

# A Zen Nazi in Wartime Japan: Count Dürckheim and his Sources—D.T. Suzuki, Yasutani Haku'un and Eugen Herrigel

戦中日本におけるあるナチス禅宗徒 デュルクハイム伯爵の情報源 鈴木大拙、安谷白雲、オイゲン・ヘリゲル

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*Introductory Note:* This is the final article in a three part series on the relationship of D.T. Suzuki and other Zen figures in wartime Japan to Count Karlfried Dürckheim and other Nazis. Part I of this series, "D.T. Suzuki, Zen and the Nazis" is available [here](#). Part II, "The Formation and Principles of Count Dürckheim's Nazi Worldview and his interpretation of Japanese Spirit and Zen" is available [here](#). Readers who have not yet done so are urged to read at least Part II of this series that provides crucial background information for understanding Part III.

## Introduction

By the late 1930s Japan was well on the way to becoming a totalitarian society. True, in Japan there was no charismatic dictator like Hitler or Mussolini, but there was nevertheless a powerful "divine presence," i.e., Emperor Hirohito. Although seldom seen and never heard, he occasionally issued imperial edicts, serving to validate the actions of those political and military figures claiming to act on his behalf. At least in theory, such validation was absolute and leftwing challenges to government policies, whether on the part of Communists, socialists or merely liberals, were mercilessly suppressed. For example, between 1928 and 1937 some 60,000 people were arrested under suspicion of harboring "dangerous thoughts," i.e., anything that could conceivably undermine Japan's colonial expansion abroad and repressive domestic policies at home. Added to this was the fact

that Japan had begun its full-scale invasion of China on July 7, 1937.

Japan's relationship with Germany was in flux according to the changing political interests of both countries.<sup>1</sup> Because of negative international reactions to the Anti-Comintern pact of November 1936, resistance against it increased in Japan soon after it was made, and the Japanese froze their policy of closer ties. However, in 1938 it became clear to Japan that the war against China would last longer than expected. Thus, Japanese interest in a military alliance with Germany and Italy reemerged. On the German side, Joachim von Ribbentrop had become Foreign Minister in February 1938, and as he had long been a proponent of closer ties with Japan, negotiations between the two countries resumed in the summer of 1938.



**Joachim von Ribbentrop**

Count Karlfried Dürckheim's first Japan trip was probably connected with the beginning of this thaw in German-Japanese relations. The birth of "total war" in the wake of World War I and even earlier had demonstrated that victory could not be achieved without the strong support and engagement of civilian populations, one aspect of which was not simply knowledge of potential adversaries but of one's allies as well. This meant enhanced cultural relations and mutual understanding between the citizens of allied nations.

It was under these circumstances that Dürckheim undertook what was portrayed as an education-related mission to Japan, a mission that would impact on him profoundly for the remainder of his life. This was not the first such mission Dürckheim had undertaken

on behalf of Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop and Education Minister Bernhard Rust, for he had previously made somewhat similar trips to other countries, including South Africa and Britain. Dürckheim's trip to South Africa took place from May thru October 1934 on behalf of Rust. He conducted research on the cultural, political and educational situation of Germans in South Africa while at the same time promoting the new regime.

During his work in Ribbentrop's office from 1935 to 1937, Dürckheim was a frequent visitor to Britain, around 20 times altogether. His task was to gather information about the image of National Socialism in Britain while at the same time promoting the "new Germany." Toward this end, he met such notables as King Edward VII and Winston Churchill and arranged a meeting between Hitler and Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the *Evening Standard*. This was part of Hitler's ultimately unsuccessful plan to form a military alliance with Britain directed against the Soviet Union. Dürckheim's work officially ended on December 31, 1937.

### **Dürckheim's First Visit to Japan**

Dürckheim began his journey to Japan on June 7, 1938 and did not return to Germany until early 1939. According to his biographer, Gerhard Wehr, Dürckheim initially received a research assignment from the German Ministry of Education that consisted of two tasks: first, to describe the development of Japanese national education including the so-called social question,<sup>2</sup> and second, to investigate the possibility of using cultural activities to promote Germany's political aims both within Japan and those areas of Asia under Japanese influence.<sup>3</sup> Dürckheim arrived by boat and travelled extensively within Japan as well as undertaking trips to Korea, Manchukuo (Japan's puppet state in Manchuria) and northern China. During his travels Dürckheim remained in close contact with the local NSDAP (Nazi) offices and the Japan-based division of

the National Socialist Teachers Association.



**Count Karlfried Dürckheim**

### **Dürckheim Meets D.T. Suzuki**

Dürckheim described his arrival in Japan as follows:

I was sent there in 1938 with a particular mission that I had chosen: to study the spiritual background of Japanese education. As soon as I arrived at the embassy, an old man came to greet me. I did not know him. "Suzuki," he stated. He was the famous

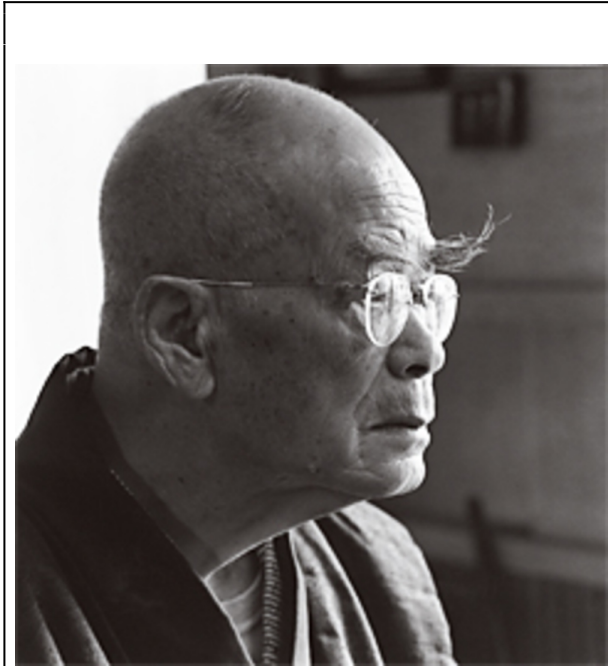
Suzuki who was here to meet a certain Mister Dürckheim arriving from Germany to undertake certain studies.

Suzuki is one of the greatest contemporary Zen Masters. I questioned him immediately on the different stages of Zen. He named the first two, and I added the next three. Then he exclaimed: "Where did you learn this?" "In the teaching of Meister Eckhart!" "I must read him again..." (though he knew him well already). . . . It is under these circumstances that I discovered Zen. I would see Suzuki from time to time.<sup>4</sup>

Although the exact sequence of events leading up to their meeting is unknown, a few points can be surmised. First, while Dürckheim states he had been sent to Japan on an educational mission, specifically to study "the spiritual foundations of Japanese education,"<sup>5</sup> it should be understood that within the context of Nazi ideology, education referred not only to formal academic, classroom learning but, more importantly, to any form of "spiritual training/discipline" that produced loyal citizens ready to sacrifice themselves for the fatherland. Given this, it is unsurprising that following Dürckheim's return to Germany in 1939 the key article he wrote was entitled "The Secret of Japanese Power" (*Geheimnis der Japanischer Kraft*).

Additionally, it should come as no surprise to read that Dürckheim was clearly aware of, and interested in, Suzuki's new book. Wehr states: "In records from his first visit [to Japan] Dürckheim occasionally mentions Zen including, among others, D. T. Suzuki's recently published book, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*. In this connection, Dürckheim comments: 'Zen is above all a religion of will and willpower; it is

profoundly averse to intellectual philosophy and discursive thought, relying, instead, on intuition as the direct and immediate path to truth."<sup>6</sup>



**D.T. Suzuki**

In claiming this is it possible that Dürckheim had misunderstood the import of Suzuki's writings? That is to say, had he in fact begun what might be called the 'Nazification' of Zen, i.e., twisting it to fit the ideology of National Socialism. In fact he had not, for in his 1938 book, Suzuki wrote: "Good fighters are generally ascetics or stoics, which means to have an iron will. When needed Zen supplies them with this."<sup>7</sup> Suzuki further explained: "From the philosophical point of view, Zen upholds intuition against intellection, for intuition is the more direct way of reaching the Truth...Besides its direct method of reaching final faith, Zen is a religion of will-power, and will-power is what is urgently needed by the warriors, though it ought to be enlightened by intuition."<sup>8</sup>

In light of these quotes, and many others like them, whatever other faults the wartime

Dürckheim may have had, misunderstanding Suzuki's explication of Zen was not one of them.

And, significantly, Suzuki was not content in his book to simply link Zen as a religion of will to Japanese medieval warriors. He was equally intent to show that the same self-sacrificial, death-embracing spirit of the samurai had become the modern martial spirit of the Japanese people as a whole:

The Japanese may not have any specific philosophy of life, but they have decidedly one of death which may sometimes appear to be that of recklessness. The spirit of the samurai deeply breathing Zen into itself propagated its philosophy even among the masses. The latter, even when they are not particularly trained in the way of the warrior, have imbibed his spirit and are ready to sacrifice their lives for any cause they think worthy. This has repeatedly been proved in the wars Japan has so far had to go through for one reason or another. A foreign writer on Japanese Buddhism aptly remarks that Zen is the Japanese character.<sup>9</sup>

Given these words, Dürckheim could not fail to have been interested in learning more about a Zen tradition that had allegedly instilled death-embracing values into the entire Japanese people. Hitler himself is recorded as having lamented, "You see, it's been our misfortune to have the wrong religion. Why didn't we have the religion of the Japanese, who regard sacrifice for the Fatherland as the highest good?"<sup>10</sup> Thus Dürckheim's mission may best be understood as unlocking the secret of the Japanese people's power as manifested in the Zen-*Bushidō* ideology Suzuki promoted. No



doubt, his superiors were deeply interested in duplicating, within the context of a German *völkisch* faith, this same spirit of unquestioning sacrifice for the Fatherland.

It is unlikely that Dürckheim had read Suzuki's book prior to his arrival. Written in English, the Eastern Buddhist Society of Ōtani College didn't publish it in Japan until May 1938. Suzuki reports that he first received copies of his book on May 20, 1938.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that it was Embassy personnel, knowing of Dürckheim's interests and Suzuki's reputation, who requested Suzuki's presence. Yet another possibility is that Dürckheim had heard about Suzuki during his frequent trips to Britain, since much of the material in Suzuki's 1938 book consisted of lectures first delivered in Britain in 1936.

It is noteworthy that the first conversation between the two men centered on Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth century German theologian and mystic. On the surface this exchange seems totally innocuous, the very antithesis of Nazism. Yet, as discussed in Part II, Meister Eckhart was the embodiment of one major current in Nazi spirituality. That is to say, within German *völkisch* religious thought Eckhart represented the very essence of a truly *Germanic* faith.



**Meister Eckhart**

Meister Eckhart's reception in Germany had undergone many changes over time, with Eckhart becoming linked to German nationalism by the early 19th century as a result of Napoleon's occupation of large parts of Germany. Many romanticists and adherents of German idealism regarded Eckhart as a uniquely *German* mystic and admired him for having written in German instead of Latin and daring to oppose the Latin speaking world of scholasticism and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, National Socialism - or at least some leading National Socialists - appropriated Eckhart as an early exponent of a specific Germanic *Weltanschauung*. In particular, Alfred Rosenberg regarded Eckhart as the German mystic who had anticipated his own ideology and thus represented a key figure in Germanic cultural history. As a result, Rosenberg included a long chapter on Eckhart, entitled "Mysticism and Action," in his book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*.



