

This tribute to the life of D. T. Suzuki was conceived and directed by Michael Goldberg, a Canadian filmmaker living in Japan. It gives us a front row seat to Suzuki's world, set within the context of the times in which he lived and to which he responded. Buddhism and Christianity, Zen and Pure Land, religion and philosophy, Zen and psychoanalysis, and religion and culture are among the many themes touched upon in presenting his thought, giving us a clue as to why Suzuki's writings have had such universal appeal. The images and voices we see and hear, as well as the narration and music, converge to make a fitting tribute to his life. Unknown to most viewers is that some of the photos and footage it contains are in fact rare ones culled from closed private collections that even Suzuki researchers may be seeing or hearing for the first time. For those of us responsible for teaching undergraduate classes, this production is to be recommended as a lead-in to further discussion of Buddhism in the modern world.

Gary Snyder put it well: "D. T. Suzuki is perhaps the most culturally significant Japanese person in international terms in all of history." This statement must have impressed director Michael Goldberg, for he develops his film around it. The fact that Suzuki became an international figure should catch our attention—for it almost did not happen. When the war ended with Japan's defeat in 1945, Suzuki was a widower who had spent much of the war years establishing a Buddhist library known as the Matsugaoka Bunko in Kamakura. He was seventy-five at the time and his life had come full circle. However, within a few years, a host of remarkable men, many brought to Japan by the American Occupation, including Richard DeMartino, Dr. Albert Stunkard, Donald Richie, and Robert Aitken Roshi, began to make their way to the door of Suzuki's Engakuji residence. It was through engaging in long discussions with them and seeing their genuine hunger for Zen that Suzuki realized that America was ready for his message. At their urging he decided to take the leap and embarked upon a journey that would turn out to be the most exciting chapter of his life. From this perspective, this film is not just about D. T. Suzuki. It is equally a tribute to these gentlemen who appeared bodhisattva-like to rescue Suzuki from the brink of oblivion. Without them D. T. Suzuki would not have spent that final decade in the United States and would not have become as internationally famous as he is now.

As we review the cast that has been assembled, however, there are a few faces that are conspicuously absent. The first that comes to mind is Taitetsu Unno, Professor Emeritus of Smith College. Dr. Unno had a close personal connection to Suzuki through the Nikkei Shin Buddhist community that was home to the latter in the postwar years. He was also a frequent visitor to Suzuki in Kamakura during the time Unno was a graduate student at Tokyo University. Another person who might have been featured, though long departed, is Ruth Fuller Everett, later known as Ruth Fuller Sasaki, who was close to Suzuki in the 1930s—even spending a week with him in Beijing during his semi-diplomatic tour of China in 1934—but had largely parted ways with him by the 1950s (Isabel Stirling has recently published a study on Ruth's life and works). A third person that comes to mind is Seizan Yanagida, the father of modern Zen studies whose achievements went well beyond Suzuki's own

preliminary work on Chinese kōan literature. Sadly, Dr. Yanagida passed away just a few months ago, making an interview impossible. In Japan, where Suzuki's reputation is firm, Shokin Furuta, late Director of the Matsugaoka Bunko Foundation, Shizuteru Ueda, Professor Emeritus, Kyoto University, and Kiyohide Kirita, professor of Hanazono University, have all done their part to promote Suzuki's legacy. Dr. Kirita is especially to be noted for placing the cornerstone to the edifice of Suzuki studies by publishing a detailed chronology and biography of Suzuki's life and works.

Having said this, it is important to realize that this tribute to the life of D. T. Suzuki is out of step with what is going on in academia today, where the drift of opinion is decidedly set against him. The reason his reputation has ebbed is largely because scholars and students have been led to believe Suzuki was a wartime nationalist who played an active role in supporting the war. Let me note that I have personally read through Suzuki's wartime diaries and did not come away with that impression. I would encourage readers not merely to take my word for it, however, but to read these diaries for themselves (he wrote them in English) when they are published in the Research Annual of the Matsugaoka Bunko Foundation later this year, and come to their own conclusions.

