

D. T. Suzuki and the Question of War¹

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Introduction

Few books in recent years have so deeply influenced the thinking of Buddhists in Japan and elsewhere as Brian Daizen Victoria's *Zen at War* (Victoria 1997). The book's great contribution is that it has succeeded, where others have not, in bringing to public attention the largely unquestioning support of Japanese Buddhists for their nation's militarism in the years following the Meiji Restoration in 1868 (when Japan opened its borders after nearly 250 years of feudal isolation) up until the end of WWII. As a Japanese Buddhist myself, I personally feel a deep sense of gratitude that this aspect of our history has been so clearly brought to light, since it is imperative that all Japanese Buddhists recognize and take responsibility for their traditions' complicity in the militarist government's actions. This applies to the Pure Land and Nichiren traditions as much as it does to Zen. Unless Japanese Buddhists sincerely repent these mistakes and determine never to repeat them, they cannot awaken to the true spirit of peace that is the necessary starting point for the creation of a world free of war. Buddhists everywhere must rediscover this spirit and make it the basis of all their activities, both at the personal and institutional levels. Otherwise, even if we promote harmony and nonviolence externally,

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internally our thoughts and actions will not partake of the Dharma-seal of enlightenment.

Despite its many contributions, however, *Zen at War* left me with the impression that the author, in his desire to present as strong a case as possible, often allowed his political concerns to take precedence over scholarly accuracy. This was especially the case with regard to his portrayal of Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki (1870–1966), whom Victoria depicts as an active supporter of the Japanese WWII war effort. This is a very serious accusation, given the importance of the issues raised in *Zen at War*.

I had the opportunity to become closely acquainted with Suzuki and his views on war when I worked at the Matsugaoka Bunko 松ヶ岡文庫 in Kamakura under his guidance from 1964 until his death in 1966. This period of contact with Suzuki, as well as my own study of his works in the years since then, have left me with an impression of Suzuki and his thought that is far different from the picture presented by Victoria. This disparity, combined with the desire to set the record straight, have inspired the present attempt to clarify what I regard as Suzuki's true attitude to war.

All scholars employ quotations from relevant texts to support and develop their arguments, and are of course at liberty to select those passages that best suit their purposes. Even so, Victoria's highly selective citations from Suzuki's works often seem motivated less by a desire to clarify Suzuki's actual views than by a determination to present a certain picture of the man and his work. As I read *Zen at War*, wondering if Suzuki had indeed taken the positions that Victoria attributes to him, I checked each and every quotation against the original Japanese texts, an experience that left me with a number of questions regarding his use of Suzuki's writings. Ideally, every position attributed to Suzuki in *Zen at War* deserves close reexamination, but considerations of space do not allow this. I will attempt, nevertheless, to evaluate the points Victoria raises and the evidence he presents as I clarify what I feel are Suzuki's true views. In the process I will quote rather liberally from his works in order to provide the reader with as full a context as possible.

Victoria attacks Suzuki on several different points, which may be summarized as: (1) Suzuki, particularly in his first book, *Shin shūkyō ron* 新宗教論 (1896, hereafter *A New Theory of Religion*) and subsequent writings on Bushido, actively supported Japanese militarism and its actions; (2) Suzuki was a proponent of Japan's aggression in China during the Second World War; and (3) Suzuki in his postwar writings continued to defend the war and attempted to evade responsibility for his own wartime complicity.

These criticisms, if true, would of course reveal Suzuki to be a willing collaborator in the tragic course followed by Japan during WWII. Let us therefore examine Suzuki's writings in the context of Victoria's critiques in order to determine the merits of the latter's allegations. I have adopted a primarily chronological approach, not only for the sake of clarity but also to show the development of Suzuki's thought over the course of his long life.

A New Theory of Religion

A New Theory of Religion, and in particular the chapter "Shūkyō to kokka to no kankei" 宗教と国家との関係 (hereafter "The Relation of Religion and State"), is the text most often cited by Victoria, whose interpretation of it forms one of the foundations of his characterization of Suzuki's nationalist and militarist views. Since it is also Suzuki's first published book, it is an especially appropriate text with which to begin our discussion.

It would be helpful to first briefly situate the book in the context of Suzuki's seventy-year career as an author and educator. *A New Theory of Religion* was published in 1896, when Suzuki was twenty-six years old and before he had undergone any of the major formative experiences of his early adulthood: the Zen awakening that he describes as occurring in December, 1896, and as fundamentally altering the way he interacted with the world; his first extended residence in the United States and Europe between 1897 and 1909; and his marriage in 1911 to the American woman Beatrice Erskine Lane (1873–1939).² His country, Japan, was just twenty-eight years out of the feudal era and still under the threat of the Western powers that controlled much of the rest of Asia. Although in the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War it had prevailed over the forces of Qing-dynasty China, the subsequent Tripartite Intervention of Russia, Germany, and France in 1895 had deprived it of its territorial gains, forcing it to recognize that it was not yet

² From a Zen point of view, the fact that Suzuki spent the years subsequent to his first awakening—the period of "post-enlightenment training," traditionally regarded as the period when the awakening is clarified, refined, and then integrated into everyday life—in America is highly significant, for it means that the foundations of his development as a Zen thinker were laid while he was in constant contact with the peoples, cultures, and languages of the West. Suzuki's eleven years working under the liberal thinker and publisher Paul Carus (1852–1919) in the town of LaSalle, Illinois, virtually without contact with other Japanese, provided him with the ideal situation to internalize the English language and assimilate cultural views quite different from those of Japan.

in a position to militarily resist the European powers, and leaving it acutely aware of the fact that nearly every other nation in Asia had been colonized either economically or militarily by the European nations.

Citing these historical circumstances, Victoria presents *A New Theory of Religion* as a central text in the development of a Buddhist rationale for the military buildup that Japan had embarked upon in response to the challenge from the West:

The short period of peace which lasted from 1896 to 1903 was also a time for Buddhist scholars to turn their attention to the theoretical side of the relationship between Buddhism, the state, and war. Interestingly, it was the twenty-six-year-old Buddhist scholar and student of Zen, D. T. Suzuki, who took the lead in this effort. In November 1896, just one month before having his initial enlightenment experience (*kenshō*), he published a book entitled *A Treatise on the New [Meaning of] Religion (Shin Shūkyō Ron)* . . . [in which he devoted] an entire chapter to “The Relationship of Religion and the State.”³

A New Theory of Religion, as Victoria notes, is a wide-ranging collection of essays on various subjects relating to religion, with chapter titles like “Kami” 神 (God), “Shinkō” 信仰 (Faith), “The Relation of Religion and State,” “Shūkyō to dōtoku no kubetsu” 宗教と道德の区別 (The Distinction between Religion and Morality), and “Shūkyō to katei” 宗教と家庭 (Religion and the Family). The chapter in question, “The Relation of Religion and State,” deals with an issue of natural concern in any overview of the meaning of religion: the relation between the political reality of the state, the ideals of religion, and the inner, spiritual life of the individual. As part of its consideration of this relationship, it discusses the subject of religion and war. The following are the passages in “The Relation of Religion and State” most directly related to this particular topic:

Let us look at the actual situation among the world’s nations today. Each has established a country on a piece of this tiny earth, claiming that country’s territory as its territory, that country’s products as its products, and that country’s people as its people. If conflicts arise between the interests of the respective nations, they soon forsake

³ Victoria 1997, p. 22.

peace and, taking up arms, kill people, halt commerce, and destroy production, continuing at this until one side or the other is defeated. However, owing perhaps to their ideals of civilized behavior, they prefer not to admit that self-interest is behind all of this, so they always use “justice” as an excuse. “We attack them,” they claim, “for the purpose of maintaining long-term peace in the East (or the West, or the World).” Or, “They ignored our rights, and so, in the name of justice, we cannot remain silent.” Or, “We desire only to help that weak and impoverished nation attain independence and raise it to the status of a civilized state.” All this talk sounds so reasonable, as if war could not have been avoided. But the truth of the situation is ugly indeed. Such countries are simply pursuing their own self-interests and at the same time curtailing the power of the other country. And this is accepted, because regardless of what the truth of the matter might be, “justice” can always be invoked as an excuse.

And what of the weak and impoverished nations? No matter how much their rights are violated and their peace destroyed, no matter how much justice for them is ignored, and no matter how much humiliation they are subjected to, they have no choice but to stifle their anger and hide their resentment as they keep silent and bide their time. It is they who are truly in a position to cry for justice, but because they lack the power to implement it they cannot even invoke its name. International law exists in name only and is of no help to countries such as they. Those with the military power to do so call that which is wrong, right, and that which is evil, good, and in broad daylight rob and pillage as they please.

Even so, the age of barbarism is long gone. Nations are ever more clever in their strategy, ever more subtle in their approach. No longer do they turn immediately to force when faced with a problem, as the barbarians did. Their first tactic is diplomacy, through which they attempt to negotiate a solution. These so-called “diplomatic” initiatives are nothing but grand deceptions, employing bluffs to intimidate or cajolery to deceive, forming alliances in secret while feigning antagonism in public, or begging for compassion in front while sneering scornfully in back. Although the strategies are infinite in variety, in the end all are nothing but scheming and intrigue. Only after they see that all their subterfuges have been tried and no

more tricks remain do the nations send their iron warships out to sea and dispatch their cannons to the fields. This is done as a last resort, and therein, I believe, lies the real difference between barbarism and civilization. We might therefore characterize present-day international relations as: beginning in self-interest, continuing in abuse, and ending in exhaustion.

This is, unfortunately, a credible depiction of contemporary associations between the nations. One has to admit that it diverges sharply from the ideals of religion, and it is only natural to question whether the state and religion can ever coexist. . . .

Argued in temporal terms, the formation of the state necessarily occurs at some point during the evolution of society, and must serve as a means to help humanity bring to realization the purpose of its existence. However, if seen as a stage that must be passed through in order to realize our purpose, we have no choice than to bear with it even if, for a time, it seems to be distancing us from that purpose. This is because that which exists as a necessary response to the demands of a particular time and place always partakes of the truth of that particular time and place; this is known as relative truth. Moreover, if a relative truth appears in response to a natural necessity, how does it differ from an absolute truth? Insofar as both bear the nature of truth, we should act in accordance with them. Thus, although the state may be but a means, it comprises an intimation of truth. Religion too must to some extent vary in form according to time and place. That is, religion must, at the beginning, seek to support the existence of the state, in accordance with its history and the feelings of its people. . . .

Although we do not know today what direction the future progress of society will take (and even if, as some scholars foretell, it becomes a single undifferentiated global entity), no one would agree that the present condition of international confrontation and rivalry constitutes the ideal state of things. Nevertheless, for the present one must act in accordance with the situation as it is. Therefore, as is clear from the discussion above, all enterprises that contribute to the progress of the nation should be undertaken, while keeping in mind that the nation as it is today is still short of the final goal and that it is desirable always to seek to improve it. This [dynamic toward improvement] is truly the sphere of religion. Religion does

not attempt to subvert the foundations of the state and replace them with something new; it simply strives for the state's progress and development in accordance with its history and makeup.⁴

Thus the interests of religion and the state do not clash; rather, both sides can only hope for wholeness when they aid and support each other. Granted, the present state of ethics governing the relations between nations smells of the barbaric and is thus quite contrary to the ideals of religion, but the fact that justice and humanitarianism are even spoken about indicates that at the core [of those ethics] there is present at least a grain of moral sense. It is from within this inner moral sense that we must germinate the seed of religion. How then, is this to happen?

The problem is easily resolved if one thinks of religion as an entity with the state as its body, and of the state as something that develops with religion as its spirit. In other words, religion and the state form a unity; if every action and movement of the state takes on a religious character and if every word and action of religion takes on a state character, then whatever is done for the sake of the state is done for religion, and whatever is done for the sake of religion is done for the state. The two are one, and one is the two; differentiation is equality, and equality is differentiation; perfectly fused, there is not a hair's width of separation between religion and the state.

If we look at this [unified relationship between religion and the state] from the point of view of international morality, we see that the purpose of maintaining soldiers and encouraging the military arts is not to conquer other countries and deprive them of their rights or freedom. Rather, they are done only to preserve the existence of one's country and prevent it from being encroached upon by unruly heathens. The construction of heavy warships and the casting of cannons are not to increase personal gain and suppress the prosperity of others. Rather, they are done only to prevent the history of one's own country from disturbance by injustice and aggression. Conducting commerce and working to increase production are not for the purpose of building up material wealth in order to subdue

⁴ The following portion of this article is also quoted by Kirita (1994, pp. 53–54) and Victoria (1997, pp. 23–25). While the translation here is based largely on their translations, we have made significant changes.

other nations. Rather, they are done only in order to further expand human knowledge and bring about the perfection of morality. Thus, if an aggressive country comes and obstructs one's commerce or violates one's rights, this would truly interrupt the progress of all humanity. In the name of religion one's country could not submit to this. There would be no choice other than to take up arms, not for the purpose of slaying the enemy, nor for the purpose of pillaging cities, let alone for the purpose of acquiring wealth. It would be, instead, simply to punish the people of the country representing injustice in order that justice might prevail.⁵ What could be self-seeking about this? In any event, this would constitute religious conduct. As long as the state takes care not to lose this moral sense, one can anticipate the step by step advancement of humanity and the fulfillment of universal ideals.

