

Suzuki Daisetsu's view of Buddhism and the encounter between Eastern and Western thought (鈴木大拙の仏教観と東西思想の出遭い)

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Introduction

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. It's very kind of you to come to this lecture, which has the title *Suzuki Daisetsu's view of Buddhism and the encounter between Eastern and Western thought*. It's brought to you by the kind permission of Ōtani University, and with the assistance of its excellent technicians.

One of the wonderful things which have happened in modern times, as well as many tragedies and desperately evil events, is that "Buddhism" was discovered by the western world. Not only was Buddhism discovered by the western world, it was also transmitted to the western world. *Discovery*, by western scholars from the Frenchman Eugène Burnouf onwards, and *transmission*, by many eastern scholars and advocates such as Nanjō Bunyū, Takakusu Junjirō and Suzuki Daisetsu from Japan, or others from Sri Lanka, belong together in a complex process of interaction. This event of combined discovery and transmission is comparable, in its cultural significance and subtlety, to the transmission of Buddhism from India to China so many centuries ago. Moreover, although this complex process began considerably before his time, there is no doubt that Suzuki Daisetsu played a leading role in it. There is probably no other single writer whose works have had a greater influence on the western reception of Buddhism in general and of Zen Buddhism in particular. He wrote much, and he wrote easily. He carried out scholarly research into Buddhist texts and Buddhist thought, but at the same time he addressed his readers with an endless supply of anecdotes, quotations and teasing remarks. He had his own view of "the west" and of "the east", and he had his own view of "Buddhism".

Today I would like to consider how these three images of "the west", "the east" and "Buddhism" influenced each other in Suzuki's own mind, and to what extent these same

images may be maintained today or are in need of correction. Recent discussions about the *construction* of such images of "the east" or "the west" have to be taken account. Also, views of "Buddhism" today must take into account not only the fruits of much research of international quality carried out both within and outside Japan, but also the impact of images of Buddhism from various traditionally Buddhist countries.

The initial context for Suzuki Daisetsu's encounter with the western world was The World's Parliament of Religions which took place in Chicago 1893. Though he did not attend it himself, he had the task of translating materials for the Japanese Buddhist leader Shaku Soyen. As can be seen from the recorded proceedings of this conference, or as one might better say, this *encounter*, there was a substantial Japanese delegation of representatives who were all at pains to present the claims of Japanese culture, politics and religion to a wider audience. The hosts on the other hand mostly saw it as an opportunity to celebrate what they regarded as the superiority both of western civilisation and of Christianity, sometimes differentiated and sometimes not. Various important voices from Asian countries were heard, notably that of Swami Vivekananda and others from India. Evidently, the whole event was something of a shock for all sides. It subsequently led to great efforts being made by representatives of both Hinduism and Buddhism to get themselves better understood in the western world, and a perception of the need for this is what evidently motivated Suzuki Daisetsu himself.

Typical expressions of the great efforts made in Japan may be found in the pages of *The Eastern Buddhist*, and perhaps more strikingly in the *The Young East*. The former was mostly, and still is mostly devoted to Buddhist studies, as the name implies, while the latter also included contributions from India, e.g. by Rabindranath Tagore, who contributed to the first issue. Another difference between the two is that during the nineteen-thirties *The Young East*, having more modest academic pretensions and containing articles on various topical matters, was gradually drawn into a more ideological direction. Its leading editor, the Buddhist scholar Takakusu Junjirō, also well known as one of the editors of the major modern Japanese edition of the Buddhist scriptures in Chinese, the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, even developed into an ultra-nationalist. Suzuki Daisetsu seems to have escaped this trap. On the other hand he did not entirely escape the intellectual dangers of the *nihonjinron* syndrome, as it later came to be called. His book *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*, based on lectures given in America and England and published in English in 1938, also found favour in Germany under the title *Zen und die Kultur Japans* (1941) at the height of the second world

war in the European arena. This was a time when it was very acceptable in Germany to be astonished at the fascinating exoticism of Japanese culture in general and the connections with martial culture in particular, for example, the so-called "art" of making swords. In all of these matters the construction and interaction of images is of the greatest importance. It is notable that the idea of "the East" (*tōyō*), that is, as opposed to "West", is included in the titles of both of the journals just mentioned. Indeed, the late nineteenth century and the earlier part of twentieth century are full of names and titles which include the element "east". We see it in the name of Tōyō University (in Tokyo), which in its public presentations has always emphasised the contribution of eastern thinkers to the history of ideas, and we find it again in works such as *The Ideals of the East* by Okakura Kakuzō or *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* by Nakamura Hajime.