In the coming years the pendulum will no doubt begin to swing back the other way. This is good news for the younger generation, the prime audience for Suzuki's literary works. New studies are now being done that better present his historical and intellectual role. New unpublished manuscripts, mainly from the postwar era, are also being prepared for publication by the Matsugaoka Bunko Foundation. These manuscripts reflect the intellectual peak of Suzuki's life, as represented by the special seminars he conducted at Columbia University, and should shed more light on the complex themes that ultimately concerned him, about which we know only the bare outlines. In addition to his wartime diaries, also forthcoming are his postwar ones written while living in Hawai'i, California, and New York.

There are places where the film is not perfect. One problem is familiar: when dealing with famous people, we have a tendency to project their achievements further back in time than they really were. Michael Goldberg does this at points, perhaps to reinforce the story line. We have to remember that Suzuki was not always famous. In his thirties, most of which he lived in middle America, Suzuki had as of yet no clear idea where his life was leading, much less the imperative to teach Zen in the West. That sense of mission did not emerge until later, though it might have well been in the works early on. On a related note, there are a lot of grey areas in Suzuki's life that we are tempted to creatively color in. For instance, we are inclined to think of Suzuki and his wife Beatrice as dedicated Buddhists. But Beatrice, for all her religious yearnings, did not focus in on Buddhism until she became co-editor of the *Eastern Buddhist*, at age forty-five. In an entry to a 1923 Radcliffe alumni pamphlet, she identifies herself as a Theosophist and a Christian Scientist. Suzuki himself was a lay Zen Buddhist and was never ordained; in fact he had definite ideas about being ordained, most of them negative, even though he wanted Westerners to undergo the

rigors of Zen monastic life. Nor should we see Tei (as she called him) and Beatrice as some kind of ideal Buddhist couple. They had their share of domestic problems. Beatrice had serious health problems the last ten years of her life that made her prone to depression, despite her strong mental disposition. Suzuki was in part to blame for the sad state of affairs at home. Then there was Ruth Fuller Everett, Suzuki's Zen protege, whom he mentored and even doted over. He ended up ignoring poor Beatrice until it was too late. He shed bitter tears—"my tears had no roots" he said (private correspondence from Dr. Stunkard)—after she was gone. This all too human side of Suzuki, long hidden from view, is now slowly emerging, though how much of depicted in this particular film is another question.

A few final words are needed on Suzuki's relation to Shin or True Pure Land Buddhism—a topic on which the film touches but does not explore. The Shin religious experience is not identical to the Zen experience of satori, nor is it completely different, as Suzuki found out. In the course of dozens of talks largely to nikkei Buddhist audiences in Hawai'i in 1949 and in California in 1950, he gives serious attention to Shin and starts to develop his own original outline of Pure Land Buddhism. As to Suzuki's Shin understanding, from what I can tell it is on a par with his Zen satori. Unfortunately, he never completes this new trajectory of thought, in part due to the busy life he is obliged to lead in New York. His talks on Shin remain largely in manuscript form, except for the small book called *Shin Buddhism*, 1970 (7), the transcription of a series of talks published posthumously by Reverend Hozen Seki of New York Buddhist Church, where Suzuki was frequently invited to speak. This is a story in itself, albeit one that is not easy to weave into *A Zen Life*.

In short, Goldberg's film raises more questions than it answers, and further research on Suzuki still needs to be done both in Japan and abroad. In recent years Dr. Tomoe Moriya of Hannan University has investigated Suzuki's early essays in the *New Buddhist*, some of which were written while he was living in LaSalle, Illinois, and she reports detecting vast shifts in the views he formulated over time. This is not surprising since he was still in the process of coming to terms with himself. In fact there is much we still do not know about Suzuki, whose life and thought remain largely unexplored even in Japan. New studies are needed, and despite the present chill in the air, in coming years we can expect to see a warming as more young scholars enter this new field of research. For many young people, this film will be their first encounter with D. T. Suzuki. I am sure it will not fail to impress them.