sentiments that would be vital for national, ideological cohesion.[11] In response to this attack, a "vanguard of modern Buddhist leaders emerged to argue the Buddhist cause."[12] These leaders largely stood in agreement with the government persecution of Buddhism, stating that the Buddhist institution was indeed corrupted and in need of revitalization. Some even saw the persecution as a purifying force that would cleanse Japanese Buddhism of its "degenerate accretions and affect a return to the original essence of the Buddha's teaching."[13]

This movement was known as *shin bukkyo*, or "New Buddhism." The leaders themselves were university-educated intellectuals who appropriated a vast body of Western intellectual ideals, including the post-Enlightenment search for a modern, scientific religion. The fact that what was presented to the West as Japanese Zen would be so commensurate with European Protestant universalism is due to this fact, as such ideals directly informed the creation this new tradition. Proponents of New Buddhism were concerned with internal reform and a return to "pure" or original Buddhism, what they saw as the vital essence of Buddhism, devoid of ritual and superstition, highly empirical and scientific, an ideal tradition that Western scholars themselves had largely created a

few decades earlier. Imakita Kosen, who would become D.T. Suzuki's teacher in Zen until his death in 1892, was an important figure in this movement. Largely responding to the Reformation critique of elite institutionalism, he opened Engakuji monastery to lay practitioners, which would allow students like Suzuki unprecedented access to Zen. However, advocates of New Buddhism, like Kosen and his successor Shaku Soen, not only saw this movement as a defense of Buddhism against government persecution, they also saw it as a way to bring their nation into the modern world as a competitive, cultural force. Kosen himself was even employed by the Japanese government as a "national evangelist" during the 1870s.[14] The cause of Japanese nationalism and the portrayal of Japan as a superior cultural entity on the international scene were at the heart of the Zen missionary movement. Shin Bukkyo Zen would be touted as the essential Japanese religion, fully embodied by the *bushido*, or samurai spirit, an expression of the Japanese people in the fullest sense, in spite of the fact that it was almost completely a recent invention in Japan that was based on Western essentialist ideals.

Shaku Soen, Suzuki's teacher in Zen after Kosen's death in 1892, made this telling statement about what was at stake in bringing Buddhism to the west:

> Religion is the only force in which the Western people know that they are inferior to the nations of the East…Let us wed the Great Vehicle [Mahayana Buddhism] to Western thought…at Chicago next year [referring to the 1893 World Parliament of Religions] the fitting time will come.[15]

According to Martin Verhoeven, "The spiritual crisis of the West exposed its Achilles' heel to be vanquished. Though economically and technologically bested by the Western

powers, Japan saw a chance to reassert its sense of cultural superiority via religion."[16] It was through the World Parliament of Religions, in 1893, that the highly Westernized version of Zen Buddhism that we know of today, founded as it was by proponents of New Buddhism and largely informed by Western intellectual ideals, would first make its way onto America soil. The story of American Zen Buddhism largely begins at this event, at the Parliament in Chicago, and even more specifically with the meeting of German philosopher Paul Carus, Shaku Soen, and Soen's translator, the young D.T. Suzuki.

Zen comes to America: Paul Carus and D.T. Suzuki

Paul Carus would become one of the single most important figures in the dissemination of this new breed of Zen Buddhism into America. Born in 1852 in Ilsenburg am Harz in Germany, Carus, the son of a prominent Reformed minister,[17] earned a Ph.D. in philology in 1873 and immigrated to America in 1884.[18] Like many well-educated Western scholars of his time, Carus had become deeply troubled by the apparent incommensurability of modern science and Christianity, a religion that had been extremely important to him in his youth. In his own words, "From my childhood I was devout and pious…On growing up I decided to devote myself as a missionary to the service of Christianity. But Alas! Inquiring into the foundations of the fortress which I was going to defend, I found the whole of the building undermined."[19] As a solution to this crisis, Carus took it upon himself to formulate a movement that would help bridge the gap between science and religion. He became obsessed with the creation of what he called the "Religion of Science," which would be the ideal post-Enlightenment religion,

highly philosophical and rational, completely purified of superstition and ritual.