The morality of the individual toward the state is similar to this. In peacetime one works diligently, day and night, seeking to promote the advancement of [such endeavors as] agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, art and science, and technology, never forgetting that the purpose of these endeavors is the advancement of all humanity. This is what is called "peacetime religion." However, should hostilities commence with a foreign country, then sailors fight on the sea and soldiers fight in the fields, swords flashing and cannon smoke belching, moving this way and that while "regarding their own lives as light as goose feathers and their duty is as heavy as Mount Taishan." Should they fall on the battlefield they

⁵ The translation of the preceding four sentences follows Victoria, with several significant differences. Victoria has: "Therefore, if there is a lawless country which comes and obstructs our commerce, or tramples on our rights, this is something that would truly interrupt the progress of all humanity. In the name of religion our country could not submit to this. Thus, we would have no choice but to take up arms, not for the purpose of slaying the enemy, nor for the purpose of pillaging cities, let alone for the purpose of acquiring wealth. Instead, we would simply punish the people of the country representing injustice in order that justice might prevail" (Victoria 1997, p. 109). The terms that he translates as "our commerce" (*waga shōgyō* 吾商業), "our rights" (*waga kenri* 吾權利), and "our country" (*waga kuni* 我国) can just as legitimately be translated with the more neutral expressions "one's commerce," "one's rights," and "one's country." These renderings are closer to the overall tone of the article (which is expressed in general terms), and of the paragraph in which they appear, where clearly neutral terms like *jikoku* 自国 (one's country) precede the usage of *waga shōgyō*, *waga kenri*, and *waga kuni*. The use of "we" as the subject of the last two lines in Victoria's translation does not reflect the original Japanese sentences, which are general statements in which no subject is identified.

have no regrets. This is what is called “religion during the time of a [national] emergency.” Religion does not necessarily involve concepts like “Buddha” or “God.” If one fulfills the demands of one’s duties, what could be more religious than that?⁶

There is certainly much in these passages that raises images of nationalism, particularly when viewed in the context of Japan’s subsequent history. An in-depth examination of this issue is obviously beyond the scope of this article, but I think it is at least necessary, before rushing to label Suzuki as a nationalist on the basis of the nineteenth-century prose of his youth, to consider whether motives other than a desire to support militarism might have motivated his words.⁷

As a starting point to clarifying Suzuki’s position in “The Relation of Religion and State,” it is helpful to examine the interpretation of this chapter given by Ichikawa Hakugen 市川白弦 (1902–1986), a Japanese scholar whose views on the relation between Japanese Buddhism and militarism were one of the principal influences on Victoria’s thought.⁸ Ichikawa, quoting statements in the chapter such as “religion should, first of all, seek to preserve the existence of the state,”⁹ regards the “The Relation of Religion and State” as a nationalist essay supportive of the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War:

Suzuki writes further that “if a lawless country (referring to China)¹⁰ comes and obstructs our commerce, or tramples on our rights, this is something that would truly interrupt the progress of all humanity. In the name of religion our country could not submit to this. Thus, we would have no choice but to take up arms, not for the purpose of slaying the enemy, nor for the purpose of pillaging cities, let alone for the purpose of acquiring wealth. Instead, we would simply punish the people of the country representing injustice in order that justice might prevail. How is it possible that we could

⁶ Suzuki *Daisetsu zenshū* (hereafter abbreviated as SDZ), vol. 23, pp. 134–40.

⁷ It is relevant to note that the types of expressions seen in this early piece regarding the relation of religion and the state are not found in Suzuki’s later works, which, as we will see below, are clearly cautious regarding this relationship.

⁸ See, for example, Victoria 1997, pp. ix–x, 167.

⁹ Ichikawa 1975, p. 35; translation by Victoria (1997, p. x). The passage from Suzuki’s *A New Theory of Religion* is found in SDZ, vol. 23, p. 137.

¹⁰ The words in parentheses are Ichikawa’s addition (Ichikawa 1975, p. 35); the English translation is by Victoria (1997, p. 24).

seek anything for ourselves? In any event, this is what is called religious conduct.”¹¹ Suzuki was claiming, in other words, that the Sino-Japanese War [1894–95] was a religious action undertaken to chastise the “belligerence” of China and promote human progress. This argument is, in form at the very least, precisely the same as the line of reasoning that Japan used to justify its fifteen-year conflict in Asia and the Pacific, glorifying it as a “Holy War for the Establishment of a New Order in East Asia.” It seems not to have occurred to Suzuki that this “punitive war against a belligerent nation” was fought, not on Japanese soil against an invading China, but on the Asian continent in the territory of the Chinese. Nor did he seem able to see the situation from the standpoint of China, whose land and people were what was being “violated” in this conflict. It was his unreflective stance that allowed Suzuki to regard this invasive war as “religious action” undertaken “in the name of religion.” This way of thinking is, to use the words of the *Record of Linji*, “To be misled by the delusions of others, to be taken in by the falsehood around one.”¹²

Victoria, following Ichikawa’s views, states in his foreword to *Zen at War*:

With his oft-pictured gentle and sagacious appearance of later years, Suzuki is revered among many in the West as a true man of Zen. Yet he wrote that “religion should, first of all, seek to preserve the existence of the state,” followed by the assertion that the Chinese were “unruly heathens” whom Japan should punish “in the name of religion.”¹³

¹¹ This quotation appears in SDZ, vol. 23, pp. 139–40. The translation of the quoted material is that in Victoria 1997, pp. 24–25.

¹² Ichikawa 1975, p. 35.

¹³ Victoria 1997, p. x. Both quotes cited by Victoria are problematic. “Religion should, first of all, seek to preserve the existence of the state,” a translation of *sunawachi shūkyō wa mazu kokka no sonzai o ijisen koto o hakaru* 即ち宗教は先づ国家の存在を維持せんことを計る, is questionable for its rendering of the word *mazu* in the original. *Mazu* can mean anything from “the most important thing” or “first of all” (the nuance that Victoria gives it) to “for a start” or “to begin with.” The context of the discussion (see full paragraph, pp. 67–68, above) is one in which the existence of the state is regarded as a temporary stage in the development of human society but as an unavoidable one, and thus one that religion must work with during that stage. This suggests that a closer translation would be, “That is, religion must, at the beginning, seek to support the existence of the state.”

Despite these depictions of “The Relation of Religion and State,” a fair reading of the chapter reveals little to support Ichikawa’s and Victoria’s contention that Suzuki is referring to China when he speaks of “a lawless country,” or that his comments on war apply to the Sino-Japanese War.

The three-paragraph section beginning with “Let us look at the actual situation among the world’s nations today” is clearly a generalized portrayal of the contemporary attitudes and actions of the world’s powerful nations, modeled on those of the Western colonial nations. Suzuki’s description, flowery though it is, provides a fairly accurate picture of the sort of political and economic strategies that these countries employed in subjugating China, Southeast Asia, and the East Indies, and were still attempting to apply, with considerably less success, to Japan during the late nineteenth century.¹⁴

The second section quoted above, in which Suzuki explicitly speaks of war—the section that Ichikawa and Victoria represent as justifying Japan’s actions in the Sino-Japanese War—never mentions China, and its description of a possible attack and defensive response is written in the conditional tense, not in the past tense as would be the case with a war already finished. The very fact that Suzuki does *not* refer to the war (and, indeed, rarely mentions it anywhere in the massive body of writings he produced)¹⁵ is significant in itself, given the virtually universal approval of the war in Japan at the time and the enthusiasm with which it was supported by other Japanese intellectuals. Moreover, Suzuki is clearly describing a defensive war fought on the home territory of the threatened nation, which was manifestly not the case for Japan

The term translated by Victoria as “unruly heathens,” *jama gedō* 邪魔外道, and linked by him and Ichikawa to the Chinese, would logically apply not to the Chinese but, if anything, to non-Asian powers. Both *jama* and *gedō* are originally Buddhist terms that refer to those who hinder or oppose the Buddhist teachings, which the Chinese unquestionably were not. See also the following note.

¹⁴ In the decades prior to when Suzuki wrote, China had been attacked by Britain during the two Opium Wars (1839–42, 1856–60), fought by the British to preserve its Chinese opium trade. After its defeat, China was forced to sign a series of “unequal treaties,” in which it agreed to pay large indemnities, open a number of ports for trade, accept extraterritoriality for British citizens, and permit the sale of opium. France, Germany, and Russia soon demanded, and received, trading rights similar to those of Britain. By the mid-nineteenth century India and Burma had also been colonized by Britain, and Indochina by France. Meanwhile, Russia had moved into Central Asia and had further designs on territories in East Asia. All of this was common knowledge at the time when Suzuki was writing. The mention of “aggressive nations” would have brought the Western powers to mind, not China.

¹⁵ One case is his 1910 article in the journal *Shin bukkyō* 新仏教 (New Buddhism) (p. 83, below), in which he mentions the war in a context unflattering to the Japanese military.

in its war with China. Ichikawa provides no reason, much less any evidence, for his assertion that this quite self-evident fact “did not occur” to Suzuki.

Furthermore, a nationalistic reading of the entire chapter would be out of accord with the rest of *A New Theory of Religion*. As mentioned above, the book is composed of a series of essays on topics of basic concern to religion, such as God, faith, ethics, and the role of religion in family life—subjects that are precisely what one would expect to find in a general overview of religion and its place in human existence. The chapter in question, “The Relation of Religion and State,” follows this pattern, discussing in a general way the evolving relationship between the individual, religion, and the political reality of the state, with no specific religions or nations being named. The discussion includes the question of war, as any responsible analysis of the relationship between religion and the state must. Although the passages on war are expressed in a nineteenth-century prose that does have a certain nationalistic tone, a balanced view of their content shows them to constitute, as we will consider below, a justification of defensive war only (as we will also see, the record shows Suzuki to have been consistently opposed to invasive war).

These early comments by Suzuki on religion and the state can easily be seen in a context that is not nationalistic. For example, let us look at the following passage:¹⁶

The problem is easily resolved if one thinks of religion as an entity with the state as its body, and of the state as something developing with religion as its spirit. In other words, religion and the state form a unity; if every action and movement of the state takes on a religious character and if every word and action of religion takes on a state character, then whatever is done for the sake of the state is done for religion, and whatever is done for the sake of religion is done for the state.

This passage, taken alone, can certainly be seen as advocating the de facto subordination of religion to the state, but, appearing as it does in the context of Suzuki’s explanation of how it might be possible to nurture the flicker of spirituality that exists even in the contentious environment of governmental and international relations, it can also be seen as a relatively straightforward expression of the Confucian ideal of a balanced and harmonious relation between the spiritual and political aspects of human existence.¹⁷ Furthermore,

¹⁶ See p. 67, above.

¹⁷ Suzuki did in fact have deep connections with Confucianism. Suzuki’s first Zen teacher,

Suzuki sets quite strict conditions for attainment of this unity between religion and state, describing a mutual dynamic in which “*if* every action and movement of the state takes on a religious character” then “whatever is done for the sake of the state is done for religion,” and that “*if* every word and action of religion takes on a state character” then “whatever is done for the sake of religion is done for the state.” This was for Suzuki clearly the ideal and not the reality. As we will see shortly, Suzuki’s later writings clearly show that when it came to the actual political situation in Japan at this time, he was quite critical of the direction in which the country was heading.

Viewed in this context, Suzuki’s statements on the legitimacy of resistance when “an aggressive country comes and obstructs one’s commerce or violates one’s rights” can most reasonably be seen, not as a description of the war with China, but as a general, straightforward argument for the justness of defensive war, in which Suzuki outlines the conditions under which armed resistance would be warranted. Indeed, one can take the evidence just as it is—Suzuki’s support of defensive war, coupled with his willingness to resist the current of Japanese public opinion by remaining silent on the Sino-Japanese conflict—and arrive at a conclusion quite the opposite of Ichikawa’s. Given the fact that the conditions Suzuki describes as justifying armed defense—an impoverished nation exploited by stronger ones, its culture suppressed, its commerce obstructed, its rights trampled, and its territory invaded—applied more to late-nineteenth-century China than they did to Japan, and that Japan was among the nations threatening China, Suzuki’s words can even be seen as an implicit criticism of the Sino-Japanese War, insofar as the war was aggressive in nature. At the very least, this interpretation is more in accord with the evidence than is Ichikawa’s, in view of the silence Suzuki maintained on this war and the consistently critical stance he took with regard to the Japanese military, as we will see in his writings below.

Before considering these writings, there is an important issue that must be addressed, that of pacifism. Suzuki’s forthright support for defensive war raises one of the issues central to the present discussion: whether war of any sort, aggressive *or* defensive, is justified in the context of Buddhism. This is a complex question, especially in light of Buddhism’s development from a tradition of world-renouncers to one that serves as the major faith of many

Imakita Kōsen 今北洪川 (1815–1892) was a Confucian scholar before turning to Zen, and many of Suzuki’s publications during his early stay in America dealt with Confucianism (e.g., “A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy,” published in three parts in *The Monist* (Suzuki 1907, Suzuki 1908a and Suzuki 1908b).

large nations. Buddhism is usually associated with a strong stress on peace and nonviolence, and indeed, much of Victoria's attack on Suzuki rests on a presumption that true Buddhism is necessarily pacifist. *Zen at War* discusses the "just war" concept in Buddhism at length, particularly in chapter 7, but always in contexts where the concept has been abused to justify wars that are manifestly unjust.¹⁸ No serious discussion is given to the possibility that there may indeed be situations—for example, clear-cut cases of genocide or invasive wars—where the use of force is warranted even for Buddhists. Suzuki's position was that of someone who recognized that war has been a persistent element in the lives of nations and that aggressive countries throughout history have attacked weaker ones, forcing even Buddhist nations to face the question of when armed resistance may be justified.

There is no clear consensus on this issue—even the briefest review of the literature on the subject shows that serious, thoughtful Buddhists have been debating it for centuries, without reaching any final conclusions. Since a full discussion of the issues involved is obviously beyond the scope of this paper, it will have to suffice for present purposes to acknowledge that there are at least two sides to the issue and that the position Suzuki took in this early volume is one that other committed Buddhists have publicly preferred to an absolutely pacifist position.

Whereas the pacifist position, in the sense of a total rejection of war and killing, has always been the ideal for the world-renouncing ordained sangha, enjoined upon them by numerous passages in the Buddhist canonical literature,¹⁹ Buddhist supporters of the notion of just war point out that with respect to his lay followers the Buddha recognized the necessity of armies and, by implication, the use of those armies.²⁰ With the emergence of Buddhism as a religion of governments and large numbers of householders, questions that committed world renouncers do not have to face take on great importance. Do Buddhists have the right to defend themselves and their

¹⁸ In the second edition of *Zen at War*, Victoria devotes an entire chapter, "Was it Buddhism?" (Victoria 2006, pp. 192–231) to the question of Buddhism and pacifism.

¹⁹ E.g., the Pāli *Vinaya* states that "a member of the Buddha's order should not intentionally destroy the life of any being down to a worm or an ant" (Oldenberg 1964, p. 97).

²⁰ For example, in the conversations recorded in numerous Pāli canonical texts between the Buddha and rulers, prominent among them the kings Pasenadi and Bimbisāra, the Buddha never enjoins them to abandon the maintenance of armies or the protection of the state. Certain Mahayana canonical scriptures, notably the *Upāya-kauśalya sūtra*, go further, hypothesizing situations in which it would be justifiable for a bodhisattva to kill in order to prevent a greater number of deaths.

families from attackers? Or their countries from invaders? If not, were the Chinese Buddhists wrong to defend themselves against the Japanese armies in the 1930s? In point of fact, throughout history all Buddhist nations—including those with strong traditions of *ahiṃsā*—have recognized the right of self-defense and found it necessary to maintain militaries. To reject defensive war for Buddhism is to reject virtually every historical manifestation of this important world religion, and restrict “true Buddhism” to a pristine “original Buddhism” (itself a hypothetical construct) and to certain groups of world renouncers.

It is in this context, I believe, that the statements on war by Suzuki in “The Relation of Religion and State” must be understood. If the maintenance of a military, and thus by implication its use, has been found necessary by all Buddhist nations, then this is clearly a topic that an author writing on the subject of “the relation of religion and state” must comment upon. When doing so—if the author is to deal with the topic honestly—it is essential to clarify the criteria that determine when the use of force is justified (*jus ad bellum*), precisely *because* nations waging invasive, aggressive wars attempt to characterize them as just (militarist Japan during the 1930s being, of course, a prime example). The conditions that Suzuki delineates in “The Relation of Religion and State”—opposing obstructions to commerce, resisting invasion, preserving the existence of one’s country—although they could have been more diplomatically expressed, are basically ones that have been recognized everywhere as *jus ad bellum*.