Suzuki Daisetsu was both an eager communicator in this context, and at the same time he became a serious student of the textual aspect of the Buddhist tradition. Although he began to write much earlier, his most productive period was in the 1920's and 1930's, and during this time he not only wrote several books on Zen Buddhism which have been reprinted and translated again and again, but also carried out textual studies making use of Sanskrit and Tibetan, notably on the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. His translation of this relatively early Mahāyāna text is, to this day, the only one available in a western language. His *Essays in Zen Buddhism* and his other works on Zen such as *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, and *Manual of Zen Buddhism* were all published in the 1930's, that is, during the pre-war period. The effect of this was that, at the end of the Second World War, when a strong interest in Zen Buddhism developed in America and almost immediately thereafter in western Europe, Suzuki's main works were all available. German and other translations followed quickly. New writings also appeared. Some dealt again with Zen Buddhism, for example *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind* (1949) which in its very title seemed to challenge the western philosophical interest in "mind". Indeed, the concept of *mushin* (no-mind) must have seemed at that time to represent a denial of all serious philosophy in the west. At the same time it is interesting that other works specifically took up the interaction with western religious and secular thinking, notably *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (1957) and *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (1960), which also contained contributions by Erich Fromm and Richard de Martino. A German translation of the latter appeared in 1963.

Orientalism, occidentalism and "westernism"

In the four decades since Suzuki Daisetsu died in 1966 we have seen, as everybody knows, the "orientalism" debate, and we hear frequently about how "westerners" create their own images of various cultures and above all religions. We have been told not only about the western "discovery" of Buddhism, but also about the western "invention" of Hinduism, "Daoism", "Yoga", and so on. It is often overlooked that "westerners" are a very mixed class of beings! In fact, as a stereotype, they have been invented.

Indeed, note has been taken recently of the reverse of orientalism, recently termed "occidentalism", which is no less significant. "Occidentalism" implies that Japanese –for example – Japanese intellectuals and cultural figures construct their own invention of "the west". And of course Japanese intellectuals are not alone in this. There are also Muslim images of "the West", which are partly appropriate and partly inappropriate. The process of deconstructing these images produced in Asian cultures has scarcely begun.

Even more recent is the recognition, admittedly by a very small number of people, that both orientalism and occidentalism are based on a fundamental misconception which may be termed "westernism". This refers to the widespread but mistaken idea that somehow modern thought and modern interactions are all the result of "western" proposals or challenges, against which reactions occurred and occur. This assumption is shared by "orientalists" and "occidentalists" alike. Of course there is some truth in it –but it is not the whole truth. When it is argued, as by some, that even "rational thinking" is a western "project" for which we are all somehow dependent on the ancient Greeks, then things have gone too far. For one thing, we have to remember that there is a serious tradition of Indian logic, which was of course important in the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism, even if it somehow makes use of logic to "go beyond" logic. We should also remember that there was a considerable tradition of systematic and critical debate within the intellectual history of Japan itself, notably in the Edo period. For example, a sustained, sophisticated, rationalist critique of Buddhist tradition was mounted by Tominaga Nakamoto (1715-1746). In the past I have been told that the ideas of Tominaga Nakamoto could not possibly have been developed by himself, because they are comparable to western ideas! Therefore people often assume that there "must have been" western influence on him. Such assumptions are not only impolite, they are also quite erroneous.

Now it must be admitted that it is one of the features of Suzuki Daisetsu's writings that he frequently seems to have presupposed a clear contrast between "eastern" and "western" ways of thinking. In particular he regarded an insistence on logic, as taught in western philosophy, as an obstacle to the understanding of Buddhism. According to his understanding of Zen, illogicalities are not only frequent but also helpful in leading the monk or layman in training to a new view of things. This is indeed characteristic of the Zen Buddhist tradition, especially in its Rinzai form. Western readers attracted by Suzuki's works on Zen Buddhism seem to have found this approach particularly attractive. But could they "understand" it? I believe that some of them could. But if so, then such westerners appear not to have suffered unduly from a so-called "western" way of thinking. Paradoxically therefore, Suzuki held an image, or a caricature, of "western" thinking which was not entirely appropriate. According to that image, westerners would not be able to understand what he was trying to explain. On the other hand there will have been those westerners who helped him to create this image, either by insisting on "logic" in inappropriate situations, or by reinforcing the call for an "exoticist" image of "the East", of an "East", which was supposed to be "different". In other words, they demanded an "illogical" East, which Suzuki Daisetsu then provided. This "East" was of course superior to the merely "logical" West.

Also rather recent in the international discussion is the recognition that a considerable amount of publishing and other cultural activity such as art, and even sport, serves to promote cultural hegemony. Suzuki Daisetsu was caught up in this discourse, and it seems that he narrowly escaped becoming a serious nationalist. As we have seen, some of his writings were published with approval at the height of the Nazi period in Germany. On the other hand, his main international orientation was towards America. His wife Beatrice Lane Suzuki was an American, and she had a long-term influence on his work and personal view of the world. At the same time, neither of them were politically progressive or, as far as is known, even tentatively critical of current political attitudes. Perhaps this slight bending with the wind occurred because they were both so conscious of the complexities of cultural interactions and were interested above all in their own function as communicators. Communicators are always caught between languages and concepts, struggling to look both this way and that, and so it undoubtedly was in the case of Suzuki Daisetsu. It somehow seems appropriate that the cover of a recent republication of his book *Buddha of Infinite Light* depicts Amida Buddha looking back, or rather to one side and back, being an illustration of the famous, unusual statue at the

Eikandō of Zenrinji in Kyōto, that is, the Migaeri Amida. The exercise of compassion requires flexibility, it may be said.