**Alfred Rosenberg**

Rosenberg was one of the Nazi's chief ideologists and *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* was second in importance only to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. By 1944 more than a million copies had been sold. Rosenberg was attracted to Eckhart as one of the earliest exponents of the idea of "will" as supreme:

Reason perceives all things, but it is the will, Eckhart comments, which can do all things. Thus where reason can go no further, the superior will flies upward into the light and into the power of faith. Then the will wishes to be above all perception. That is its highest achievement.<sup>12</sup>

Suzuki would no doubt have readily agreed with these sentiments, for, as we have already seen, he, too, placed great emphasis on will, identifying it as the very essence of Zen.

Rosenberg also included this almost Zen-like description of "Nordic Germanic man":

Nordic Germanic man is the antipode of both directions, grasping for both poles of our existence, combining mysticism and a life of action, being borne up by a dynamic vital feeling, being uplifted by the belief in the free creative will and the noble soul. Meister Eckhart wished to become one with himself. This is certainly our own ultimate desire.<sup>13</sup>

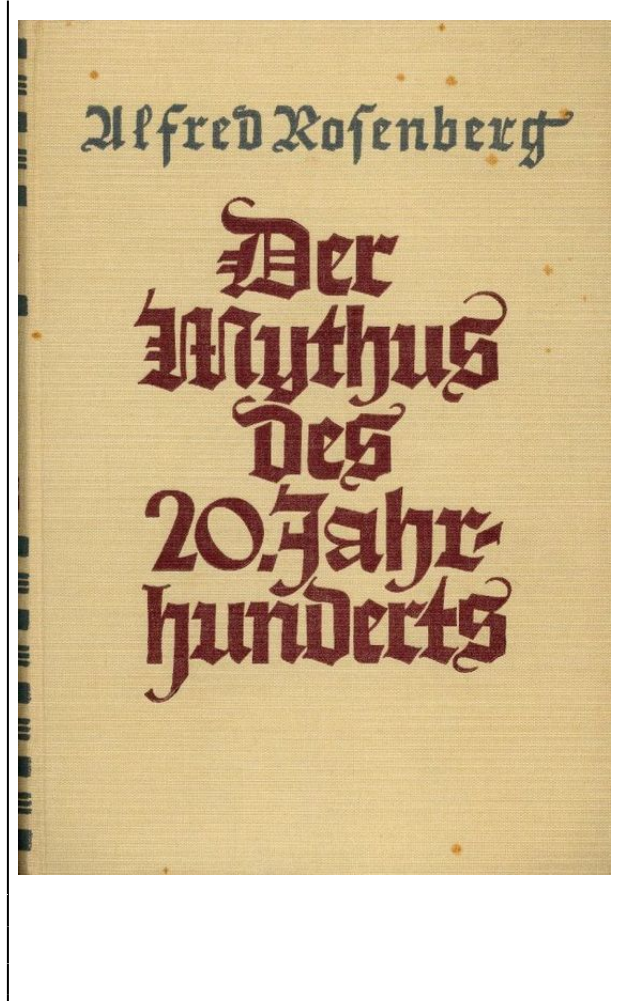
This said, the fact that there were similarities between Rosenberg's description of Eckhart and Suzuki's descriptions of Zen by no means demonstrates that Suzuki's interest in Eckhart was identical with Rosenberg's racist or fascist interpretation. In fact, Suzuki's interest in Eckhart can be traced back to his interest in Theosophy in the 1920s.

Nevertheless, there is a clear and compelling parallel in the totalitarian nature of *völkisch* Nazi thought as represented by Rosenberg, as well as Dürckheim, and Suzuki's own thinking. As pointed out in Part II, one of the key components of Nazi thought was that "individualism" was an enemy that had to be overcome in order for the "parts" (i.e., a country's citizens) to be ever willing to sacrifice themselves for the *Volk*, i.e., the "whole," as ordered by the state. Rudolph Hess, Hitler's Deputy Führer, not only recognized the importance of this struggle but also admitted that the Japanese were ahead of the Nazis in this respect. Hess wrote:

We, too, [like the Japanese] are battling to destroy individualism. We are struggling for a new Germany based on the new idea of totalitarianism. In Japan this way of thinking comes naturally to the people.<sup>14</sup>

Just how "naturally" (or even whether) the Japanese people rejected individualism and embraced totalitarianism is open to debate. Yet, we find Suzuki adopting an analogous position beginning with the publication of his very first book in 1896, i.e., *Shin Shūkyō-ron* (A Treatise on the New [Meaning of] Religion). Suzuki wrote:

At the time of the commencement of hostilities with a foreign country, then marines fight on the sea and soldiers fight in the fields, swords flashing and cannon-smoke belching, moving this way and that. In so doing, our soldiers regard their own lives as being as light as goose feathers while their devotion to duty is as heavy as Mt. Tai in China. Should they fall on the battlefield they have no regrets. This is what is called "religion in a national emergency."<sup>15</sup>



Suzuki was only twenty-six years old when he wrote these lines, i.e., long before the emergence of the Nazis. Yet, he anticipated the Nazi's demand that in wartime all citizens must discard attachment to their individual well-being and be ever ready to sacrifice themselves for the state, regarding their own lives "as light as goose feathers." During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, Suzuki exhorted Japanese soldiers as follows: "Let us then shuffle off this mortal coil whenever it becomes necessary, and not raise a grunting voice against the fates. . . . Resting in this conviction, Buddhists carry the banner of Dharma over the dead and dying until they gain final victory."<sup>16</sup> Given these sentiments there clearly was no need for the Nazis to inculcate *völkisch* values, emphasizing self-sacrifice for the state, into Suzuki's thought, for they had long been present.



In any event, the content of the initial conversation between Suzuki and Dürckheim does suggest why, from the outset, these two men found they shared so much in common. For his part, like "Nordic man" in the preceding quotation, Suzuki frequently equated Zen with the Japanese character.<sup>17</sup> In other words, within one of the two major strands of Nazi religiosity, Dürckheim would perhaps have understood, and welcomed, Suzuki as a *völkisch* proponent of a religion, i.e., Zen, dedicated to, and shaped by, the Japanese *Volk*. This may well explain what initially drew the two men together and led to their ongoing relationship.

It should also be noted that Suzuki was not the first to recognize affinities between Eckhart and Buddhism. In the 19th century the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer had postulated this connection. He wrote:

If we turn from the forms, produced by external circumstances, and go to the root of things, we shall find that [Buddha] Shākyamuni and Meister Eckhart teach the same thing; only that the former dared to express his ideas plainly and positively, whereas Eckhart is obliged to clothe them in the garment of the Christian myth, and to adapt his expressions thereto.<sup>18</sup>

As for Dürckheim, his interest in Eckhart, as noted in Part II, can be traced back to the 1920s when he began to practice meditation together with his friend Ferdinand Weinhandl, the Austrian philosopher who later became a professor in Kiel and another strong proponent of National Socialism. Additionally, the Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung identified Eckhart as the most important thinker of his time.

### Suzuki's View of Nazi Germany

There is one vital question that warrants our attention, i.e., why had Suzuki accepted an invitation to come to a German Embassy so firmly under Nazi control? In the context of the times, this may not seem so surprising, but it is in fact a very surprising turn of events. Very surprising, that is, if one believes the testimony of Satō Gemmyō Taira, a Shin (True Pure Land) Buddhist priest who, readers of Part I of this article will recall, identifies himself as one of Suzuki's disciples in the postwar period.

Satō claims:

Although Suzuki recognized that the Nazis had, in 1936, brought stability to Germany and although he was impressed by their youth activities (though not by the militaristic tone of these activities), he clearly had little regard for the Nazi leader, disapproved of their violent attitudes, and opposed the policies espoused by the party. His distaste for totalitarianism of any kind is unmistakable.<sup>19</sup>

If, as Satō asserts, Suzuki "opposed the policies espoused by the [Nazi] party," etc. why would he have agreed to meet a Nazi researcher like Dürckheim on his arrival in Japan? And why would he subsequently have continued to meet him "from time to time"? Still further, why would the German Embassy have invited a known critic of the Nazis, someone whom Satō claims had publicly expressed his anti-Nazi views in October 1936, to meet a visiting Nazi researcher less than two years later? While these questions may seem unrelated to Dürckheim's wartime activities in Japan, they do point to a striking parallel between the two men *in the postwar period*, a parallel that will become apparent below.

First, however, it should be noted that there is an alternate narrative that readily explains



Suzuki's willingness to assist a Nazi-affiliated researcher like Dürckheim. This narrative begins by noting that in his 1938 book, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, Suzuki wrote:

Zen has no special doctrine or philosophy with a set of concepts and intellectual formulas, except that it tries to release one from the bondage of birth and death and this by means of certain intuitive modes of understanding peculiar to itself. It is, therefore, extremely flexible to adapt itself almost to any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with.

It may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political and economical dogmatism. It is, however, generally animated with a certain revolutionary spirit, and when things come to a deadlock which is the case when we are overloaded with conventionalisms, formalism, and other cognate isms, Zen asserts itself and proves to be a destructive force.<sup>20</sup>

Given that Suzuki, at least in 1938, claimed that Zen could be wedded to almost any political ideology, fascism included, he would have had no reason for refusing to meet Dürckheim at the German Embassy. As Part I of this article revealed, Suzuki's staunch defender, Satō Gemmyō Taira, was willing to go so far as to fabricate part of his translation of Suzuki's October 1936 newspaper description of the Nazis in order to make it appear his master was critical of this movement. This bears repeating because a similar phenomenon occurred on the part of those who were close to

Dürckheim, including his family members.

If in Dürckheim's case it was impossible to deny outright his Nazi connection, then the least his admirers could do was minimize the significance of that connection, for example, by describing his role in wartime Japan as that of a "Kulturdiplomat" (cultural diplomat). This title suggests that Dürckheim did nothing more than engage in "cultural activities" during his nearly eight-year residence in Japan. However, as this article makes clear, Dürckheim was in fact an indefatigable propagandist for the Nazis, anything but a mere cultural envoy. This point will be touched upon again below.

In part, this attempt to disguise Dürckheim's actions as being cultural in nature can be explained by the fact that for the Nazis "culture," like "education," was an all-embracing concept subsumed into the overall struggle for a totalitarian society and state. Thus, the primary focus of Dürckheim's "cultural activities," including his interest in Zen, was his mission to promote the cultural, educational and political policies of the Third Reich in Japan as a part of the overall struggle to ensure the triumph of National Socialism.

As for the frequency of Suzuki's meetings with Dürckheim during his first visit to Japan we know relatively little. However, Suzuki did include the following entries in his English language diary: (January 16, 1939), "Special delivery to Durkheim (sic), at German Embassy";<sup>21</sup> (January 17, 1939), Telegram from Dürckheim";<sup>22</sup> (January 18, 1939), "Went to Tokyo soon after breakfast. Called on Graf. [Count] Durkheim at German Embassy, met Ambassador [Eugen] Otto [Ott], and Dr. [space left blank] of German-Japanese Institute. Lunch with them at New Grand [Hotel]."<sup>23</sup> It is likely that this flurry of activity in early 1939 was connected to Dürckheim's impending return to Germany. If so, Dürckheim's luncheon invitation may well have been by way of thanking Suzuki for the latter's assistance during his stay.