There is one final matter that needs to be considered, before continuing, a procedural issue relating to Victoria’s use of source materials both here and elsewhere. In introducing the chapter “The Relation of Religion and State,” Victoria writes:

[Suzuki devotes] an entire chapter [of *A New Treatise on Religion*] to the “Relationship of Religion and the State.” If only because Suzuki’s views in this area are so little known in the West, it is instructive to take a careful look at his comments. Much more important, however, the views that Suzuki expressed then parallel the rationale that institutional Buddhism’s leaders would subsequently give for their support of Japan’s war efforts up through the end of the Pacific War.²¹

²¹ Victoria 1997, pp. 22–23.

The claim that Suzuki's views "parallel" the rationale of institutional Buddhist leaders who supported the war, in itself a questionable assertion, implies that Suzuki shared the views of these leaders or that his obscure, early text, published half a century earlier, was in some way responsible for their thinking. Since Victoria provides no evidence of an actual connection between Suzuki's views and those of the pro-war Buddhist leaders, this claim amounts to an attempt to discredit Suzuki through guilt by association. Unfortunately, guilt by association is a polemical device Victoria employs repeatedly in *Zen at War* and in other writings criticizing Buddhist figures. One such instance, and a clear refutation of the type of logic behind it, is offered by the Japanese scholar Miyata Koichi:

Victoria quotes a passage from Makiguchi's 1903 work *Jinsei Chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life), in which Makiguchi notes that Russia was engaged in a policy of expansionism in the search for year-round harbors. Victoria asserts that this world view was identical to that of the government of Japan, a view used to justify the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), then the annexation of the Korean peninsula (1910) and the founding of the puppet state of Manchukuo (1932). Victoria's assertion, and his implicit criticism of Makiguchi, simplistically links analysis of the global situation with the policies taken in response to that. Makiguchi was merely voicing what was then the accepted understanding of the geopolitical motives for Russia's expansionist policies, a view held not only by the Japanese government, but shared by the British, with whom Japan had formed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Certainly I know of no scholar of political geography who rejects this commonsense view in favor of one that Russia posed no danger. If we were to extend Victoria's argument, the logical conclusion would be to find not only Makiguchi but everyone who studies political geography guilty of complicity with Japanese aggression.²²

Similarly, it is hardly surprising that those who sought to justify Japan's invasive wars would use arguments "paralleling" Suzuki's attempts to define the legitimate use of force, since those who support any war always endeavor to present that war as just. Any apparent connection between Suzuki's position and that of the pro-war Buddhist leaders is superficial, since Suzuki was

²² Miyata 2002, p. 80.

making a philosophical case for war to defend the nation from an invading force, while the Buddhist leaders were supporting what was clearly a war of aggression abroad. One can argue for the existence of certain circumstances in which armed resistance is just, and without contradiction strongly oppose wars that do not fit those conditions. In Suzuki's case, the issue thus becomes, not whether he expressed ideas that "paralleled" or "were similar to" the ideas expressed by war supporters, but what his actual views were regarding Japan's military and its wars.

Writings Prior to Pearl Harbor

Despite Victoria's efforts to portray Suzuki as an important militarist thinker, it quickly becomes apparent from a review of Suzuki's writings that military issues were not of major interest to him. In the vast body of writing he produced, filling forty volumes in the newest edition of the *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集 (Collected Works of D. T. Suzuki), there is remarkably little material relating to the subject of war. There are several general articles on the topic, in which, as we have seen, Suzuki recognizes the persistent reality of war in the course of human history; there are his writings on Bushido, in which Suzuki describes the ethical ideals of the feudal Japanese warrior; and there are a number of explicit (and overwhelmingly negative) references to war in his journal articles, private letters, and recorded talks.

It is important first to note that Suzuki was not without patriotic sentiment—on several occasions, for example, he mentions favorably the fortitude and valor with which the Japanese soldiery acquitted itself during the Russo-Japanese War. Suffice it to say that support for one's country's soldiers does not necessarily mean support for the wars they are fighting in—even in the case of the present Iraq War, few of the many American opponents I know are critical of the ordinary troops who are in combat there. In any event, a review of his writings quickly shows that Suzuki's sympathy for the ordinary soldier did not extend to the military establishment, the ideologies it supported, or the wars it engaged in.

Within two years of Japan's victorious conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and within six months of publishing *A New Theory of Religion* and departing Japan for America, Suzuki was already writing letters to friends critical of State Shinto. This is a standpoint that hardly would have aligned him with the right-wing forces, and, coming so soon after the publication of *A New Theory of Religion*, further suggests that this book was not written with

nationalist goals in mind. On 13 June 1897, Suzuki wrote as follows to the owner of the publishing house Baiyō Shoin 貝葉書院:

In our country an increasing number of people are promoting religion. Among the various attempts to satisfy the religious spirit is something called “New Shinto” that advocates a kind of nationalism. While it is laudable that religion is at last gaining the attention of the general populace, I have my reservations about this “New Shinto” as a religion. First of all, there appear to be some hidden motives behind the fact that it takes a position distinct from that of religious philosophy and ethics. If we do not now take up these motives for consideration, I think our efforts to discuss [this New Shinto] will come to nothing. To conclude, it seems that these people have yet to arrive at a deep understanding of the depths of the human heart.²³

This letter demonstrates that Suzuki’s reservations about the new forms of Shinto, and his belief that it did not represent a genuine system of spirituality, had their beginnings quite early in his life, and were not, as Victoria asserts, acquired only with the decline of Japan’s wartime fortunes in the 1940s.²⁴

Suzuki’s critical comments on the emerging power of the nationalist forces was not confined to his private correspondence. In 1898, a year after he wrote the letter quoted above, the following comments appeared in an article published in the journal *Rikugō zasshi* 六合雜誌:

They say, “Obey the rescripts on the Imperial Restoration,” “Study the *Imperial Rescript on Education*,” “Display a nation-building spirit,” “Honor the ancestors of the country.” All of this is fine. But while these people on the one hand proclaim reason as their supreme sword and shield and talk continually of the results of nineteenth-century historical research, on the other hand they manipulate the weaknesses of the Japanese people, embracing the

²³ SDZ, vol. 36, p. 90.

²⁴ Victoria, discussing Suzuki’s postwar stance on Buddhist war support writes: “Suzuki spoke again of his own moral responsibility for the war in *The Spiritualizing of Japan (Nihon no Reiseika)*, published in 1947. This book is a collection of five lectures that he had given at the Shin sect-affiliated Ōtani University in Kyoto during the month of June 1946. The focus of his talks was Shinto, for by this time he had decided that Shinto was to blame for Japan’s militaristic past. According to Suzuki, Shinto was a ‘primitive religion’ that ‘lacked spirituality’” (Victoria 1997, p. 150).

imperial family and the imperial rescripts and attempting to imbue them with a religious significance. The hypocrisy of it all is quite overwhelming. . . .

Let us stop pretending that the Japanese are a great people merely because their imperial family has continued unbroken for the past 2,500 years.²⁵

Suzuki expanded on these themes in a letter to his good friend Yamamoto Ryōkichi 山本良吉 (1871–1942), in a letter dated 14 June 1898:

It seems to me that the imperial household still clings to the dream of its ancient days of transcendence and sanctity, while the Japanese people think there is nothing more wonderful than the imperial rescripts and believe that modern progress will bring about no benefit. For that reason, when the government encounters a situation unfavorable to itself it quickly tries to hide behind such attitudes and silence the voice of the people. Moreover, because of this the people find the path of free thought cut off to them. We are obliged to obey those who exalt the imperial household and shield themselves with the imperial rescripts. This is extremely unreasonable. (*In the margin*: These words must never be made public, I must wait for the right time.) Recent attempts to dress up utilitarian ideologies like Japanese nationalism in the clothes of the emperor and foist them on us remind me of the Buddhist bonzes in the ancient capital of Nara who would take advantage of the Shinto *mikoshi* in their rituals. Kimura's *Kokkyōron*²⁶ (The Japanese Nationalist State Religion) is wild in the extreme; even if the nationalists have a few points of interest to make, seeing the distorted utilitarian arguments they use, no one would be tempted to pay them any attention.²⁷

A few weeks after this letter was written, an article appeared in the *Rikugō zasshi*, the journal quoted above, showing that Suzuki was not only critical of the ideology and political maneuvering of the rightists, but was also positively inclined to socialist thought, further distancing him from the nationalist thinkers:

²⁵ SDZ, vol. 30, pp. 130–31. The article originally appeared as “Tabi no tsurezure” 旅のつれづれ (Random thoughts while traveling) in *Rikugō zasshi* 20 (25 June 1898), pp. 70–72. The translation here relies on Kirita 1994, p. 54.

²⁶ Suzuki is referring to the book *Nihon shugi kokkyōron* 日本主義国教論, a nativist work by Kimura Takatarō 木村鷹太郎.

²⁷ SDZ, vol. 36, pp. 151–52. Cf. Kirita 1994, pp. 54–55.

It is said that the government has forbidden the formation of the Social Democratic Party. I deeply regret the Japanese government's irresponsibility and lack of farsightedness, and its inattentiveness to social progress and human happiness.²⁸

Suzuki writes on socialism in greater detail in letters he sent in early 1901 to Yamamoto. The subject is mentioned in two interesting letters, also cited by Victoria in a recent article.²⁹ The first is dated 6 January 1901:

Lately I have had a desire to study socialism, for I am sympathetic to its views on social justice and equality of opportunity. Present-day society (including Japan, of course) must be reformed from the ground up.³⁰

No more than a week later, on 14 January 1901, Suzuki wrote as follows:

In recent days I have become a socialist sympathizer to an extreme degree. However, my socialism is not based on economics but religion. This said, I am unable to publicly advocate this doctrine to the ordinary people because they are so universally querulous and illiterate and therefore unprepared to listen to what I have to say. However, basing myself on socialism, I intend to gradually incline people to my way of thinking though I also believe I need to study some sociology.³¹

These ideas and outlooks were reflected in some of Suzuki's public writings at this time. For example, the following passage appears in the article "Shakai kyūsai ron" 社会救済論 (On Social Relief) in 1904:

When we look for the reasons for the plight of the impoverished in today's society, we see that their poverty is due not so much to any fault of their own as to the defects of the social system and the maldistribution of wealth. . . . One can hardly expect impoverished

²⁸ SDZ, vol. 30, p. 265. The article originally appeared as "Shakai minshuteki tō no kettō kinshi ni tsukite (Shakai shugi no shūkyōteki kiso)" 社会民主的党の結党禁止につきて (社会主義の宗教的基礎) (On the Prohibition of the Formation of the Social Democratic Party: The Religious Foundations of Socialism) in *Rikugō zasshi* 249 (15 September 1901), pp. 43–47; This translation appears in Kirita 1994, p. 56.

²⁹ Victoria 2007.

³⁰ SDZ, vol. 36, p. 204. This translation relies on Victoria 2007.

³¹ SDZ, vol. 36, p. 206. This translation relies on Victoria 2007.

people in such difficult circumstances to be satisfied with spiritual comfort bereft of any material aid. . . . My earnest desire is that Buddhists do not remain satisfied with personal peace and enlightenment but take it upon themselves to help society.³²

In a letter to Yamamoto in 1903 (exact date unknown), Suzuki criticizes the nationalist direction taken by the Ministry of Education in words that are surprisingly strong:

What is this unbelievable childishness that is going on, as with that recent affair at Tetsugakkan 哲学館 University?³³ Looking at the situation from where I am now here in the United States, I can only conclude that our Ministry of Education's behavior is sheer lunacy. What is all this about "loyalty"? What is all this about "national polity"? Do these things have any more worth than a baby's rattle? Viewed from this shore,³⁴ it seems such a farce, both the government officials that brandish these concepts as though they were Masamune swords³⁵ and the public that attempts to avoid trouble by conveniently ignoring the issues, as in the saying, "Don't provoke the gods and you won't be punished." Of course you, living there in Japan, probably think I'm overstating things. In any event, these government people lack any democratic spirit, and their claims that they represent the emperor, that the emperor himself is a god-man superior to ordinary human beings, and that "loyalty" consists of following his orders or some such thing, are utterly absurd. Fortunately the present Japanese emperor is a man of good sense and does not attempt to interfere in the government. If, when the crown prince accedes to the throne, he tries like the present German

³² SDZ, vol. 30, pp. 339–40. This translation relies on Kirita 1994, p. 56. The article originally appeared in the journal *Beikoku bukkyō* 米國佛教 5, no. 1, pp. 8–10.

³³ The Tetsugakkan Affair refers to an incident involving the private university Tetsugakkan (present Tōyō University). In 1902 the Ministry of Education took exception to one of the university's final examination questions, which the Ministry regarded as constituting *lèse majesté* against the emperor. Despite a public outcry against the Ministry for what was regarded as a blatant interference in academic freedom, the university was stripped of its right to license middle school teachers.

³⁴ I.e., the United States.

³⁵ The swords made by the smith Okazaki Masamune 岡崎正宗 (ca. thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) are regarded as the finest examples of Japanese sword making.

emperor to run things and force the people to obey him in the name of “loyalty to the ruler,” it isn’t difficult to imagine the result.³⁶

After the commencement of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan’s first armed conflict after the publication of *A New Theory of Religion*, none of the jingoistic spirit that Victoria accuses the young Suzuki of is seen in his correspondence with Yamamoto. In a letter dated 1 October 1904 he laments the sacrifices involved and expresses concerns about the intentions of both sides:

Is this war dragging on? I can hardly bring myself to read the daily newspaper reports of the tragic situation at Port Arthur. Both sides are prepared to fight to the death in battle, and it seems they will not quit till they have all killed each other. I am sad at the loss of so many promising young Japanese soldiers and sympathize with the suffering of the innocent Russian peasantry. Is there not some way to come to a settlement? It is tragic to see that the enemy government, as a totalitarian monarchy, intends to fight till it collapses from exhaustion.³⁷

A letter dated 1 December 1904 continues in the same vein, with criticism of the Japanese government:

When reporting the progress of the war, the Japanese government exaggerates the victories and either remains silent on the defeats or downplays them as much as possible. They treat the populace like fools. [Protecting] military secrets is one thing, but other news should be handled in an aboveboard fashion that shows trust in the populace. It is deplorable that [the government] has been unable to do this. I mentioned this matter to a Japanese who was staying here for several days, but he stubbornly agreed with the actions of the Japanese government. If such support exists even among educated Japanese, then one must conclude that the progress of political thought in Japan is still lagging. What do you think? Japanese politics appears to be exceedingly complex and very annoying in its meddlesome intrusions. If I had to return to Japan suddenly I think I might find it terribly confining.³⁸

³⁶ SDZ, vol. 36, pp. 238–39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 254–55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

As the war progressed and the Japanese military achieved a string of victories, Suzuki, in a letter dated 2 February 1905, continues to refrain from praise for the war itself while expressing hope that the successes and the valor shown by the Japanese forces would brighten Japan's outlook and offset to some extent the conflict's terrible burdens and losses. Regarding the war itself his emphasis is on the importance of continued diplomatic initiatives.

