

Reading D. T. Suzuki Anew

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Translator and Interpreter

JUST WHO WAS Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎 (1870–1966), a.k.a. D. T. Suzuki? Daisetsu is a Buddhist “householder name”; his given name was Teitarō. A “householder” is a lay person who excels in Buddhist knowledge; Daisetsu was never a monk. If not a monk, then was he a scholar? He dropped out of the Dai Yon Kōtō Chūgakkō 第四高等中学校 (Fourth Upper-Level Middle School) in Kanazawa in his first year. Daisetsu continued a deep friendship with his classmate Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), another dropout who later became a philosopher, until the latter’s death. Daisetsu first worked as a primary school assistant and instructor in charge of English. He went on to enter the philosophy departments at Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō 東京専門学校 (Tokyo Vocational School; later Waseda University) and Teikoku Daigaku Bunka Daigaku 帝国大学文科大学 (Teikoku University of Science and Technology; later University of Tokyo Faculty of Letters), but graduated from neither. Daisetsu’s final academic credentials were elementary and middle school graduation. He was born in 1870 and died in 1966, and thus lived through nearly a century of tumultuous history. His growth, and the growth of modern Japan, proceeded in parallel, and in a sense, to inquire into one is to ask questions about the other. Since Daisetsu was excluded from the modern institutions of politics, economics, and education, and was forced to live outside the system, so to speak, to inquire into Daisetsu is to interrogate Japan’s modern age from the outside.

In modern Japan, Daisetsu did not become a specialist of any kind, which meant he was free to become a specialist in whatever he chose. In these circumstances, he

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chose Buddhism. Neither temple monk nor university researcher, Daisetsu understood Buddhism practically and sought to live it in a practical way. He came to Tokyo from Kanazawa, and frequented not the university but a Rinzai 臨濟 temple in Kamakura called Engakuji 円覺寺. He first practiced Zen 禪 meditation under head abbot Imakita Kōsen 今北洪川 (1816–1892), and personally witnessed the abbot's death. He then practiced Zen meditation under Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1860–1919), Kōsen's successor. It was Sōen who bestowed on him the Buddhist name Daisetsu, the first known appearance of which is December 1894, in his twenty-fourth year. The following year, Daisetsu published the first book in his own name, a translation into Japanese of a work by another who had grown up in a completely different culture.

The book in question was *The Gospel of Buddha*, a single-volume summary of the life story and teachings of the Buddha Gautama Siddhartha, founder of Buddhism, by a German religious exile named Paul Carus (1852–1919). When we consider that *The Gospel of Buddha* itself was based on Buddhist scriptures that had been translated from Sanskrit and Chinese into European languages, Daisetsu was effectively layering translation upon translation, and interpretation upon interpretation. This is precisely what determined the path that Daisetsu was hereafter to follow. The true creativity of the modern age, in which the world became one, probably exists in the translations that bind different cultures together. A litany of translations and interpretations amounts to the creation of entirely new languages between distinct cultures. It is in the gaps in global translation and interpretation networks that it becomes possible to discover local originality. Daisetsu went on to discover his Buddhism from just such a perspective.

Carus and Daisetsu's teacher, Sōen, encountered one another at the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. To be precise, they met at the World's Parliament of Religions held in tandem with the exposition. Carus was there representing "scientific religion" on behalf of the United States, while Sōen was representing the Japanese Rinzai sect of Buddhism. Carus found in Buddhism a refining of the means of annihilating "self" that resonated with the task of modern science. He located the foundation of science in a one-dimensional world which demolished the "self" and was without subject (subjectivity) or object (objectivity). For Carus, the new biology, physiology, psychology, and philosophy could only be established on such a horizon. Carus was not only active in introducing the philosophy of Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to the United States, he also had a strong interest in the theory of biological evolution and theories of the psychological unconscious. For Carus, all of this resonated with Buddhism's teaching of no-self. The latest Western wisdom, namely science, and the oldest Eastern wisdom, that is Buddhism, linked together. Carus welcomed Sōen.

Carus sent to Sōen the English-language proofs of *The Gospel of Buddha* which Daisetsu then set about translating. This was the prompt for Carus to invite Daisetsu over to America, and Daisetsu ended up working for the Open Court Publishing Company

that Carus and his adoptive father, Edward C. Hegeler, owned. Daisetsu was unable to find regular employment, but his sojourn in America lasted a full eleven years, from February 1897 to February 1908. In March 1909, after spending one year in London, Daisetsu finally returned to Japan. He was approaching forty years of age. In his American years, Daisetsu also translated the *Dao de jing* 道德經 of Laozi 老子 and *Āsvaghoṣa's Discourse on the "Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna"* (hereafter, *Discourse*) from the Chinese into English, and immediately after returning to Japan turned out Japanese translations of the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1668–1772) in rapid succession. Daisetsu's first encounter with Swedenborg's thought also dates back to his American period.