Suzuki's assistance appears to have extended to aiding Dürckheim indirectly during a sightseeing visit he made to Kyoto on November 20-24, 1938. Wehr informs us that while in Kyoto Dürckheim met *ikebana* master Adashi and participated in a tea ceremony. In describing his visit Dürckheim wrote in his diary: "My loyal companion, Mr. Yanasigawa, was - what a happy coincidence! - Suzuki's secretary."<sup>24</sup>

### Dürckheim's Second Visit to Japan

Dürckheim returned to Japan in January 1940 and remained there throughout the war. It was during this time that his most important work for the Nazis was undertaken. This time Dürckheim travelled to Japan by train through Russia, taking advantage of the new, and once unthinkable, non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. It was, however, this very treaty that had produced a crisis in Germany's relationship with Japan. That is to say, the promising negotiations of 1938 between the two countries had led to nothing, mostly because of Japan's hesitant attitude. As a result, Germany changed its plans and on August 23, 1939 Foreign Minister Ribbentrop signed a "Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," thereby allying itself with Japan's archenemy. This ruptured the Anti-Comintern pact, and the relationship between the two countries hit rock bottom.



**Signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact**

Interestingly, Dürckheim appears to have had advance knowledge of this development. That is to say, in his 1992 book, *Der Weg ist das Ziel* (The Way is the Goal), Dürckheim recalls:

As soon as I had returned to Germany [from Japan in 1939], Ribbentrop summoned me. In the meanwhile he had become foreign minister, yet he never abandoned people he had worked with. He said to me: "I would like to conclude a treaty with Russia. Here is the draft. You are the first one I'm showing it to. What will the Japanese say?" "Well," I replied, "of course they will not be very happy about it, Mr. von Ribbentrop."<sup>25</sup>

This incident suggests just how important

Dürckheim had already become, at least concerning Japanese affairs.

By the spring of 1940 Germany had achieved an impressive list of military victories leading to the occupation of Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and, most important, France. The defeat of England seemed to be only a matter of time. This led Japan to approach Germany with the goal of ensuring protection of its own sphere of influence in East Asia. As for Germany, as it became clear that the defeat of England would take longer than expected, especially in the face of possible US intervention in Europe as well as East Asia. Thus, Germany, too, once again became interested in a military alliance with Japan. This time renewed negotiations bore fruit in the form of the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Japan and Italy, signed on September 27, 1940.



**Signing of the Tripartite Pact**

Dürckheim continued to work for Ribbentrop during his second stay in Japan. This time his work included collecting information about Japanese opinion concerning Germany and its policies as well as organizing propaganda for the Nazis, especially at the academic level. About this, Dürckheim recalls:

Then the war started. The day after [Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939] Ribbentrop summoned me and said: "We need somebody to maintain contact with scientists in Japan." I answered: "Mr. Von Ribbentrop, I can't wait to return to Japan." "OK," he answered, "then come back tomorrow and tell me what you want to have [to carry out this task]." The next day I said to him: "I want eighty libraries consisting of one hundred volumes each." "What do you mean?" "Eighty libraries with one hundred volumes in each is a library for every teacher at German schools [in Japan]." He said "OK, approved. I think this is reasonable."<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Dürckheim sought to place pro-Nazi articles in important Japanese journals while supplying the German Foreign Office's propaganda magazine, *Berlin-Rom-Tokyo*, with articles about Japan. He also claims to have played a role in the preparation of the Tripartite Pact signed on September 27, 1940.<sup>27</sup> Despite his lack of official status in Germany's Foreign Ministry, Dürckheim was clearly an important, even key, figure in promoting the wartime relationship between the two countries.

### **Gerhard Wehr's View of Dürckheim in Japan**

A major divergence in viewpoints is evident in the available descriptions of Dürckheim's activities during his second residence in Japan. This divergence might best be characterized as a divergence between those in Europe who described Dürckheim's residence in Japan from outside Japan, and without knowledge of Japanese, and those who described him from within Japan, primarily from Japanese sources.

Among those in the first category is Gerhard Wehr, Dürckheim's biographer and admirer. Wehr acknowledges that his subject eagerly embraced his new duties as a Nazi emissary: "In the wave of enthusiastic nationalism, Dürckheim saw himself as a useful representative of the 'new Germany' for his people and his employers in Berlin, for the Minister of Foreign Affairs Von Ribbentrop, and for the Minister of Education, Bernhard Rust."<sup>28</sup>

Wehr further states: "And as his biography shows, it was not hard for him to obey the orders of his superiors." Yet, Wehr immediately adds: "But in the background, there was always this other tendency toward the spirituality of the East, and especially toward Zen Buddhism; later it will be for Zen as a trans-religious attitude in universal man, the practice of spiritual exercise and disciplines."<sup>29</sup>

Wehr also informs us: "From the outside, in the years 1930 to 1940, Professor Karlfried Graf [Count] Dürckheim seemed to be a cultural envoy of the Third Reich. At the same time, a subterranean process of transformation of which he was hardly conscious was taking place."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, Wehr admits that, at the very least, Dürckheim was in the employment of the Nazis, but on the other hand he claims that from the very outset of his residence in Japan, Dürckheim was drawn toward the spirituality of the East, most especially Zen.

Yet, what exactly was this transformational "subterranean process" Dürckheim was undergoing? Wehr introduces a quote from Dürckheim describing how his spiritual journey after arriving in Japan led him to practice not only Zen but also traditional Japanese archery and painting as well:

Out of personal preference, I came to know many Zen exercises. I even worked outside of meditation

(*zazen*), especially in archery and painting. It is surprising to notice that from the point of view of Zen, the most varied arts have the same purpose, whether it be archery or dance, song or *karate*, floral decoration or *aikido*, the tea ceremony or spear throwing. . . . Done in the spirit of Zen, they are merely different ways aiming toward the same thing: the breakthrough toward the nature of Buddha, toward "Being."<sup>31</sup>

Wehr goes on to inform his readers that "the thought at the foundation of this special exercise [i.e., archery] . . . is Zen. Further, through his practice of Zen and Zen-influenced arts Dürckheim feels that he is able to approach "the Japanese character," the ultimate expression of which is that "a person realizes himself completely, discovering in his way the Divine. And that is of course what man feels most directly."<sup>32</sup> Yet, throughout the entire period Dürckheim pursues his spiritual interests he remains in the service of the Nazis.

The preceding comments raise two interesting questions. First, is Zen practice, especially as it is allegedly found in Japanese arts like archery, really in conflict with the ideology of National Socialism? And second, are all of these arts, particularly archery, really connected to Zen in the first place?

## Dürckheim and Eugen Herrigel





**Eugen Herrigel**

Dürckheim tells us that he was drawn to the practice of archery thanks to Eugen Herrigel, the well-known author of the short classic, *Zen in the Art of Archery*. According to Wehr:

Dürckheim remembers having read an article by his colleague Eugen Herrigel dealing with the martial arts. He is therefore already familiar with the thought at the foundation of this special exercise that is Zen. And as this master of archery follows the same tradition as Herrigel, it is an added incentive to become initiated in

this discipline. "That is what led me to begin this activity. I knew that I would learn things about Japan which would be useful to me and which cannot be found in books or in any other way."<sup>33</sup>

The first problem with Wehr's description is that subsequent research has shown that Dürckheim did not study archery with a teacher in the lineage of Awa Kenzō, i.e., someone who "follows the same tradition as Herrigel." However, Dürckheim may not have been aware of this. Dürckheim provides a more detailed description in his book *Der Weg ist das Ziel* (The Way is the Goal): "One day in 1941 a Japanese friend invited me, 'Come with me, my master is here. What master? The master of archery.' This is how I got to know master Kenran Umechi [Umeji]."<sup>34</sup>

The Japanese scholar Yamada Shoji emphasizes that Umeji was *not* in Awa's lineage. Instead, he was simply another archery instructor of that era. The only known connection between the two men was that Awa once visited Umeji to query him about a fine point of archery technique. In the aftermath of his visit Umeji's disciples claimed that their master was the greater of the two, going so far as to suggest that Awa was one of Umeji's students. Unsurprisingly, Awa's students adamantly rejected this claim.<sup>35</sup>

Be that as it may, there nevertheless appears to be a genuine connection between Dürckheim and the martial art of archery. Additionally, Zen is identified as the "foundation of this special exercise." There is, however, yet another problem with this scenario, for as Yamada Shoji has demonstrated, the connection of Zen to archery is, historically speaking, little more than a modern myth, primarily created even in Japan itself by Herrigel:

Looking back over the history of

kyūdō [archery], one can say that it was only after World War II that kyūdō became strongly associated with Zen. To be even more specific, this is a unique phenomenon that occurred after 1956 when *Zen in the Art of Archery* was translated and published in Japanese. . . . This suggests that the emphasis on the relationship between the bow and Zen is due to the influence of *Zen in the Art of Archery*.<sup>36</sup>

Yamada reveals moreover that Herrigel himself never underwent any formal Zen training during his five-year stay in Japan from 1924-29. Yamada also informs us that Awa "never spent any time at a Zen temple or received proper instruction from a Zen master."<sup>37</sup> Awa did, however, teach something he called *Daishadōkyō* (Great Doctrine of the Way of Shooting) that included a religious dimension he expressed using elements of Zen terminology. Awa's Japanese students noted this Great Doctrine consisted of "archery as a religion" in which "the founder of this religion is Master Awa Kenzō."<sup>38</sup> Herrigel also refers to the "Great Doctrine" but, as Yamada notes: "Herrigel offered no explanation of what the "Great Doctrine" might be, so readers of *Zen in the Art of Archery* had no way of knowing that this was simply Awa's personal philosophy."<sup>39</sup>

Yet another key component of Herrigel's archery training was the mystical spiritual experience he claimed to have had, expressed verbally as "'It' shoots" rather than the familiar "I shoot (an arrow)." The spiritual connection came from Herrigel's identification of "It" with "something which transcends the self."<sup>40</sup> Inasmuch as this expression appears to resonate with Zen teaching the question must be asked, what's the problem?

The problem is, as Yamada explains: "There is no record of Awa ever having taught: "'It'

shoots" to any of his disciples other than Herrigel."<sup>41</sup> How is this possible? Yamada's painstaking research led him to the following conclusion:

When Herrigel made a good shot, Awa cried, "That's it!". . . . "That's it" was mistakenly translated to Herrigel [in German] as "'It' shoots," and Herrigel understood "It" to mean "something which transcends the self." If that is what happened, then the teaching of "'It' shoots" was born when an incorrect meaning filled the void created by a single instance of misunderstanding.<sup>42</sup>

The relevance of this alleged "misunderstanding" to Dürckheim is that the latter shared the same misunderstanding, albeit under a different master with only a tenuous connection to Awa. During an interview with German television at the age of eighty-seven Dürckheim said:

I still remember the day, in the presence of the master, when I shot an arrow and it left on its own. "I" had not shot it. "It" had shot. The master saw this and took the bow in his hands, then took me in his arms (which is very rare in Japan!) and said: "That's it!" He then invited me to tea. That is how archery taught me so much, for the mastery of a traditional Japanese technique does not have as goal a performance, but on the contrary requires the achievement of a step forward on the inner path.<sup>43</sup>

Dürckheim thus used nearly the same words as Herrigel to describe his mystical experience,

i.e., "It' had shot." Yet, unlike Herrigel, Dürckheim did not claim that his archery master had used these words. Instead, he states that, upon seeing Dürckheim's accomplishment, his archery master said, "That's it!" Not only does this episode provide strong evidence that Yamada's conclusion is correct, but it also suggests that, since neither Herrigel nor Dürckheim were fluent in Japanese, Dürckheim, at least, had the superior interpreter.

That said, where had Dürckheim first learned the expression, "It' shoots" if not from Herrigel's writings? As noted above, Awa did not employ this expression in his teaching which, in any case, was not based on any Zen training but rather on his own personal philosophy that included Zen expressions. This forces us to recognize that there was no "Zen" in the "art of archery" other than that first created in Herrigel's mind based on a mistaken translation of Awa's words.