Suzuki Daisetsu and the "essence" of Buddhism

Suzuki's view of Buddhism can fairly be described as arising on the basis of an "essentialist" approach to the interpretation of religious traditions. This means that he assumed that it is desirable and possible to sum up the main point of a religious tradition in brief. This was still a widespread assumption in the mid-twentieth century. Edward Conze, for example, a well known specialist in the study of early Mahāyāna Buddhism, wrote a book entitled *Buddhism. Its Essence and Development* (1951). Suzuki himself wrote a lecture entitled *Bukkyō no tai-i*, the English version of which bore the title *The Essence of Buddhism* (1948, 1968). This lecture was held in the presence of Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito) shortly after the end of the war. The question may arise whether *tai-i* has exactly the same meaning as "essence", but the general comparability is not in doubt.

In many quarters today this approach is criticised as being unhistorical and unsophisticated. If you want to annoy a fellow academic you can suggest that he or she is "an essentialist". You are not supposed to be an essentialist nowadays. People speak of the problem of "essentialism", that is, the problem about those who (it is said) wrongly assume that it is possible to identify the "essence" of a religious tradition. Now it must be said that there is a certain amount of confusion about this. If we are historians, or specialists in the study of religions, we should of course avoid "essentialism". It is not our task to claim that we can authoritatively say what the fundamental or essential meaning of some particular religious faith or orientation is, as if we could invent it or construct it for ourselves. However this does *not* mean that religious people, believers, preachers, expositors and so on, themselves avoid this question. They do not. In fact they may be most concerned to indicate the "real" meaning of their religious tradition, its quintessence, its main point, the *ghee* of the *ghee*, the *daigo*. Indeed it is one of their normal tasks. For example, in the context of Shin Buddhism we often hear that everything really comes down to the attitude of *shinjin*. Naturally, this important concept is locked up in its own language, and is therefore often left untranslated elsewhere. It is very special, very essential. Or we might say that the main point of Buddhist experience can be summed up in words such as *sono mama* or *yama kore yama mizu kore mizu* or *mushin*, to use some phrases found in Suzuki Daisetsu's calligraphies. I won't try to translate them: we

can discuss that later if you want to. In such an understanding of tradition, and one's relationship to it, regular processes are involved, as I tried to explain long ago in an essay entitled "Comparative hermeneutics in religion". Suzuki Daisetsu was one of the most interesting examples cited there. On the one hand his work is very wide-ranging. But then again it is *selective* from within the Buddhist tradition, in a very original way. His particular approach, and his selection, is not dependent on a denominational position, as is often the case. Indeed he communicates his selection as "Buddhism". It is particularly interesting that he used the term *tai-i*, or "cardinal meaning", in the lecture –in the title of the lecture mentioned above. This term also occurs in the *Dankyō, The Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (i.e. Enō) to refer to that which is passed on from master to master, or from mind to mind. In his essay *Bukkyō no tai-i*, Suzuki in fact gives a summary view of some of the leading ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism: compassion, wisdom, the bodhisattva, and so on.

Another example of the "essence" of Buddhism would be the verse which Nāgārjuna respectfully addresses to the Buddha before providing his own famous exposition of emptiness:

No arising and no ceasing
No permanence and no annihilation
No identity and no difference
No arriving and no departing

Before him who can expound causality
And fully destroy all vain theories
I bow my head, before the enlightened one
The greatest exponent of them all

In four lines (or in Chinese in eight lines) Nāgārjuna appears to present the teaching of conditioned arising, *pratītyasamutpāda*, as the central point of Buddhism. Indeed he is not the only one to have regarded this as central, whether as a teaching, or as a matter to be apprehended in the central experience of enlightenment.

Nevertheless there is a problem about such "essences", because they can be and often are *contested*. Thus neutral scholars prefer to leave such matters to the exponents of a religion and

regard all this respectfully from the sidelines. As the previously mentioned Tominaga said: "I am not a follower of Confucianism, nor of Daoism, nor of Buddhism. I watch their words and deeds from the side and then privately consider them."

In spite of the problem about "essentialism", it is extremely interesting to see what "Buddhism" Suzuki Daisetsu was trying to transmit. (I think it's time to have another picture of the great man, to keep you going.) Of course everybody thinks at once of his presentations of *Zen Buddhism*, whether in substantial books such as *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (which are in great part not actually about Zen Buddhism, but about other things, other aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism) or in shorter works for busy people such as *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. However, Suzuki's studies on Sanskrit and Tibetan texts were also carried out with a view to the presentation of his results in English, for the wider world. It must have been a very exciting time of life for him! When I was a young lecturer in England, in the late sixties, the materials on Buddhist studies available for students were still very limited, and at that time I was most grateful for the existence of Suzuki's translations of the *Daijōkishinron* (I'll come back to that in a minute, *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*) and of the *Lankāvatāra Sutra*, also for his substantial book *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* and his introductory work, a very early work, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*.

