

Tokyo Boogie-woogie and D.T. Suzuki

Sample Translation of Introduction

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Contents

Preface

Introduction

1 Hidden Origins

The Adopted Child

Daisetz's Parents

Zen Training

Bottom of the Heap

Daisetz's Image of Women

Daisetz's Marriage

Beatrice and Okono

Alan in the "Daisetz Dairies"

Daisetz's Dependant Family

2 Juvenile Delinquent

A Prison Without Bars

Daisetz's Fears

Daisetz's Philosophy of Education

A Parent's Hope

Alan Goes Wild

Womanizing Rears Its Head

Daisetz's Views on Sexual Desire

"Confinement" on Kōyasan

Repeated Offenses

3 Glimpses of Brilliance

Japan-America Students Conference

Alan Discusses Zen

A Novelist's Misunderstanding

The 2nd JASC

Alan Discusses Japaneseness

Daisetz's Indifference

Two Red Threads

Beatrice's Change of Heart

A Man with Many Loves

Hidden Facts

A Mother's Death

Daisetz's Mourning

First Marriage

To Shanghai

4 Tokyo Boogie-woogie

Shanghai

Reunion with Ike Mariko

The “Tokyo Boogie-woogie” Is Born

Second Marriage

Alan’s Drinking

Meeting Shikiba Ryūzaburō for the First Time

A Sudden Parting

Daisetz’s Sorrow

5 Daisetz and the Beat Generation

The American “Comrades”

The Basis of Transcendentalism

Early Preaching

Zen in English

Art Encounters Zen

The Birth of the Beat Generation

Daisetz’s Increases His Name Recognition

The Great Scholar Changes

San Francisco Renaissance

Daisetz’s Big Break

On the Road

America’s Dharma Year

The Context of the *Chicago Review* Zen Special Issue

The Dharma Bums

A Once-in-a-lifetime Conversation

The Beats and Zen: Parting of the Ways

6 The Undutiful Son

Alan During that Time

Daisetz Returns Home

Incident

Alan's Loneliness

The "Undutiful Son" Label

The Death of Daisetz

Reconsidering the Parent-Child Relationship

Great Wisdom and Great Compassion

Father and Son

Family Tree

Chronology of Important Events

Bibliography

Index

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Introduction

In the hours just before dawn on July 12, 1966, the 95-year-old Daisetz Suzuki (given name: Teitarō; 1870–1966) was on his deathbed. Daisetz had been stricken with sudden abdominal pains the previous day and had been taken by sleeper taxi from his residence-cum-library, the Matsugaoka Library, located on top of a hill behind Tōkeiji Temple in Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture, to the St. Luke’s Hospital in Tsukiji, Tokyo. The great scholar, the student of Buddhism and recipient of the Order of Culture, he who was known as “The Teacher of Humanity” who had spread Zen throughout the world, was preparing to breathe his last.

Hayashida Kumino (maiden name: Suzuki; 1918–2011), the eldest daughter of Daisetz’s nephew, describes the scene in detail in her book, *Ōji Suzuki Daisetsu kara no tegami* (Letters from My Granduncle D.T. Suzuki; hereinafter *Granduncle*).¹ Daisetz, who had been admitted as an emergency patient, was surrounded by an oxygen tent to help him breathe. The attending physician was Hinohara Shigeaki (1911–), who would later become famous in Japan as the doctor who was still working at the age of 100. Daisetz would occasionally open his eyes and appear to be trying to look at something.

Among the people who had heard of the emergency and rushed to the hospital to see Daisetz was a middle-aged man with well-ordered features of a Western appearance. This was Daisetz’s adopted son Alan, also known as Suzuki Masaru (ca. 1916–1971).

Father and son were meeting after a long separation. Alan bent over and brought his face close to Daisetz from outside the oxygen tent. Daisetz’s secretary, Okamura Mihoko (1935–) called to Daisetz.

¹ Hayashida Kumino, *Ōji Suzuki Daisetsu kara no tegami* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1995), 130–143.

“Sensei, it's Alan.” Her voice appeared to reach him, and Daisetz, saying “Ohh, ohh...” moved himself close to the oxygen tent, opened his eyes wide, and moved his hands.²

What were Daisetz's feelings as he moaned “Ohh, ohh”? There is no record of what Alan said at that time. Nobody even knows how long he stayed at the hospital. Hinohara Shigeaki, the attending physician, doesn't even remember the presence of a man named Alan.³

Alan was not some anonymous person. He wrote the lyrics to *Tokyo Boogie-woogie* (1947), the pop song that epitomized post-war Japan, and he had once been married to the singer Ike Mariko (1917–2000), known as “The Queen of Swing.” However, for a person who presented to the world a song that represented a generation, there is very little information about Alan available. There is no one who speaks very much about the fact that Daisetz had an adopted son named Alan. For the people who surrounded Daisetz, Alan had become something they didn't want to touch. There were even those who considered Alan an “undutiful son.”

