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One Cornered Future?

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During the past few years the *Eastern Buddhist* has shown considerable interest in the relation of Buddhist spirituality and modern culture. For example, Professor Abe Masao has been involved in a Christian-Buddhist dialogue on the subject of the "quasi-religions" and the threat which they pose to traditional religions in the modern world. Dr. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi has written on the meaning of Zen for the modern world, and recently Nolan Pliny Jacobson has discussed possible Buddhist elements in the coming world civilization. As Professor Jacobson pointed out, consideration of our respective cultural pasts in search of what might be universal elements appropriate to the future is an immediate necessity.¹ Potentially catastrophic problems are already upon us. Global pollution and a shortage of critical resources which are the result of international industrialization provide one example. Already, a commercial-industrial life style has replaced traditional ones in major cities of the developed world. These cities have come to look alike as once diverse metropolitan centers are now characterized by the same impersonal commercial style. The "Californication" of metropolitan centers around the world is already apparent. Traditional sources of meaning and identity are thus lost. Those who are conscious of these changes and wish to effect future developments, rather than leave them to chance, must consider the possible contributions of past great cultures for solving the massive international and intercultural problems of today's world. Professor Huston Smith set the precedent for this in his well-known address to the American Academy of Religion in 1957.² Our life styles must be made complementary and

¹ Nolan Pliny Jacobson, "Buddhist Elements in the Coming World Civilization," *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. V, no. 2 (October, 1972), pp. 12-43.

² See: Huston Smith, "Accents of the World's Philosophies," *Philosophy East and West* Vol. VII, no. 1 and 2 (April-July, 1957), pp. 7-19.

cultural provincialism must be avoided for the good of the whole. Elements from past cultures conducive to human freedom and creativity, and most universally applicable should be immediately promoted. The key to the future lies in our ability to find cultural elements with these three characteristics. It is in this context that I should like to consider some previous discussions that have appeared in the *Eastern Buddhist*.

Professor Jacobson's principle of self-correction according to which nothing is absolutized and one is continually testing past knowledge would certainly be conducive to human freedom and broadly applicable. It would also be at one with the Buddhist teaching of impermanence (*anicca*) and with the early Buddhist emphasis on individualism and rigorous self-analysis.³ I would like to consider in greater detail, however, Professor Hisamatsu's suggestions for the evolving civilization. In "Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," he diagnosed the problem of modern man. Man is overcome by complexity and manifold problems, the solutions to which often appear contradictory. This produces a fragmented life and personal anxiety. In response, modern man increasingly seeks simplicity, leisure, freedom from concern, and quietude. Yet these things in themselves do not solve the problem. The real problem is that modern man has not realized that "oneness and manyness—or, unity and diversity—are mutually indispensable moments within the basic structure of man. They must necessarily be one with each other not two."⁴ The real solution is thus for man to discover that within himself there is a unity which must always be appropriate to any multiplicity. The dynamic unity within is described as follows:

It must be a dynamic and creative oneness or unity which as the root-origin of multiplicity, produces multiplicity from within itself without limit; a oneness that can eternally produce multiplicity out of itself freely and yet remain unbound by what is produced; a unity which while producing multiplicity yet remains within that multiplicity and can accord with that multiplicity appropriate to the particular time and place.⁵

³ Jacobson, "Buddhist Elements in the Coming World Civilization," pp. 37-39.

⁴ Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, "Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. I, no. 1 (September, 1965), p. 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42. It is interesting to note that this modern dilemma was the very issue raised by Paul Tillich as his own special concern in the Tillich-Hisamatsu dialogues of 1957. Professor Hisamatsu's prescription was essentially the same there as here. See: "Dialogues, East and West; Conversations Between Dr. Paul Tillich and Dr. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi" (Part One), *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. IV, no. 2 (October, 1971), pp. 91ff.