For his part, Dürckheim subsequently accepted this mistaken translation at face value. Further, as we have seen, Dürckheim mistakenly believed his archery master "follow[ed] the same tradition as Herrigel."<sup>44</sup> Thus, it can be said that while Dürckheim had the superior interpreter, there was nothing "superior" or even "accurate" in either man's understanding of their practice of archery or its non-existent historical relationship to Zen.<sup>45</sup>

Be that as it may, the importance of this discussion is that the connection of archery to Zen was not an ancient tradition that Herrigel encountered while in Japan, nor was the practice of archery understood as an alternate form or expression of Zen practice. As Yamada, himself an accomplished student of archery, states, Zen's connection to archery is primarily a postwar "myth" that Herrigel himself promoted.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, it is not surprising that Dürckheim would have also embraced this myth in light of

the fact that Herrigel, in his writings from 1936, promoted a *völkisch* religious understanding very similar to that of Dürckheim. Further, Dürckheim was aware of these 1936 writings before he started his own practice of archery. This *völkisch* understanding was, however, not the only thing the two men shared in common.

## A Shared Nazi Past

In a political context, the most important feature Herrigel and Dürckheim shared was their active allegiance to National Socialism, an allegiance that was of great benefit to both of their careers. Herrigel joined the Nazi party on May 1, 1937. The following year he became the vice rector of the University of Erlangen and in 1944 was promoted to rector, a post he held to the end of the war. As Yamada notes: "In a climate where right-minded scholars were leaving the universities in droves, only a person who had ingratiated himself with the Nazis could hope to climb as high as rector."<sup>47</sup>

During the Nazi era Herrigel wrote such essays as *"Die Aufgabe der Philosophie im neuen Reich"* (The Task of Philosophy in the New [Third] Reich) in 1934 and *"Nationalsozialismus und Philosophie"* (National Socialism and Philosophy) in 1935. In 1944, as an expert on Japan, he wrote, *"Das Ethos des Samurai"* (The Ethos of the Samurai). Herrigel's wartime writings reveal him to have been an enthusiastic Nazi.<sup>48</sup> For example, in 1935 Herrigel described Hitler as follows:

The miracle happened. With a tremendous drive that made all resistance meaningless, the German *Volk* was carried away. With unanimous determination it endorsed the leader. . . . The fight for the soul of the German *Volk* reached its goal. It is ruled by one will and one attitude and commits itself to its leader with a kind of

unity and loyalty that is unique within the checkered history of the German Volk.<sup>49</sup>

Given this it is not surprising to learn that following Germany's defeat Herrigel was brought before the denazification court at Erlangen. Although he strenuously denied any wrongdoing, he was nevertheless found guilty of having been a *Mitläufer* (lit. a "runner with") of the Nazis. In terms of guilt, this was one rank below that of a committed Nazi, but it nevertheless resulted in his dismissal from the university. Thereafter he retired, dying of lung cancer in 1955.

Thus, it can be said that, unlike Dürckheim who successfully hid his Nazi past in postwar Germany, Herrigel did pay a price for his wartime collaboration. Had Dürckheim been in Germany at war's end, he, too, might have faced a reckoning. Given his role as a tireless propagandist for the Nazi cause, he might very well have been convicted of having been a *Belasteter* (Offender), i.e., an activist, militant, profiteer, or incriminated person. The punishment for those convicted of this status was imprisonment for up to 10 years. Thus Dürckheim was fortunate to spend only eighteen months in Tokyo's Sugamo prison.

### **Dürckheim, Herrigel and Suzuki's Postwar Relationship**

There was one additional thing Dürckheim and Herrigel shared in common, i.e., their longstanding relationship with D.T. Suzuki, a relationship that continued into the postwar era. Dürckheim recalls:

[Suzuki] later came to see me at Todtmoos. It was in 1954, and I had just received a telegram of the Protestant Academy of Munich asking me to do a conference on oriental wisdom. I took advantage

of his presence to ask him: "Master, could you tell me in a few words what oriental wisdom is?" He smiled and said: "Western knowledge looks outside, Eastern knowledge looks within." I said to myself: "That is not such a great answer. . ." Then he continued: "But if you look within the way you look without, you make of the within a without." That is an extraordinary statement! It reveals the whole drama of western psychology which looks within the way we look without, making of the within a without, that is, an object. And life disappears.<sup>50</sup>

Dürckheim noted that during his visit Suzuki expressed his interest in meeting Martin Heidegger who lived nearby:

I met Heidegger again twenty years later, when Suzuki, the eighty-year old prophet of Zen visited me and wanted to see him. It was an encounter of a man of the word with a man, who, as a Zen Master, is certain that in opening our mouth we are already lying! For only silence contains truth.<sup>51</sup>





**Martin Heidegger**

It should be noted that Heidegger's own Nazi past was also the subject of ongoing controversy in the postwar period inasmuch as he had joined the NSDAP on May 1, 1933, ten days after being elected Rector of the [University of Freiburg](#). However, in April 1934 he resigned the Rectorship and stopped attending Nazi Party meetings. Nevertheless, Heidegger remained a member of the Party until its dismantling at the end of [World War II](#). More recently, scholars in both Germany and America have demonstrated the profound affinities between Heidegger's thought and his reactionary milieu. In the postwar period, Heidegger commented: "If I understand this man [Suzuki] correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings."<sup>52</sup>

As for Herrigel, his relationship to the Nazis is, as noted above, far clearer. Herrigel's significant postwar connection to Suzuki is well

illustrated in Suzuki's preface to the 1953 English edition of Herrigel's classic. Suzuki wrote:

In this wonderful little book, Mr. Herrigel, a German philosopher who came to Japan and took up the practice of archery toward an understanding of Zen, gives an illuminating account of his own experience. Through his expression, the Western reader will find a more familiar manner of dealing with what very often must seem to be a strange and somewhat unapproachable Eastern experience.<sup>53</sup>

Suzuki's appreciation of Herrigel's "wonderful little book" is high praise indeed for a man who stated in a 1959 conversation with the Zen scholar Hisamatsu Shin'ichi that no Westerner had yet understood Zen despite the many books that Westerners had written on this topic. Was Herrigel then the single exception? In fact, he was not, for when Hisamatsu asked Suzuki's assessment of Herrigel, Suzuki replied: "Herrigel is trying to get to Zen, but he hasn't grasped Zen itself. Have you ever seen a book written by a Westerner that has?"<sup>54</sup> Suzuki was then asked why he had agreed to write the introduction to Herrigel's book? "I was asked to write it, so I wrote it, that's all," he replied.<sup>55</sup>

There is no reason to believe that Suzuki would have had a higher regard for Dürckheim's understanding of Zen. Dürckheim was, after all, just another "Westerner" and definitely not Japanese. In an article written in June 1941 Suzuki claimed: "The character of the Japanese people is to come straight to the point and pour their entire body and mind into the attack. This is the character of the Japanese people and, at the same time, the essence of Zen."<sup>56</sup> Given this, how could any Westerner aspire to understanding "the essence of Zen" while

lacking "the character of the Japanese people"?

At the same time, given the historical *non*-relationship of Zen to archery, the question must be asked as to what this tells us about Suzuki's own understanding of Zen? That is to say, did he knowingly participate in what Yamada described as a postwar "myth"? If so, what was his purpose? Interesting as these questions may be, they lie beyond the scope of this article to explore.

### Wehr's Defense of Dürckheim

Unsurprisingly, Wehr provides us with none of this information about Herrigel let alone about any personal relationship Dürckheim may have had to him. Nor, for that matter, does Wehr inform us much about Dürckheim's relationship with Suzuki either during or after the war. His focus is on one thing, weakening Dürckheim's connection to National Socialism while simultaneously strengthening his relationship to Zen:

Reflections such as these still do not reveal the distance which Dürckheim is taking vis-à-vis National Socialism and his own concept of nationalist culture. These two worlds still co-exist for him. He is attempting to harmonize his nationalist ideals and his spiritual interests. He does not yet realize that he will have to make a decision if he continues his inner path. He believes that what Zen Buddhism offers him is a gain to his exterior status.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Wehr would have us believe that as Dürckheim's understanding of Zen deepened he was slowly drawn away, if only unconsciously, from the Nazis' worldview to that of Zen. In fact, he would "have to make a decision," i.e., choosing either Zen or National Socialism. But

did Dürckheim ever make such a choice? On this crucial point Wehr is silent. The best Wehr could do was to admit: "The quoted biographical documents suggest that it was a very slow process of change."<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, Wehr goes on to claim that Dürckheim became such an accomplished Zen practitioner that he had an initial enlightenment experience known as *satori*. Not even Herrigel had explicitly claimed this for himself. Wehr wrote:

Toward the end of his stay in Japan, Dürckheim experienced *satori*, the aim of Zen: a degree of illumination of reality. Through this he achieved the "spiritual break-through toward ultimate reality." In this way a greater Self is uncovered, beyond the ordinary self. This greater Self, and the destiny linked to it, does not spare a person on the inner way from trials. In the following stages of his life, Dürckheim experienced an imprisonment of a year and a half in the prison of Sugamo in Tokyo under the control of the American Occupation.<sup>59</sup>

Once again the reader is presented with the incongruous relationship between a confirmed Nazi, a suspected war criminal in postwar Japan, and an enlightened Zen practitioner. Yet, when did Dürckheim have his enlightenment experience? Was it before, or after, he was imprisoned at war's end? And who was the Zen master who authenticated Dürckheim's enlightenment experience as is required in the Zen school? Did Dürckheim even train under a recognized Zen master? Wehr once again remains silent.

Wehr does, however, quote Dürckheim in describing his incarceration in the Sugamo

prison:

In spite of everything, it was a very fertile period for me. The first weeks I had a dream almost every night, some of which anticipated my future work. In my cell, I was surrounded by a profound silence. I could work on myself and that is when I began to write a novel. My neighbors simply waited for each day to pass. That time of captivity was precious to me because I could exercise *zazen* meditation and remain in immobility for hours.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that Wehr tells us Dürckheim experienced *satori* "toward the end of his stay in Japan" suggests that Dürckheim had what he believed to be *satori* while in prison, for, as noted, he was incarcerated for some eighteen months under suspicion of being a Class A war criminal before finally being released without trial and repatriated to Germany. If Dürckheim did experience *satori* in prison, it would have been impossible for a Zen master to verify his experience. Thus, within the norms of the Zen tradition, and without additional clarifying evidence, the authenticity of Dürckheim's claim must remain suspect if not denied outright. Nevertheless, Wehr ends his description of Dürckheim's experience in Japan as follows: "The years in Japan represent a special formation for Dürckheim's later work as teacher of meditation and guide on the inner path."<sup>61</sup>

In fairness to Dürckheim, it should be noted that upon his return to Germany he did not claim to be a "Zen master" although it appears there were those around him who regarded him as such. About this, Dürckheim said: "What I am doing is not the transmission of Zen Buddhism; on the contrary, that which I seek after is something universally human which comes from our origins and happens to be more

emphasized in eastern practices than in the western. What interests us is not something uniquely oriental, but something universally human which the Orient has cultivated over the centuries and has never fully lost sight of."<sup>62</sup>

In a conference held in Frankfurt, Dürckheim went further:

I find it especially shameful that people say: the experiences of Being which Dürckheim brings us are imported from the East. No, the experience of Being is everywhere in the world, even if it is given different names according to the religious life which has developed there, if we understand by the word "Being" the Divine Being. All reflection on Being begins with this experience. . . . This experience can truly help man feel and assist him in living something contradictory to his usual self and his ordinary view of life, and make him suddenly experience another force, another order and another unity. It is obviously greater, more powerful, more profound, richer and vaster than anything else he can live through.<sup>63</sup>

Yet, in another sense, it can be said that Dürckheim claimed to be *far more* than a mere Zen master. That is to say, over the years Dürckheim came to express his Zen-induced experience of a "breakthrough of Being" as a breakthrough of Being *in Christ*.<sup>64</sup> Thus, he conceived of himself as having incorporated the essence of Eastern spirituality as encapsulated in Zen into an esoteric understanding of Christianity. Dürckheim states: "Man is in his center when he is one with Christ and lives through Christ in the world without ever leaving the voice of the inner master which is

Christ and continually calls him toward the center. Here Christ is not only the 'Being of all things,' nor the intrinsic Path in each one of us, but also Transcendence itself."<sup>65</sup>

In claiming this, Dürckheim placed himself at the apex of a new, or at least revitalized, religious movement that, on the one hand, enjoyed deep roots within the Christian mystical tradition even while incorporating the "enlightenment experience" of ancient Eastern wisdom. Whereas by the modern era Christian mysticism lacked (or had lost) a clear-cut methodology for achieving Transcendence, the Zen school had maintained a meditative practice based on *zazen* and allegedly associated arts. Dürckheim could claim to have combined the best of both worlds, placing him in a unique position among religious teachers. In a postwar Germany still struggling to free itself from the bitter legacy of the Nazi era, it is not surprising that Dürckheim would have been an attractive figure.