It is important to remember that Suzuki Daisetsu did not formally represent any particular institution. His overall view of Buddhism was therefore not doctrinally located. The major schools of Buddhism in Japan usually have a rather definite understanding of their teaching or their practice, and it is quite clear that Suzuki's position was not "authoritative" in this sense. When publishers refer to his view of Buddhism as "authoritative", this should not be understood in a narrow sense. In fact, Suzuki developed a modern version of "Buddhism" which had not previously existed as such, a pattern of teachings and communications with which he tried to be true to the story of Buddhism in general and of Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular - but in a new time and under new circumstances.

Suzuki's view of "Buddhism" may therefore be described as non-denominational (*hishuu-hateki* in Japanese). However this may sound unfairly negative, while his contribution was intended to be a positive one. While he taught much about Zen Buddhism, and not a little about Shin Buddhism, his main purpose was to communicate the leading ideas or the basic spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Buddhism of the Great Vehicle. To give an example,

without deference to any school, we find in the *Essays on Zen Buddhism* a lengthy translation and exposition of the *Gandavyūha* from the *Avatāmsaka Sūtra*, which happens to be important in the Kegon school of Buddhism.

In view of the plurality of the Buddhist world, it might be said that there is in any case no single view of "Buddhism" which can be regarded as "authoritative". However, when Suzuki began his work few attempts had been made to present Buddhism as a representation of the whole Buddhist world, or as one might say "ecumenically". It is paradoxical that views of Buddhism which may now challenge a more traditional, denominational version of it are themselves the result of the labours of Suzuki Daisetsu and others. Note that this is also something which westerners wanted. Just as some Japanese converts to Christianity in the nineteenth century wanted a faith without denominations or churches, and (under the leadership of Uchimura Kanzō) invented the Mukyōkai (the Non-Church), so Suzuki Daisetsu invented a pattern of Buddhism which had not previously existed as such. And this is because his western readers needed it, or at least wanted it. I don't know whether they really needed it, but anyway they wanted it! He was very sensitively oriented towards his potential readers and therefore took their expectations into account. He also took their expected misunderstandings into account. His "Buddhism", therefore, was influenced by what he thought was needed for his *communication* of "Buddhism". I'll come back to this again a little later.

Mysticism and difference

At this point I would like briefly to discuss Suzuki Daisetsu's contribution on "mysticism". The "essentialist" assumption often leads to problems, and just such a problem appears in his well known work *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (1957). Much of this collection is devoted to a study of Meister Eckhart, a theme which was later profoundly pursued by Ueda Shizuteru. Suzuki's argument in this collection of related essays was, first, that Zen and Shin (Shin Buddhism) are intimately related, at that level where discriminatory thought ends, thus overcoming the polarisation of *jiriki* and *tariki*, which of course is based on a discrimination. Second, such an overcoming of opposites may also be found in the mystical writings of Meister Eckhart. In this respect, he argued, the experience of Zen or Shin can be regarded as very similar to that of Christian mysticism, in so far as the latter is also not dependent on conceptual differentiation. Putting it briefly, with regard to Christianity, this means that the

closer one is to God, or "God", the more radically does the concept of God itself come to be deconstructed.

When I first read Suzuki's book on mysticism, shortly after it appeared, in Japan in 1962, I found it most fascinating, and indeed mostly very convincing. It is striking that so much material is drawn here from the tradition of Shin Buddhism, in particular from the letters of Rennyo Shōnin and the notebooks of Saichi. This was most instructive, especially as I was also studying the *Tannishō* at the same time. However I came across one problem in the book. The main argument is that the mystical tradition of Buddhism and Christianity come very close to each other – so close that the publisher of the German edition declares on the cover, rather enthusiastically that the differences (somewhere I've got the German, yes this is it; it has a nice "global" cover, and I'm quoting the back of this edition at the moment) –he declares, the publisher declares that the differences between Zen or Shin and the teachings of Christianity are "artificial" (*künstlich*). Indeed Suzuki teaches us here how close they can be. However there is one chapter which contradicts this view completely, namely the chapter which contrasts crucifixion and enlightenment. Here Suzuki explores the significance of the two contrasting physical positions of Jesus on the cross (vertical) and the Buddha, whether in the position of meditation (seated) or of nirvana (horizontal). He sees a profound gulf between them. Unfortunately he concludes that the meaning of the verticality of the cross lies in being argumentative and assertive (typically western, typically Christian!), whereas for most interpreters it would be precisely the opposite. Jesus was on the cross not because he "asserted" himself, or anything else, as some of his disciples apparently expected, but because he accepted or "suffered" the self-assertion of others. The mediaeval hymn *Ave verum corpus...* refers to this as *vere passum*, "truly suffered" and we see here the verbal root from which the grammatical term "passive" comes. Jesus was not the agent of his own crucifixion!