The act of translation involves the writing of oneself into the target language, and Daisetsu wrote in English about the possibilities of Mahayana Buddhism, beginning with Zen, and in Japanese about the possibilities of Christian mysticism as typified by Swedenborg. After 1920, Daisetsu ceased to produce works related directly to Swedenborg, but in the latter half of his life, in the same consistent fashion, he turned to the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–ca. 1328). In other words, Daisetsu's interest in Christian mysticism, and in comparing and contrasting it with Mahayana Buddhism, remained a constant throughout his life. Daisetsu literally inhabited the spaces between the Japanese and English languages, and between Mahayana Buddhist thought and Christian mysticism. He was a "bidirectional translator," working between Japanese and English and between Mahayana Buddhism and Christian mysticism. Indeed, the first book he published bearing his own name, *The Gospel of Buddha*, had just such a bidirectional structure.

For Carus, a remarkable similarity and parallelism existed between Buddhism and Christianity. But Daisetsu did not venture to translate the book's preface, in which Carus stated his position clearly. Carus documented Jesus's life and acts, and wrote the Buddha's gospel following the structure of the four gospels of the New Testament. Carus went one step further, arguing that Buddhism and Christianity very likely shared the same source. If that were the case, then Buddhism was closer to the origin. Daisetsu's pioneering translation work gave him a good understanding of the sentiment that informed *The Gospel of Buddha*. Carus published an essay on the theme "Buddhism and Christianity" in the magazine *The Monist*.¹ Daisetsu translated this, and had it published in successive issues of the journal *Meikyō shinshi* 明教新誌 from February 1895² to coincide with the appearance of *Budda no fukuin* 仏陀の福音, the Japanese version of *The Gospel of Buddha*, published in January of the same year. At this time, of course, Daisetsu had yet to travel to America.

¹ Vol. 5, no. 1, October 1, 1894, pp. 65–103.

² Nos. 3537–3555.

What was important for both Carus and Daisetsu, however, was neither proving that Buddhism and Christianity had the same source nor establishing their historical connection. Both men sought rather to discover in the acts of the Buddha and of Jesus the germ of monism. This is precisely why Carus and Daisetsu drew this conclusion in *The Gospel of Buddha*: in order to reach a monistic realm, the human “self” must be extinguished as a first priority; “truth” manifests only in the extinguishing of “self.” The most rapturous “good news” the Buddha brought to humankind was the truth of the extinguishing of “I,” the root of all evil. In the place where the human “self” has been extinguished, there spreads out the realm of the monistic “mind,” wherein neither “I” (subject) nor “you” (object) have an existence, and where no distinction exists between spirit and matter. In chapter 52 of *The Gospel of Buddha*, “All Existence is Spiritual,” Carus and Daisetsu drew on the Buddha’s teachings to express it thus: “Verily, I say unto thee, thy mind is spiritual, but neither is the sense-perceived void of spirituality. The bodhi is eternal and it dominates all existence as the good law guiding all beings in their search for truth. It changes brute nature into mind, and there is no being that cannot be transformed into a vessel of truth.”³ This “mind” is the root of the universe; thus, it is the “one” that exists at the root of consciousness. All things come from the “mind” that is “one.”

What is stated here is none other than the concept of “spirituality” (*reisei* 靈性), which Daisetsu would later develop extensively in his *Nihonteki reisei* 日本的靈性 (*Japanese Spirituality*; 1944). He trumpeted spirituality in the foreword of this volume in these terms:

In a view that sees spirit (*seishin* 精神) or mind (*kokoro* 心) in opposition to substance, spirit cannot be contained within substance, and substance cannot be contained within spirit. There is something more which must be seen at the innermost depths of spirit and substance. As long as two things oppose each other, contradiction, rivalry, mutual suppression, and annihilation cannot be averted. In such situations, it will become impossible for human beings to carry on. What is needed is something that can encompass both of them, and understand that the two are really not two, but one, and that the one is, as it is, two. Spirituality accomplishes this. If we want the rivalries of the existing dualistic worldview to cease and become conciliatory and fraternal, and mutual interpenetration and self-identity to prevail, we have no choice but to await the awakening of man’s religious consciousness, spirituality.⁴

³ Carus (1895) 1915, p. 151.

⁴ SDZ 8: 21–22. Translation adapted from Waddell’s in Suzuki 1972, pp. 14–15.

What sublates the conflict between spirit and matter is the one “mind” positioned as the root of “spirituality,” that is, the one “mind” that gives rise to both spirit and matter. The direct source of this idea is to be found in the *Discourse*, which Carus saw as a framework for developing Hegel’s philosophy in the context of Eastern thought and which Daisetsu translated directly into English from the Chinese. In other words, the origins and the outcomes of Daisetsu’s thought were a continuation, one from the other. Throughout his lifetime, Daisetsu explored just one matter: the workings of the “mind,” which exists prior to the opposition between matter and spirit and which nullifies that opposition.

American Daisetsu and Daisetsu’s America

The origins of Suzuki Daisetsu’s thought lie in his first American period when he fully established himself as a bidirectional translator. Daisetsu produced new works in rapid succession in both Japanese and English by creatively reiterating those origins in various chance encounters. Daisetsu’s thought was consistent and continuous from beginning to end in that it always harked back to these origins. But in terms of reiteration based on “various chance encounters,” Daisetsu’s thought had breaks—and deepenings—in the beginning and at the end, and so it was discontinuous. There is a duality to Daisetsu: Daisetsu the writer of Japanese works and Daisetsu the writer of English works; the consistent and continuous Daisetsu and the inconsistent and discontinuous Daisetsu; Daisetsu the nationalist and Daisetsu the internationalist. The origins of Daisetsu’s duality, his double-sided nature, lay in America. A new reading of Daisetsu’s thought for a new age might usefully begin with a sensitive discerning of the complex connections between two questions: (1) What did Daisetsu reap from America (the American Daisetsu)? And (2) What did America mean to Daisetsu (Daisetsu’s America)? Daisetsu twice stayed in America for extended periods, once before and once after the Pacific War—the event which made America Japan’s greatest foe. In the postwar years, of course, Daisetsu moved back and forth between America and Japan.