Until the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, Carus' opinion of Buddhism was neutral at best. Only twice does he refer to it during his seven-year term as editor of *Open Court.*[20] After the Parliament, however, his attitude underwent a sea change of the highest magnitude. Within a single year, he had already published *Gospel of Buddha*, making clear his belief that Buddhism, the kind that had been presented to him by Shaku Soen at the Parliament, was the Religion of Science that he had been looking for all along. As Carus explained in *Open Court*, "In Buddhism, theory is nothing, and facts are everything...[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."[21] Before the turn of the century, he would come to publish seven more books, six of which would focus on Buddhism. During this time he also caught the attention of Shaku Soen, whose views on Buddhism could not have matched more perfectly.[22] As such, Soen came to see Carus as the ideal agent for the propagation of his ideas in America. Suzuki, then Soen's assistant, also showed a great deal of interest in Carus' ideas as well, translating the *Gospel of Buddha* into Japanese soon after its publication. Based on this shared interest, in 1897, Suzuki would travel to America to live with Carus in LaSalle, Illinois, for the next eleven years. It was in this way that Zen's foremost emissary to America would make his entrance.

The impact of D.T. Suzuki on Western culture cannot be overemphasized. As early as 1927, James Bisset Pratt was quoted as saying, "there are two kinds of cultured people.

Those who have read Suzuki, and those who have not."[23] Paul Carus was not the only Westerner to find exactly the religion he was looking for in Suzuki's Zen. This was even more the case after Suzuki had appropriated a great deal of Carus' own ideas about religion, often speaking of Zen with almost completely Christian terminology. For example, Suzuki takes for granted the existence of God and equates him with the Buddhist concept of "ultimate reality,"[24] and treats Christ as a being who has attained Buddhist enlightenment.[25] To those Western intellectuals who were in awe of the pristine, "pure" Buddhism that they had largely created in their own image, Suzuki brought them a contemporary, living tradition that heralded exactly the same qualities. He even went as far as to explain that all of the seemingly pessimistic qualities of Buddhism that had been unpalatable to many Westerners, such as the idea that life is characterized by suffering, were actually attributable to early Buddhism only, and that Japanese Zen had cleansed itself of such sentiments.[26] According to Suzuki, Zen lacked emphasis on doctrine, ritual, and superstition, while focusing on the "pure experience" of the here and now.

Suzuki's emphasis on "pure experience" was largely appropriated from Western intellectuals such as Rudolph Otto, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger and William James. Like these Western philosophers, Suzuki and his cohorts were, in Robert Sharf's words, "reacting to the onslaught of Enlightenment values. They sought to reframe our conceptions of the religious such that a core of spiritual and moral values would survive the headlong clash with secular philosophy, science and technological progress. They were thus led to posit an 'essentialist core' of religion, conceived of as a private, veridical, ineffable experience inaccessible to empirical scientific analysis."[27] The utilization of this all-too-familiar essentialist core was not only useful in appealing to

the West, its presence in Japan also allowed it to remain the property of the Japanese people. Suzuki and his cohorts portrayed Zen as the holy grail that Western essentialists had been looking for all along, although it would always be just out of reach to them, as the Western mind was too inherently intellectual, rational, and overly analytic.[29] Such inaccessibility did not stop Suzuki from tantalizing Westerners with it, however, although he did express the possibility that Westernera may eventually be able to grasp Zen in time. Such sentiments were on par with other tactics of Japanese nationalism, or *nihonjinron*, although other Japanese nationalists were purporting Japanese superiority through such mediums as architecture and language, as opposed to religion.[30] The fact that Zen had come to Japan through China was countered by the fact that it had reached its full realization through its manifestation in the Japanese spirit, in Suzuki's view.

Psychology, Democracy, and Lay Practice: Contemporary American Zen

Another way in which Suzuki had appropriated Western concepts in his portrayal of Zen was his use of psychoanalytic terminology. It is no small matter that Suzuki's 1949 volume, *Introduction to Zen*, would include a twenty-page foreword by the now legendary psychoanalyst Carl Jung. In fact, Suzuki's repeated references to the Cosmic Unconsciousness, contained within his lectures on Zen Buddhism in the 1960 volume, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, seem extremely reminiscent of Jung's "collective unconscious," as it is certainly not a commonly used term in traditional Zen Buddhism.