Japan's success in the war appears not to have changed Suzuki's critical attitude toward the military itself, however. In 1910, just a year after his return from his ten-year stay abroad and less than five years after the end of the war, Suzuki wrote an essay, "Ryokuin mango" 緑陰漫語 (Idle Talk in the Shade of a Tree), published in the journal *Shin bukkyō*, in which he expresses dismay at the rising status of the Japanese armed forces:

The dominance of the military, perhaps as a result of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, is something I don't feel entirely comfortable with. In America the closest thing I saw to a military uniform was the outfit worn by hotel bellboys. Crossing the sea to England, I saw a few soldiers around, but nothing really noticeable. Moving on to France and Germany, I first observed great military organizations backed by the entire nation, and I believe the situation is pretty much the same in Russia. However, I have been most struck by this type of thing in Japan, following my return. This is partly because I am more familiar with the situation in my own country, of course, and because of the numerous opportunities I have to notice the military's ascendancy. Nevertheless, the sort of unease I feel about this is something I would have felt anywhere. I don't know what those who have gained prominence by becoming military men may think of the matter, but as for myself I can't help feeling that these military people are receiving far more preferential treatment than they deserve. Even from a purely objective standpoint, I do not think this overindulgence of the military is to be celebrated as far as the future of the country is concerned. If one emphasizes one thing then the tendency is to undervalue another. In other words, if you devote too many resources to the military then you can easily end up depriving education of the resources it needs.³⁹

³⁹ SDZ, vol. 30, pp. 407–8. A similar distaste for the military is reflected in a later report by a student of Suzuki, who recalls that during WWII, when he called upon Suzuki at his home near Otani University dressed in his army officer's uniform with his sword by his side, Suzuki was

In 1914, following the beginning of WWI in Europe, Suzuki wrote an essay in which he first of all expresses a clear aversion to the human and cultural sacrifices that war invariably involves, then steers the discussion in a spiritual direction, using war as a symbol for the struggle against one's own inner enemies.

Zen and War

Suppose someone were to ask, "What is the opinion of a Zen person on the present Great War [WWI]?" The Zen man would answer: "I have no particular opinion, and in particular I have no opinion as a Zen person." A Zen person is no different from others, having two eyes and two legs and a head just like everyone else; there is nothing that sets him apart from other human beings. Thus when it gets cold he feels the cold, when it gets hot he feels the heat; when he sees the autumn moon he fully admires the pale moonlight, when he sees the pink blossoms of springtime he is moved with emotion. With regard to war, as well as peace, as far as his thoughts go there is not an iota of difference with how other humans regard it. However combative Zen people may seem because of their shouting and stick-wielding, just show them a mound of corpses or a river of flowing blood and not one of them will celebrate war.

This is precisely the way I feel. The development, advancement, and perfection of our inner capabilities, which may be regarded as the most essential task of our lives, can be effectively accomplished only during times of peace. When peace is lost and people start shooting and slashing at their neighbors, the world becomes the realm of the *asuras*⁴⁰ and the Demon King prevails. As long as hostilities continue, the flowering of the humanities, the progress of science, the happiness of the individual, and the enjoyment of family life are all like spring blossoms carried off by the wind. War instantly turns heaven into hell and transforms *bodhi* into delusion. How could a Zen man assent to it?

Thus as to the impressions of the Zen man regarding the present tragic situation, they are the same as the impressions of teachers,

visibly unhappy. Standing at the entrance, Suzuki said, "Don't come here dressed up like some kind of toy. Come back after you've changed into something else, even if it's just a *nemaki* [a light kimono for sleeping]" (Kitanishi 2007, p. 118).

⁴⁰ The *asura* (Jpn. *ashura* 阿修羅) is a fighting deity, or a titan.

of those who love the humanities, of those who celebrate progress, of merchants, of farmers, of scientists, and of statesmen. It is misguided to inquire about the impressions of Zen people in particular, as if they formed a separate category. . . .

But if I were to comment on the Great War just as an ordinary person, it seems to me to represent a major blow against, or breakdown and failure of, Occidental Christian civilization. War itself is already irreligious in nature, so once the social order breaks down the restraints that had prevailed till then are quickly lost, and soon we see scenes straight from the age of barbarism. How shameful it is that the naked human heart can be so brutal. . . .

Speaking of war, it strikes me that a person's life itself is like an ongoing war. Whenever we're even the slightest bit careless the enemy uses that gap to attack. Thus every day, in each and every instant, we must persevere in our watchfulness, our cultivation, and our practice, or the foundations of our moral and religious life will be overturned. It is just as in actual combat—if for a while we get the upper hand and let down our guard as a result, then the source of our destruction will rush through that opening without a moment's delay. Moreover, the enemy being very secretive about its route of entry, it is exceedingly difficult to spy it out. Thus the moment of carelessness itself equals the enemy's attack. If, relying on the bit of Zen insight you might have gained, you allow yourself to become unaware, that insight will vanish as though dropped from your hand. Why would this apply only to Zen training?

Zen people have no set view with regard to war, or at least I as an individual do not. If there is such an outlook, it applies only to the type of inner battle that I have described. Given the present nature of civilization, given the present nature of the human mind, and given the present nature of international relations, it is only to be expected that wars will occur, so what can one say about such a matter? However, I would ask each and every one of you not to forget that when you fight the enemies in your own mind you must do so to win.⁴¹

During the 1930s—a time when the Japanese militarists were consolidating their power and right-wing thought was ascendant—several of Suzuki's letters

⁴¹ SDZ, vol. 30, pp. 480–82.

to Yamamoto indicate that the interest in socialist principles he first expressed thirty years earlier had continued throughout the ensuing decades, along with his dissatisfaction with the direction the government was heading in. In a postscript to a letter dated 21 February 1930, he writes:

I cast my vote for Kawakami. I have just got the news that he lost. The ruling party candidates are all no good. In any event, it is beneficial to have a number of candidates from the Proletariat Party running, though not too many.⁴²

A letter dated 16 October 1935 indicates that Suzuki's interest was not merely intellectual, but concrete enough for him to actively intervene on behalf of people with a leftist outlook:

Is there no one whom you know in the Tokyo Police Department? There is a someone I know who has been incarcerated at Yodobashi on the grounds of having leftist tendencies (I hear he has been transferred from place to place after that). I'd like to find out if there is any way to trace his whereabouts, and possibly to gain his quick release. Please let me know if there is some way to do this.⁴³

Although this hardly rates as a major act of defiance against the government, it still demonstrates a decidedly non-rightist outlook, in addition to considerable integrity at a time when thousands suspected of leftist sympathies were being arrested and interrogated by the Special Higher Police (Tokubetsu Kōtō Keisatsu 特別高等警察, commonly known as the "thought police").

The next example of Suzuki's writing that I would like to examine is from an English essay published in Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Third Series*. It does not directly relate to the subject of war but is of interest for what it says about Victoria's use of the sources. In *Zen at War*, Victoria describes the Shin Buddhist missionary efforts on the Asian continent, concluding that the "missionary efforts of the Shin sect . . . actually preceded the Japanese military's advance. This practice emerged as a result of the vision of Meiji-era leaders such as Ogurusu Kōchō [小栗栖香頂] and Okumura Enshin [奥村円心], who advocated using Buddhism as the basis for forming an anti-Western alliance

⁴² SDZ, vol. 36, p. 536. Kawakami Hajime (1879–1946) was a member of the Musan Seitō Nihon Rōnō Seitō 無産政党日本労農政党 (Japanese Labor and Farm Proletarian Party).

⁴³ SDZ, vol. 36, p. 615. Yamamoto was at this time a "high level civil servant" (*kōtōkan* 高等官), and would have had friends in the mid-ranks of government.

between Japan, China, and India.” Victoria continues:

D.T. Suzuki also shared this ideology, as demonstrated by an essay on Zen he published in English in 1934, in which he wrote:

If the East is one and there is something that differentiates it from the West, the differentia must be sought in the thought that is embodied in Buddhism. For it is in Buddhist thought and in no other that India, China, and Japan representing the East, could be united as one. . . . When the East as unity is made to confront the West, Buddhism supplies the bond.

Such ideas provided one of the ideological underpinnings for the subsequent development of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” (Dai Tōa Kyōei Ken), Japan’s rationalization for its aggression in Asia.⁴⁴

It is instructive to consider the entire, unexcerpted passage from which Victoria quotes:

If the East is one, and there is something that differentiates it from the West, the differentia must be sought in the thought that is embodied in Buddhism. For it is in Buddhist thought and in no other that India, China, and Japan representing the East, could be united as one. Each nationality has its own characteristic modes of adopting the thought to its environmental needs, but when the East as unity is made to confront the West, Buddhism supplies the bond. What then are those central ideas of Buddhism which sweep over Asia and which have been asserting themselves either openly or covertly in Japan? They are the immanent conception of Buddha-nature, the transcendentality of Prajñā, (intuitive knowledge), the all-embracing compassion and the eternal vows of the Bodhisattva.⁴⁵

It is quite clear when this passage is read in full (and especially when read in the context of the chapter, a short overview of the development of Japanese Buddhism) that Suzuki is not advocating “using Buddhism as the basis for forming an anti-Western alliance,” but simply stating that, if there is a certain unity to be discerned in the cultures of India, China, and Japan as opposed to

⁴⁴ Victoria 1997, pp. 64–65. The quoted passage may be found in Suzuki 1970, p. 378.

⁴⁵ Suzuki 1970, p. 378.

the major cultures of the West, then that unity is provided by Buddhism. This is hardly a problematic statement, given that Buddhism is the only system of thought shared by all three cultures. Nowhere in his writing does Suzuki advocate an anti-Western alliance. Although he believed that there was much of value in the East that was deserving of preservation, he was equally aware of the East's shortcomings, and he strongly urged—even during the Second World War, as we shall see later in this article—that Japan maintain a positive attitude toward what it could gain from the West.⁴⁶

Returning to Suzuki's writings more directly related to the war, there were in the first years of the 1940s several further letters from Suzuki to Yamamoto showing that Suzuki's dissatisfaction with the government had deepened, and that he had strong reservations about the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). In a letter dated 10 February 1940, nearly two years before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Suzuki writes:

They can talk if they like about the national polity, the function of the emperor, and the unity of Shinto and government, but the embodiment of these concepts is nil—utterly without substance. The same is true of the New Order in East Asia, which has come to nothing. The people were just spurred on and sacrificed to the ideology of certain government leaders. We'll be lucky if there's not a civil war. Those of us on the home front—to say nothing of the soldiers on the battlefields—have suffered for this ten-thousand times over. It is the deplorable truth that Japan today hasn't a single statesman. We must start preparing for twenty years in the future; the responsibility of those in charge of education is great.⁴⁷

Suzuki laments the lack of statesmen once again a year later, in a letter dated 13 February 1941:

Indeed, thinking about it, there is much about Japan's future prospects that chills the heart. The most worrisome thing is that there are no real statesmen. I can't bear seeing the dominance of this boisterous bunch [in government] lacking in any kind of philosophical vision.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see Ueda 2007.

⁴⁷ SDZ, vol. 37, p. 2.

⁴⁸ SDZ, vol. 37, p. 17.

Six months prior to Pearl Harbor, in a letter dated 8 August 1941 to a former student, the socialist novelist Iwakura Masaji 岩倉政治 (1903–2000), Suzuki writes:

It is unfortunate that the authorities will not grant you permission to publish your book. I know how disappointed you must feel. Keep in mind, however, that some years from now publication will become possible, so be patient until such a time comes. This war is certain to take Japan to the brink of destruction—indeed, we can say that we are already there. The leaders of Japan cannot continue this fight forever; in their innermost minds they are deeply conflicted, and until this is taken care of there will be no betterment of the country's fortunes. The New Order in East Asia was certain to fail before anything came of it. We must accept the consequences⁴⁹ of what we have done as a nation—there is nothing we can do about it now. I must put off telling you my frank opinion of the situation until we meet directly. History attests to the dangers of entrusting the affairs of a nation to people with no religious convictions; is this not what Japan is dealing with right now?⁵⁰

It was at just around this time that there appeared in Japanese several articles on the subject of Bushido 武士道, the Japanese “Way of the Warrior.” Since this subject plays a central part in Victoria’s critique of Suzuki, I would like to consider this complex and interesting issue at some length.

Bushido

Let us begin by examining Victoria’s treatment of a 1941 article by Suzuki entitled “Zen to bushidō” 禅と武士道 (hereafter “Zen and Bushido”), an essay appearing in a book entitled *Bushidō no shinzui* 武士道の神髄 (The Essence of Bushido), together with a number of articles written by political and military figures. Although this article was not his earliest treatment of Bushido, having been predated by several 1938 English-language essays on the subject, it is of interest since it touches on several issues related to Victoria’s critique.

Victoria characterizes Suzuki as a central figure in the compilation of this publication:

⁴⁹ The word Suzuki uses is *gōhō* 業報, which has a nuance of karmic retribution.

⁵⁰ SDZ, vol. 37, pp. 25–26.

Less than one month before Pearl Harbor, on November 10, 1941, [Suzuki] joined hands with such military leaders as former army minister and imperial army general Araki Sadao (1877–1966), imperial navy captain Hirose Yutaka, and others to publish a book entitled *The Essence of Bushido* (*Bushidō no Shinzui*).⁵¹

Aside from stressing that “the connection of this book to the goals and purposes of the imperial military was unmistakable,” Victoria says very little about Suzuki’s article, acknowledging that it was simply “a fourteen-page distillation of his earlier thought. It did not cover any new intellectual ground.” Instead, Victoria focuses on a statement by the collection’s editor, Handa Shin 半田信, that “Dr. Suzuki’s writings are said to have strongly influenced the military spirit of Nazi Germany,” and further insinuates a link between Suzuki and Nazism by quoting a speech mentioning Bushido (but not Suzuki) given by Kurusu Saburō, the Japanese ambassador to Germany, on the occasion of the formation of the Tripartite Pact between Japan, Germany, and Italy.

Does the fact that Suzuki wrote on Bushido, and that Bushido thought influenced the German military spirit, mean that Suzuki was an active supporter of Nazi ideology? No more, I would venture, than the fact that Victoria critiques Zen, and the fact that several Fundamentalist Christian websites I have seen in the past have utilized those critiques in their attacks on Buddhism, means that Victoria is an active supporter of Fundamentalist Christian ideology. Here, too, Victoria’s argument is based entirely on guilt by association.

