

“Reflections on D. T. Suzuki: Commemorating the
Fiftieth Anniversary of His Death”
December 5–6, 2016, Nichibunken, Kyoto

JOHN BREEN

BY PRETTY much any measure, D. T. Suzuki was a great man. He was a man of charisma, who charmed audiences in Japan and in the West throughout his long and productive life. He was a prolific writer, and his books and essays have exerted a profound and enduring impact, especially on the way Westerners have viewed Japan, Buddhism and, above all, Zen. His writings were also at times difficult, problematic, and controversial, as late twentieth-century scholars have been wont to point out. Global interest in Suzuki endured unabated after his death in 1966, as scholars and writers continued to work on his life and legacy from a multiplicity of angles. What was missing, however, was an attempt to bring these scholars together to attempt a comprehensive assessment. The fiftieth anniversary of his death and, indeed, the termination of copyright on his literary output, seemed to us, the organizers of the conference, an ideal opportunity to take stock.

There were difficulties in the planning of the conference: how to frame the event to avoid alienating interested parties; who to involve and who not to involve. But those difficulties were finally of little consequence when set against outcomes. The conference was the first time that all the leading D. T. Suzuki scholars had gathered together in one place to exchange views and reflect objectively on the man and his legacy. Scholars came to Nichibunken (International Research Center for Japanese Studies) from America, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, as well as from other parts of Japan. The papers they delivered dealt with a real diversity of subjects: Suzuki and war and peace, Suzuki and Zen and Mahayana, Suzuki and nationalism and international relations, Suzuki and family and friends.

They promise to make for a great book. Indeed, the organizers plan to publish two conference volumes, one in English and one in Japanese, to be co-edited by John Breen and Yamada Shōji.

The two main conference days began with keynote lectures by Professor Richard Jaffe of Duke University and Sueki Fumihiko, Professor Emeritus of Nichibunken, respectively. They were followed by panels organized broadly chronologically, the better to bring into relief the evolution in Suzuki's thinking from the last decades of the nineteenth century through to the second half of the twentieth.

Richard Jaffe, presently editing a multi-volume series of selected works by D. T. Suzuki for University of California Press, launched day one with "D. T. Suzuki and the Two Cranes: American Philanthropy and Suzuki's Global Agenda." The two "Cranes" of his title are Charles and Cornelius Crane, two American philanthropists. Professor Jaffe argued the need to approach D. T. Suzuki not only through his voluminous writings, but through other sources in order to shed light on his active and sometimes difficult engagement with global capitalism and global cultural flows. Professor Sueki started the proceedings for day two with the second keynote lecture: "Daisetsu o dō yomu ka? *Rinzai no kihon shisō* ni okeru 'nin' no shisō o chūshin ni" (How to Read Daisetsu, with a Focus on the Notion of the "Person" in His *The Fundamental Ideas of Linji*). He began by pointing out the challenges in tackling the writings of Suzuki, straddling the divide between the academic and popular. Professor Sueki then explored the concept of "nin" (person) as Suzuki articulated it, especially in his last work in Japanese, *Rinzai no kihon shisō* (1949), finding in that difficult work both problems and possibilities.

Professors Mark Blum (University of California, Berkeley), James Mark Shields (Bucknell University), and Roy Starrs (University of Otago) featured on the first of the two panels on day one. Mark Blum in "Early Suzuki Mahāyānism" delved into Suzuki's "idiosyncratic" *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, initially published in 1907. James Mark Shields, in "From Post-pantheism to Trans-materialism: D. T. Suzuki, Nature, and New Buddhism," took up Suzuki's contributions on nature and society to the *Shin Bukkyō* journal in the 1890s and early 1900s. And in "D. T. Suzuki and the Challenges of Cross-Cultural Transmission," Roy Starrs looked for what was lost in Suzuki's creative attempts to communicate Zen to a Western audience in the early twentieth century.

Papers by Professor Iwamoto Akemi (D. T. Suzuki Museum), Professor Wayne Yokoyama (Hanazono University), and Professor Judith Snodgrass

(Western Sydney University) comprised the second panel of day one. Their interests ranged broadly: from Professor Iwamoto's observations on Suzuki's indebtedness to early Indian Yogācāra teachings, and the connectivity between them, through Professor Yokoyama's reflections on Suzuki's unfinished work on the "controversial" Shin Buddhist poet, Asahara Saichi, to Professor Snodgrass's exploration of Suzuki's engagement with two anglophone journals published in interwar Japan, *The Eastern Buddhist* and *The Young East*, and, more generally, with the International Buddhist Society.