Even though Suzuki had clearly appropriated a number of psychological terms in his

discussion of psychoanalysis in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, the central theme of his discussion was that all of Western science, including psychology, is fundamentally flawed in that it is overly analytical. Suzuki's stance here shows a sea change in his opinion of science since his time with Carus, largely reflecting the view of many intellectuals who had witnessed the ravages of two world wars as well as Einstein's theory of relativity, which proved that even science had room for dramatic change and didn't appear to be as absolutely positivistic at it had seemed.[31] Even more critical than this, however, is his statement that the Western mind itself is inherently problematized by its over intellectualization. He bases this argument around the subject-object dichotomy, stating that analytical thought demands the continual reinforcement of this distinction, whereas Oriental thought, especially Zen, flourishes by transcending it.

According to Suzuki, Zen, not psychology, is the cure for all ailments of the mind, especially the intellectually fixated Western mind, as Zen helps us to successfully link our conscious and unconscious minds by seeing that they are really one and the same.[32] As long as we are obsessed with scientific analysis, our pursuit of truth is doomed to failure, as such analysis will not allow us to bridge the gap between subject and object, conscious and unconscious. Suzuki argued that Zen, like the essence of the human mind, is something that science can never touch, no matter how hard it tries. Zen can only be accessed directly, through "pure experience." While it is clear that Suzuki was attempting to continue his critique on the West as well as to support his claim of inherent Oriental superiority, what is perhaps most notable is that he was largely reacting against the parallel being drawn between Zen and psychology itself. Suzuki's goal of spreading his

brand of Zen Buddhism to the West had been immensely successful by this time, and it should have come as no surprise to him that Westerners would eventually begin to make the tradition their own. Within these lectures, Suzuki had attempted to reverse this appropriation, asserting the utter independence of Zen from Western psychoanalysis. Unfortunately for him, the damage had already been done, and, as we can see by his vast utilization of psychological terminology in his presentation of Zen, he was largely responsible for this connection. Furthermore, his decontextualized, ahistorical depiction of Zen as a religion of "pure experience" which is highly practical and devoid of ritual, rendered it particularly comparable to a secular, *"scientific"* system of personal development such as psychology. The emphasis on looking inward, into the mind, to relieve suffering, is also something that is shared by both traditions. The result is that American Zen Buddhism today is so closely linked to the tradition of Western psychology that the two have largely melded together into a single tradition.

In 1983, *Windbell*, the journal for the San Francisco Zen Center, issued the following statement to explain the indefinite leave of absence of its current roshi, or Zen master, Richard Baker: "The precipitating event which brought this about was his relationship with a married resident woman student, and the upset which this caused for those principally involved, and for others in the community who knew about it."[33] The article continues by explaining that Baker, also married, had been "involved in similar situations before."[34] According to G. Victor Sogen Hori, the Japanese monk referred to at the opening of this paper, this scandal had a great deal to do with the blending of American Zen and psychoanalysis. Before dealing with Hori's point in detail, however, it is

important to note that this phenomenon may also have had a lot to do with the type of Zen Buddhism propagated by D.T. Suzuki as well. In the spring of 1993, the Dalai Lama met with twenty-two Western dharma teachers to address the potential dangers of guiding others in the practice of meditation without proper training and personal maturity.[35] The SFZC scandal was squarely a part of this lecture, however implicitly.

According to Blanche Hartman, the current abbess at the SFZC, the fact that Richard Baker was only thirty-six years old when he was appointed abbot of the Zen Center, whereas a Japanese abbot would be at least fifty, as well as the fact that he had become isolated from his peers, is a testament to American Zen.[36] According to Hori, this is due to the fact that, like the system of training that was developed by the small group of New Buddhists in Japan that had created this breed of Zen, American Zen is almost entirely a lay movement. The number of ordained monks is negligible. The difficulty of selecting a qualified abbot from within such an environment seems clear. Furthermore, the role of the American roshi, surrounded by a group of adoring American lay followers steeped in the stories of magical Zen masters from ancient times, as opposed to monks who live with and around him day in and day out, can be seen as another problematic factor. As Kenneth Kraft explains, "a master was expected to be enlightened, and enlightenment was often understood as perfect in every way. Whereas in Japan and other Buddhist countries familiar with countless living representatives of the tradition tempered the urge to idealize, in the West authentic teachers were virtually unknown, and misconceptions about the 'Zen master' often went unchecked."[37] The prominence of the laity in American Zen is something we will come back to later. For now, let us return to the

subject of Western psychology and its impact on Zen.