Nevertheless, to the detached observer it can only be a source of amazement that a once dedicated and tireless propagandist for an utterly ruthless totalitarian ideology could, with a metaphorical flip of the hand, transform himself in the postwar era into someone who embodied the elements of a universal spirituality. That is to say, he became someone who, claiming to have experienced *satori*, proceeded to incorporate his understanding of Eastern spirituality into a transcendent, mystical form of Christianity, all without having acknowledged, let alone expressed the least regret for, his Nazi past.

As for Wehr, it can be said that, at least by comparison with Satō who falsified Suzuki's opposition to the Nazis, he honestly admitted Dürckheim's Nazi past. Yet, having made this admission, Wehr immediately set about attempting to downplay Dürckheim's Nazi affiliation as much as possible. He did this by replacing his political affiliation to fascism with

a Zen-based narrative of spiritual growth that gradually removed Dürckheim from the world of National Socialism even though the latter is described as having been largely unaware of his transformation.

But is this description correct?

### The Search for Evidence

In searching for evidence to assess Wehr's description of Dürckheim in Japan, the author could but regret how little space Wehr devoted to such things as his relationship to National Socialism, Zen and Zen figures like Suzuki. It was just at this time, i.e., June 2011, when Hans-Joachim Bieber, Prof. Emeritus of Kassel University, sent me an e-mail that ended as follows:

There is one source which could probably give more information about Dürckheim's encounter with Zen Buddhism and perhaps with D.T. Suzuki personally during his years in Japan: Dürckheim's diaries. They are unpublished and belong to the Dürckheim family in Germany. They have been used by Dürckheim's first biographer (Gerhard Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim*, Freiburg 1996). Wehr found out that Dürckheim had been a fervent Nazi. For the Dürckheim family and Dürckheim's students his book was a shock (despite the fact that Wehr basically was an adherent of Dürckheim). And my impression is that since then the family doesn't allow anyone to use Dürckheim's diaries. At least they refused my request.<sup>66</sup>

In reading this I could not help but empathize with Wehr and the shock he must have felt



upon learning of Dürckheim's Nazi past. This author, too, underwent a similar experience when first becoming aware of Suzuki's wartime writings, having originally believed and been inspired by Suzuki when he claimed: "Whatever form Buddhism takes in different countries where it flourishes, it is a religion of compassion, and in its varied history it has never been found engaged in warlike activities."<sup>67</sup>

At the same time the author could not help but admire Wehr, at least to some degree, for having included Dürckheim's Nazi affiliation in his biography of a figure he clearly deeply admired. The phrase "at least to some degree" is used because Wehr continually tried to show Dürckheim distancing himself from National Socialism in tandem with his growing interest in Zen.

Further, it was impossible not to empathize with Bieber as well. Just as Bieber had attempted to research Dürckheim's wartime record in Germany, the author sought to explore Suzuki's relationship to Dürckheim in Japan. In Bieber's case, the Dürckheim family turned him away, refusing to permit access to Dürckheim's diaries. In the author's case, I met with a stony silence when repeatedly seeking permission to access Suzuki's extensive personal library, known as the Matsugaoka Bunko, located in Kita-kamakura not far from Tokyo.

### D.T. Suzuki's Diaries

Nevertheless, there is one significant difference as far as Suzuki's wartime diaries (1936-45) are concerned. That is to say, Matsugaoka Bunko published Suzuki's wartime diaries over a period of six years, from 2007 thru 2012, in their yearly research organ, *The Annual Report of the Researches of the Matsugaoka Bunko*. Surprisingly, Suzuki kept these diaries in English so there can be no doubt about their meaning.

The diaries show that Suzuki maintained an ongoing relationship with Dürckheim throughout the war years, beginning with a flurry of activity involving Dürckheim in January 1939. There is, further, nothing in these 1939 entries to suggest that this was the first time the two men had met. Thus, it is likely they had met earlier. In addition, following Dürckheim's return to Japan, i.e., on July 14, 1942, Suzuki writes: "Telegram to Graf [Count] Dürckheim re his invitation to lunch tomorrow,"<sup>68</sup> and on February 15, 1943: "Went to Tokyo to take lunch with Graf von Dürckheim and stayed some time with him."<sup>69</sup>

It is noteworthy that Suzuki's contact with leading Nazis in Japan was not limited to Dürckheim. As we have already seen, Suzuki lunched with Ambassador (and Major General) Ott as early as January 18, 1939. Further, on February 4, 1943 Suzuki took part in a dinner party to honor the ambassador: "Went to Imperial Hotel to attend dinner party given to Amb. Ott and his staff,"<sup>70</sup> and on February 16, 1943 Suzuki received "a box of fruits in recognition of my presence at a dinner party in honor of Amb. Ott of Germany."<sup>71</sup>

Suzuki's diaries also contain frequent references to lectures at German-related venues beginning as early as May 28, 1938: "Lecture at German research institute for K.B.S. in the evening"<sup>72</sup> followed on June 26, 1938 by: "Kurokawa and Kato brought money for my lecture at German Institute."<sup>73</sup> Additional references to lectures include: the German Society on September 13, 1943; German residents in Tokyo on October 4, 1943; the German Club on December 10, 1943; and the German Society, once again, on December 15, 1943.<sup>74</sup>

One reason these lectures are important is because Dürckheim states:

When I came to Japan, I did not know anything about Zen. Very

soon I met the Zen-master Suzuki, the greatest Zen-scholar of our time. I heard many of his lectures, and through him I discovered Zen.<sup>75</sup>

Dürckheim's Zen study with Suzuki appears to have consisted of a number of personal meetings punctuated with attendance at Suzuki's lectures on Zen at German venues. Needless to say, simply listening to lectures *about* Zen does not constitute *Zen practice*. In fact, an academic understanding of Zen sans practice is often castigated as the very epitome of a mistaken approach to Zen, relying, as it does, on conceptual thought.

In the postwar period Dürckheim was specifically asked about this: "With which Zen exercise did you start your Zen practice? Zen is a kind of practice which one has to learn, isn't it?" To which Dürckheim responded: "My access was through archery."<sup>76</sup>

Suzuki's luncheon with Dürckheim and Ambassador Ott on January 18, 1939 took place just two months after the massive, coordinated attack on Jews throughout the German Reich on the night of November 9, 1938. This anti-Jewish violence, known as *Kristallnacht*, or "Night of Broken Glass," was accompanied by the torching of hundreds of synagogues together with their *Torah* scrolls. Although *Kristallnacht* was widely condemned by governments, newspapers and radio commentators throughout the world, and despite his many contacts in the English-speaking world, Suzuki was undeterred from maintaining his contacts with Dürckheim and the German embassy either then or for the remainder of the war.

Thanks to the publication of Suzuki's diaries, it can be argued that we have a more detailed picture of Suzuki's wartime actions than we do those of Dürckheim. For example, we now know that between 1938 and 1944 Suzuki met

with five Imperial Navy Admirals (Mori, Yamaji, Yamanashi, Nomura and Sato) on eight occasions.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Suzuki was in contact or dined with Count Makino Nobuaki on forty-four occasions between 1930 and 1945 (thirty-one times between 1936-45). The extremely rightwing Makino was one of Emperor Hirohito's closest advisors, having served him as Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal from 1925 to 1935. As late as February 1945 Makino met Hirohito together with six former prime ministers and, despite Germany's impending defeat, urged him to continue the war, saying "the ultimate priority is to develop an advantageous war situation."<sup>78</sup>

Suzuki's connection to someone as close to the emperor as Makino is indicative of Suzuki's access to Imperial Court circles.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, it raises the question of Suzuki's own attitude to the emperor, especially as references to the emperor, either positive or negative, are all but absent from his published writings in either English or Japanese. Some Suzuki supporters have interpreted this absence as a sign that he was either opposed, or at least critical, of the Imperial system and the ultra-nationalism associated with it.

Fortunately, there is one wartime report on Suzuki's view of the emperor supplied, interestingly enough, by yet further wartime German visitors to Japan. The visitors in question were not themselves Nazis but, despite having once come under suspicion by the Gestapo, were nevertheless given permission to travel on Christian mission-related business in both China and Japan. These missionary visitors were Gerhard Rosenkrantz and his wife who visited Japan in 1939. They requested a meeting with Suzuki and met him in the library of what was then Otani College where he was teaching:

"We Buddhists," Suzuki told them, "bow in front of the emperor's image, but for us this is not a

religious act. The emperor is not a god because for Buddhists a [Shinto] god can be something very low. We see the emperor in an area high above all religions. Trying to make him a god today means a reduction in the status of the emperor. This brings confusion to Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity."<sup>80</sup>

Thus, even while denying the emperor's status as a Shinto deity, Suzuki nevertheless justified bowing to the emperor's image as a Buddhist because he was a personage "high above all religions." Suzuki, of course, never publicly denied the emperor's divinity in his wartime Japanese writings.

Regrettably, we cannot be sure what Suzuki told his German audiences because even though nearly seventy years have elapsed since the end of WWII, the attempt to preserve his reputation, similar to that of Dürckheim himself, continues to be an important task for those who were close to both men and now seek to preserve their respective legacies.

### The View of Dürckheim from within Japan

As for Dürckheim, we do have one observer who had first-hand knowledge of his activities within Japan. He was a German academic by the name of Dr. Dietrich Seckel. Seckel taught in Japan from 1937 to 1947 and later at Heidelberg University from 1965 to 1976. He described Dürckheim's wartime activities in Japan as follows:

Dürckheim also went to Zen temple[s] where he meditated. However, his study and practice of Zen Buddhism has been extremely exaggerated. In particular, I felt this way because, at the same time, he was propagating Nazism.

There was something incongruous about this. I recall seeing him at a reception at the German Embassy. At that time he was poking his finger into the breast of one of the most famous Japanese professors of economics who was wearing a brown silk kimono. While explaining the ideology of the German Reich to him, Dürckheim kept pushing the poor professor back until the latter reached the wall and could go no further. I could not help but feel pity for this professor who was the subject of Dürckheim's indoctrination.

Dürckheim thought of himself as a friend and supporter of German teachers [in Japan]. He provided us with everything he could think of. He lectured everywhere ceaselessly with his lectures first being translated into Japanese and then, later on, distributed to all German residents in the original German. His speeches arrived in the mail on an almost daily basis. It was extremely unpleasant. He was what might be called an excellent propagandist who, possessed of a high intellectual level, traveled throughout Japan teaching Nazism and the ideology of the Third Reich."<sup>81</sup>

The above account is instructive in a number of ways, first of all because it reveals that Dürckheim viewed himself as a friend and supporter of German teachers in Japan. In fact, as we have seen, even during his first visit to Japan in August 1938 he had visited the Japanese faction of the National Socialist Teachers Association (NS-Lehrerbund). There he talked about the principles and forms of national socialist education and the difference

between the national socialist understanding of freedom and a liberal conception of it.