As to the term "mysticism", it may be added that in recent years the study of "mysticism" has made much progress. In particular philosophers of religion have patiently clarified the relation between mystical experience and language, though recently less attention has been paid to the character of "mysticism" in comparative terms. Now there is a particular problem when it comes to discussing the theme of mysticism in Japanese (I would just like to mention this) because the term *shinpi*, though given in most dictionaries, electronic or other, does not really correspond to "mysticism" at all. It means "mysterious" or even "mystificatory", as in the tradition of the "esoteric" Buddhism of Japan (*mikkyō*). The religion of Shinran Shōnin

therefore certainly cannot be described in Japanese as *shinpiteki*, but on the other hand this founder of Shin Buddhism can be characterised in my judgment, in quite a precise sense as "a mystical religious thinker". And this is broadly in line with Suzuki Daisetsu's use of the term "mysticism". If you read the Japanese version of this book you have to be careful because it is translated as *shinpi*, *shinpiteki* or *shinpishugi*, which is not really very appropriate.

The three bodies of the Buddha

Suzuki's choice of western or Christian-theological terms was sometimes appropriate and sometimes less so. As I indicated just now, it seems to me that his use of the term "mysticism" was quite reasonable. On the other hand his use of the term "Trinity" was not very helpful. Indeed, it caused considerable confusion in western studies of Mahāyāna Buddhism when he compared it with the teaching of "three bodies" of the Buddha. Chapter 10 of his early book *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* bears the title "The Doctrine of Trikaya" (i.e. three bodies) and, in brackets beneath, the confusing sub-title "(Buddhist Theory of Trinity)". About this he wrote:

"How did the Buddhists come to relegate the human Buddha to oblivion, as it were, and assign a mysterious being in his place invested with all possible or sometimes impossible majesty and supernaturalism? This question, which marks the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, brings us to the doctrine of Trikaya, - which in a sense corresponds to the Christian theory of trinity." (p.245)

This statement is misleading for two reasons. First, it gives the impression that the "doctrine of Trikaya", i.e. of three bodies of the Buddha, is a more or less central teaching without which Mahāyāna Buddhism can hardly be explained. However, this is not so. The leading themes in early Mahāyāna Buddhism are concepts such as: *bodhisattva*, *prajñā*, *karuna*, *upāya* and *śūnyatā*. Second, it implies that the concept of *trikāya* was available at the time when the Mahāyāna originated, which is not the case. It seems that for Suzuki these two points were connected, in other words that the concept of *trikāya* was both of fundamental importance and early.

Admittedly it would be open to anybody to argue that an "essential" feature of a system might only come to be satisfactorily formulated some time *after* its "rise". Indeed, had Suzuki taken the

comparison with the Christian teaching of the Trinity seriously he might have adopted this point of view. The doctrine of the Trinity took three or four centuries to be worked up into its classical form. However he regarded the Buddhist teaching of "three bodies" as marking "the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism", and others have tended to follow his lead.

Now this combination of a historical confusion with a doctrinal confusion was probably caused by the false ascription of the text known as *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* to the Indian writer Asvaghosa. He is supposed to have lived in the century preceding the Christian era, and as the presumed author of the *Daijōkishinron* (as it's known in Japanese) was thought to have contributed to the original emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. However this Chinese text never in fact existed in Sanskrit, and cannot be dated before the sixth century CE. The section on the "three bodies" found there is quite interesting - but for other reasons.

Quite apart from this major chronological error it should also be noticed that the details of *trikāya* teaching, though interesting, are not at all fundamental to Mahāyāna Buddhism. On the contrary, the interest in its supposedly being "trinitarian" has led to the obscuring of something more fundamental, namely, the binary dialectic which runs through most Mahāyāna teaching on the nature and appearances of the Buddha or buddhas.

It would take too long to discuss the whole development of the *trikāya* concept or doctrine here, but there is this one important aspect to bear in mind. If we trace it out historically, what we find is that in pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism and early Mahāyāna Buddhism there is in fact this *binary* concept which I referred to. Only later came the *triple* concept. Although hardly any chronological questions about the development of early Mahāyāna can be solved with precision, there is nowadays much greater clarity about the broad outlines. And this is quite sufficient for correcting the general framework for discussion about the concept of *trikāya*.

The *Lankāvātara Sūtra* poses more difficulties. It is usually regarded as a sutra from the second, still relatively early phase of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the relevant passages, being in the main body of the work, may be presumed to have antedated the *Mahāyānasūtralamkāra* which is where the *trikāya* doctrine first appears, a little later. Now it is a further irony in the history of images of Buddhism that the *Lankāvātara Sūtra*, which Suzuki Daisetsu studied intensively, also has a concept of three kinds of Buddha. In fact it is possibly the earliest text which refers to the different kinds of Buddhas as threefold. However they are not referred to as *-kāya*.