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This harmonious relation of unity and multiplicity within man is called the "Original Subject," the "Formless Self," or "Oriental Nothingness" (*mu*).⁶ It is the "Original Face" or "True Self" to which Zen Buddhism calls man to awaken (*satori*). The *koan* and *zazen* are the traditional means. It is free and creative since it is really the very source of civilization. The Formless Self "freely and unlimitedly creates civilization and is ever present, appropriate to the time and place within the civilization which has been created."⁷ The Formless Self itself is always free to appropriately create multiplicity because of its "Not a Single Thing" nature. It is always free because "seeing into one's True Nature, not being anything, is everything, and being everything is not any-thing." Absolute negation in itself becomes affirmation and vice-versa. In a similar way creativity is related to Oriental Nothingness as water is to waves. It is the very substance of creativity.⁸

Oriental Nothingness thus by definition meets the requirements of being conducive to freedom and creativity. It would seem to be especially suitable for any future world culture. Additionally, it would appear to be universally applicable since it is the essence or true nature of man himself.

One may wonder what the characteristics of a civilization reflective of Oriental Nothingness might be. Dr. Hisamatsu has even provided us with some clues as to the answer to this question. A problem arises, however, in that these clues seem to point in two quite different directions. One of them suggests that we will later need to return to the question of the universality of Oriental Nothingness.

It can be said that the characteristics of a civilization based on Oriental Nothingness will be true, good, and beautiful. Professor Hisamatsu says that the "awakening-working" of the True Self, "is the ultimate active truth, active good, and active beauty, which transcends all limitation; it is the root-origin of every particular—and therefore limited—instance of truth, good, and beauty." Taking beauty as his example, he continues:

Supreme or ultimate beauty is not a particular beauty belonging to the realm of art in the narrow sense, but is, rather, the beauty of the awa-

⁶ The Sanskrit term is *śūnya*. For an exhaustive discussion of Oriental Nothingness by Dr. Hisamatsu, see: "The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness," *Philosophical Studies of Japan* Vol. II (1960), pp. 65-97. Cf. Abe, Masao, "God, Emptiness, and the True Self," *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. II, no. 2 (December, 1969).

⁷ Hisamatsu, "Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," p. 43.

⁸ Hisamatsu, "The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness," pp. 93, and 94-95.

kened, working Self. It is a formless beauty which never becomes an "object." . . . It is Active-Subject-Beauty, that is, the beauty which is the free functioning itself of that which is emancipated from all forms; it is, neither merely the concept of beauty nor the idea of beauty. That is, it is the beauty of our being the human self which is actually awakened and is at work; it is not any objective beauty which arises from seeing or otherwise sensing that self as an object. It is the beauty which becomes aware of itself only when it becomes the awakened Self itself.⁹

The formlessness of the Awakened Self itself is the reason for its universality. Yet the beauty of the Formless Self itself must remain an enigma to the unenlightened, who are limited to perception through forms. The unawakened can however enjoy expressions of beauty through a form of the formless. This is because formless beauty freely takes on form in any and all the objective realms of sense perception. As the same would be true for truth and goodness, we can say that any civilization based on the Formless Self will not only be truly good and beautiful, but also will possess forms recognizably true, good, and beautiful.

As we have suggested, because true beauty is formless beauty, "it can freely take on *any* form in self-actualization." Thus the beauty of "Formless Self Civilization" would be the "beauty of formlessness which freely actualizes itself within form *while never being bound by any form.*"¹⁰ In the formless character of truth, beauty, and goodness we have the universality which is a requirement for elements in any future world culture. Because we are dealing with a *Formless* Self, and because beauty is formless, no particular forms are dictated. Oriental Nothingness is neither dependent on any form nor limited to any particular form. Consequently "its"¹¹ truth, beauty, and goodness also can be expressed through any form. Whatever the forms of any future culture, Oriental Nothingness will be appropriate to them and our qualification for universality is met. This is the first direction of Professor Hisamatsu's thought on the character of a future culture based on Oriental Nothingness.