Professors Dobbins, Victoria, and Moriya of Oberlin College, the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, and Hannan University, respectively, comprised the first panel of day two. James Dobbins delved into Suzuki's writings on the theory of animal welfare—inspired partly by Western ideas—and his practice of it, too, which culminated in the building of the Jihien animal shelter in Kamakura. Brian Victoria highlighted essays by Suzuki on the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, and World War II, which led him to ask whether Suzuki's Zen was not the perfect religion for a totalitarian state. Moriya Tomoe explored Suzuki's shifting approach to religious experience from a stance critical of monotheistic Christianity to a discovery, via William James, of Christian mysticism.

The fourth and final panel on day two began with Dr. Roman Rosenbaum (University of Sydney) making the case for D. T. Suzuki as "one of the most culturally influential thinkers of the twentieth century" for his reimagining of Zen as "emblematic of world culture." Dr. Alice Freeman (University of Oxford) focused on the Occupation period, and the demilitarization of Zen, to which Suzuki contributed mightily by presenting Zen to his Allied friends as nonbelligerent. In the final paper, Dr. Ben Van Overmeire (St. Olaf College) took a critical look at a selection of monastic memoirs written by Western writers inspired by D. T. Suzuki, concluding that even those memoirs which were critical of the man, still inherited his project of making Zen accessible to the West. Dr. Stefan Grace summed up the two days' achievements.

After the conference, Professor Michael Pye led an excursion to Ōtani University library to view a selection of objects and books related to D. T. Suzuki. The party then gathered in the publication office of *The Eastern Buddhist*, a journal with which D. T. Suzuki was intimately related, for further discussion and reflections on the two-day conference.

Inventory of Contributors

Organizers

Yamada Shōji 山田奨治 (国際日本文化研究センター; Nichibunken)

John Breen (Nichibunken)

Keynote speakers

- Richard M. Jaffe (Duke University). “D. T. Suzuki and the Two Cranes: American Philanthropy and Suzuki’s Global Agenda.”
- Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士 (Emeritus, Nichibunken). “Daisetsu o dō yomu ka? *Rinzai no kihon shisō* ni okeru ‘nin’ no shisō o chūshin ni” 「大拙をどう読むか? 〈人〉の思想を中心に」.

Panelists (in order of appearance)

- Mark L. Blum (University of California, Berkeley). “Early Suzuki Mahāyānism: Contextualizing *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*.”
- James Mark Shields (Bucknell University). “From Post-pantheism to Trans-materialism: D. T. Suzuki, Nature, and New Buddhism.”
- Roy Starrs (University of Otago). “D. T. Suzuki’s Theory of Inspiration and the Challenges of Cross-Cultural Transmission.”
- Iwamoto Akemi 岩本明美 (D. T. Suzuki Museum). “Daisetsu no Zen shisō to Indo shoki Yogācāra no kyōsetsu” 「大拙の禅思想とインド初期ヨーガーチャーラの教説」.
- Wayne S. Yokoyama (Hanazono University). “Suzuki’s Work on Saichi’s Poems: Another Lifework Left Incomplete.”
- Judith Snodgrass (Western Sydney University). “D. T. Suzuki’s Contribution to the Anglophone Press of Interwar Japan.”
- James Dobbins (Oberlin College). “D. T. Suzuki and the Welfare of Animals.”
- Brian A. Victoria (Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies). “D. T. Suzuki Zen: The Perfect Religion for a Totalitarian State.”

- Moriya Tomoe 守屋友江 (Hannan University). "Suzuki Daisetsu no shukanteki shūkyōron to sono shisōteki igi" 「鈴木大拙の「主観的宗教論」とその思想的意義」.
- Roman Rosenbaum (University of Sydney). "Transnationalising Spirituality: D. T. Suzuki's Zen Textuality."
- Alice Freeman (University of Oxford). "Suzuki Daisetsu's 'Spiritual Japan' and the Question of Buddhist War Responsibility: An Alternative History of the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952)."
- Ben Van Overmeire (St. Olaf College). "D. T. Suzuki's Influence on Monastic Memoires."

Panel commentators (in order of appearance)

- Stefan Grace (Taishō University)
- Jacqueline Stone (Princeton University)
- Paul Watt (Waseda University)
- Michael Pye (Ōtani University)
- Yoshinaga Shin'ichi 吉永進一 (Maizuru National College of Technology)
- Silvio Vita (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies)

Panel chairs (in order of appearance)

- Orion Klautau (Tōhoku University)
- Takii Kazuhiro 瀧井一博 (Nichibunken)
- Andō Reiji 安藤礼二 (Tama Art University)
- Robert Sharf (University of California, Berkeley)