We come back now to *The Arising of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (the *Daijōkishinron*), dating from the middle of the sixth century C.E., is a summary of Mahāyāna ideas which is loyal to both the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra Schools, thus presupposing their existence. The treatment of the idea of the *trikāya* is similar to that of the earlier *Mahāyānasūtralamkāra*, but the interesting point is that all of the three types of body (J. *shin*) are correlated with the concept of suchness (J. *nyoze*, c.f. Sanskrit *tathatā*, meaning suchness. Thus the underlying dialectic is *binary*. On the one hand there is a certain kind of body, –“body”, which can be distinguished, and then again each "body" has the character of suchness. In other words, although reference is made to three kinds of "buddha-body", these are all understood under *two* aspects, the aspect of their appearance and the aspect of their suchness.

Chronologically proximate is a highly interesting chapter of *The Sutra of Brilliant Golden Light*, (*Konkōmyōkyō*) which has a Chinese date of 569 C.E.. The well known translator of this sutra into German, Johannes Nobel, slipped into a wrong view by rendering the title of Chapter 3 of this sutra as "Die Lehre von den drei Körpern" (i.e. "the teaching of the three bodies"), as if it were a fixed doctrine depending on the number three. That this is mistaken can be seen very clearly in the title itself which is, more precisely, "Distinguishing the three bodies" (*Funbetsusanjinbon* 分別三身品). In this fine text we read that the Dharma Body is without characteristics, while the other two kinds of body are with characteristics. So a Buddha-body can be either *with* characteristics or *without* characteristics. This *binary* dialectic, a movement of thought from the one to the other, is more important than the number three. In a typical Mahāyāna Buddhist way of thinking, we are invited first to differentiate characteristics, but then to learn that in the last analysis there are no characteristics!

So it seems as if Suzuki Daisetsu caused considerable confusion here by talking about the "Trinity". The question is, why did he do it? The chronological misplacement of the *Daijōkishinron* is one thing. It is easy to say this many years later. However, the main problem was that Suzuki Daisetsu was so sensitive, even too sensitive, to the expectations of western readers. By drawing a parallel between *trikāya* and trinity (and of course the element *tri-*, like in a tricycle, is very tempting) he assisted western readers in understanding it somehow. But in turn this led to the problem that the Dharmakāya, or the Buddha of unlimited life-duration, was then absolutised *ontologically*, so that it seemed as if some kind of transcendental theism had been developed, with many other spiritual beings besides. This then came to be regarded as a

significant change from, or even a betrayal of early Buddhism. Of course, I do not believe that this understanding of the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism is justified. But the western readers of those times seem to have wanted it that way. Their wish led Suzuki into his mode of presentation. At the same time, a careful reading of his works shows that he did not himself really *share* such an ontologised view of the Buddha-nature (although it is not altogether unknown in Japanese Buddhism). Suzuki did not share this ontologised view, I don't think. It was put forward because the western readers were looking for it. Rather, he himself regarded all such concepts as mere pointers to an ineffable experience which does not depend on assertions of any kind.

Why did the Patriarch come from the west?

One of the famous Zen Buddhist questions which Suzuki Daisetsu commented on, when teasing and instructing his western readers, runs: "Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?" This may be found in an article in *The Eastern Buddhist* (1933), which was republished in his extremely influential work *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. It is typical of Suzuki's easy-going approach that he simply changed the original question, for western readers, by adding the name! The original runs "Why did the Patriarch come from the west? But he changed it, for western readers. The strange thing is that, in an American perspective, Suzuki himself came from the west, rather from the east. At the same time it may be said that his work reached Europe both from the west and from the east. So we can give up our differentiations here.

Now the basic difficulty in interpreting Suzuki Daisetsu's writings, as a whole corpus, is that he sometimes wants to find similarities with western thought, especially but not only religious thought, while at the same time he also wants to assert a profound difference. This is the fundamental problem about orientalism and occidentalism, which the expressions "east" and "west" inevitably suggest. There is a lot to think about here. We all love "difference". *Vivre la différence!* If there is no "difference" (– Oh I'm sorry, in my manuscript I put *vivre la différence* because we are living at Ōtani University here right next to the shop known as Vivre. But of course it isn't *vivre la différence* but *vive la différence!* You'll have to cut this piece out of the recorded lecture afterwards.) If there is no "difference", culturally and religiously speaking, then there is no need to transmit anything. But if there is a profound