Further, Seckel describes Dürckheim as "an excellent propagandist who, possessed of a high intellectual level, traveled throughout Japan teaching Nazism and the ideology of the Third Reich." Neither Dürckheim's intelligence nor his dedication to propagating Nazi ideology can be in doubt. In fact, he was so dedicated in his work that he was awarded the War Merit Cross, Second Class on Hitler's birthday, April 20, 1944. Dürckheim shared this honor with such prominent Nazis as Adolf Eichmann and Dr. Josef Mengele. Yet, what of his interest in Zen? ". . . his study and practice of Zen Buddhism has been extremely exaggerated," Seckel informs us.

We have already learned that early in Dürckheim's first sojourn in Japan he claimed to have met D.T. Suzuki, someone whom Dürckheim describes as "one of the greatest contemporary Zen Masters." Suzuki, of course, was not a Zen master, and he never claimed this title for himself. He was, instead, a lay practitioner and regarded as such by the Rinzai Zen sect with which he was closely affiliated. That said, Suzuki did have an initial enlightenment experience, i.e., *satori*, as a young man and, unlike Dürckheim, had his enlightenment experience verified by a noted Rinzai Zen master, Shaku Sōen. Additionally, Suzuki also possessed significant academic accomplishments as a Buddhist scholar, especially as a translator of Buddhist texts.

Does this mean, then, that Dürckheim never practiced with a recognized Zen master in Japan? No, for the record is clear that Dürckheim did indeed train, albeit for only a few days, with Yasutani Haku'un, then a Sōtō Zen priest, who, in the postwar era, became a well-known Zen master in West, particularly the U.S. We know about Dürckheim's training with Yasutani thanks to Hashimoto Fumio, a former higher school teacher of German, who

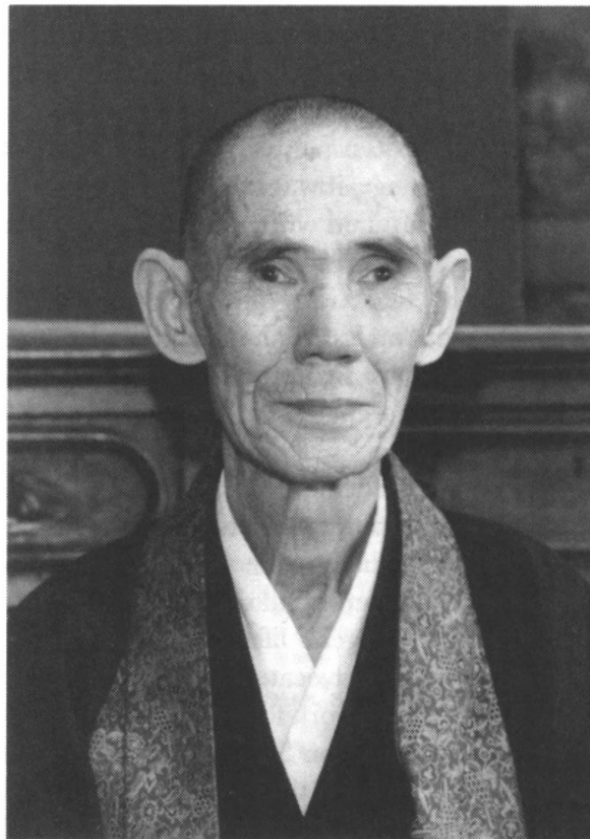
served as Dürckheim's interpreter and translator at the German embassy in Tokyo.

Hashimoto described his relationship to Dürckheim as follows:

When Dürckheim first arrived in Japan, he was surrounded by Shintoists, Buddhist scholars, military men and right-wing thinkers, each of whom sought to impress him with their importance. The Count found it difficult to determine who of them was the real thing, and I stepped in to serve as his advisor. In addition, a great number of written materials were sent to him, and my job was to review them to determine their suitability. . . .

In the end, what most interested the Count was traditional Japanese archery and Zen. He set up an archery range in his garden and zealously practiced every day. In addition, he went to Shinkōji temple on the outskirts of Ogawa township in Saitama Prefecture where he stayed to practice Zen for a number of days. His instructor in *zazen* was the temple abbot, Master Yasutani [Haku'un]. I accompanied the Count and gladly practiced with him.<sup>82</sup>





**Yasutani Haku'un**

Hashimoto relates that it was he who first took an interest in Yasutani because of the latter's strong emphasis on both the practice of *zazen* and the realization of enlightenment. This emphasis on practice was a revelation for him, for until then his only knowledge of Buddhism had come from scholars who "had never properly done *zazen* or realized enlightenment."<sup>83</sup> In particular, Hashimoto was impressed by Yasutani's 1943 book on Zen Master Dōgen and a modern-day compilation of Dōgen's teachings for the laity known as the *Shūshōgi*. Hashimoto claimed that Yasutani's book revealed "the greatness of this master [i.e. Yasutani] and the profundity of Buddhism."<sup>84</sup> So impressed was Hashimoto that not only did he provide Dürckheim with a detailed description of the book's contents but went on to translate the entire book into German for him.

Thus, Yasutani's book, coupled with Hashimoto's recommendation, was the catalyst for Dürckheim's training at Shinkōji albeit for only "a number of days." Dürckheim could not help but have been aware of Yasutani's extremely right-wing, if not fanatical, political views as clearly expressed in his book. Given this, the author asks for the reader's understanding in quoting extensively from his book. It is done in the belief that if we are to understand Dürckheim's view of Zen we need to become acquainted with the teachings of the only authentic Zen master he appears to have trained under, albeit briefly.

Yasutani described the purpose of his book as follows:

Asia is one. Annihilating the treachery of the United States and Britain and establishing the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere is the only way to save the one billion people of Asia so that they can, with peace of mind, proceed on their respective paths. Furthermore, it is only natural that this will contribute to the construction of a new world order, exorcising evil spirits from the world and leading to the realization of eternal peace and happiness for all humanity. I believe this is truly the critically important mission to be accomplished by our great Japanese Empire.

In order to fulfill this mission it is absolutely necessary to have a powerful military force as well as plentiful material resources. Furthermore, it is necessary to employ the power of culture, for it is most especially the power of spiritual culture that determines the final outcome. In fact, it must

be said that in accomplishing this very important national mission the most important and fundamental factor is the power of spiritual culture. . . .

It is impossible to discuss Japanese culture while ignoring Buddhism. Those who would exclude Buddhism while seeking to exalt the Spirit of Japan are recklessly ignoring the history of our imperial land and engaging in a mistaken movement that distorts the reality of our nation. In so doing, it must be said, such persons hinder the proper development of our nation's destiny. For this reason we must promulgate and exalt the true Buddha Dharma, making certain that the people's thought is resolute and immovable. Beyond this, we must train and send forth a great number of capable men who will be able to develop and exalt the culture of our imperial land, thereby reverently assisting in the holy enterprise of bringing the eight corners of the world under one roof.<sup>85</sup>

For Dürckheim, the words "it is most especially the power of spiritual culture that determines the final outcome" must have been particularly attractive inasmuch as they paralleled his own *völkisch* understanding of religion. However, without knowledge of modern Japanese Buddhist history, it is unlikely that he would have understood the reference to "those who would exclude Buddhism while seeking to exalt the Spirit of Japan..." Here Yasutani refers to Shinto and Neo-Confucian-inspired criticism dating back to the late Edo period (1600-1867) that condemned Buddhism as a foreign, degenerate religion defiling a divine Japan properly headed by a "living (Shinto) god"

(*arahito-gami*). The reference, of course, is to the emperor. As late as the 1930s Shinto and Neo-Confucian advocates maintained that Buddhism, an outdated foreign import, had nothing to offer modern Japanese society, a position Yasutani vehemently rejected.

Note, too, that the basis of the martial spirit of the Japanese people was described as the "Spirit of Japan" (*Yamato-damashii*). Yasutani clearly concurred with this belief though he asserted that it was Japanese Buddhism that made the cultivation of this ultranationalist and xenophobic spirit possible. Yasutani even turns Zen Master Dōgen, the 13th century founder of the Sōtō Zen sect in Japan, into the model of an Imperial subject:

The Spirit of Japan is, of course, unique to our country. It does not exist in either China or India. Neither is it to be found in Italy or Germany, let alone in the U.S., England and other countries....We all deeply believe, without the slightest doubt, that this spirit will be increasingly cultivated, trained, and enlarged until its brilliance fills the entire world. The most remarkable feature of the Spirit of Japan is the power derived from the great unity [of our people]. . . .

In the event one wishes to exalt the Spirit of Japan, it is imperative to utilize Japanese Buddhism. The reason for this is that as far as a nutrient for cultivation of the Spirit of Japan is concerned, I believe there is absolutely nothing superior to Japanese Buddhism. . . .That is to say, all the particulars [of the Spirit of Japan] are taught by Japanese Buddhism, including the great way of 'no-self' (*muga*) that consists of the fundamental duty of 'extinguishing the self in

order to serve the public [good]' (*messhi hōkō*); the determination to transcend life and death in order to reverently sacrifice oneself for one's sovereign; the belief in unlimited life as represented in the oath to die seven times over to repay [the debt of gratitude owed] one's country; reverently assisting in the holy enterprise of bringing the eight corners of the world under one roof; and the valiant and devoted power required for the construction of the Pure Land on this earth.

Within Japanese Buddhism it is the Buddha Dharma of Zen Master Dōgen, having been directly inherited from Shākyamuni, that has emphasized the cultivation of the people's spirit, for its central focus is on religious practice, especially the great duty of reverence for the emperor.<sup>86</sup>

Interestingly, among other nations, Yasutani excludes even wartime allies, Germany and Italy, from sharing in the uniquely Japanese "Spirit of Japan." Given this, the reader might suspect Dürckheim would have been somewhat alienated by Yasutani's words. In fact, as we have seen, the Nazis readily recognized that every *Volk* had their own unique spirit and culture. Thus, it was self-evident that the equally unique "German Spirit" (*G. Deutscher Geist*) propagated by the Nazis would have excluded the Spirit of Japan. Nevertheless, there was nothing to prevent the unique spirits of the three peoples from working closely together, not least of all against common enemies, while simultaneously learning and sharing with one another. Dürckheim mirrored this close collaboration.

By this point readers may be asking, "I thought

Buddhism was a religion that forbids killing. Don't both Buddhist laity and clerics undertake to abstain from taking life?" Yasutani did, in fact, recognize this as a problem but asserted nonetheless:

At this point the following question arises: What should the attitude of disciples of the Buddha, as Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas, be toward the first precept that forbids the taking of life? For example, what should be done in the case in which, in order to remove various evil influences and benefit society, it becomes necessary to deprive birds, insects, fish, etc. of their lives, or, on a larger scale, to sentence extremely evil and brutal persons to death, or for the nation to engage in total war?

Those who understand the spirit of the Mahāyāna precepts should be able to answer this question immediately. That is to say, of course one should kill, killing as many as possible. One should, fighting hard, kill everyone in the enemy army. The reason for this is that in order to carry [Buddhist] compassion and filial obedience through to perfection it is necessary to assist good and punish evil. However, in killing [the enemy] one should swallow one's tears, bearing in mind the truth of killing yet not killing.