There was a reason for this. In his forties, normally the time when a man has developed a sense of discretion, Alan was the main character in an incident that became grist for the mills of the weekly tabloids.

Few people have been able to write about Alan without having to rely on secondary sources. *Granduncle*, however, was written by someone who had devoted herself to Daisetz over a long period of time and had been, at one point, Alan's fiancée. Precisely for that reason, it is rich with first-person testimonies that cannot be found in similar publications. It has been an invaluable resource for this book.

Kumino had known Alan, who was the same age as her, from childhood. Kumino, while

² Ibid., 141.

³ Telephone interview with a secretary of Dr. Hinohara.

being careful to be discreet, states that “I am forced to speculate that there was some problem in the family environment that caused Alan to grow up to be a person who lost his way in life.”⁴

Even allowing for the fact that fathers in that period were all more or less the same, Kumino says that “Daisetz was not the kind of father who would take time away from his research to play with his son, or, spending time with him, would forget the passing of time.”⁵

Most researchers are silent about Alan. Neither do they have any desire to consider Daisetz from the point of view of his relationship with Alan. In such circumstances, the scholar of Buddhism, Yokoyama Wayne Shigeto (1948–) addresses this issue in some depth, albeit briefly:

Once Alan reached adulthood, his many gifts came wonderfully to the fore, and he grew into an elegant and freewheeling person. It is a fact that while Alan esteemed Professor Suzuki, his father, and held him in high regard, Professor Suzuki, in his turn, took a standoffish and closed-off attitude to Alan. It was a very sad thing. What I mean by that is that the Professor could have learned the lesson of “humility” from his own son.⁶

This paragraph appears in a publication commemorating the forties anniversary of Daisetz's death. This can be read as a positive assessment of Alan's life and a criticism of Daisetz's parenting on Yokoyama's part. Yokoyama is the scholar who reprinted Daisetz's English-

⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁶ Yokoyama Wayne Shigeto, “Kaisetsu Biatorisu fujin no tegami ni han'ei sareru ningen Suzuki Daisetsu no shōzō,” in Matsugaoka Bunko, ed., *Suzuki Daisetsu botsugo 40 nen* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2006), 77.

language diaries and who, in comparison to other researchers, has had a markedly greater number of opportunities to view the primary resources housed in the Matsugaoka Library. It is significant that a man in Yokoyama's position asserts that while Alan esteemed Daisetz, Daisetz was standoffish.

The novelist Iwakura Masaji (1903–2000), a disciple of Daisetz, is one of those who wrote about Alan in some depth, or, should I say, one of those who was able to do so. Iwakura was asked by Daisetz to look after Alan, who had entered puberty and was too wild for Daisetz to control. Iwakura had the following to say in *Suzuki Daisetsu no hito to gakumon* (Daisetz T. Suzuki: The Man and His Work; 1961), edited by Furuta Shōkin (1911–2001).

Subsequently, [Daisetz] Sensei did not want to talk very much about Alan, whom he had disowned. This wasn't a matter of who was in the wrong; I think it is more correct to call this a tragedy with its roots in generational differences and life circumstances. I feel sorry for both of them.

However, the relationship between Sensei and Alan is a conspicuous example how even a person such as Sensei, who was a perfect model of the human character, can be unequal to the task of educating a young person. I could really feel his pain.⁷

This was written in November of 1960, while Daisetz was still alive. It appears to say that Alan was not the only one in the wrong but that Daisetz was also to blame.

Kumino, Yokoyama, and Iwakura all say that Daisetz was not able to raise his son in the way

⁷ Iwakura Masaji, "Ōtani daigaku jidai no Suzuki Daisetsu," in Furuta Shōkin, ed., *Suzuki Daisetsu no hito to gakumon* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1961), 90.

that he wanted. However, we cannot divine from these snippets the manner in which Daisetz was shut off from his son or what sort of worries he experienced. What is even more invisible is the agony of Alan, the “undutiful son.”

There really has been very little written about Alan. I am sure that if he had been dedicated to carrying on Daisetz’s work, much more would have been left to posterity. Daisetz’s work amounts to tens of millions of words. His collected works alone amount to 40 volumes, and it appears that there are quite a number of documents that were not included in his collected works. Even today, the massive trove of Daisetz’s manuscripts, diaries, and book collections are carefully stored at the Matsugaoka Library. I am sure there are as yet unknown writings in libraries and in private hands all over the world. A lifetime wouldn’t be enough time to read all of this material with proper attention.