What merits discussion first is Daisetsu’s English translation of *Discourse* since it laid the theoretical groundwork for the voluminous *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Daisetsu’s true maiden work. *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* was born out of Daisetsu’s interpretation of *Discourse*. Moreover, Daisetsu in his first American period digested Swedenborg’s theory of the spirit world, the theory of pure experience of William James (1842–1910), and the Theosophical cosmology he learned from Beatrice Lane (Suzuki; 1878–1939), his future wife, in terms of their resonances with *tathāgatagarbha* theory as explained in *Discourse*. Those elements, it appears, formed the genuine foundation of his theory of spirituality. There is even the possibility that contact between Daisetsu and Theosophy predates his encounter with Beatrice. The

Theosophical vision overlaps in part, moreover, with the teachings of the Vedanta Society where Daisetsu and Beatrice met. The society facilitated a modern rereading of Hindu nondual monist thought.

James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* also referenced the work of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), who founded the Theosophical Society, and that of her successor, Annie Besant (1847–1933), who expanded its headquarters in India. Beatrice, who later formed a branch (lodge) of the Theosophical Society at her home with Daisetsu, also received James's teachings directly at Radcliffe College. James's father was a Swedenborgian, and pragmatism, America's new philosophy according to James, took shape in close proximity to Carus's monism. Various chance encounters had become a singular inevitability for Daisetsu. But that is not all. *Discourse* binds together the early Daisetsu and the late Daisetsu, before and after the Pacific War. Daisetsu delivered a series of lectures at Columbia University from 1952 through to the following year. The record of those lectures, presumably drafts and untouched lecture transcripts, was published bilingually as *Suzuki Daisetsu Koronbia Daigaku seminā kōgi* 鈴木大拙コロンビア大学セミナー講義 (Columbia University Seminar Lectures), and therein he took up anew *Discourse*, which he himself had translated into English more than half a century earlier. At the beginning of the fifth lecture, Daisetsu assumes that *Discourse* occupies an extremely important position for understanding not only Zen but also Mahayana Buddhism in general, and he cites a passage where Mahayana itself is debated.⁵ Here, Aśvaghōṣa (and thus, Daisetsu, too) straightforwardly defines the Mahayana as follows:

The Mahāyāna can be briefly treated as to two aspects, namely, what it is, and what it signifies.

What is the Mahāyāna? First, it is the soul of all sentient beings (*sarva-sattva*), that constitutes all things in the world, phenomenal and supra-phenomenal; and through this soul we can disclose what the Mahāyāna signifies.

Because the soul in itself, involving the quintessence of the Mahāyāna, is suchness (*bhūtatathatā*), but it becomes [in its relative or transitory aspect, through the law of causation] birth-and-death (*saṃsāra*), in which are revealed the quintessence, the attributes, and the activity of the Mahāyāna.

The Mahāyāna has a triple significance.

The first is the greatness of quintessence. Because the quintessence of the Mahāyāna as suchness exists in all things, remains unchanged in the

⁵ Daisetsu not only discussed *Discourse on the "Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana"* in this lecture, he also constantly compared it with Eckhart's mystical theology.

pure as well as in the defiled, is always one and the same (*samatā*), neither increases nor decreases, and is void of distinction.

The second is the greatness of attributes. Here we have the Tathāgata's womb (*tathāgatagarbha*) which in exuberance contains immeasurable and innumerable merits (*puṇya*) as its characteristics.

The third is the greatness of activity, for it [i.e., Mahāyāna] produces all kinds of good work in the world, phenomenal and supra-phenomenal. [Hence the name *Mahāyāna* (great vehicle).]⁶

Discourse declared that everything arose from the “mind” (which Daisetsu translates as “soul” in the quotation above).⁷ This is why it is said to be the ultimate theoretical text of Buddhist idealism or mind-only thought. In the immediately following lines, however, it is stated that the mind has two conflicting aspects: the mind as “suchness” (*tathatā* or things as they are in themselves) and the mind as “birth-and-death.” The mind as suchness represents the true world, which is none other than the “emptiness” that constitutes the pure mind of the Tathāgata. The mind as birth-and-death represents the deluded world, which is none other than the “multiplicity” that arises from the defiled mind of sentient beings. These two conflicting aspects, however, constitute the truth that is “one” as it is. The mind of sentient beings is, in itself, the mind of the Tathāgata. *Discourse* proposed that things that are two were, as such, one. What connected two to one was *tathāgatagarbha*, the *ālaya* consciousness. *Ālaya* consciousness is a term unique to consciousness-only thought in Buddhism, and *tathāgatagarbha* thought seems to have emerged as one development of consciousness-only thought. Consciousness-only thought taught that the “mind” has a multilayered structure: the six consciousnesses of external sensations (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and feelings) and, for want of better expressions, the personal unconscious (*manas* consciousness) and the collective unconscious (*ālaya* consciousness).