The second direction of Hisamatsu's thought on the probable appearance of a "Formless Self Culture" is related to his discussions of *sadō* (tea) culture and Zen art. *Sadō* culture is not simply the ritual procedures for preparing and serving

⁹ Hisamatsu, "Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," p. 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46. Italics mine.

¹¹ The possessive pronoun is unavoidable here, but it must be remembered that truth, beauty, and goodness are not really separate from the Formless Self. Rather, they are it, itself.

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tea (*temae*), but an entire cultural style encompassing art, philosophy, architecture, ethics, etc. It is based on a religious awakening; "the Awakening of *sadō* is no shallow and ephemeral upsurge of sentimental feeling, but rather of a religious nature which, rooted in humanity, penetrates to the very heart of man. One can say that this is the basis of the cultural system on which the way of tea rests."¹² The very heart of man here referred to is none other than the Formless Self. Thus, true *sadō* culture must be said to be an expression of Oriental Nothingness: "This *mu* is indeed the creative source which has made Japanese *sadō* culture."¹³ In the way of tea we therefore have an example of a culture created by the Formless Self.

The seven characteristics of tea culture are: asymmetry (*fukinsei*), simplicity (*kanso*), the austere and sublime (*kokō*), naturalness (*sbizen*), profound gracefulness (*yūgen*), unworldliness (*dassuzoku*), and tranquility (*seijaku*). Asymmetry indicates an irregularity,¹⁴ and a lack of formal balance. Simplicity means the uncomplex and unsophisticated, but it means neither naive simplicity nor rough vulgar simplicity. The terms neat and tidy rather point to a quality of lightness in which order is preserved. The austere and sublime (*kokō*) can also be expressed by the terms *sabi* and *sbibui*. Here the austere strength of the aged is expressed. There is also the quality of loneliness associated with the impersonal aspect of nature, and the taste of the astringent. By naturalness is meant without intent or purpose. Here spontaneity replaces intentionality. *Tūgen* is difficult to translate. Professor Hisamatsu says that it is profound and refined gracefulness. It possesses a darkness and sense of serious gravity. In the early fifteenth century, Zeami Motokiyo gave the example of "blossoms on a crag." This points to the elements of melancholy and nobility. Unworldliness indicated a separation from the everyday world and an independence of its laws and tranquility means "self-composed quietness" or "a settled, quiet, unturbulent quality."

These seven elements characterize not only the tea ceremony, but the entire life of the truly awakened man. As characteristics of past forms that have been expressive of Oriental Nothingness they suggest what a culture based on Oriental Nothingness might resemble. This observation in turn raises the ques-

¹² Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "The Nature of *Sadō* Culture," *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. III, no. 2 (October, 1970), p. 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ In the text this is called a "destruction of perfection," yet a comment by Mr. DeMartino in the Tillich-Hisamatsu dialogues suggests that "breaking of regularity" is more to the point. See: "Dialogues East and West" (Part One), p. 105.

tion whether Oriental Nothingness most expresses itself in terms of just these seven characteristics. We would expect not, consequently the following quotation is a bit startling.

These seven qualities are not combined together deriving from various separate sources, they all spring from one original source. They are not by origin separate entities, but are rather the attributes of one single entity. *Sadō* culture is one unified whole. Unless these seven characteristics are present we cannot speak of *sadō* culture. It may be safely said that even one characteristic cannot be missing. By its very essential nature the way of tea has oneness with these seven qualities united together. When this oneness manifests itself it inherently possesses these seven. This one is *mu*. This *mu* is indeed the creative source which has made Japanese *sadō* culture.¹⁵