Failing to kill an evil man who ought to be killed, or destroying an enemy army that ought to be destroyed, would be to betray compassion and filial obedience, to break the precept forbidding the taking of life. This is a special characteristic of the Mahāyāna

precepts.<sup>87</sup>

The assertion that failing to kill an "evil man" is to *betray compassion* is one of the more extraordinary of Yasutani's claims. Yet, innumerable wartime Zen leaders echoed much of what Yasutani wrote above. There was, however, one area where he had less company. Yasutani was one of only a few Zen masters to integrate virulent anti-Semitism into his pro-war stance. The following are a few representative quotes, the first of which manages to combine Confucian social values, including its sexism, and anti-Semitism:

1. Everyone should act according to his position in society. Those who are in a superior position should take pity on those below, while those who are below should revere those who are above. Men should fulfill the Way of Men while women observe the Way of Women, making absolutely sure that there is not the slightest confusion between their respective roles. It is therefore necessary to thoroughly defeat the propaganda and strategy of the Jews. That is to say, we must clearly point out the fallacy of their evil ideas advocating liberty and equality, ideas that have dominated the world up to the present time.

2. Beginning in the Meiji period [1868-1912], perhaps because Japan was so busy importing Western material civilization, our precious Japanese Buddhism was discarded without a second thought. For this reason, Japanese Buddhism fell into a situation in which it was half dead and half alive, leaving Japanese education without a soul. The result was the

almost total loss of the Spirit of Japan, for the general citizenry became fascinated with the ideas of liberty and equality as advocated by the scheming Jews, not to mention such things as individualism, money as almighty, and pleasure seeking. This in turn caused men of intelligence in recent years to strongly call for the promotion of the Spirit of Japan.

3. We must be aware of the existence of the demonic teachings of the Jews who assert things like [the existence of] equality in the phenomenal world, thereby disturbing public order in our nation's society and destroying [governmental] control. Not only this, these demonic conspirators hold the deep-rooted delusion and blind belief that, as far as the essential nature of human beings is concerned, there is, by nature, differentiation between superior and inferior. They are caught up in the delusion that they alone have been chosen by God and are [therefore] an exceptionally superior people. The result of all this is a treacherous design to usurp [control of] and dominate the entire world, thus provoking the great upheavals of today. It must be said that this is an extreme example of the evil resulting from superstitious belief and deep-rooted delusion.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, almost inconceivably for the knowledgeable observer, Yasutani ends his book by once again invoking Zen Master Dōgen as a supporter of his militarist faith:

At this point in time, nothing is



more urgent than the clarification of the true Dharma of Zen Master Dōgen, thereby extolling the great duty of reverence for the emperor, and, at the same time, rectifying numerous unsound ideas, cultivating proper belief among the Japanese people as leaders of the Orient, one hundred million [people] of one mind, equipped with a resolute and immovable attitude.

In this connection I have provided a brief and simple outline of Zen Master Dōgen's Buddha Dharma. Nothing could bring me greater joy than, if through the dissemination of this book, the true Dharma becomes known once again, resulting in the total and complete exaltation of the Spirit of Japan and benefitting both the state and humanity.

Moreover, I am convinced this will become the spiritual foundation for the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the standard for cultural activities, and the pillar for the construction of a new world order.<sup>89</sup>

In his conclusion, Yasutani manages to combine the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Dōgen, the Spirit of Japan and the militarist "Greater East Co-Prosperity Sphere" into one indivisible and fanatical whole. Thus, if only for a period of a few days, Dürckheim trained under the guidance of one of Japan's most virulently militarist and anti-Semitic of all Zen masters. And as Hashimoto informs us, Dürckheim knew exactly what Yasutani stood for inasmuch as the former had translated *all* of Yasutani's book into German on Dürckheim's behalf. Since anti-Semitism was not typical of wartime Zen masters, it is difficult to escape the conclusion

that for Dürckheim among the most attractive features of Yasutani's teaching was both his embrace of a militarism based on "no-self" and his virulent antipathy to Jews.

And, of course, one should not forget the claim made by Dürckheim's interpreter and translator, Hashimoto Fumio, that Dürckheim had been drawn to Yasutani due to "the greatness of this master" and the fact that Yasutani was unlike Zen scholars who "had never properly done *zazen* or realized enlightenment." Thus, one cannot help but ask what Yasutani's alleged "enlightenment" consisted of?<sup>90</sup> And further, what was the nature of Dürckheim's self-proclaimed experience of *satori* in light of his training under Yasutani?

In the postwar era, Philip Kapleau introduced Yasutani to the West in his widely acclaimed book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, as the very model of an enlightened Zen master even while the latter continued his rightwing activities. For example, in 1951 Yasutani established a journal known as *Gyōshō* (Awakening Gong) as a vehicle for his religious and political views. Typical of his postwar political views is the following:

It goes without saying the leaders of the Japan Teachers' Union are at the forefront of the feeble-minded [in this country]. . . . They, together with the four Opposition political parties, the General Council of Trade Unions, the Government and Public Workers Union, the Association of Young Jurists, the Citizen's League for Peace in Vietnam, etc. have taken it upon themselves to become traitors to the nation. . . .

The universities we presently have must be smashed one and all. If that can't be done under the

present Constitution, then it should be declared null and void just as soon as possible, for it is an un-Japanese constitution ruining the nation, a sham constitution born as the bastard child of the Allied Occupation Forces.<sup>91</sup>

As for the theoretical basis of Haku'un's right-wing political views, he shared the following with his readers a few months later: "All machines are assembled with screws having right-hand threads. Right-handedness signifies coming into existence, while left-handedness signifies destruction."<sup>92</sup>

Yasutani maintained his relationship with Dürckheim in the postwar years as evidenced by Dürckheim's 1964 publication of *Die wunderbare Katze und andere Zentexte* (The Wonderful Cat and Other Zen Texts). This book consisted of a collection of texts on archery, fencing and Zen including a section on Zen Master Dōgen's "Fukan-zazengi" (A Universal Recommendation for the Practice of Zazen) with a commentary by Yasutani and translated into German by Hashimoto Fumio, Dürckheim's wartime translator and advisor. The same book also contained a section entitled, "On Zen Practice" comprised of talks given by Yasutani first translated into English by Philip Kapleau.<sup>93</sup>

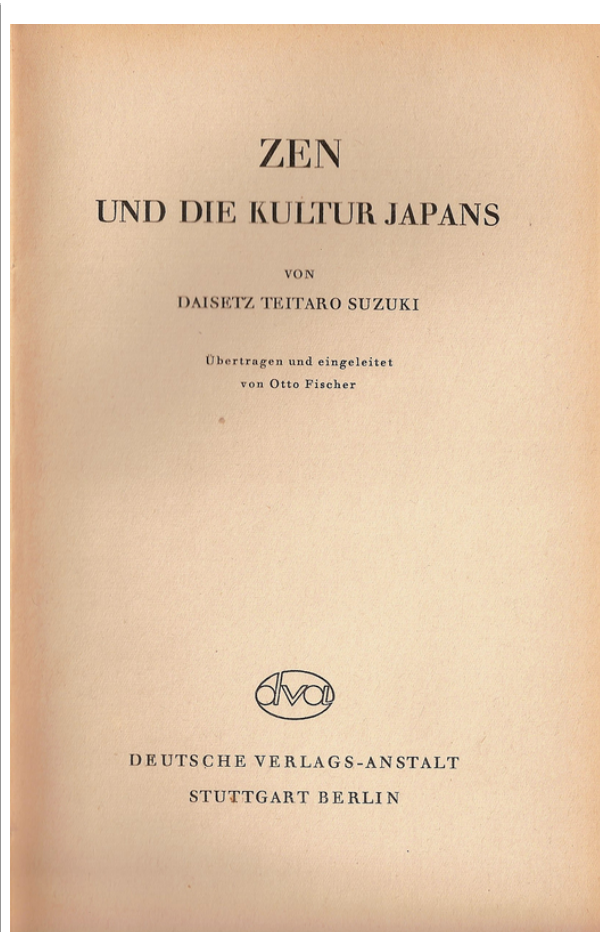
According to Wehr, Yasutani visited Dürckheim in Todtmoos in 1966 accompanied by Hashimoto Fumio. Wehr writes that Yasutani came "to greet a kindred spirit." (G. *um den Geistesverwandten zu grüßen*).<sup>94</sup> Further, one year later Yasutani contributed to Dürckheim's 70th birthday commemorative volume.<sup>95</sup> That these two men were truly "kindred spirits," in peace *and war*, there can be no doubt.

### D.T. Suzuki's Influence on the Nazis

By comparison with Yasutani, Suzuki may seem absolutely benign. After all, up to this point the record reveals that all Suzuki actually did was

provide guidance on Zen to Dürckheim through a combination of personal meetings and public lectures. Dürckheim in turn introduced Suzuki's thoughts, as contained in his 1938 book, to a German audience in a series of articles written in 1939. These actions hardly seem worthy of the claim made by Suzuki's editor, Handa Shin, that "Dr. Suzuki's writings are said to have strongly influenced the military spirit of Nazi Germany."

Yet, Suzuki's diary reveals he initiated the process for his book to be translated and published in Germany on August 8, 1938, i.e., less than three months after its appearance in Japan: "Letters to German publishers re. translation of my book."<sup>96</sup> When this effort didn't immediately bear fruit, Suzuki wrote the following entry on January 19, 1939: "Zen and Jap. Culture sent to [Walter] Donat of the Jap-German Culture Institute of Tokyo."<sup>97</sup> Dr. Walter Donat was the General Secretary of the Japanese-German Culture Institute and, needless to say, a dedicated Nazi.



**German Title of Suzuki's *Zen und die Kultur Japans***

Suzuki was clearly an active participant, in fact the initiator, of a process that finally led to the publication of his book in Germany in 1941 under the title of *Zen und die Kultur Japans* (Zen and the Culture of Japan). Like Dürckheim, the translator, Otto Fischer, introduces Suzuki as a "Zen priest" as well as "a professor at the Buddhist Ōtani College in Kyoto."<sup>98</sup> In his introduction Fischer also notes that Suzuki was already known to a German audience inasmuch as his book, *Die große Befreiung* (The Great Liberation) had been published in Leipzig in 1939. This was the German title given to Suzuki's 1934 book, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*.

It is no exaggeration to say that Suzuki's new

book was translated and published in the right place at the right time. That is to say, even before it was publicly available, it was reviewed in one of Germany's major newspapers. Or more accurately, in the most important newspaper in Germany, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, (*Völkisch Observer*) the official newspaper of the Nazi Party with a readership of 1.7 million as late as 1944. By comparison, the *New York Times* currently (2013) has a daily circulation of 1.8 million.