It is significant to note that after Baker roshi's dismissal from the SFZC, it was not Japanese *vinaya,* or precept, experts that were called on to repair the damage. Instead, "they brought in abuse counselors and created groups sessions organized on therapeutic, not Buddhist, models."[38] Clearly, Americans paid little attention to Suzuki's warnings against the limitations of psychotherapy, and it would be the addition of this Western tradition that would be America's great contribution to their brand of Zen. In fact, American Zen Buddhists would come to see psychotherapy as an inherent advancement of the tradition, making it all the more scientific and practical. Today, a significant number of American Zen centers have psychotherapists as their Dharma teachers, and at places like the Los Angeles Zen Center, group therapy sessions have become an integral part of their practice.[39] It is clear that many American Zen practitioners see the search for enlightenment as just another form of psychotherapy. Not all Japanese Zen Buddhists, however, would share the view that psychology and Zen make such an ideal match.[40]

In his article, *Japanese Zen in America*, G. Victor Sogen Hori argues that because Americans are accustomed to the psychotherapeutic model as the definitive model for personal growth, their automatic response to the master/disciple relationship is to recreate the therapist/patient relationship. The roshi is treated as an analyst, and practitioners instinctively divulge all of their most personal information to him or her. According to Hori, such a relationship creates a great deal of psychological dependence for the practitioner on the roshi, and the possibilities for abuse, including the type of abuse

displayed by Richard Baker roshi, are greatly enhanced.[41]

In contrast to this situation, Hori explains that in Japan, while a great deal of intimacy and even love exists between master and disciple, intimate conversations are extremely rare, and psychological dependence, as found in America, is not readily fostered. The master/disciple relationship is also treated with a high level of social restraint and ritual formalism, to the point that forming such dependency, and its accompanied potential for abuse, would be almost impossible. Furthermore, Hori explains that in Japan, the roshi is not the only authority figure. Senior monks often provide more training than the master himself by continually scolding junior monks for making mistakes of any kind.[42] This method of training, referred to as "mutual polishing," is the key to proper Zen training, according to Hori, as it is an integral part of the Japanese Zen monastic system, where Zen practice exists as a total experience.[43] Monks are not given instruction of any kind, and are taught to learn their duties by watching others, thereby integrating their training into every moment of their lives. Each monk is constantly in a position of teacher, to junior monks, and student, to senior monks and the roshi, where daily life itself expounds the breakdown of intellectualization and discriminatory thinking. Compassion is also an important part of these relationships, and Hori makes his feelings clear that the Western stereotype of the Zen monastery as a form of "boot camp" is a gross misinterpretation.[44] To Hori’s great dismay, this system has been completely removed from American Zen, where it is seen as inhumane and cruel.[45]

According to Hori, Americans, obsessed with notions of egalitarianism and extremely

distrustful of authoritative hierarchy of any kind, have taken steps to "purify" the tradition of such elements. As the words of Dr. Joanna Macy, a popular speaker at Buddhist conferences, make clear:

> We are participating in a balancing of Buddhism that has great historical significance…I see Buddhism as a tradition that has suffered under several thousand years of patriarchy. Now there is a return, and we can see more clearly the male-dominated, hierarchical patterns that have arisen in the last two millennia…We do not have to buy into hierarchical understanding of what power is, because the central teaching of Lord Buddha himself—the vision of dependent co-arising—shows that power is essentially relational and reciprocal.[46]

Hori's response to this is that the type of hierarchy that he is referring to is highly reciprocal in nature, an important fact apparently misunderstood by Dr. Macy. But she is not alone in purporting such views. American Zen Buddhists on the whole see themselves as correcting hierarchy by replacing it with democracy, although, according to Hori, with little success. He explains that while the roshi is now often elected by vote in American Zen centers, the small number of monks at each center often form an isolated, elitist group in opposition to the lay majority, creating a management/worker distinction that is counterproductive to the reciprocal nature of Zen training. According to Hori, in the Japanese Zen monastery, each member of the monastic community is constantly learning and teaching one another, and no such distinction exists. Even for those monks who take office, their positions only last for several months at a time before there are moved elsewhere, thereby inhibiting the creation of an elite class.