The phrases "one original source" and "one single entity" of the preceding quotation could refer to either Oriental Nothingness or to *sadō* culture. In both cases the assertions would be fully coherent, but the meaning would be quite different. If the "one" refers to *sadō* culture, then the latter is one particular manifestation of Oriental Nothingness and further all seven characteristics of *sadō* culture must be present for it to be genuine. If—on the other hand—the "one" refers to Oriental Nothingness, the situation would be quite different. Then, the seven characteristics are actually characteristics of Oriental Nothingness ("they all spring from one original source"). Further, Oriental Nothingness would be dependent upon their presence ("even one characteristic cannot be missing") and would be expressible only in forms related to them. In other words, it could finally be concluded that Oriental Nothingness must manifest itself in just the forms which these characteristics represent ("By its very essential nature the way of tea has oneness with these seven qualities united together. When this oneness manifests itself it inherently possesses these seven."). Surprisingly, the last two sentences seem to demand the latter interpretation ("This one is *mu*. This *mu* is indeed the creative source which has made Japanese *sadō* culture.").

This conclusion concerning the Formless Self seems inconsistent considering the earlier descriptions of it in relation to freedom, beauty, and creativity. Yet, it is confirmed by certain comments in the article "On Zen Art." It is stated, "when Zen meaning is to be expressed aesthetically, it must be expressed through a form which is both suitable and possesses a necessary relation to the

¹⁵ Hisamatsu, "The Nature of *Sadō* Culture," p. 17.

meaning being expressed."¹⁶ This raises two questions. What constitutes suitability: forms generally associated with the culture in which the Formless Self is present or something within the very nature of Oriental Nothingness itself? Secondly, if the Formless Self must be expressed through forms with which it has a necessary relation, is not Oriental Nothingness thereby limited to only those forms? In the text, the following example is given: "If a Zen monk wrote in the beautiful, delicate, haze-like, running *kana* style of ancient time, if he painted brilliant, gold images, or if he engaged in elegant, enticing behavior, he could not be said to be 'Zen-like'."¹⁷ Is *kana* style unsuitable due to incompatibility with some aspect of Oriental Nothingness itself? Does *kana* style represent an aesthetic form through which the Formless Self cannot express itself? If either of these two possibilities actually represent the problem with *kana* style, Oriental Nothingness is limited to certain forms or expressions. Given the limitations to formless expression suggested here and its past association with forms characterized by Professor Hisamatsu's seven elements, it might be concluded that any future culture in which Oriental Nothingness plays a dominant role *must* be aesthetically oriented in terms of *sado* culture. Further, because in the tea culture "characteristics of a peculiarly Japanese nature are found,"¹⁸ our future culture would have to be essentially Japanese. This conclusion seems to approach cultural provincialism and suggests that Oriental Nothingness is not so universal as to be appropriate for future transcultural developments.

A further example of unnecessary exclusivism also appears in "On Zen Art." Here a distinction is made between that which is aesthetically beautiful (the sublime) and Zen art.¹⁹ The former meets the six classical rules of Chinese painting and the latter expresses Zen meaning.²⁰ The implication of this distinction is that something may be beautiful without being Zen art. Such a definition of

¹⁶ Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, "On Zen Art," *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. I, no. 2 (September 1966), p. 29-30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Considering the comment in this quotation concerning gold, Hisamatsu's inclusion of Hasegawa Tōhaku's *Maple* as an example of Zen art is interesting. In his discussion of the painting, however, he emphasizes the importance of its asymmetry and imbalance. See: Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, Gishin Tokiwa (translator), *Zen and The Fine Arts* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Limited, 1971), pp. 65-66.

¹⁸ Hisamatsu, "The Nature of *Sado* Culture," p. 11.

¹⁹ Hisamatsu, "On Zen Art," pp. 21-25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

beauty seems to directly contradict Professor Hisamatsu's earlier one: "Supreme or ultimate beauty is not a particular beauty belonging to the realm of art in the narrow sense, but is, rather, the beauty of the awakened, working self."²¹ Abandoning this latter definition of beauty seems to rob the Formless Self of its universal appeal as well as limiting the concept of beauty.