Although Victoria implies that Suzuki actively participated with militarist leaders in the publication of this work, Suzuki was involved only to the extent of permitting publication of his essay “Zen and Bushido,” which was not even written for *Bushidō no shinzui* but was a reprint of a piece that had appeared ten months earlier in the February 1941 issue of the journal *Gendai* 現代 (The Modern Age). Moreover, the article, as Victoria notes, is simply an essay setting forth Suzuki’s thought on Bushido in general; it contains no mention of the ongoing war in Asia, nor any suggestion that Suzuki supported it. Such silence is hardly what one would expect if its author had been a committed proponent of the conflict, since the article would have provided a perfect venue for voicing such support, support that Suzuki would have had nothing to lose and everything to gain by expressing. Popular opinion would have been with him, as would the weight of opinion in the Japanese Buddhist world. And with much of the Zen intelligentsia at the time writing articles backing the nation’s

⁵¹ Victoria 1997, p. 110.

wartime policies, a well-known figure like Suzuki must have faced considerable pressure, both subtle and overt, to conform. Instead, here as elsewhere in his writings on Bushido, he confined his discussion to the subject itself and remained silent on Japan's contemporary military situation.⁵²

Insofar as Suzuki's work on Bushido relates to martial issues it is easy, of course, to link them to Japan's modern wars, and for this very reason it is important to examine them in the context of Suzuki's overall views on war, the military, and political ideology. As we have seen from Suzuki's public writings and private letters, two basic positions characterize his thought on these subjects. The first is a recognition of the reality of aggression in human history, and of the consequent legitimacy of defensive war under certain conditions. The second is a clear antipathy toward the Japanese military establishment and its activities—a statement, in effect, that Japan's modern military conflicts did not meet the conditions he set for justifiable war. This extends, as we have seen, to the 1930s war with China (Victoria presents what he considers to be evidence for support of this war, evidence that we will consider below). I believe that a full consideration of Suzuki's writings on Bushido show that they were in accord with these positions.

It should be noted first of all that although Bushido was obviously a subject of interest to Suzuki, appearing in a number of his writings on Zen, feudal samurai culture, and Japanese society, he was not, contrary to Victoria's assertions,⁵³ a major figure in the development or dissemination of Bushido thought. For one thing, the militarists hardly needed Suzuki to formulate a Bushido ideology for them. Bushido was already central to Japanese military culture from at least the Tokugawa period (1600–1868),⁵⁴ by which time it constituted an important aspect of Japanese feudal law. Bushido was thoroughly familiar to the modern Japanese army officer corps from the time of the Meiji Restoration, composed as it was primarily of former members or descendents of the feudal warrior class. More importantly, Suzuki's writings on Bushido comprised a relatively minor portion of his entire body of work, and came quite late in his career as a writer. Although mentions of Bushido are found in several of his early works,⁵⁵ his first systematized writings on

⁵² Suzuki did express the opinion that some of the samurai spirit lived in the modern Japanese soldier (e.g., Suzuki 1959, p. 85), an opinion that surely any of the armies fighting Japan would have concurred with. What Suzuki's writings show, both prior to and during WWII, is that what he disagreed with was the way in which the military establishment was using that spirit.

⁵³ See Victoria 1997, pp. 111–12, particularly p. 112.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Henshall 1999, pp. 56–60.

⁵⁵ For example, a one-paragraph mention in Suzuki 1906–7, p. 34.

the subject appeared in *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, a collection of essays that was published in 1938, when Suzuki was nearly seventy years old. As an English-language work the book was, of course, directed toward a Western readership, hardly an audience that Suzuki would have chosen had he been seeking fertile ground for the promotion of ideas useful to Japanese militarism. Nor did Suzuki produce a Japanese edition, although he was the logical person to do so (the translation that appeared in 1940, two years after the work's appearance in English, was done not by Suzuki himself but a professor of art history named Kitagawa Momo'o 北川桃雄 [1899–1969]). The 1941 article "Zen and Bushido," is, as far as I can determine, Suzuki's first full Japanese-language essay specifically on Bushido, and also one of the last.

Thus Suzuki's prewar and wartime writings on Bushido were pretty much confined to the period between 1938 and the early 1940s, by which time the die was long since cast for Japanese militarist ideology and the Japanese military itself was already well on its course toward disaster in Asia and the Pacific—a disaster that Suzuki saw coming, judging by his letters in 1940 and 1941 to Yamamoto and Iwakura. Why, at this of all times, would Suzuki have started writing on the subject of Bushido? Although all attempts to answer this question must remain conjecture, I would like to propose a possibility that at least has the merit of consistency with Suzuki's opposition to modern Japanese militarism as expressed in his letters and non-Bushido writings, an essential body of evidence that Victoria excludes from his analysis.

As mentioned above, if one recognizes the fact that invasive wars have occurred throughout human history and that therefore defensive action is occasionally unavoidable, then it is essential to consider the conditions under which fighting is justifiable (*jus ad bellum*) and the manner in which fighting must be carried out in order to be justifiable (*jus in bellum*; if one is a Buddhist, this means considering in particular how to conduct combat in a way that minimizes contravention of the principle of nonviolence). The effort to define these issues inevitably involves an unsatisfactory compromise between realism and idealism, particularly in the case of Buddhism, since violence is always a part of war. Nevertheless, the effort to define a just form of combat should be seen for what it is: a real-world attempt to minimize the possibility of even worse alternatives.

I believe that it was with this in mind that Suzuki, with his long-standing misgivings about the modern Japanese military establishment and his aware-

ness of the way that it was mishandling the war,⁵⁶ began to write on the ideals of Bushido at this difficult juncture in Japan's history. Victoria's attack on Suzuki relies principally on Suzuki's main English essays on Bushido, "Zen and the Samurai" and "Zen and Swordsmanship (Parts 1 and 2)," in *Zen and Japanese Culture*.⁵⁷ Although these essays, like Suzuki's other writings, contain no expressions of support for Japan's modern wars, Victoria takes selected passages and, through suggestion and juxtaposition, attempts to establish a connection with militarist thought. As Victoria's arguments demonstrate, the essays do indeed contain much material that can be utilized in this way. I would therefore urge anyone seriously interested in this issue to read the full texts, which are after all in English and readily available. I believe a full reading reveals that Suzuki's intention throughout these writings was not to encourage conflict, but to stress that the avoidance of conflict was at the heart of Bushido.

For example, Suzuki often notes how Bushido, in its stress on "abandoning life and death," parallels the constant enjoinders heard in Zen training to resolve the central problem of samsara. While the Zen monk is motivated to face this issue by an inner, existential question, the more down-to-earth warrior is compelled to do so by the outer realities of his lifestyle, and the dynamic between the two approaches was obviously of interest to Suzuki. For Suzuki, however, the emphasis is always on the inner battle with the fear of death, for both the samurai and the monk. Although *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* discusses in an abstract manner the importance of detachment from death for the samurai seeking to gain victory in battle, Suzuki presents no actual examples of samurai utilizing such detachment to slay opponents. Quite the contrary—all of the historical exemplars of Bushido that Suzuki introduces are figures for whom the mastery of swordsmanship is marked by a certain transcendence, a calm maturity of personality that whenever possible avoids violence and needless fighting. For example, Suzuki relates at some length two stories connected with Tsukahara Bokuden 塚原卜傳 (1489–1571), one of the greatest swordsmen of his time:

⁵⁶ In addition in his above-mentioned letters to Yamamoto and Iwakura in 1940 and 1941, it appears that Suzuki was aware of the Nanjing Massacre of December 1937 to January 1938 (see his comments on pp. 112–13, below). It is not clear how he would have learned of this, considering the strict censorship in effect during the war; acquaintances in the Japanese or foreign diplomatic services may have informed him.

⁵⁷ Suzuki 1959, pp. 61–85 and 89–214, respectively.

As Tsukahara Bokuden was . . . one of those swordsmen who really understood the mission of the sword not as a weapon of murder but as an instrument of spiritual self-discipline, let me cite here the two best-known incidents of his life:

When Bokuden was crossing Lake Biwa on a row-boat with a number of passengers, there was among them a rough-looking samurai, stalwart and arrogant in every possible way. He boasted of his skill in swordsmanship, saying he was the foremost man in the art. The fellow-passengers were eagerly listening to his blatant talk while Bokuden was found dozing as if nothing were going on about him. This irritated the braggart very much. He approached Bokuden and shook him, saying, "You also carry a pair of swords, why not say a word?" Answered Bokuden quietly, "My art is different from yours; it consists not in defeating others, but in not being defeated." This incensed him immensely.

"What is your school then?"

"Mine is known as the *mutekatsu* school" (which means to defeat the enemy "without hands," that is, without using a sword).

"Why do you then carry a sword yourself?"

"This is meant to do away with selfish motives, and not to kill others."

The man's anger now knew no bounds, and he exclaimed in a most impassioned manner, "Do you really mean to fight me with no swords?"

"Why not?" was Bokuden's answer.

The braggart-samurai called out to the boatman to row towards the nearest land. But Bokuden suggested that it would be better to go to the island farther off because the mainland might attract people who were liable to get somehow hurt. The samurai agreed. The boat headed towards the solitary island at some distance. As soon as they were near enough, the man jumped off the boat and, drawing his sword, was all ready for combat. Bokuden leisurely took off his own swords and handed them to the boatman. To all appearances he was about to follow the samurai onto the island when Bokuden suddenly took the oar away from the boatman, and applying it to the land gave a hard back-stroke to the boat. Thereupon the boat took a precipitous departure from the island and plunged itself into the deeper water safely away from the man. Bokuden smilingly

remarked, “This is my no-sword school.”

Another interesting and instructive anecdote is told of Bokuden, whose mastery of the art really went beyond mere acquiring proficiency in sword-play. He had three sons who were all trained in swordsmanship. He wanted to test their attainments. He placed a little pillow over the curtain at the entrance to his room, and it was so arranged that a slight touch on the curtain, when it was raised upon entering, would make the pillow fall right on one’s head.

Bokuden called in the eldest son first. When he approached he noticed the pillow on the curtain, so he took it down, and after entering he placed it back in the original position. The second son was now called in. He touched the curtain to raise it, and as soon as he saw the pillow coming down, he caught it in his hands, and then carefully put it back where it had been. It was the third son’s turn to touch the curtain. He came in brusquely, and the pillow fell right on his neck. But he cut it in two with his sword even before it came down on the floor.

Bokuden passed his judgment: “Eldest son, you are well qualified for swordsmanship.” So saying, he gave him a sword. To the second son he said, “Train yourself yet assiduously.” But the youngest son Bokuden most severely reproved, for he was pronounced to be a disgrace to his family.⁵⁸

Here Suzuki is quite explicit in his message that the highest mastery of the art of swordsmanship involves a calm transcendence of pride, anger, and violent action. He further emphasized this message when he published *Zen and Japanese Culture*, his revision of *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*.⁵⁹ He describes the standpoint of a sword master named Odagiri Ichūon 小田切一雲 (1630–1706), the chief proponent of the “Sword of No-abiding Mind” 無住心劍 school and, in Suzuki’s opinion, one of the most deeply Zen-influenced swordsmen that Japan has produced:

⁵⁸ Suzuki 1938, pp. 51–53.

⁵⁹ Although this book, published in 1959, may be regarded as irrelevant to the discussion of Suzuki’s prewar and wartime presentation of Bushido, I have taken my cue from Victoria, who in his attack on Suzuki uses material from the 1959 *Zen and Japanese Culture* that is not in the 1938 *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (e.g., the passage on the sword of life and the sword of death, Victoria 1997, p. 110).

The perfect swordsman avoids quarreling or fighting. Fighting means killing. How can one human being bring himself to kill a fellow being? We are all meant to love one another and not to kill. It is abhorrent that one should be thinking all the time of fighting and coming out victorious. We are moral beings, we are not to lower ourselves to the status of animality. What is the use of becoming a fine swordsman if he loses his human dignity? The best thing is to be a victor without fighting.⁶⁰

In *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, Suzuki also relates several episodes relating to the great generals Takeda Shingen 武田信玄 (1521–1573) and Uesugi Kenshin 上杉謙信 (1530–1578), who, although rivals during the Warring States period (ca. 1467–ca. 1573), treated each other with magnanimity and respect both on the battlefields and off. Kenshin, for example, sends Shingen supplies of salt when he learns that the latter's stores of this precious commodity have run out. Whether these stories are historically true is not as relevant here as the fact that Suzuki chooses these examples to illustrate his position on Bushido: that the warrior ideal lay in avoiding conflict whenever possible, and in acting fairly and magnanimously toward others. In short, it appears that, far from extolling Bushido to encourage militarism, Suzuki was attempting to reframe it in terms as nonviolent as possible.