When it comes to understanding *ālaya* consciousness, however, there is a big difference between consciousness-only thought and the *tathāgatagarbha* thought explicated in *Discourse*. For consciousness-only thought, the *ālaya* consciousness is the foundation that gives rise to “deluded thoughts,” and relates only with the realm of the “mind as birth-and-death” as named in *Discourse*. The *ālaya* consciousness as explained in *Discourse* relates to both the realms of the “mind as suchness” and the “mind as birth-and-death” and exists as the “combined consciousness” that connects the two contradictory realms together. *Ālaya* consciousness is that which harmonizes “mind as suchness” and

⁶ Suzuki 1900, pp. 52–54.

⁷ Editor's note: Although Suzuki used “soul” to translate “*kokoro*” in the *Discourse*, we have decided to translate the term as “mind” in this article, both for consistency and to best represent the intention of the *Awakening of Faith*.

the “mind as birth-and-death,” “true” and “deluded,” in such a way that they are “neither identical nor different.” “Mind” is *tathāgatagarbha*, which is “suchness.” “Mind” is the womb (of the Tathāgata) of existence, pregnant with embryo-like seeds for becoming Tathāgata.⁸ Through *tathāgatagarbha*, “mind” gives rise to the aspects of “suchness” and “birth-and-death.” The two aspects are linked together in the *ālaya* consciousness in such a way that they are neither “one” nor “different.” Human beings, and all of creation, by having within the “mind” the womb of existence that is pregnant with seeds for becoming Tathāgata, both fall into “delusion” and are led toward the awakening of “truth.” Regardless of the circumstances, the path toward becoming an “awakened one” unfolds. That is the essence of “mind” that *Discourse* preached, and that is the essence of Mahayana.

Daisetsu attached several important notes to this passage in his English translation of *Discourse*. He regarded Mahayana as “mind,” and “mind” as having the threefold meaning of essence, aspect, and function, to which he applied the words “quintessence,” “attribute,” and “activity” respectively. He noted that it was perfectly possible to compare these three concepts with the “substance,” “attribute,” and “mode” which Spinoza delineated in his *Ethics*. According to Spinoza, all of creation, from a single substance with infinite attributes, was produced as a mode through which its infinite attributes transformed and materialized. Daisetsu grasped suchness as explicated in *Discourse* as a Spinoza-like God, not a transcendent God but an immanent God, or a kind of God-as-nature qua nature-as-God existence. Carus’s influence here was great. Such a monistic-pantheistic system lay at the core of Daisetsu’s modern understanding of Mahayana Buddhism.

That is not all. Daisetsu translated *tathāgatagarbha* as the “womb” of Tathāgata, and added a note to the word “womb,” in which he attempted to compare it with the Hindu “Brahman” by referring to the *Bhagavad Gita* in the Sacred Books of the East series compiled by the comparative religionist, Max Müller (1823–1900). For Daisetsu, Brahman, which embodied the principle of the universe, harbored the seeds of all of existence. The Vedanta Society (where Daisetsu met Beatrice) resuscitated for the modern age the nondual monism discourse that explicated Brahman alone as the true self, that is, that Brahman is identical with Atman. The Vedanta Society, which had branches across the United States, was centered upon the teachings of Vivekananda (1863–1902), whose teacher was Ramakrishna (1836–1886). Vivekananda, of course, attended the World’s Parliament of Religions as a representative of India. In the English translation of *Discourse* and the English book, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Daisetsu constantly compared Hindu nondual

⁸ In Sanskrit, *tathāgatagarbha* means “embryo of the Tathāgata.” It was translated into Chinese as *rulai zang* 如来藏, meaning the “treasury” or the “womb” of the Tathāgata.

monistic thought and the *tathāgatagarbha* thought of Mahayana Buddhism by referring to Max Müller's work.

Daisetsu considered suchness/*tathāgatagarbha* as a Spinoza-like God, proposed that God was immanent nowhere so much as in one's own "mind," and thought that through the "mind" it was possible to achieve "unity" between finite human beings and the infinite God. "Unity" as mediator of the "mind" of finite human beings and the infinite God was a model of thinking that applied not only to the *tathāgatagarbha* thought of Mahayana Buddhism and Hindu nondual monistic thought. It also applied to the spiritual world of Swedenborg, as well as to the mystical theology of Eckhart, and to the cosmology of Theosophy, which set as its doctrinal basis the Neoplatonic theory of emanation (the outflow and return of all things from a foundational One); it even applied to the philosophy of William James, which discussed various aspects of the religious experience while repeatedly engaging in dialogue with Theosophy and psychology.