At this point the reader should be even more aware of an important distinction between "traditional" Zen Buddhism in Japan and American Zen that has already been discussed

earlier. The type of Japanese Buddhism that Hori is describing is a monastic movement, whereas the American tradition is a lay movement. The fact that a lay version of such an intensive monastic discipline could be rendered plausible is, once again, largely due to the influence of D.T. Suzuki. It is important to note that the breed of Japanese Zen that was propagated by New Buddhism ideologues, such as Imakita Kosen and Shaku Soen, was not typical of Japanese Zen during their time, nor is it typical of Japanese Zen now.

Although greatly altered by the Meiji restoration, for example, with the end of the practice of celibacy for priests, Japanese Zen still flourishes as a monastic tradition. The Zen Tradition in Japan, aside from the New Buddhism style of it, required a great deal of time and discipline from monks that laity, especially working Americans with families, could never hope to find. Zen monks were often expected to have spent several years in intensive doctrinal study, memorizing sutras and pouring over commentaries, before even entering the monastery to undergo *koan* practice in *sanzen* with the roshi.[47] The fact that Suzuki himself was able to do so as a layman was entirely the invention of New Buddhism. Furthermore, the fact that doctrinal analysis was such a key component in traditional Zen practice in Japan is further evidence that Suzuki was solely preaching the New Buddhism version of the tradition to the West. As Hori points out, in Japan, *koan* practice is highly ritualized and requires a great deal of scholarly analysis and memorization. While Suzuki argues, in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, that this practice has become highly stereotyped, and is deteriorating in Japan,[48] Hori acknowledges the possibility of this but points out that, "a full understanding of Zen

requires that one knows the Zen within history, language, and culture. More practically speaking, without that literary and intellectual understanding, one is crippled as a teacher no matter how clear and open one's eye of enlightenment."[49] Hori explains that, while there is truth to Suzuki's emphasis on direct experience in Zen practice, there is a counterbalance of intellectual effort that needs accompany it.

According to Hori, the fact that Suzuki's brand of Zen has largely become the heart of American Zen Buddhism has certainly had its problematic affects for the efficacy of practice in America, perhaps most significantly in his portrayal of the inherent plausibility of achieving the height of monastic achievement as a layperson who engages in it at level of a weekend hobby. While Suzuki continually purported the difficulty of grasping Zen, he simultaneously described it as a simple process. In his own words, "the truth of Zen, just a little bit of it, is what turns one's humdrum life, a life of monotonous, uninspiring commonplaceness, into one of art, full of genuine inner creativity."[50] Hori's article stands as a warning to us that, while perhaps palatable to the West, Suzuki's Zen may have its shortcomings, and that, "by casting out un-American elements, we are in danger of throwing out the 'Buddha with the bathwater.'"[51] It is important to note, however, that Hori's discussion has been included here largely due to its considerable value in placing the American tradition, as well as the version of Japanese Zen that he has experienced, in clear relief by giving it a strong point of comparison, not for the purpose of denigrating the tradition itself.[52]

Conclusion

It is clear that D.T. Suzuki was an intelligent Japanese philosopher with sincere beliefs and good intentions. It must be kept in mind, however, that the type of Buddhism that he was evangelizing for and popularizing in the West was something almost entirely new to his era. It was also something that owed a great deal of its substance to the Western post-Enlightenment search for a highly Protestant-informed universal religion, based on rationality and empiricism, highly devoid of ritual and superstition. The degree of his success, however, is undeniable, and can be seen, amongst countless other places, in the title of Mircea Eliade's mid 1960s work, *From Primitives to Zen,*[53] showing the currency it had won as having reached the height of religious evolution. The fact that his portrayal of Zen is still seen as largely representative of the type of Zen that was practiced in Japan prior the advent of New Buddhism, however, makes for a troubling commentary on contemporary religious scholarship. Diana Eck's entirely uncritical portrayal of Suzuki as "the first real cultural translator of the Zen tradition"[54] in her book, *A New Religious America*, published in 2001, is evidence that Suzuki's legacy largely continues unexamined.