Nevertheless, the position of the samurai necessarily entailed the use of the weapons that characterized their status, whether as warriors or law enforcers. This raises the question of how potentially lethal force fits into the ideals of Bushido as presented by Suzuki. This in turn brings up “the sword that kills and the sword that gives life,” a concept that is one of the most important (and controversial) in Suzuki's Bushido thought. Let us first look at the paragraph, found at the beginning of the chapter “Zen and Swordsmanship,” that introduces the concept:

The sword has thus a double office to perform: to destroy anything that opposes the will of its owner and to sacrifice all the impulses that arise from the instinct of self-preservation. The one relates itself with the spirit of patriotism or sometimes militarism, while the other has a religious connotation of loyalty and self-sacrifice. In the case of the former, very frequently the sword may mean destruc-

⁶⁰ Suzuki 1959, p. 132. Ichion's ideas are set forth in the book *Kenjutsu fushiki hen* 剣術不識篇 (The Unknown in the Art of Swordsmanship), by Kimura Kyūho 木村久甫, a short treatise compiled in 1768.

tion pure and simple, and then it is the symbol of force, sometimes devilish force. It must, therefore, be controlled and consecrated by the second function. Its conscientious owner is always mindful of this truth. For then destruction is turned against the evil spirit. The sword comes to be identified with the annihilation of things that lie in the way of peace, justice, progress, and humanity. [*Zen at War's* citation ends here.] It stands for all that is desirable for the spiritual welfare of the world at large. It is now the embodiment of life and not of death.⁶¹

Here again I believe that Suzuki is doing his best to address a real-world dilemma: if war is sometimes unavoidable (or if violent lawbreakers must occasionally be stopped), then weapons have to be used. If weapons have to be used, than how can they be used in a way that minimizes violence to both body and spirit? The passage above reflects Suzuki's view that the sword itself is value-neutral: its use is unjustified and harmful in some situations, necessary and beneficial in others, depending upon the circumstances and the purpose for which it is employed. Technical skill in its use does not necessarily mean that it will be used correctly, for a warrior skilled in technique but immature in personality may be tempted to utilize his technique with self-aggrandizement as the goal. This is the realm of the sword of death, a realm that Suzuki, significantly, specifically links to patriotism and militarism. Suzuki stresses that this aspect of the sword must always be "controlled and consecrated" by the ethical principle he symbolically identifies as "the sword of life," so that it is employed only when absolutely necessary and in a manner free of hatred. This much would seem to apply to the use of any weapon. Of course, in the late 1930s and the early 1940s the Japanese military was most clearly not using its weapons in a "controlled and consecrated" way, which, I believe, is one of the reasons that Suzuki, aware of this abuse, chose this period to write about Bushido, emphasizing in particular the internalization of a code of moral behavior:

As something of divinity enters into the making of the sword, its owner and user ought also to respond to the inspiration. He ought to be a spiritual man, and not an agent of brutality. His mind ought to be in unison with the soul which animates the cold surface of the steel. The great swordsmen have never been tired of instilling

⁶¹ Suzuki 1959, p. 89. Cited in Victoria 1997, pp. 108–9.

this feeling into the minds of their pupils. When the Japanese say that the sword is the soul of the samurai, we must remember all that goes with it as I have tried to set forth above, that is: loyalty, self-sacrifice, reverence, benevolence, and the cultivation of the religious feelings. Here is the true samurai.⁶²

Important as the cultivation of these virtues is, there is another, more internal aspect wherein Suzuki saw the meeting point of Bushido and Zen. First of all, it should be mentioned that Suzuki's use of the term "Zen" can be confusing, as he (and many other writers on the subject) tend to use it in several different meanings. In Japanese the character for "Zen," 禅, can mean either the practice of meditation (more fully expressed using the word *zazen* 坐禅), the meditative experience itself, or the Mahayana Buddhist religious tradition known as the Zen school (Zenshū 禅宗). Zen as Mahayana Buddhism has, of course, all of the thought structures associated with that tradition, but it is in the sense of meditation and the meditative experience that he uses the word "Zen" when he writes:

Zen has no special doctrine or philosophy with a set of concepts and intellectual formulas, except that it tries to release one from the bondage of birth and death and this by means of certain intuitive modes of understanding peculiar to itself. It is, therefore, extremely flexible to adapt itself almost to any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with. It may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political or economic dogmatism. It is, however, generally animated with a certain revolutionary spirit, and when things come to a deadlock which is the case when we are overloaded with conventionalism, formalism, and other cognate isms, Zen asserts itself and proves to be a destructive force.⁶³

Suzuki often likes to express his point using language that is a bit on the provocative side, as is the case here. But the underlying point itself is important. The Zen referred to here is the Zen that, with its emphasis on the here-and-now, "asserts itself and proves to be a destructive force"—destructive, that is, of "conventionalism, formalism," and all other isms that would reduce the meditative experience to a system of ideas and beliefs confined to the limits

⁶² Suzuki 1938, pp. 71–72.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

of the human mind; it is thus “destructive” in the sense that all true meditation is destructive. Meditation in this sense is the infinite openness in which there is no self and other; it is the mind prior to thought, and thus prior to the distinction between good and evil. Being prior to the arising of good and evil means also, of course, that it is value-neutral, with all the dangers that accompany this. It can be employed equally for either good or evil; when misused it can enable killing unrestrained by pangs of guilt or conscience, but when used in conjunction with an ethical system that stresses benevolence, magnanimity, and compassion, it can provide an important spiritual foundation to that system and help minimize the ego concerns that form “the root of all quarrels and fightings.”⁶⁴ Hence Suzuki’s constant emphasis on the moral aspect of training.

An approach to understanding Suzuki’s position is provided by another passage in *Zen and Japanese Culture* describing Odagiri Ichiun’s notion of the highest attainment in swordsmanship being realization of what Suzuki calls “Heavenly Reason” or “Primary Nature”:

Ichiun mentions the thing of first importance for the swordsman’s personality. He is to give up all desire for name and gain, all egotism and self-glorification, he is to be in accord with Heavenly Reason and observe the Law of Nature as it is reflected in every one of us. . . . One is not to think of achieving a victory over the opponent. Let the swordsman disregard from the first what may come out of the engagement, let him keep his mind clear of such thoughts. For the first principle of swordsmanship is a thorough insight into Heavenly Reason, which works out according to the chance circumstances; the rest is of no concern to the swordsman himself.

When Heavenly Reason is present in us it knows how to behave on every occasion: when a man sees fire, his Reason knows at once how to use it; when he finds water, it tells him at once what it is good for; when he meets a friend, it makes him greet him; when he sees a person in a dangerous situation, it makes him go right out to his rescue. As long as we are one with it, we never err in our proper behavior however variable the situation may be.⁶⁵

The position of Ichiun—and of Suzuki in citing him—is that the person

⁶⁴ Suzuki 1959, pp. 133–34.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 173–74. One particularly interesting aspect of Ichiun’s thought is that of the non-violent outcome in swordsmanship known as *ai-nuke* 相抜け. Generally when two swordsmen of equal ability face each other, the final result is *ai-uchi* 相打ち, in which both masters strike

who has transcended all “desire for name and gain, all egotism and self-glorification” is most naturally able to distinguish those occasions when force is justified from those when it is not. The meditative mind is best positioned to perceive the true nature of a situation, free from the distorting influences of self-interest. The same can be said of the application of force, which is most likely to be carried out appropriately when freed from the anger, fear, self-righteousness, fear of death, and all of the other ego mechanisms that are so often at the root of truly violent acts against others, and against oneself.

Suzuki’s prewar writings clearly show that he was opposed to militarism and right-wing thought, and that he had grave misgivings about war. We will see below that these misgivings continued throughout WWII. But in the period Suzuki was writing about Bushido, the war was an undeniable fact that had to be dealt with. I believe that Suzuki wrote on Bushido because he saw in its ethics and ideals one of the only ways to influence the military to, at least, minimize the ongoing violence. Whether this was the optimal approach is another question, of course. Suzuki may have felt that it was his only option during wartime given the totalitarian nature of the government at the time—a sentiment that Ichikawa Hakugen would surely have understood⁶⁶—but the potential was clearly present for his writings to be abused by a militarist gov-

each other simultaneously. With “Sword of No-abiding Mind” masters, however, the result is *ai-nuke*, in which both masters strike simultaneously but the result is a mutual “passing-through” in which neither gets injured.

⁶⁶ Although Ichikawa is described by Victoria as “a Rinzai Zen sect-affiliated priest . . . who had gone from staunch supporter to severe critic of Japanese militarism” (Victoria 1997, p. ix), this description does not accurately describe Ichikawa’s true situation. Far from being a “staunch supporter” of Japanese militarism, Ichikawa had for many years prior to the start of the war been a left-wing critic of the military government. Christopher Ives, for example, writes:

Ichikawa was a shy child, naturally intimidated and repulsed by the education he received under the imperial education system and “terrified” of the state and the supreme commander (emperor) who could order his death. With this disposition he found himself increasingly against war and the rhetoric of the *kokutai* (national polity). . . . Gradually, a “humanistic anger toward the evils of society and the state” welled up in him, and his lifelong interest in Buddhism, socialism, and anarchism began to crystallize. (Ives 1994, pp. 16–17.)

Ishii Kōsei, a professor at Komazawa University, writes:

Ichikawa Hakugen, who after WWII combined self-criticism with an examination of the Buddhist world’s war responsibility, was a man who by his own admission went through many changes. At first, speaking from his personal political standpoint of Buddhist-Anarchist-Communism, he was a critic of Buddhist cooperation in the war effort. Fearing torture under the Special Higher Police, however, he adopted positions that were

ernment already employing Bushido to promote its own goals. If Suzuki is to be criticized for anything, it is for being insufficiently aware of the potential for misuse associated with stressing the ideals of a warrior code more suited to the Warring States period than the modern age.

One such ideal is *makujiki kōzen* 驀直向前, rushing determinedly forward without looking either backward or sideways. As Suzuki expressed the concept in his article “Zen and Bushido”: “The spirit of Bushido is truly to abandon this life, neither bragging of one’s achievements, nor complaining when one’s talents go unrecognized. It is simply a question of rushing forward toward one’s ideal.”⁶⁷ In the feudal period, when battles were fought between samurai armies and involved few noncombatants, *makujiki kōzen* was not only the most effective way to prevail in combat but also raised fewer ethical questions than in an age when machine guns and other modern weaponry had turned battlefields into slaughtergrounds and civilians were seen as legitimate targets of attack. As it was, not long after the publication of his articles on Bushido, seeing perhaps that the paradigm of *makujiki kōzen* was indeed being used to urge “Zen-inspired warrior-soldiers to ‘rush forward to one’s ideal,’ ignoring everything else including questions of right and wrong,”⁶⁸ Suzuki felt compelled to publicly express his opposition to attempts to associate Zen and *makujiki kōzen* with meaningless death. The following passage appeared in a 1943 article in the Buddhist newspaper *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報:

Some people think that to die recklessly is Zen. But Zen and death are not the same thing. *Makujiki kōzen* does not mean to sit in the grip of the hand of death. It is deplorable to think of Zen as a purification rite. The Zen understanding of human life is based on Mahāyāna Buddhism. Zen without this is not Zen. It isn’t anything at all. . . . To regard the foolhardy and senseless sacrifice of one’s life as Zen is a mish-mash idea. Zen absolutely never teaches one to

progressively more ambivalent, until finally he wrote material supportive of the war (Ishii 2004, p. 227).

Ichikawa, in other words, was a long-time opponent of the government who was intimidated into cooperation by the authorities. This is not to condemn him—his reaction is quite understandable given the coercive powers of the totalitarian authorities, against whom opposition would have done little except land him in jail. This is an important point to keep in mind when attempting to assess the wartime actions of individuals like Ichikawa or D. T. Suzuki.

⁶⁷ Suzuki 1943, p. 75. This translation appears in Victoria 1997, p. 111.

⁶⁸ Victoria 1997, p. 208, n. 15.

throw one's life away.⁶⁹

That he came to realize the difficulties involved in the practical application of this feudal samurai ideal to the realities of modern war is suggested by the need he felt to state that "Zen absolutely never teaches one to throw one's life away." One might draw the same conclusion from the fact that after the early 1940s he wrote no more on Bushido during the wartime years.

Wartime Statements

Apart from his silence on Bushido after the early 1940s, Suzuki was active as an author during all of the war years, submitting to Buddhist journals numerous articles that conspicuously avoided mention of the ongoing conflict. Kirita Kiyohide, the Japanese Buddhist perhaps most familiar with the entire body of Suzuki's writing, comments:

During this period one of the journals Suzuki contributed to frequently, *Daijōzen* [Mahayana Zen], fairly bristled with pro-militarist articles. In issues filled with essays proclaiming "Victory in the Holy War!" and bearing such titles as "Death Is the Last Battle," "Certain Victory for Kamikaze and Torpedoes," and "The Noble Sacrifice of a Hundred Million," Suzuki continued with contributions on subjects like "Zen and Culture."

A further indication of his posture during the war years is his work for the Buddhist newspaper *Chūgai nippō*. Between 1941 and the end of the war in 1945 Suzuki contributed two regular articles and 191 short installments for a column entitled "Zen." Virtually none of these pieces contain any reference to the current political and war situation. Instead, they simply introduce the lives and recorded sayings of the masters or explain the outlook of Zen.⁷⁰

In his private correspondence, however, Suzuki continued to express the same standpoint of opposition to the ongoing military developments seen in his earlier letters. A letter dated 28 February 1942, just a few months after the attacks on Pearl Harbor and Singapore that ignited the war against the Western Allies, expresses Suzuki's anger at the situation in a series of *waka* poems to his friend Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945):

⁶⁹ SDZ, vol. 15, p. 224. This translation appears in Kirita 1994, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Kirita 1994, pp. 60–61. Reference to SDZ, vol. 15, pp. 157–425.

The glint of the sacred sword appears blinding.
Nevertheless, I love only the soft light
of the unclouded sacred jewel.”

Mitsurugino hikari suzamashi sawa aredo kumoranu tama no uruoi o omou.
みつるぎの 光すぎましきはあれど くもらぬ玉の潤ひを思ふ

You, the demon who lives through power, will, and blood!
Who is it that questions your responsibility?
(How sad it is that there is none who does so!)

Kenryoku to ishi to chi de ikiru akuma! Nanji no sekinin toumono wa darezo.
(*Daremo naki koso kanashikere.*)

権力と意志と血で生きる悪魔! 汝の責任 問ふものは誰ぞ (誰もなきこそ悲しけれ)

There is a someone who acts with absolute power
but takes no responsibility [for his actions].
His name is the state.

Zettai no iryoku ni ikite sekinin o motanumono ari. Na o kokka to iu.
絶対の威力に生きて責任を持たぬものあり 名を国家と云ふ

You who behave as a demon
under the name of the state—
I despise you.

Kokka chō naniyorite ma no itonami o itonamu nanji ware nanji o nikumu.
国家てふ名によりて魔のいとなみをいとなむ汝 われ汝を悪む

You!

Don't dance on Singapore Island!

Destruction is easy, but creation takes much time!

Kimitachi yo sonnani odoruna shōnantō hakai wa yasushi sōzō wa nagashi.
君達よ そんなに踊るな昭南島 破くわいは易し創造は長し⁷¹

It was also as an opponent to the war that Suzuki was remembered by his colleagues at Otani University, where Suzuki was a professor at the time. At an assembly for students at Otani University who had been conscripted and were about to enter the army, Suzuki is recorded to have spoken as follows:

As the war continued, student deferments were eventually halted,

⁷¹ SDZ, vol. 37, p. 36.

and many young men from the universities were conscripted and sent to the battlefields. Otani held a sending-off gathering for the university's departing students, with Suzuki chosen to give the address. As he stood at the podium, he was silent for a time, perhaps at a loss for words to say to the young men about to depart for the fields of death. His silence must have impressed a sense of gravity upon the students. Finally, he began to speak, saying, "How tragically unfortunate this is. What possible reason do young Americans and young Japanese have to kill each other? How long will this absurd war go on? But someday it will come to an end. When it does, it will be the job of you young people to create a new world and a new age. So you must not die during this war. You must come back alive, even if that means being taken prisoners of war."