Further, in *Nihonteki reisei*, which Daisetsu continued to write during the course of the Pacific War—that global conflict in which modern Japan was completely engulfed—the only form of Shinto that he evaluated positively was Ise Shintō 伊勢神道. Ise Shinto was a type of thinking characteristic of the Japanese archipelago in that it allowed an amalgamation of buddhas and gods. By means of *tathāgatagarbha*, not only infinite existence and finite existence, but gods and buddhas, indeed all of creation, are bound together into one. As the early Daisetsu developed into the late Daisetsu, he returned to his origins as if by way of a grand spiral trajectory. He did this by synthesizing the work of his closest companion Beatrice and his great friend Nishida Kitarō, both of whom passed away before the war ended. Daisetsu moreover sought to bring together on a higher plane—using Kegon 華嚴 as a medium—the teachings of Zen and Pure Land that were ultimately incapable of preventing the war. Daisetsu discovered in these two teachings "Japanese" manifestations of "spirituality." Daisetsu's last battles were fought from the Columbia University lectures through to his English work *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (1957; hereafter, *Mysticism*), and beyond to the Japanese work *Tōyōteki na mikata* 東洋的な見方 (Oriental Points of View; 1963), which he published at the age of ninety-three.

Eastern Buddhism

In his English work, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Suzuki Daisetsu proudly proclaimed that his focus was not on the "Northern Buddhism" that developed from India through to Central Asia, nor on the "Southern Buddhism" that spread from India to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Rather, it was upon the "Eastern Buddhism" that passed through the Korean Peninsula from China and was transformed in the far eastern

archipelago of Japan. “Eastern Buddhism” was a synthesis of Northern and Southern Buddhism. Indeed, Daisetsu would later, with Beatrice, publish *The Eastern Buddhist*, a journal that explored Eastern Buddhism’s possibilities. *Tathāgatagarbha* theory lay at the heart of this Eastern Buddhism, which Daisetsu advocated. This is the teaching that all of creation, beginning with human beings, contains the seeds of buddhahood (*tathāgata*). At the root of all things exists the Dharma body as the Tathāgata, or the fundamental principle of the universe. The Dharma body contains, latent within itself, infinite possibilities for differentiating and creating all manner of things. Adapting concepts in Spinoza’s philosophy, Daisetsu reworked the three-body theory as outlined in *Discourse*: namely, the Dharma body (*dharmakāya*), which alone exists; the reward body (*sambhogakāya*), which embodies the infinite attributes of the Dharma body; and the response body (*nirmānakāya*), which takes the concrete form of the reward body.

Daisetsu himself, in *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, did not go so far as to make such an assertion, but if one refers to the English translation of *Discourse*, it is perfectly possible to view it as equating Dharma body with substance, reward body with attribute, and response body with mode. Only one substance exists that possesses infinite attributes (reward body), and that is the Dharma body. Daisetsu regarded *tathāgatagarbha*, or this Dharma body that potentially harbors the infinite possibilities of the reward body, as the “womb” of existence, and tried to bind together Asian polytheism and European monotheism into one, as “God” (divinity) in Mahayana Buddhism. Indeed, in *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, he clearly states that Jesus and Gautama Siddhartha, who had human bodies, were manifestations of the reward body, and that the sole principle of the peerless universe embodied by them was the Dharma body.

At the stage of *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Daisetsu relied primarily on Kegon Buddhist teachings, the better to draw out the ways of the Dharma body, which he considered to be the ultimate divinity of Mahayana Buddhism. Daisetsu began discussing Kegon head-on in his Japanese publications following the Pacific War, and in particular after the publication of *Bukkyō no taii* 仏教の大意 (*The Essence of Buddhism*) in 1947. Kegon represented most symbolically the continuity and discontinuity in Daisetsu’s thought. Immediately after finishing his lectures at Columbia University, he published in 1955 the Japanese work *Kegon no kenkyū* 華嚴の研究 (Studies on Kegon), a concerted discussion of Kegon. However, Daisetsu’s Kegon theory, on which this book was based, was already found in the third volume of the English *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1953), that is, exactly in between early-period Daisetsu and late-period Daisetsu. At the beginning of the essay “Kegonkyō, bosatsu risō oyobi Buddha” 華嚴經、菩薩理想及び仏陀 (The *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the Bodhisattva Ideal, and the Buddha) in the first chapter of part 2 of *Kegon no kenkyū*, Daisetsu summarized the magnificent spectacle that opens in the depth of the “mind” that becomes one with the Dharma body, as expounded in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

When we come to the *Gaṇḍavyūha* . . . there is a complete change in the stage where the great religious drama of Mahāyāna Buddhism is enacted. We find here nothing cold, nothing grey or earth-coloured, and nothing humanly mean; for everything one touches in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* shines out in an unsurpassable manner. We are no more in this world of limitation, obscurity, and adumbration; we are miraculously lifted up among the heavenly galaxies. The ethereal world is luminosity itself. . . . When the Buddha enters a certain kind of Samādhi, the pavilion where he is situated all of a sudden expands to the fullest limits of the universe; in other words, the universe itself is dissolved in the being of the Buddha. The universe is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the universe. And this is not mere expanse of emptiness, nor is it the shrivelling-up of it into an atom; for the ground is paved with diamonds; the pillars, beams, railings, etc., are inlaid with all kinds of precious stones and gems sparkling brilliantly, and glittering with the reflection of one another.⁹

By the *samādhi* into which the Buddha (Gautama Siddhārtha) enters, the human Buddha who exists as the response body transforms into the reward body, a body filled with light by the possibilities of infinite change, and at last becomes one with the Dharma body that is the universe itself. The universe becomes the Buddha, and the Buddha becomes the universe. The *Avataṃsaka Sutra* depicts this as an “infinite” Pure Land filled with spiritual light, that is, the “Dharma realm.” Kegon for Daisetsu was extremely similar to, and corresponded with, Swedenborg’s “spiritual world” and Eckhart’s “God” of nothingness. If Swedenborg was the culmination of Christian mysticism, Eckhart was its source. These were men who, at the outset and at the end of his career, were chosen by Daisetsu as privileged objects of comparison, so that he might render clearer the structure of *tathāgatagarbha* philosophy, the core of “Eastern Buddhism.”