difference, as Suzuki sometimes suggests, then it may not be possible to transmit anything. The question therefore arises: "Can Westerners understand Buddhism?" One answer is "no". But in spite of all the people met by Suzuki Daisetsu who evidently had difficulties with understanding Buddhism, the answer "no" is not a very good one. A better answer is "yes". This answer can be justified by the counter-question: "Can Chinese understand Buddhism?" Whatever we may think about the character of Chinese Buddhism, it is hard to give the answer "no" in this case. After all, if the task of transmission was by definition impossible, the famous question "Why did the Patriarch come from the west?" takes on a particularly hollow tone. In fact, the transmission of Buddhism from India to China may be regarded as one of the great cultural feats of all time. According to R. H. Robinson, "the Chinese" (that is, Chinese Buddhists such as Seng Chao) even understood Mādhyamika Buddhism, even though this was very difficult. Mādhyamika was originally formulated in an Indo-European language, using a strictly formulated logic previously unknown in China and not used very much in East Asia even today! Moreover, if "the Chinese" failed to understand "Buddhism", how could "the Japanese" understand it? Well, of course, many Japanese people do not understand Buddhism. (You are supposed to laugh there. Thank you!) But there have been many great teachers of the Buddhist Dharma in Japan, and in spite of their differences this simple observer has concluded that most of them have understood "it". So the answer "yes" is better than the answer "no". This must also apply to "westerners".

As far as we know, Suzuki Daisetsu himself did not reflect on these matters very much at a meta-level, because he was after all very busy indeed with the process of transmission itself. But by now we have had the advantage of a few more decades to think about it. What is the conclusion? Or, as we should better say, how may we regard this matter now? It is true to say that the elucidatory process is open, and critically informed, in a way which was not conceivable fifty years ago. Moreover, the process of the diachronic transmission of "Buddhism" has become very complex. In particular, many share in it who do not maintain a denominational affiliation. Now whatever may be felt about the needs of religious organisations, thinking people can be quite happy about this. On the other hand, we should not think too much! The "simplicities" are important and if we think too much we may fail to understand them. An aspect of Suzuki Daisetsu's skill certainly was that he could often bring things down to a simple point which broke through the complexities. That is the meaning of his coming both from the east and from the west.

Non-discrimination as an "eastern", Buddhist virtue

I think we can now understand much better how Suzuki Daisetsu's view of Buddhism was constructed, why he translated and interpreted the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, why he wrote *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, and why he translated *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*. In so far as non-discrimination was the message, then the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* was a perfect text. He also used shorter versions of the *Prajñapāramitā Sūtra* for this purpose. He could have used *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, but he left this to another translator in *The Eastern Buddhist*. Suzuki's presentations of Zen Buddhism spoke to an audience who were prepared to listen to an "authoritative" voice which declared that "western" ways of thought, with which they were disenchanted, could be overcome by deconstruction. The presentation of Shin Buddhism was insightful and sincere, but showed this Buddhism of faith in a similar light to Zen Buddhism, that is, as based on a rationally disjunctive, subjective experience which did not presuppose a systematic or logically built-up doctrinal structure. Typically, he emphasises the *kono mama* of Saichi, just as he is at pains to explain the notion of "suchness" (*tathatā*) in his writings on Zen. Yet it is striking that he went to the trouble of translating Shinran Shōnin's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which was his last major work of translation. What was his motivation here? Institutionally it reflects the fact that he not only had a life-long loyalty to the Rinzai Zen tradition of Engakuji in Kamakura, but also a later loyalty to the Shinshū oriented Ōtani University, where the offices of *The Eastern Buddhist* were also located, and still are. But I think there is more. While enjoying the spontaneity and the intellectual elasticity of Zen Buddhism, to which he found a certain counterpart in the non-intellectual, more or less mystical notion of *kono mama* in Shin Buddhism, he also displayed (and this often goes unnoticed) a certain recognition of the *systematic* nature of Buddhist thought. In a sense this is provided for Shin Buddhism by the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Now systematic teaching is not a feature of Buddhism which western readers necessarily want to know about, as Suzuki realised, but at the same time they do want to know what is the main point of Buddhism or, as it used to be said, what is its "essence". To approach this problem, playful writing was not enough. It was necessary to *summarise* positions in Buddhism –in "Buddhism", OK? – and in particular in "Mahāyāna Buddhism", which were not based on specific, selected sutras. Suzuki rather avoided sutras which provide the main doctrinal focus of a particular denomination. There is no work by him on *The Lotus Sutra* for example, or the *Dainichikyō*, or even on the *Amida Sanbukyō*. But he did write his *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* and he

also translated the *Daijōkishinron* which is a systematic work. So in a sense the translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* continued this aspect of his work although, perhaps unfortunately, it appeared only *after* he had already established his dominant reputation with his works on Zen so that less notice was taken of it in the western world.