The heart of American Zen, especially in its more popular forms, continues to be the brand propagated by Suzuki and his New Buddhism cohorts, albeit tempered to some degree by those who have actually practiced in Japan and returned to America. As an American tradition, Zen is in a state of flux, between tradition and innovation, reflection and alterity. It is an authentic tradition in its own right, however, and as a subject for religious scholarship, deserves to be treated as such. In spite of these facts, however, American Zen is a religion that is far from static and if the direction it has been taken in

by American roshi Philip Kapleau's student, Toni Packer, is any indication, it may eventually cease to exist as a form of Buddhism altogether. While still an aberration from the rest of American Zen, her group has entirely eliminated traditional practices such as chanting, the use of bells, bowing, and the traditional relationship between master and disciple itself, seeing these elements as "inessential, even deleterious to the possibility of awakening."[55] She instead simply focuses on being present in the moment, "openly investigating the network of conditioned thoughts, and allowing the mind to move beyond that network."[56] As David McMahan explains:

> Packer's example is instructive in understanding the character of convert Zen insofar as it embodies the extreme, and yet in some ways the logical, conclusion of an important theme in American Zen that can be traced back to Suzuki: the idea that Zen is more an inner process than a historical tradition or institution.[57]

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[1] G. Victor Sogen Hori, "Japanese Zen in America: Americanizing the Face in the Mirror," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, edited by Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 53.

[2]See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. her chapter on Buddhism: 121-146. Masuzawa's text serves as my chief source concerning the relationship between 19th century Western scholars and early Buddhism.

[3]See Robert Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *History of Religions* (1993): 1-43. The bulk of my discussion on the history of New Buddhism comes from his work.

[4]Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 126.

[5]Ibid., 134.

[6]Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 140-141.

[7]As explained later in my essay, Japanese New Buddhists, such as Suzuki, would attempt to completely reverse this stereotype.

[8]Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki* (New York: Dutton, 1962), 111.

[9]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 12.

[10]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 3.

[11]As is well documented, it was State Shinto, purporting the divinity of the Emperor as the descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu, that would come to perform this function.

[12]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 7.

[15]Martin Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha: Paul Carus and the Transformation of Asian Thought," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, edited by Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 217. Verhoeven's discussion of the relationship between Paul Carus and Japanese New Buddhists forms a central part of my argument.

[16]Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha," 217.

[17]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 13.

[18]Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha," 211.

[19]Ibid.
[20]Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha," 214.
[21]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 15.
[22]See Verhoeven, 216. In his introduction to the Japanese translation of Carus' *Gospel of Buddha*, Soen describes Carus as a "beachhead" for conversion in America. He also explains that he has been requiring his own Zen students to read Carus' works on Buddhism instead of traditional Buddhist texts, as he describes Carus' text as easier to understand.
[23]Lindsay Jones, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), vol. 12, 8887.
[24]Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings*, 265-266.
[25]Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Erich Fromm (New York: Harper, 1960), 55.
[26]Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *What is Zen?* (New York: Perennial Library, 1972), 84.
[27]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 34.
[29]Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," 1-76.
[30]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 35.
[31]Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha," 223-224.
[32]Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," 15.
[33]Sandra Bell, "Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism," in *Westward Dharma*, edited by Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 235.
[34]Ibid, 235.
[35]Ibid., 230.
[36]Bell, "Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism," 237.
[37]Kenneth Kraft, *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 189.
[38]Franz Aubrey Metcalf, "The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology," in *Westward Dharma*, edited by Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 355.
[39]Metcalf, "The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology," 356.
[40]Aside from Hori's article, another of note, in the same collection, is Ryo Imamura's article, "Buddhist and Western Psychotherapies: An Asian American Perspective."
[41]Hori, "Japanese Zen in America," 72.
[42]Hori, "Japanese Zen in America," 57.
[43]Ibid., 53.
[44]Ibid., 60.
[45]Ibid., 58.
[46]Kraft, *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, 187.
[47]See Giei Sato, *Unsui: a Diary of Zen Monastic Life* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973), amongst others.
[48]Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," 56.
[49]Hori, "Japanese Zen in America," 74.
[50]Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," 17.
[51]Hori, "Japanese Zen in America," 77.
[52]Hori's account must be taken for what it is: a sectarian argument from the perspective of a "traditional" Japanese Zen monk; "traditional" here meaning not of the *shin bukkyo* lineage. It is not included simply to bash the American tradition but to show what has changed in translation, and what these changes might mean from a certain perspective.
[53]Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 276.
[54]Diana Eck, *A New Religious America* (New York: Harper, 2001), 186.

[55]David L. McMahan, "Zen for the West," in *Westward Dharma*, edited by Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 227.

[56]Ibid, 227.

[57]Ibid., 228.