In the Dharma realm, everything that exists is transparent and full of spiritual light, and all the attendants surrounding the Buddha who became the light within the light are altogether “spiritual beings.” Daisetsu’s understanding of Kegon—that the Dharma body is identical to the Dharma realm—takes the precise form of a Swedenborgian “spiritual world” in which all things existing in the inner “spiritual world” are emitted from the “principle” that is light within light. It may be surmised that when he finished the English work, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Daisetsu already fully understood the entire framework of Swedenborg’s thought. Swedenborg proposed that the spiritual sun located in the center of the spiritual world from which spiritual light emanates is the true God. God, the sun of the spiritual world, is a person (Christ the Savior) as well as God. From this identity of God and man, countless angels of light (“heavenly

⁹ Suzuki 1953, pp. 75–76 (SDZ 5: 202).

people” of light) come forth: the Dharma body that is God qua human and the angels of light embodying all the possibilities of the Dharma body, that is, the reward body. In *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Daisetsu regards the reward body as a kind of “angel.”¹⁰

The spiritual world is the only entity with infinite attributes, and human beings—for such is our nature—store the spiritual world inside the mind as if embracing an embryo. The spiritual world which is built in our mind, and the spiritual sun which is the center of that spiritual world, constitute one thing but have two aspects which confront and complement each other: Wisdom and Love. These two aspects complement, even as they conflict with, each other as do such things as light and heat, intelligence and will, lungs and heart; they become organs, and life with a tangible body takes shape. Daisetsu himself did the Japanese translation of Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Wisdom*, which explicates such a theory of spiritual evolution. Daisetsu held thereafter that Mahayana Buddhism had two aspects, “Great Wisdom” and “Great Compassion,” each complementing the other. It was Zen that represented the “Great Wisdom” side of Mahayana Buddhism, while Pure Land represented the “Great Compassion” side. With Zen and Pure Land, “spirituality” in the true meaning of the word was Japanized. In *Nihonteki reisei*, Daisetsu used the word “spirituality” in conscious opposition to the jingoistic term “Japanese spirit” (Yamato *damashii* 大和魂) favored by the Japanese militarists during the war. However, in using the notion of spirituality, which takes Zen and Pure Land, and Great Wisdom and Great Compassion, as two poles, he was only able to show his opposition to Japan’s entry into World War II in a passive way. Stopping the war itself was impossible. After World War II, Daisetsu tried once more to discuss Kegon head on, but Swedenborg was no longer the subject of comparison. Instead, it was Meister Eckhart who caught Daisetsu’s attention.

The *Columbia University Seminar Lectures*, a compilation of Daisetsu’s lectures at Columbia University, is divisible into six parts in terms of content. In lectures one to four, Daisetsu argued for the experience of *satori* 悟り that Zen and Pure Land (Zen in particular) rendered possible. Daisetsu discussed this *satori* experience in detail as the “pure experience” articulated by his sworn friend, Nishida Kitarō. Pure experience was an adaptation of James’s philosophy, which Daisetsu himself had taught to Nishida. In lecture five, Daisetsu summarized the structure of the world that appears before people as their “pure experience,” based on the *Discourse*, which he had translated into English more than a half-century earlier. In the sixth and final lecture, Daisetsu tried to present the world of light as revealed by Kegon. The opening of pure experience was the world of light as *tathāgatagarbha*, where finite human beings could “unite” with infinite existence. This then was the completion of Daisetsu’s thought.

¹⁰ Suzuki 1907, pp. 264–65.

At this point, Daisetsu constantly referred to Eckhart's teachings to express his vision more clearly. This connects with Daisetsu's final works, *Mysticism* in English and *Tōyōteki na mikata* in Japanese. It is not clear exactly when, where, or from whom, Daisetsu discovered Eckhart. To judge from a reading of Daisetsu's *Columbia University Seminar Lectures* and the later *Mysticism*, which drew on the lectures, Daisetsu frequently cited Eckhart's teachings, referencing a work by Raymond B. Blakney (1895–1970). As well as being a bona fide expert on Eckhart who introduced his thought into the United States, Blakney could also freely read and write kanji, as he had proselytized in China as a Christian missionary. Blakney was convinced that Eckhart's endeavor in medieval Europe in reaching “nothingness” via a thorough investigation of “God” and Laozi's endeavor in ancient China in reaching “nothingness” via a thorough investigation of the “Way” resonated with one another. Blakney, who translated Eckhart's “nothingness” into English and brought it to the United States, also tried his hand at translating Laozi's “nothingness,” which resonated with Eckhart's “nothingness,” and brought this, too, to the United States. Blakney's English translation of the *Dao de jing* was published in 1955, just after Daisetsu's lectures at Columbia University and just before *Mysticism* appeared. It seems that Daisetsu promptly took up and read Blakney's English translation. This is clear from the fact that Daisetsu refers not only to Blakney's translations of Eckhart but also to his comments on Laozi's *Dao de jing* in the essay on “Meister Eckhart and Buddhism” found at the beginning of *Mysticism*. So, there is no doubt that Blakney's studies became the thread that guided Daisetsu from Laozi's “nothingness” to Eckhart's “nothingness.” At the same time, they also made possible *Tōyōteki na mikata*, Daisetsu's last work.