Conclusions

I have four conclusions. But before I come to them I would just like to record, personally, that apart from having benefited from reading Suzuki Daisetsu's works, I have the very slightest, indirect connection (what in Japanese would be called an *en* –just a very tiny little *en*) with Suzuki Daisetsu, and this arose when, in 1965, I had the opportunity in Tokyo to check his English, just a foreword for a book which he had written for his friend R.H. Blyth, a resident of Japan and another interpreter of Zen who helped to shape its modern image. There was little to correct in the foreword – I think one comma was shifted, or something like that – but unfortunately my hope of meeting the great man briefly myself was not possible because of his very advanced age. Visiting the exhibition at Ōtani University a little while ago (the exhibition about Suzuki Daisetsu), I experienced some nostalgia when seeing not only the books which I read in those days, laid out in glass cases, but also Suzuki's typewriter –here's his suit, here's his suitcase –suitable for travelling abroad by sea. It reminded me of my own first voyage to Japan by sea in 1961, with one suitcase, one suit, some books, and my first, remarkably similar typewriter, which I bought in Hong Kong on the way. And it is against the background of these simple associations, perhaps rather sentimental, that I have presumed to make some criticisms of Suzuki's work above. However, somehow I feel that I do understand his project, his "project", as they say nowadays.

Now to my four conclusions. First, the choices made by Suzuki Daisetsu were fundamentally led by what he regarded as necessary for the formulation of Buddhism for western people. In turn therefore, it was largely the needs of western people in the twentieth century, as he perceived them, which determined Suzuki's own view of Buddhism itself. I put this forward as a hypothesis. In this short exploration my hypothesis is little more than a *hint*, based mainly on the western language works. It is in no way intended to disparage the importance of his Zen training at Engakuji in Kamakura. Nor do I mean to underestimate the influence of his interaction with the Kyōto school, which however may sometimes have been *overestimated*.

In any case, it would be very valuable if future researchers would consider the importance of Suzuki's own view of "the west" more exhaustively, taking into account the Japanese writings and in particular his correspondence. I expect that the results might lead to a strengthening of this hypothesis (I leave it to future researchers), and in any event to a better understanding of the precise importance of Suzuki's view of the "west" on his view of "Buddhism".

Second, Suzuki Daisetsu's works are a reflection of east-west interaction in the twentieth century. They could not have been written, for example, in the eighteenth century, and it would not be quite appropriate any more to write in this manner in the twenty-first century. Yet this does not detract from the lasting value of his work. It is the story of one man's enduring and patient encounter with a foreign language and a foreign way of thinking, mainly the American, with which he was concerned through most of his adult life. Through Suzuki's experiences we can enjoy the fascination of an individual's discovery of a world beyond the first world, beyond his first world. It is one of the many such stories of modern Japan.

Third, Suzuki's Zen is drawn from Rinzai Zen, and more or less ignores Sōtō Zen. This is partly because of his experience at Engakuji, and partly because his perception of the western world was that an interactive discourse, more typical of Rinzai Zen, was expected. Of course, Sōtō Zen has also been transmitted to the western world, but it is more difficult to write exciting books about it! While Suzuki's Zen is drawn mainly from Rinzai Zen, and from the substantial Chinese tradition, it is not altogether clear whether it represents Japanese Rinzai Zen in general. Probably it is best to think of it as "Suzuki's Zen".

Fourth, Suzuki Daisetsu's view of "Buddhism" (in inverted commas) represents a new model which only became possible in modern times. Suzuki is somehow riding a bicycle: that is, he is turning two wheels. He is presenting "Zen Buddhism", and he is presenting "Mahāyāna Buddhism". It would be interesting to consider whether one of the wheels is larger than the other, or even includes it. Which one would include which is a little bit of a problem. The answer is not obvious. Because of the historically strong denominational structure of Japanese Buddhism, it is only in modern times that this question has become really visible. And this is partly because of a new interest in the identification of reliable manuscripts, in the question of the origins of the Mahāyāna, and in questions about the relations between the various early sutras and schools. In a new way therefore, and Suzuki Daisetsu was part of this process, it has become possible to ask, "What *is* the Mahāyāna?" Moreover, quite apart from questions

of historical research, Buddhist scholars and teachers in Japan have increasingly tended to present their own particular traditions in the light of this question, in order to avoid being just an isolated relic from the past. So in a way Suzuki Daisetsu's early book *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* symbolises the opening of a new period of an integral, inter-confessional Buddhism. A tentative answer to the question about the two wheels of the bicycle might be that it is Mahāyāna Buddhism which is the larger, within which Zen, for Suzuki, represents a smaller, concentrated centre. (A little bit of concentration is being applied to that block of wood, a concentrated centre.) In later life, due above all to Suzuki's association with Ōtani University, he regarded Shin Buddhism in a similar way, as a smaller concentrated centre within Mahāyāna Buddhism. Because of demands from the western world and increasingly also from within Japan, these smaller focal points tended to take over, leading to his converse with the Kyōto School and to writings and translations in the field of Shin Buddhism. Yet he realised that, as with all the later forms of Buddhism in East Asia, the central insights to which recourse is made are to be found in the origins. And it is for this reason that his study and exposition of early Mahāyāna sutras had continued well into the nineteen-thirties. In this sense we see in the work of Suzuki Daisetsu, in interaction with the western world, a new point of departure for the understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And this approach continues, I believe, to represent a serious challenge to the contemporary Buddhist world.

Thank you very much for your kind attention; and we can shortly have some discussion if you would like to stay a few more minutes. Thank you.

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