Suzuki's address, so different from the war-promoting speeches that were customary at such gatherings, deeply affected not only the newly conscripted students but also everyone else present. His words are still remembered today. Suzuki's talk as quoted above was recorded by Hino Kenshi, a temple priest whose father, a former Otani student present at the gathering, repeated Suzuki's statement "on numerous occasions." Many other former students recall Suzuki's words in almost exactly the same way.⁷²

Earlier, when the Pearl Harbor attack was announced at an Otani University faculty meeting on 8 December 1941, Suzuki created quite a commotion among the assembled faculty members by stating, "With this, Japan will be destroyed. What will destroy it is Shinto and the militarists."⁷³

This, at least, is not a point that would be disputed by Victoria. In the later sections of *Zen at War* he concedes that the war against the Western Allies was not supported by Suzuki, but he insists that Suzuki was opposed only to this aspect of the war, knowing full well from his years of residence in the West that Japan could not prevail against such mighty industrial powers. Regarding the war on the Asian continent, Victoria says, Suzuki was "quite enthusiastic":

Nowhere in Suzuki's writings does one find the least regret, let alone an apology for Japan's earlier colonial efforts in such places

⁷² Quoted from Ueda 2007, p. 36.

⁷³ Kitanishi 2006, p. 13.

as China, Korea, or Taiwan. In fact, he was quite enthusiastic about Japanese military activities in Asia. In an article addressed specifically to young Japanese Buddhists written in 1943 he stated: “Although it is called the Greater East Asia War, its essence is that of an ideological struggle for the culture of East Asia. Buddhists must join in this struggle and accomplish their essential mission.” One is left with the suspicion that for Suzuki things didn’t really go wrong until Japan decided to attack the United States.⁷⁴

Suzuki was certainly well aware of the futility of going to war with the United States, as indicated by several passages quoted by Victoria.⁷⁵ But it is difficult on several levels to agree with Victoria’s contention that Suzuki supported the war in China. First, Suzuki’s letters of 10 February 1940 and 8 August 1941, quoted above, show that, far from being enthusiastic about the conflict, he viewed it as an utter disaster. Moreover, even on a purely semantic level, Victoria’s interpretation of Suzuki’s words is ruled out by the fact that the term “Greater East Asia War” (*Daitōa sensō* 大東亜戦争) never referred to the war with China alone; the name came into existence only on 10 December 1941, two days after the Pearl Harbor attack, when it was applied by decision of the Japanese Cabinet to both the war with China and the war with the Western Allies.⁷⁶ Thus, when Suzuki wrote these words in June 1943, no reader would have interpreted them as referring solely to the war in China.

Most importantly, it is obvious from the overall context of the quoted sentences that Suzuki was not referring to the actual fighting in China at all. The essay containing the quoted passage, entitled “*Daijō bukkyō no sekaiteki shimei: Wakaki hitobito ni yosu*” 大乘仏教の世界的使命: 若き人々に寄す (The Global Mission of Mahayana Buddhism: Addressed to Young People),⁷⁷ sets forth Suzuki’s position on the cultural encounter between East and West, and the proper role of Mahayana Buddhism in facing the resulting tensions and challenges. I will quote from it in some length, not only to contextualize the sentence cited by Victoria but also to show something of the broad general

⁷⁴ Victoria 1997, p. 151.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Victoria 1997, p. 152; p. 208, n. 15. Suzuki was indeed realistic about Japan’s relative weakness with regard to the United States, but, as we have seen, his opposition to Japan’s wars was much broader.

⁷⁶ See the *Nihonshi daijiten* 日本史大辞典, s.v. “*Daitōa sensō*.” It is generally agreed that the name did not apply retroactively to the war prior to December, 1941.

⁷⁷ SDZ, vol. 32, pp. 420–35. Originally published in the *Ōtani gakuhō* 大谷学報, June 20, 1943 issue.

lines along which Suzuki was thinking during the wartime years. The article begins with the following paragraphs:

In the almost eighty years that have passed since the Meiji Restoration [1868], great progress has been made in all of the non-Buddhist areas of culture. Contact with the cultures of the West was for the Japanese a terrible shock, but we were able to respond in an appropriate fashion. This is something that anyone who compares our culture now with what it was at the beginning of the Meiji period would readily acknowledge.

Never in history have we experienced such rapid progress in every aspect of our lives, whether in the advance of science and technology, the accumulation of capital, the growth in social complexity, or the momentous transformation of political ideas. In the East, and particularly in Japan, this “raised the heavens and shook the earth,” and it continues to do so today, although in the nations of the West this type of progress may no longer seem surprising, owing to the qualitative differences between East and West.

Even nowadays we can perceive how flourishing is the intellectual competition between these qualitatively different cultures. I believe that this phenomenon of rivalry, trade-off, confrontation, struggle, or whatever you wish to call it will continue for quite some time. Then, out of these struggles and rivalries will inevitably arise a natural integration of the cultures of East and West. Before then, however, we must undergo many trials and tribulations, particularly with regard to thought and culture.⁷⁸

The article continues throughout in much the same vein, exploring the implications of Western technology and thought for the material and spiritual culture of Japan and discussing the challenges and benefits of Western rationality for traditional Japanese ways of thinking (often in a manner quite critical of the latter). Arguing for the importance of transcending Japan’s cultural limitations in order to encompass the Western outlook, Suzuki sharply criticizes the response of Buddhism to the Western challenge:

What changes has Buddhism made in thought and lifestyle as a result of this jolt from the West to its environment? The fact is, in

⁷⁸ SDZ, vol. 32, pp. 420–21.

the eighty years since the Meiji Restoration, Japanese Buddhism has done nothing. Although Buddhism, even should its “body” perish, is certain to sprout anew as long as any life remains in its teachings, those teachings are nevertheless spread by human beings, human beings who represent one aspect of the body of Buddhism. Should that aspect of the body disappear, revival of the Way itself would become a very difficult and time-consuming process, allowing undesirable teachings to run rampant. Thus the protection, growth, and welfare of the truth must be attended to in a conscious, rational, and systematic manner. Japanese Buddhism today is facing an extreme crisis. If at this time we miss the opportunity to turn it around, we will witness the tragic demise of Buddhism’s very life. Indications of this are visible everywhere.

The political upheavals of the Meiji Restoration dealt a severe blow to the feudal Buddhist organizations, depriving them of much of their material support and shaking their ideological foundations. Fortunately, prominent priests at the time were able to contain the crisis, but ever since then the Buddhists—especially the bonzes—have been, in their thought and their spiritual practice, like “the bug in the lion.”⁷⁹ Herein we see the root of the problem. Day by day the toxin spreads. The Japanese Buddhist organizations must deal with the fact that they have become little more than funeral-service associations, and there is little they can do about it. The organizations are full of shavepates, but one can only wonder if any of them are devoting thought to the serious and very real problem of the cultural and ideological tension between East and West.

Most of the clergy is content to confine itself to understanding, protecting, and maintaining what might be called “*Nihonteki*” *bukkyō* 「日本的」仏教 (“Japanese-style” Buddhism). The *Nihonteki bukkyō* they speak of is nothing but the relics of Buddhism past—relics that, in today’s world situation, should not be adhered to. I’ve heard it said that the best defense is a good offence. What the term *Nihonteki* should imply in this day and age is the perspicacity to leave the past behind and open up new approaches. Instead of living in rigid conformity with “the past,” we must renounce it and out of this renunciation bring new life into being. If we do not do

⁷⁹ A Buddhist simile meaning a parasite that drains the life from its host.

this, even conforming to the past will become impossible. Recently one hears terms like *tenshin* 転進 [a positive change in course] or *hatteneki kaishō* 発展的解消 [the dissolution of an organization to make way for its existence in a different form]; in all of them the operating principle is the logic of negation. Needless to say, this is not negation in the ordinary sense of the word.

Kamakura Buddhism renounced the Buddhism of the Nara and Heian periods in the process of developing a new, more grass-roots form of Japanese Buddhism. This opportunity was afforded to Japan by the decline of the courtly culture, the ascendancy of the warrior class, the renewed contact with Chinese literature, the struggle against the Mongol invasions, and other factors. As a result of these stimuli Buddhism during the Kamakura age was able to rid itself of the conceptual, aristocratic, and leisure-oriented character that had typified it during the Nara and Heian eras. The result was a reawakening of Buddhism to its original mission.⁸⁰

Next comes the paragraph from which Victoria draws his citation:

In the course of the ensuing six or seven hundred years, however, Buddhism has bound itself with new fetters. Today we are blessed with the opportunity to cast these fetters aside and advance another step. In response to the influx of the different culture and thought of the West, Buddhists, as Buddhists, must renounce those things in their way of thinking—those things from their past—that deserve to be renounced, and develop new approaches. We speak of the “Greater East Asia” War, but its essence, ideologically, should be seen as a struggle by East Asian culture.⁸¹ Buddhists must join in this struggle and fulfill their original mission as Buddhists.⁸²

⁸⁰ SDZ, vol. 32, pp. 423–24.

⁸¹ Victoria’s reading, “its essence is that of an ideological struggle for the culture of East Asia” (Victoria 1997, p. 151), although possible, is difficult to support either in light of the context of the article, or of the original Japanese: *sono jitsu wa shisōteki ni tōa bunka no kōsō de aru to mite yoi* その実は思想的に東亜文化の抗争であると見てよい。

It is of interest to note that, although it does not change the overall meaning of what Suzuki is saying, it is likely that there was a misprint here in which *tōa* 東亜 (East Asia) was substituted for *tōzai* 東西 (East-West). In the original text, Suzuki places quotation marks around the “Greater East Asian” in the term “Greater East Asian War,” suggesting that he wished to express a contrast between “East Asia” and something else. The fact that the entire article is a discussion of the differences and tensions between Eastern and Western cultures, combined

Suzuki, beginning a new section at this point, explains the nature of this conflict:

In the area of culture and ideology, though one may speak of “struggle,” “conflict,” or “rivalry,” what is involved is not throwing your opponent to the ground and pinning him so that he cannot move. This is especially true when the opponent is not necessarily your inferior intellectually, materially, historically, and otherwise. In such cases not only is it impossible to destroy him, but even if it were it would not be to your benefit to do so. Western culture is qualitatively different from that of the East, but for precisely that reason it should be accepted. And those on the other side need to accept our culture as well. It is important to arouse the frame of mind that seeks to accomplish this. That, truly, is the role with which Buddhism is charged, for it is Buddhist thought that functions at the center of the Eastern way of thinking.⁸³

It is obvious that this article has nothing to do with expressing support for the war in China or calling for young Buddhists to join the army and go off to fight on the continent. Rather, Suzuki is appealing for a positive, determined engagement with the culture of the West as a way not only to enrich Japanese culture but also to revive the life of Japanese Buddhism. Far from an expression of enthusiasm for the Asian war, it is indicative of precisely those qualities in Suzuki that caused him to oppose the outlook and actions that led the militarists to invade the continent. It is particularly indicative of Suzuki's outlook that this article was published in 1943 at the height of the wartime xenophobia, a time when for most Japanese the common epithet for Westerners was *kichiku beiei* 鬼畜米英 (demon-animal Americans and English) and when English itself was forbidden in schools as the language of the enemy.

Later in his essay Suzuki renews his call to Japanese Buddhism for a greater universality and sense of an international mission:

with the fact that the two characters *a* 亜 and *zai* 西 can easily be confused when written by hand, suggests that the original manuscript, before being set to type, read, “We speak of the “Greater East Asia” War, but its essence, ideologically, should be seen as a struggle between Eastern and Western cultures” (“*Daitōa*” *sensō to iu ga, sono jitsu wa shisōteki ni tōzai bunka no kōsō de aru to mite yoi* 「大東亜」戦争と云ふが、その実は思想的に東西文化の抗争であると見てよい).

⁸² SDZ, vol. 32, p. 424.

⁸³ SDZ, vol. 32, pp. 424–25.

Japanese Buddhism has never been Mahayana Buddhism in the true sense of the term. It has always been too insular and too political—qualities that suited it for existence in its cultural environment, but have rendered it unable at present to transcend its limits. Japanese Buddhists have never had the missionary fervor to depart for foreign lands and live out their lives in the wild—in this regard we lag far behind the Christians, particularly the Catholics, with their indomitable spirit. It may be acceptable here in our own country to resign oneself to irrelevance, but Japanese Buddhism has failed to produce so much as a single individual willing to go abroad to dwell amongst foreign peoples, not knowing whether he will live or die, and sacrifice himself for the Way he believes in. This failure is a natural outcome, given the nature of “Japanese” Buddhism. . . .

Mahayana Buddhists must not only recognize that their faith is universal in nature, but also proclaim that universality via a universal logic on a global scale. This will probably require that tradition and history be set aside for a time. It is now required of us that we make a radical, 180-degree turn with regard to the world. The opportunity for this may be provided by a chance occurrence. Or it may be provided by an act of resistance against suppression by a certain group. In any event, regardless of what the direct catalyst might be, today, in this eighteenth year of the Shōwa era [1943], what the world asks of us is complete revolution in our culture and thought. It would seem to me that this call would be heard, deep in the heart, by some Mahayana Buddhist—no, more than that, I believe that it is heard by *everyone*! The problem is simply that we’re not yet fully prepared to act. Look at the way in which Shinran Shōnin 親鸞聖人 (1173–1262) went against tradition when he felt the spirit of the times calling from the very depths of the earth.⁸⁴

There is one final point I would like to make with regard to this article. Toward the end Suzuki makes what is, in those days of government censorship, about as close as possible to a direct appeal for his young readers to wake up to what was going on around them and not follow the lead of those who claim the spiritual superiority of the Japanese:

We must open our eyes and see how culture is being influenced in

⁸⁴ SDZ, vol. 32, pp. 430–32.

all of its aspects by modern thought—especially scientific thought. We cannot afford the shallow narcissism implicit in the attitude that “we [Japanese] are spiritual, those [Westerners] are materialistic.” The people who call themselves spiritual or claim a monopoly on morality are actually the most materialistic and immoral of all. What these people are up to is, in fact, obvious to any Buddhist with even the slightest capacity to observe within and watch without, though not to those who cover their eyes and ears and do as they’re told, turning right and turning left when ordered to; while I won’t say these people have been deceived, the truth is that they are not fully utilizing their senses.⁸⁵

While Victoria and others may wish that Suzuki had criticized Japanese militarism more directly, their failure to acknowledge that Suzuki did publish such indirect criticisms sadly distorts the historical record. Especially for a citizen whose personal circumstances—a long residence in the United States, an American spouse, and past criticism of the military—made him vulnerable to charges of sympathizing with the enemy, Suzuki’s words, mild as they may seem in hindsight, were actually quite courageous under a totalitarian regime.⁸⁶

Victoria, in his attempts to find other evidence that Suzuki favored Japan’s military actions in China, quotes the following passage from the chapter “Zen and the Samurai” in *Zen and Japanese Culture*:

There is a document that was very much talked about in connection with the Japanese military operations in China in the 1930s. It is known as the *Hagakure*, which literally means “Hidden under the Leaves,” for it is one of the virtues of the samurai not to display himself, not to blow his horn, but to keep himself away from the public eye and be doing good for his fellow beings.⁸⁷

The first line of this passage—the only mention of China in the entire chapter it appears in—is no more than a statement of fact. Indeed, if the Japanese military had acted in accordance with the words of this passage—not displaying itself, and doing good for its fellow beings—its problems in China would never have occurred in the first place.