At the stage of the *Columbia University Seminar Lectures*, it was to Eckhart's viewpoint on the unity of the infinite God and the finite “I” in the here and now, which overlapped with his own reading of Kegon, that Daisetsu referred. Eckhart explained that the creation of heaven and earth, that is, the incarnation of the infinite God as finite human being, and the birth of Jesus, son of God, were repeated in the here and now. The infinite God was incarnate in a finite human being through the soul (*tamashii* 魂) or mind (*kokoro*) as God himself gave birth to Jesus as his son. At that time, however, along with “I” becoming “nothingness,” “God” also became “nothingness.” This “I” and “God” achieved “unity” through the “soul,” a vast “desert” (“nothingness”) in which nothing existed. Blakney translated the desert of “nothingness” where the “I” meets “God”—in a word, the “soul”—as “womb.” This was the very translation Daisetsu gave for *tathāgatagarbha*. In the latter half of the chapter “Meister Eckhart and Buddhism” in *Mysticism*, Daisetsu made his own, new translations of certain passages of Laozi's *Dao de jing*, and drew a correspondence between Eckhart's “nothingness”

and Laozi's "nothingness."¹¹ In the following quotation, the first four lines are from *The Way and Its Power*, Arthur Waley's translation of the *Dao de jing*, while the last two lines are by Daisetsu himself.

The Way is like an empty vessel
 That yet may be drawn from
 Without ever needing to be filled.
 It is bottomless: the very progenitor of all things in the world. . . .
 It is like a deep pool that never dries.
 I do not know whose child it could be.
 It looks as if it were prior to God.¹²

Daisetsu here regarded the "Way" as prior to "God," but this is a rather bold translation. The original text reads "the image existed before the emperor," that is, the image of the Way precedes any human emperor. Daisetsu took this to be "God," not a human "emperor." So, the Way, which is the source of all creation, preceded the existence of God. It was an "empty" vessel, or "nothingness": the "nothingness" which preceded God, the "nothingness" which birthed God. It was Blakney who, before Daisetsu, translated this same phrase, and thus the Way of Laozi, as "a preface to God."¹³ Eckhart's nothingness not only connected with the Buddhist emptiness but also with the "nothingness" of Laozi, the "first Oriental thinker" before Buddhism. "Emptiness" was accommodated by "nothingness," and from there "the One" was born. The synthesis of "nothingness," "emptiness," and "the One"; the synthesis of Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity; and the synthesis of Zen, Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗, and Kegon—these were the topics woven together by the later Daisetsu, the Daisetsu who composed *Tōyōteki na mikata*.

The Infinite Womb of Nothingness

Tōyōteki na mikata, which Suzuki Daisetsu published in 1963 three years before his death, formed the final synthesis of his thought. If one were to cite the essay that most beautifully and succinctly expresses Daisetsu's final thoughts, it would be "Tōyō 'tetsugaku' ni tsuite" 東洋「哲学」について (Concerning Oriental "Philosophy"). Here, Daisetsu introduced a poem by Xuedou Zhongxian 雪竇重顯 (980–1052), a "great figure of Song-dynasty Zen":

Spring mountain enfolding a riot of green,
 A hollow blue-green bobs along the spring river.

¹¹ Suzuki 1957. Suzuki here translates chapters 14 and 25 of the *Dao de jing*. The former is on pp. 15–16, while the latter is on pp. 16–17.

¹² Suzuki 1957, p. 15.

¹³ Blakney 1955, p. 56.

Empty stillness between heaven and earth,
 Standing alone, how can there be a limit to what I can see?

Xuedou just stands in the endless spring fields “between heaven and earth,” and “between a blanket of limitless green.” Xuedou, a person of quite normal stature, stands alone in the midst of the spring mountain and spring river, a limitless green, right in the midst of a million kinds of change. At such a time, “a person immediately drinks in and vomits out the limitless universe.” In other words, “infinity is wrapped in the infinitesimal as it is, and then passes away.” “Zero” transforms into “infinity” at the moment the person says, “How can there be a limit to what I can see?”¹⁴ Daisetsu summarized the scenery Xuedou saw in the limitless spring fields spread between heaven and earth as follows:

Heaven and earth are green in spring, but infinite change exists in this green. We do not know how many plants there are, but green, pregnant with an unknowable number of changes, stains heaven and earth with its single color. Expressed in words, we may articulate it as one in many, and many in one. And so, each individual “many,” or “all,” is pregnant with all other individual “manys” and “alls,” even while maintaining its distinctiveness as itself. Here, however, there is not one plant that bows down to others, that is, other selves, saying, “I alone am the true green.” While each has its own green, the mountain fields are enriched to the full with the green of self and others as one.¹⁵