Continuing his definition of the Zen-meaning which defines Zen art, Professor Hisamatsu says, "'Zen-meaning' is not an intellectual, conceptual meaning, but it is the living 'Zen-mind' itself."²² It is Oriental Nothingness. Pursuing this course of logic, it must be concluded that the future "Formless Self Culture" we have been considering must be characterized by Zen art but may not necessarily be beautiful. Further, our future culture aesthetically will not be Western in any present sense since "it cannot be said that such [Western] art or literature thoroughly or purely expresses the kind of 'mysticism' expressed in the Zen art of the Orient."²³

When the question is asked why the Formless Self must express itself only in the forms of Zen art or *sado* culture, we are told the answer can only truly be known by the Zen man.²⁴ It is stated that only the awakened Zen man can produce Zen art or correctly recognize and appreciate it.²⁵ It would seem that discussion must stop here. The conclusion is that, if our future world culture is to have Oriental Nothingness as its dominant element, it must be an essentially Japanese one of *sado* culture and Zen art. One must accept on authority the judgment of the enlightened as to the necessity of these particular forms as well as their judgments as to what things truly express them. This is difficult to accept. Moreover, a future culture based on Oriental Nothingness becomes impossible to implement due to an old Platonic problem. For the establishment of the new state the support of the unenlightened is necessary. This will not be forthcoming, however, as long as they remain unenlightened. Unfortunately, their enlightenment would seem to await the establishment of the new state.

With the two aspects of Professor Hisamatsu's thought on the character of a "Formless Self Culture" before us, three problems have emerged. The first is the two definitions of beauty or the sublime in "Zen: Its Meaning for the Modern World" and "On Zen Art." I suspect that this is really a terminological

²¹ Hisamatsu, "Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," p. 45.

²² Hisamatsu, "On Zen Art," p. 30.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 27. Cf. "Dialogues East and West" (Part One), p. 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

problem which can be solved without great difficulty. The last two problems are more substantial. Is the Formless Self truly free from all forms²⁶ or is it necessarily related to certain forms²⁷ such that it must express itself in *sadō* culture or Zen art? Do the conclusions about the necessarily Japanese *sadō* style of a "Formless Self Culture" represent a kind of cultural provincialism which limits the value of Oriental Nothingness for any future world culture? The two questions are directly related.

In spite of our unawakened perspective, the following reflections might be suggestive for future discussion. The consideration as to whether or not anything Western has been or might be expressive of Oriental Nothingness is not vital. The real issue is whether only *sadō* culture or Zen art—as defined by Professor Hisamatsu's seven elements—can express Oriental Nothingness. If only the characteristics of the cultural style are suitable, even the vast majority of Buddhist art would be excluded. The Greco-Indian Buddhist iconography of Gandhara, Tantric art of Tibet, and Esoteric art of China and Japan would have to be rejected as not possessing the necessary seven characteristics. Specifically, the mandalas of Esoteric Buddhism as well as the Tibetan tankhas are highly symmetrical and very complex. The early Buddhist symbols of the wheel and the empty throne are also balanced and symmetrical. Unlike the case of the West, there were many awakened Buddhists in these cultures. Does their art reflect Oriental Nothingness? If so, then Oriental Nothingness is not necessarily related only to the forms and associated characteristics of *sadō* culture. If not, then it would seem that an unduly exclusive claim is being made even from the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism as a whole.

Might it be that *sadō* culture has been defined too narrowly? The translators of "The Nature of *Sadō* Culture" pointed out that "*wabi* is the most suitable term to characterize the nature of *sadō*" and that it includes "within itself all of the seven characteristics of *sadō*."²⁸ D. T. Suzuki defined *wabi* as "transcen-

²⁶ "Zen's 'not relying on words' means freedom not only from the already established forms but, indeed, from every form; further, it means that while continually creating forms in Self-expression, one is not captured by those forms or by their creation." Hisamatsu, "Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," p. 35.