⁸⁵ SDZ, vol. 32, pp. 434–35.

⁸⁶ See, for example, n. 66, above.

⁸⁷ Victoria 1997, p. 107. The original passage is found in Suzuki 1959, p. 70.

Postwar Writings

This brings us to a consideration of Suzuki's postwar writings, writings that are strongly critical of Japan's wartime actions and the behavior of the Zen leadership. Let us begin with an article that appeared in the 1 September 1945 issue of the journal *Teiyū rinri* 丁酉倫理. The date, a mere two weeks after the defeat and virtually simultaneous to Japan's formal surrender on 2 September, suggests that the thoughts expressed by Suzuki were already well-formed, and perhaps already set to paper, by the war's concluding months. Here are a few representative passages:

This war lacked any just moral cause or argument, or any credible ideological background. The war that was started in Manchuria was an act of pure exploitation and imperialism. . . .

After the army had finished its work in Manchuria, it marched into northern China, saying that it was necessary to do so in order to secure Japan's economic survival. Things went well for it there, and this was attributed to the "august powers of the emperor." I'm sure this was the most unwelcome nuisance imaginable as far as the emperor himself was concerned. "August powers" are like the sword of life of Mañjuśrī or the demon-suppressing sword of Acala (Fudō Myōō 不動明王). Was it necessary for the Japanese army to wield such arms in either Manchuria or northern China? The Chinese had done us no harm. . . . It was nothing other than a confirmation that this was invasive, militaristic imperialism. . . .

As the so-called "Holy War" expanded from northern China to central China and on to southern China, the Japanese populace was kept completely in the dark. It seemed like the militarists and industrialists, swept up in their own momentum, could think only of advancing farther south. Then that inhuman atrocity committed in Nanjing—that unprecedented atrocity, news of which was concealed from the Japanese people but which was clearly reported abroad. People could not fathom out how such a thing could happen in a "Holy War," and why the "Army of the Emperor" had to engage in such acts. . . .

The "Holy War" in central and southern China was a violation by us of the rights and interests of another nation. That other nation was not always an exemplar of charity and humanitarianism, of course,

but it is only to be expected that when one side uses force the other side will resist by using force also. That is the nature of war. Basically, there is nothing “holy” about any war. “Holiness” manifests itself only in that which transcends force. Yet the militarists insisted upon referring to their “Imperial” Army and their “Holy” War. . . .

Why did Japan deliberately press on with this recklessness? In this is revealed the thoughtlessness of the militarists. Unable to manage the “Holy War” in China, they extended it to all of East Asia under a new name. It was a vivid demonstration of the militarists’ and industrialists’ intellectual poverty. There was little that the ordinary populace could do, silenced as it was by gag laws and censorship, but it is incomprehensible to us why figures like senior officials and parliament members were unable to pressure the militarists and industrialists to stop their rash behavior. At the start of the conflict the military experienced some stunning successes, but although that may have been enough to mislead the people, among those who understood such matters it was recognized as extremely dangerous. In spite of this—or actually because of this—the authorities increasingly turned to deception and intimidation in their dealings with the people. The actions of the majority of the population were guided by mass psychology. Only a small number of intellectuals foresaw what was coming, but they were deprived in every sense of their freedom of action and expression, and could only look on helplessly from the sidelines. And, finally, the war ended in the situation we have today.⁸⁸

The sentiments expressed in these passages gave rise to a series of contemplations by Suzuki, regarding the weaknesses of Japan that had led to its disastrous course, and on the possibilities for the distinctly Japanese spiritual renewal that he saw as essential to the full recovery of the nation. First expressed in his wartime article “The Global Mission of Mahayana Buddhism,” his ideas were developed primarily in a series of four books, all centered on the concept of “Japanese spirituality”: *Nihonteki reisei* 日本的靈性 (Japanese Spirituality, 1944; revised edition, 1946), *Reiseiteki Nihonteki jikaku* 靈性的日本の自覚 (The Awakening of Japanese Spirituality, 1946), *Reiseiteki nihon no kensetsu* 靈性的日本の建設 (The Construction of a Spiritual Japan, 1946), and *Nihon no reiseika* 日本の靈性化 (The Spiritualizing of Japan, 1947).

⁸⁸ SDZ, vol. 33, pp. 7–9.

Suzuki regarded “Japanese spirituality”—in his view, the type of spirituality seen primarily in Japanese Pure Land figures like Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and Shinran—as the religious ideal most suited to the religious culture of the nation, and the best alternative to the failed State Shintoist ideology. His views on the subject were already developing during the war years. In June 1945, two months before the Japanese surrender, Suzuki explained what he intended by the term “Japanese spirituality” in a lecture prepared for delivery at Higashi Honganji’s Kyōgaku Kenkyūsho 教学研究所 (Center for Shin Buddhist Studies):

I would like to say a word about the way in which I will use the word “Japan.” I intend it to refer only to the place and the people, and not to imply anything else. Thus, when I speak of “Japanese spiritual awakening,” I mean a spiritual awakening experienced by the people or populace that inhabit the land of Japan, a place that occupies a spatial location in a corner of East Asia. The concept of spirituality is, needless to say, a universal one, but the awakening to spirituality occurs only on an individual basis. And those individuals live in a certain land and belong to a certain people. This is why I feel it is possible to precede the term “spiritual awakening” with the word “Japanese.” . . .

To help prevent misunderstanding, let me stress that the term “Japanese” as I use it has absolutely no political implications. . . . Politics is always about power, and involves force, dominance, and suppression. Spirituality has nothing of this sort about it. Spirituality seeks the happiness of others; it strives to ease their suffering, it aspires to transcendence, it is infinitely compassionate. These are the sources of its strength. Unless strength arises from such sources, it invariably turns to repression, exclusion, and arrogance, and embraces imperialism, aggression, annexation, and all the other distortions of power. Nothing is more malign than “the sword that takes life” when it is uncontrolled by “the sword that gives life.” Spiritual awakening can never arise from politics. It is politics that must originate in spiritual awakening; the converse is fraudulent, and will inevitably lead to breakdown and confusion. We needn’t search far for examples—just look at Germany.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ SDZ, vol. 9, pp. 164–66.

I will not devote too much space to an analysis of Suzuki's postwar writings. Although *Zen at War* regards Suzuki's thought in these works as the product of a hypocritical conversion undergone only after the collapse of Japan's war effort,⁹⁰ it should be obvious from our overview of Suzuki's writings that all of the main themes seen in his critical postwar writings—the doubts about State Shinto, the mistrust of the military establishment, the encouragement of a greater rationality for the Japanese, the recognition of a need for Buddhist reform—are in fact logically consistent with his positions dating back to the late nineteenth century.

One example will suffice, I think, as a response to Victoria's attacks. In several places Victoria takes Suzuki to task for stating positions in his postwar writings that all historians recognize as simple fact. Victoria writes, for example

Even in the midst of Japan's utter defeat, Suzuki remained determined to find something praiseworthy in Japan's war efforts. He described the positive side of the war as follows:

Through the great sacrifice of the Japanese people and nation, it can be said the various peoples of the countries of the Orient had the opportunity to awaken both economically and politically. . . . This was just the beginning, and I believe that after ten, twenty, or more years the various peoples of the Orient may well have formed independent countries and contributed to the improvement of the world's culture in tandem with the various peoples of Europe and America.

Here, in an echo of his wartime writings, Suzuki continued to praise the "great sacrifice" the Japanese people allegedly made to "awaken the peoples of Asia."⁹¹

There is actually nothing controversial about Suzuki's position: historians are in agreement that the Japanese military actions in Southeast Asia and the Pacific provided an important impetus to the nationalist movements in the colonized nations of those regions, although the dynamics were complex and involved both pro- and anti-Japanese sentiments. And Suzuki was unquestionably correct in his prediction that several decades after the war the East Asian

⁹⁰ Victoria 1997, pp. 147–52.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 150–51.

and Southeast Asian nations would attain independence.

Moreover, Victoria's citation from Suzuki is quite selective. The full passage reads:

The great losses⁹² suffered by the Japanese people and nation can be said to have provided the various peoples of the countries of the East with the opportunity to awaken both economically and politically. Needless to say, embarking on the "Greater East Asia War" was a highly unreasonable course, the result of the Japanese militarists at the time instigating reckless campaigns that were supported by Japan's "politicians." But it would be a fine thing, I believe, if with this as a beginning the various peoples of the East are able in a few decades to form nations that are independent in every way, and are contributing to the improvement of the world's culture in tandem with the various peoples of Europe and America. Asians originally learned of things like imperialism and colonialism from Europe, but at the same time it was also from Europe that we learned of concepts like independence, freedom and equality, peaceful economics, and equal opportunity. Therefore I believe that we owe great respect to the people of Europe and America, who are the origin of these ideas that were planted in Asia. . . . With regard to this past war, Japan must bear its full share of moral and political responsibility. What is fortunate, however, is that Japan has renounced engagement in war and is venturing out, naked, among the nations of the world.⁹³

I will leave it to the reader to assess how fairly Suzuki's position is represented in *Zen at War*, and I would hope that the reader keeps in mind Victoria's treatment of this straightforward and unambiguous passage when evaluating his interpretation of Suzuki's writings on war and Bushido.

Several other issues brought up in *Zen at War*'s chapter on Suzuki's postwar writings, such as his supposed enthusiasm for the war in China, have already been dealt with above and will not be considered further here.

There is one particular point raised by Suzuki in his postwar writings

⁹² The original Japanese, *daigisei* 大犠牲, can be translated as "great sacrifice," as Victoria did, but in the context of the entire passage, where Suzuki is discussing the damage inflicted by the Japanese military on its own nation and people, I believe that "great losses" is more accurate.

⁹³ SDZ, vol. 8, p. 237.

and cited in *Zen at War* that it is regrettable Victoria did not pursue more objectively:

With *satori* [enlightenment] alone, it is impossible [for Zen priests] to shoulder their responsibilities as leaders of society. Not only is it impossible, but it is conceited of them to imagine they could do so. . . . In *satori* there is a world of *satori*. However, by itself *satori* is unable to judge the right and wrong of war. With regard to disputes in the ordinary world, it is necessary to employ intellectual discrimination. . . . For example, *satori* has no relation to economics. There may be no problem with economics as it was in the old days, but if one is dealing with the complexities of economic theory or international relations today, one has to have an adequate level of technical knowledge or one can't even form an opinion. *Satori* by itself is inadequate to determine whether communist economics is good or bad.⁹⁴

Victoria, using this as simply more material with which to discredit Suzuki, misses what I believe is a sincere attempt on Suzuki's part to address the most perplexing question raised by the material in *Zen at War*: Why did Zen masters, supposedly enlightened, cooperate in the war effort? Suzuki's opinion on this matter as expressed in these comments relates back to the point made above about the value-neutral nature of the nondual meditative experience: such experience may be extremely helpful when it comes to discerning the true nature of the self and the suchness of the present moment, but alone it is of little use in reaching an accurate assessment of, say, the complex issues behind a war. A discussion of the entire issue of enlightenment and its relation to social ethics is beyond the scope of this paper, of course; I simply wish to express my disappointment that Victoria was unwilling to engage with even straightforward attempts by Suzuki to address the failings and weaknesses of his own spiritual tradition.

Conclusion

In the course of this article I have been very critical of Victoria's presentation of Suzuki's work and of Suzuki the man, so I would like to reiterate

⁹⁴ SDZ, vol. 28, p. 413. The portion before the second ellipsis appears in Victoria 1997, pp. 148–49.

what I said at the beginning. Overall I think that Victoria's work has been of value—Japanese Buddhism, and particularly the Zen school, did unquestionably cooperate in the militarist war effort, and it is important for the future development of Japanese Zen Buddhism that this fact be known and that the Zen institutions explore the reasons for and consequences of this cooperation. I for one encourage Victoria in his continuing efforts to remind us of this chapter in Japanese Zen's history. Painful as this may be to many followers of the Zen tradition, it can in the long run have only the beneficial effect of motivating a reassessment of what practice and enlightenment is, and of what role conscious ethical choice needs to play in the spiritual life of Zen, and indeed of all traditions that aim for the attainment of meditative insight.

I do not believe, however, that Victoria has presented a valid case against D.T. Suzuki as a proponent of Japan's war in Asia and the Pacific. We have seen that Suzuki was not averse to expressing his opinions on political issues in both his private correspondence, and, when he felt free to do so, in his public writings. If, as Victoria claims, Suzuki had advocated Japanese militarism, one would expect to see explicit support for militarist positions not only in his prewar and wartime personal letters but also, and especially, in his public statements, given that such support would have been fully in line with the political and intellectual trends of the times. Instead one sees precisely the opposite. In cases where Suzuki directly expresses his position on the contemporary political situation—whether in his articles, public talks, or letters to friends (in which he would have had no reason to misrepresent his views)—he is clear and explicit in his distrust of and opposition to State Shinto, right-wing thought, and the other forces that were pushing Japan toward militarism and war, even as he expressed interest in decidedly non-rightist ideologies like socialism. In this Suzuki's standpoint was consistent from the late nineteenth century through to the postwar years. These materials reveal in Suzuki an intellectual independence, a healthy scepticism of political ideology and government propaganda, and a sound appreciation for human rights.

In contrast, those writings cited by Victoria as militarist in nature are almost conspicuous in their refusal to explicitly comment upon, much less support, contemporary political and military developments, and when read in their full context are seen to contain much material that is plainly not supportive of the Japanese military agenda. Suzuki clearly believed in the legitimacy of defensive war, but when it came to the actual wars embarked upon by the Japanese military, Suzuki's writings show that he recognized none of them as justified. Similarly, Suzuki was impressed by the martial ethics and ideals of Bushido,

but saw its highest expression in the skillful defusing of confrontation without resort to violence. He respected the samurai detachment toward life and death, and the average Japanese soldier's retention of that detachment.⁹⁵ Yet when it came to the reality of Japan's young men being uselessly slaughtered on the battlefields at the order of government officials "with no religious convictions," he did not hesitate to declare, in a published article during the height of the war, that "to regard the foolhardy and senseless sacrifice of one's life as Zen is a mish-mash idea. Zen absolutely never teaches one to throw one's life away."

If there are valid reasons for criticizing Suzuki's actions during the war or anytime else, then certainly those reasons must be brought to light and thoroughly discussed. But I would hope that the discussion would accord equal weight to all of the available evidence, fully situate it in the social and historical context, and examine all possible interpretations. These issues involved are too important to deserve anything less.

ABBREVIATION

SDZ Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙. *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集. New enlarged edition, 40 vols., ed. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi 久松真一, Yamaguchi Susumu 山口益, Furuta Shōkin 古田紹欽. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999–2003.

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⁹⁵ See Suzuki 1959, p. 85.

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