In this passage, Daisetsu’s ideological trajectory up to *Tōyōteki na mikata* appears integrated into one. The logics of “identity and difference” (*sokubi* 即非) and of “absolute paradoxical identity” (*zettai mujun no jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾の自己同一) found in Zen, as well as the logic of “lateral transcendence” (*ōchō* 横超) found in Shin Buddhism, and that of “nonobstruction among individual phenomena” (*jiji muge* 事事無礙) found in Kegon, dissolve remarkably into one. Infinite and finite are bound to each other through a relationship of “identity and difference,” because they are absolutely contradictory: “A is not A; thus, A is A.” As such, finite existence does not “transcend” on a vertical axis infinite existence, but becomes one by “transcending it” laterally, that is, through “crossing over.” To transcend something laterally is to jump into its midst; to return, to come back to the original path, the source. Thus, the finite returns to infinity. In the finite and infinite, united through “identity and difference” and “lateral transcending,” “mind” (the mind itself) and “things” (things themselves) that usually are not bound together—such as hearing and seeing—are all bound into one, despite

¹⁴ All of the short quotations in this paragraph are found in SDZ 20: 187–89.

¹⁵ SDZ 20: 188.

remaining mutually contradictory. Things become mind, and mind becomes things. Seeing becomes hearing, and hearing becomes seeing. You can hear with your eyes, and see with your ears. Each finite existence accommodates an infinite existence. It is like one vast web that has been woven with countless transparent jewels that shine, each constituting a knot in the web. Because each jewel is transparent and brilliant, into one jewel the image of countless other jewels reflects, and into countless jewels the image of one jewel reflects: one in many, and many in one. All the individuals that constitute the many envelop all other individuals, even as they retain their distinctiveness.

Daisetsu took it one more step. He rediscovered the word “marvelous” (*myō* 妙), using it to consolidate and synthesize both Zen, Jōdo Shinshū, and Kegon, as well as the notions of “identity and difference,” “lateral transcendence,” and “nonobstruction among individual phenomena.” Daisetsu positioned Laozi as the first Oriental philosopher, “the first Oriental thinker,”¹⁶ and that which formed the basis of Oriental culture. Laozi took the phrase “before numbers, before time, before there were signs of differentiation, before *logos*”¹⁷ to mean “where mystery is the deepest” (*xuan zhi you xuan* 玄之又玄),¹⁸ and it is from the latter phrase that the term “marvelous” emerges. Daisetsu explained it thus:

Borrowing the words of Laozi, the first thinker of the Orient, the scene before the division of subject and object or light and dark is “nothingness.” Zhuangzi 莊子 referred to it as “chaos” or the “shape of no shape and the form of no form.” It seems to have a shape, but there is nothing. When we give it a name, we think that there is something corresponding to it out there. So, where nothing has yet been named and nothing has yet been characterized, we can provisionally regard it as the state of God’s existence prior to movement. Laozi also called this the “stream under heaven” and the “valley under heaven.”¹⁹ Valleys and streams are the same. He also calls this the “female mystery.” It means the mother, or the female. It is Goethe’s “eternal feminine.” To keep with this, adhere to it, not be distracted by it, is to return to the “infant,” return to the “great ultimate,” and return to the “pure.”²⁰

To return to “where mystery is the deepest,” the “motherhood that brings all things into existence,”²¹ the “marvelous,” that is, the womb as the synthesis of “identity and

¹⁶ SDZ 20: 286.

¹⁷ SDZ 20: 227.

¹⁸ SDZ 20: 286.

¹⁹ *Dao de jing*, ch. 28. Suzuki translated these phrases as “empire’s river” (p. 92) and “empire’s valley” (p. 93) respectively in Carus (1913) 1954.

²⁰ SDZ 20: 286.

²¹ SDZ 20: 287.

difference,” “lateral transcendence” and “nonobstruction among individual phenomena”; to be reborn as an “infant” with a pure “childlike spirit”: such is the place without precedent where Daisetsu finally stood.

But if we look back again upon Daisetsu’s career, he had already co-translated Laozi’s *Dao de jing* into English with Paul Carus (though in fact most of it is said to have been done by Daisetsu)—the very person who called him to America. This was in 1898, when Daisetsu was twenty-eight years old, just shortly after he left Japan and headed to the United States. It was only after he finished this translation that he attempted to express the core of “Mahayana Buddhism” in English. That is, the early Daisetsu was moving from the “marvelous,” the entrance to “where mystery is the deepest,” toward “Mahayana Buddhism,” and from the origins of Oriental philosophy toward the completion of Oriental philosophy. Moreover, in his translation of Laozi’s *Dao de jing*, Daisetsu translated the phrase discussed above (*xuan zhi you xuan*) as: “Indeed, it is the mystery of mysteries. Of all spirituality it is the door” (*xuan zhi you xuan zhong miao zhi men* 玄之又玄衆妙之門).²² It is important to note that the word “spirituality” is already being used here. Daisetsu declares that the mystery of mysteries alone is the door that leads to all spirituality. No other words could express Daisetsu’s life so precisely. The late Daisetsu and the early Daisetsu made contact with each other, as though they had been following one great spiral-shaped trajectory. It was this spiral form that gave shape to the unique life and thought of modern Japan, in this case, in the person of Suzuki Daisetsu.

(Translated by Lindsey DeWitt)

ABBREVIATION

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

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²² Carus (1913) 1954, pp. 73–74.

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