²⁷ "When Zen meaning is to be expressed aesthetically, it must be expressed through a form which is both suitable and possesses a necessary relation to the meaning being expressed." Hisamatsu, "On Zen Art," p. 30.

²⁸ Hisamatsu, "The Nature of *Sadō* Culture," p. 13, fn. 14.

dental aloofness in the midst of multiplicities."²⁹ He used the term "poverty" to convey his meaning. By poverty or simplicity he meant possessing "just enough." This poverty means freedom from distractive multiplicity and for something greater. "To be poor, that is, not to be dependent on things worldly—wealth, power, and reputation—and yet to feel inwardly the presence of something of the highest value, above time and social position: this is what essentially constitutes *wabi*."³⁰

If *wabi* in this more general sense were taken as Oriental Nothingness' self-expression, many more aesthetic forms might be said to be expressive of the Formless Self and much more Buddhist art could be included. The problem of cultural parochialism then should not arise. The following quotation attributed to Sen no Rikyū suggests that he considered a broader concept such as Suzuki's to represent both the essence of the tea ceremony and the Formless Self:

It is in earthly life that luxurious living and dainty food are considered the source of comfort. If a person has shelter just sufficient to protect him from the rain, and a supply of food just enough to keep him from hunger, that is all he needs. This is the essence of the tea ceremony, as well as the Buddha's teaching.³¹

The breadth of Rikyū's concept of the essence of the tea ceremony is also apparent in this well-known episode:

Someone once asked Rikyū about the secret of the art of the tea ceremony. Rikyū answered: "Entertain your guests so that they feel warm in the winter and cool in summer. Set charcoal so that it will boil the water, and prepare tea so that it will taste good. There is no other secret." The man who asked was not at all satisfied and said: "I know all that." Thereupon Rikyū replied: "Then you try to do just that. I will be your guest; in fact, I will become your pupil if you can do it."³²

If *wabi* (the essence of *sado* culture and the Formless Self) is defined in the sense suggested by Suzuki and Rikyū, a much greater number of forms might be expressive of the ultimate. Indian, Southeast Asian, Chinese and Japanese Esoteric art could in principle qualify as expressive of the Formless Self and

²⁹ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1959), p. 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³¹ Quoted in Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Cleveland, Ohio: Western Reserve University Press, 1967), p. 91.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

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the universality of Oriental Nothingness would be apparent. Another advantage of such a broad definition as this one is that the virtues of Oriental Nothingness as a primary element in any future culture could be made apparent even to the unenlightened. Consequently, their support and cooperation could be enlisted. A few examples may be helpful.

It is easily seen that the concepts of "transcendental aloofness in the midst of multiplicity" and simplicity or poverty are not only aesthetic but also religious. In the Four Noble Truths, Shakyamuni diagnosed the problem of suffering (*dukkha*) as resulting from having desires (*tanha*). His prescription given in the Third Noble Truth is for the elimination of our cravings. Surely this would involve a "transcendental aloofness in the midst of multiplicities" or a kind of "poverty." *Wabi* in this sense is the very thing called for by the Third Noble Truth. It is not only obviously Buddhist, but also the very key to solving the problem of suffering. In modern society where complex multiplicity produces often acute anxiety, the need for "transcendental aloofness in the midst of multiplicities" can be recognized even by those totally ignorant of "Buddhist doctrine." The question is only how to attain this.

Finally, it can be understood by all that civilization itself needs *wabi* as here defined if it is to continue. Given the problems of global pollution, limited resources, and the still basic needs of the underdeveloped nations, the only possibility for future harmony in a world shared by all must be the discovery of a sense of satisfaction in simplicity. If Oriental Nothingness leads to a love of simplicity or poverty in the sense of appreciating "just enough," for many that alone would be sufficient reason to support a Buddhist culture. For all these reasons *wabi* in the broader sense would seem most appealing as the self-expression of the Formless Self in any future civilization, even to the unawakened.