What I want to hear is not the voice of the garrulous father, however, but the voice of the son who was not able to leave any of his words for posterity. It seems to me that some important message is hidden within this seemingly failed father-son relationship. How should a parent relate to a child who did not grow up into the person the parent was hoping for? Daisetz was also troubled by this universal question. It seems to me that researchers have failed to see this.

In his excellent critical biography of Suzuki, *Suzuki Daisetsu no genfūkei* (The Real Daisetz Suzuki; 1993), the high-ranking Rinzai Zen Buddhist priest Nishimura Eshin (1933–) obliquely criticizes biographies of Suzuki written by Suzuki’s disciples, saying, “The biographies of famous people are, in general, recorded by witnesses, their disciples, and in such cases, it is usual that the stories are embellished a great deal, leading to needless mythologizing. It is precisely by de-mythologizing such biographies that the objective truth is brought truly into relief.”⁸ While

⁸ Nishimura Eshin, *Suzuki Daisetsu no genfūkei* (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1993), 4.

taking the position of not engaging in the mythologizing of Suzuki, Nishimura, who was not Suzuki's disciple, still makes practically no mention of Alan in his book. Even though this work reconstructs a great part of Suzuki's life in great detail, Nishimura does not have anything to say about Alan. Why is that, I wonder?

In order to present someone as a good person, I suppose it is necessary to hide some things. For the Daisetz Suzuki legend, perhaps that was what Alan was. However, if that is so, then an important aspect of Daisetz's life becomes invisible. It seems to me that not averting our gaze from Alan is what will allow us to see a different side of Daisetz. This will bring the feelings that Daisetz had for his son, and the troubles he had with him, that are hidden in the corners of Daisetz's words, to the surface.

Zen, the Rinzai sect in particular, seems to be weak in the areas of the inner workings of human emotions and family relationships. Zen attempts to break apart logical thinking through the device of the *kōan*, which is presented as a cryptic riddle. These *kōan* prompt feelings rather than stimulating the intellect, and so appeal to argumentative Westerners.

For example, there is the *kōan* "What was your original face before your parents were born?" It appears to be asking, "Who was the original you who existed before your parents were born?" Insofar as it is telling the trainee to search for his or her original self that is beyond the parent-child relationship, it does seem, after all, that Zen does not put an emphasis on the parent-child relationship. The novel *Mon* (Gate; 1910) by Natsume Sōseki (1867–1918), one of Japan's most famous novelists, depicts a protagonist who is wrestling with this *kōan*. Perhaps Sōseki was given this *kōan* by the Zen priest Shaku Sōen (1859–1919), who was the teacher of both Daisetz and Sōseki. Of course, Daisetz also probably experienced the state induced by this *kōan*.

The scholar of Buddhism Sueki Fumihiko (1949–) relates the following thoughts regarding

Zen and the parent-child relationship in *Nihon bukkyō no kanōsei* (Japanese Buddhism: The Possibilities; 2011):

Having spent many years reading the *Blue Cliff Record* what I can say in general is that while the *Blue Cliff Record* is deeply involved in the issue of language, I cannot escape the feeling that the issue of feelings gets lost and that problems on that level are not explained. Today, when considering various social problems and the like, for example, when considering children's issues, issues of the subtleties of human feelings take on a very important meaning, and I can't shake the feeling that Zen is quite lacking in this area.⁹

It can be said that not only Zen, but Buddhism in general, does not emphasize the parent-child relationship. I think that saying this might make some people uncomfortable. This is because the image that people have of present-day Japanese Buddhism revolves around things like funerals, cemeteries, and memorial services for ancestors during the *obon* (bonfire) season and the like. However, Buddhism was not like that originally. Entering Buddhist orders meant severing family relationships, including those with one's parents. Religious precepts did not allow priests and nuns to have sexual relations, so those in religious orders would not become the biological parents of children.

That's right: after all, Buddhism and Zen don't have anything that can serve as a guidepost for how parents and children should relate to one another. Even if Daisetz, who was a Zen Buddhist, was having trouble relating to his son, this does not diminish his worth. Rather,

⁹ Sueki Fumihiko, *Nihon Bukkyō no kanōsei: Gendai shisō to shite no bōken* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 2011), 189. Originally published by Shinchōsha in 2006.

realizing his pain and learning from it should be seen as an homage to Daisetz and Alan.

The suffering of a child with a parent who was too great; the troubles of a parent whose child did not grow up as he wished: finding out the true identity of Suzuki Alan Masaru, who wrote the lyrics to *Tokyo Boogie-woogie*, learning more about Daisetz T. Suzuki – like Don Quixote, who driven by passion, went on a reckless journey, I would like to take you, the reader, on a journey of discovery.