On January 11, 1942 the *Völkischer Beobachter* carried a review article featuring four full pages of Suzuki's book. The review's title said it all: "[Zen and the Samurai: On the Japanese Warrior's Readiness for Death](#)," ([click title to view](#)). Unsurprisingly, the Nazis' supreme interest in Zen was its contribution to the warrior's willingness to die. The words, "death," "die," "deadly" occur no less than fourteen times in these four pages. Typical of these death-related passages is the opening sentence that reads: "The problem of death is a great problem with every one of us; it is, however, more pressing for the samurai, for the soldier, whose life is exclusively devoted to fighting, and fighting means death to either side of fighters."<sup>99</sup>

As Suzuki made clear with his reference to "for the soldier," he wanted his readers to understand that his words about Japan's past applied equally to its present. Suzuki also discussed the *Hagakure* (lit. Hidden under the Leaves), a classic early 18<sup>th</sup> century work on *Bushidō* authored by Yamamoto Jōchō (1659-1719), a Zen priest and former samurai:

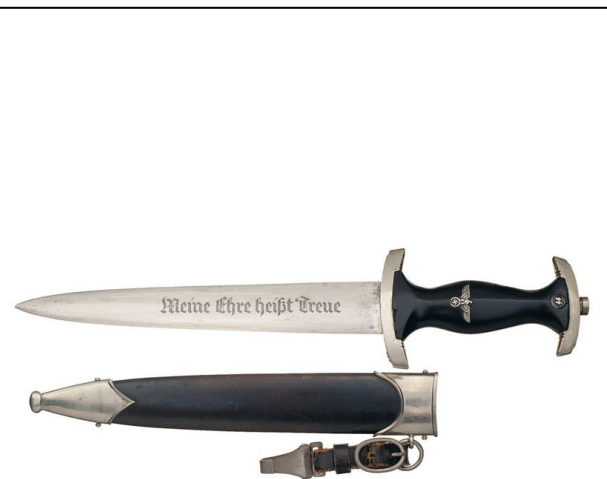
We read the following in the *Hagakure*: "Bushido means the determined will to die. When you are at the parting of the ways, do not hesitate to choose the way of death. No special reason for this except that your mind is thus made up and ready to see to the

business. Some may say that if you die without attaining the object, it is a useless death, dying like a dog. But when you are at the parting of the ways, you need not plan for attaining the object. We all prefer life to death and our planning and reasoning will be naturally for life. If then you miss the object and are alive, you are really a coward. This is an important consideration. In case you die without achieving the object, it may be a dog-death – the deed of madness, but there is no reflection here on your honor. In Bushido honor comes first.<sup>100</sup>

The last sentence would no doubt have had a special resonance for members of the SS inasmuch as their motto was "*Meine Ehre heißt Treue*" (My honor means loyalty.) The SS is, of course, infamous for having run the Nazis' concentration camps. Note, however, that the emphasis on honor and loyalty in both the SS and the allegedly Zen-inspired *Bushidō* code is not coincidental, for on November 1, 1935 Heinrich Himmler received permission from Adolf Hitler to model the SS on the Japanese samurai. Himmler's ultimate goal was that in a victorious Germany the SS would form an elite force that would rule the country as the samurai once had.

Bill Maltarich describes this development in *Samurai and Supermen: National Socialist Views of Japan* as follows: "Although Europe had always shown an interest in the samurai, with Germany leading the trend after the alliance with Japan, it was Himmler's SS who saw in this class a far flung and yet nearly perfect analog. Just as the samurai's rigid and high-minded warrior code had, at least in the view of Japan at the time, influenced and bettered the entire Japanese people, the SS would set and was setting the example for the rest of Germany."<sup>101</sup>

Himmler was so taken with the samurai that he commissioned a booklet on their history and values to be written and handed out to every SS member. The booklet was entitled *Die Samurai, Ritter des Reiches in Ehre und Treue* (The Samurai, Knights of the Empire in Honor and Loyalty). The booklet's author was Heinz Corraza who wrote at length about the importance of the samurai as the leading force in Japan's rise to world power status. For his part, Himmler wrote the booklet's introduction in which he emphasized the parallel role the SS was expected to play in Germany. He claimed readers would come to "the recognition that it is mostly minorities of the highest worth who give to the people a life that, in earthly terms, is eternal."<sup>102</sup>



**SS Daggers**

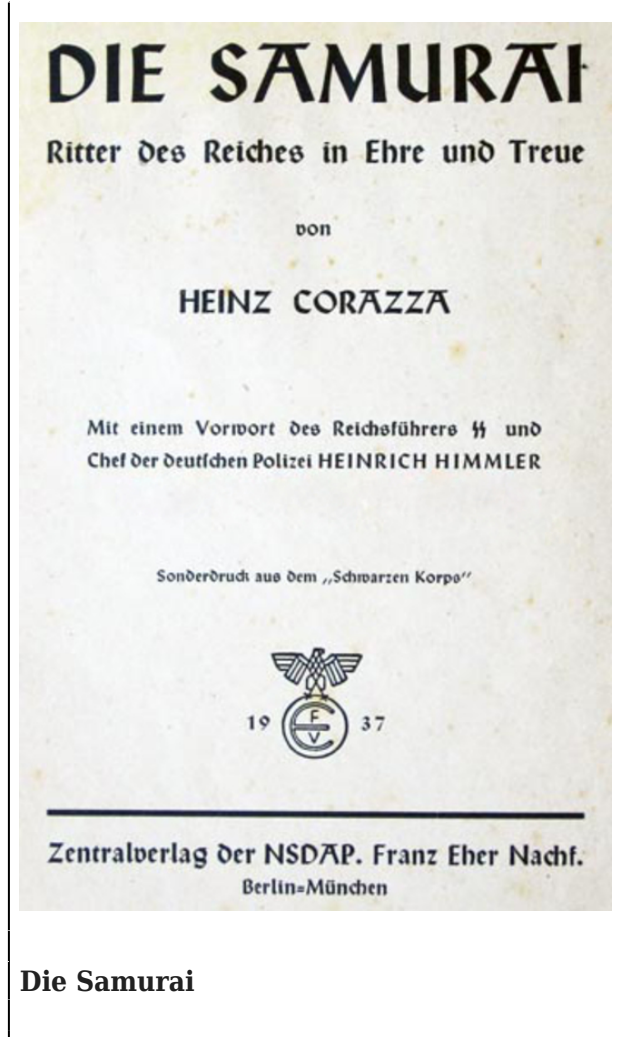
This helps explain why only four days after the initial review, on January 15, 1942, Suzuki was again introduced in the same newspaper, this time in an article focused on the most important ultra-nationalist in prewar Japan, Tōyama Mitsuru. The section on Suzuki read as follows:



The Japanese D. T. Suzuki recently wrote a book about the meaning of the Zen sect, published by Deutsche Verlagsanstalt in German. We published a section of his book describing the Japanese warrior's preparedness for death in Vol. No. 11 of the *Völkischer Beobachter*.

Suzuki is a Zen priest and professor at a Buddhist university in Kyoto. If one were to attempt to characterize the Zen sect scientifically, which is difficult, one can conclude that in it Buddhism has been completely revamped to meet Japanese conditions. This is not a unique process but one that has also happened to Christianity in the past, for example with the birth of Puritanism and certain of its oriental forms.

The recent decade in particular has once again led the Zen sect to increased importance in Japan. The battle for Japan's survival is taking place against the powerful backdrop of a history that has been able to survive for two and a half millennia in a rare concord of race, religion and politics. It is quite understandable that in this difficult time for the existence of the Japanese people, they would retreat to the intellectual roots of their history and regard them as being quite valid for their present. The outstanding national virtues of the Japanese are anchored in the Zen sect, a fact that signifies a monumental endorsement of this practical life-art.



In words that seem to spring directly from Suzuki's pen, we learn that as with Christianity, "Buddhism has been completely revamped to meet Japanese conditions" resulting in a "rare concord of race, religion and politics." Further, "The outstanding national virtues of the Japanese are anchored in the Zen sect, a fact that signifies a *monumental endorsement of this practical life-art.*" (Italics mine) The author of these words, Ernst Meunier, was a very active Nazi propagandist credited with some 20 wartime works in 32 publications, including two works for the *Reichspropagandaleitung* (Reich Propaganda Office).

Given this background, it is not surprising that the Nazis celebrated and promoted Suzuki's writings. This may also be connected to the fact

that Alfred Rosenberg, deeply attached to Meister Eckhart as he was, and embracing a *völkisch* understanding of religion, was editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. He certainly would have welcomed Suzuki's presentation of Zen as serving to reinforce the Nazis' own *völkisch* understanding of religion while, at the same time, inspiring German readers to embrace a death in which even "dying like a dog" was honorable.

Suzuki's supporters will no doubt claim it is unfair to hold Suzuki responsible for the way in which the Nazis (mis)used his writings. But Suzuki's diaries reveal that on at least two occasions he was the one who took the initiative to ensure his death-embracing writings on *Bushidō* and Zen would be available in Nazi Germany. Further, Suzuki focused on exactly the same Zen-inspired embrace of death in his writings in Japanese that appeared in military-oriented books and journals.

For example, in a lengthy article that appeared in the June 1941 issue of the Imperial Army's officer's journal, *Kaikō-sha Kiji* (Kaikō Association Report), Suzuki wrote:

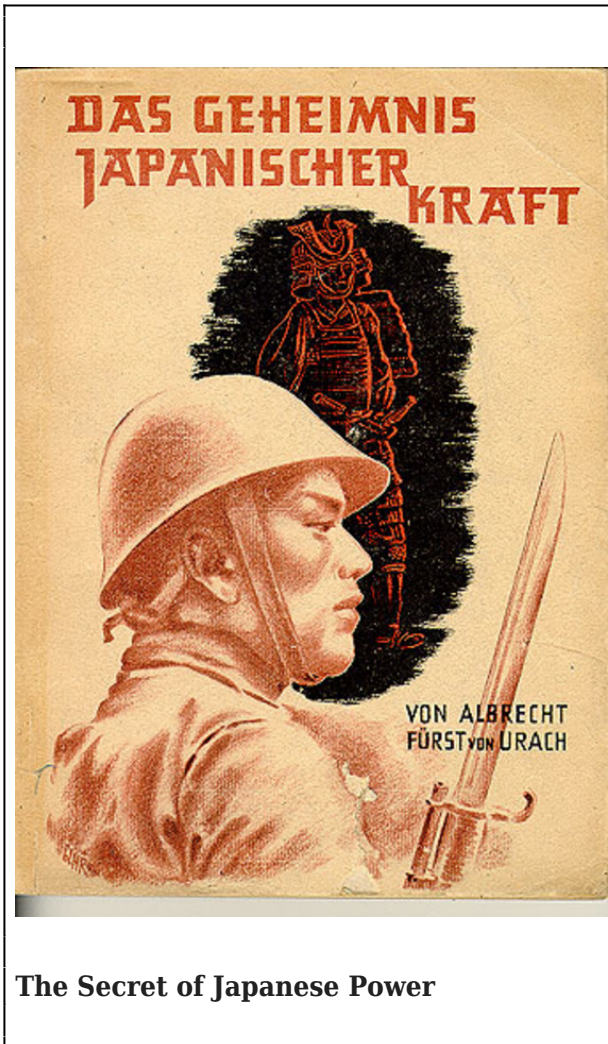
It isn't easy to acquire the mental state in which one is prepared to die. I think the best shortcut to acquire this frame of mind is none other than Zen, for Zen is the fundamental ideal of religion. It isn't simply a question of being prepared to die, as Zen is prepared to transcend death. This is called the "unity of life and death" in which living and dying are viewed as one. The fact that these two are one represents Zen's view of human life and the world.



**Heinrich Himmler**

A translation of the entire article, entitled "'*Makujiki Kōzen*' (Rush Forward Without Hesitation)" is available [here](#).

Shortly after Suzuki's book appeared, another Nazi expert on the Far East, Prince Albrecht of Urach, once again sought to explicate the "secret" of the Japanese soldier's strength just as Dürckheim had first done in 1939. In fact, he gave his booklet, published in 1942, exactly same title: *Das Geheimnis japanischer Kraft* (The Secret of Japanese Power). In it he had this to say about Japanese religion in general: "The Japanese are fortunate in having never experienced serious conflict between national interests and personal religious beliefs. . . . Shinto is Japan's primeval faith, it corresponds to the Japanese character so completely that it is never discussed."<sup>103</sup>



As for Japanese Buddhism, Albrecht opined: "Japanese Buddhism is much more positive and activist than Indian Buddhism. . . . There are countless very active sects of both Buddhism and Shinto that express their religious life not only in Japan itself, but go out into the areas dominated by Japan to give local people an idea of the power and strength of Japanese state religion."

However, the Nazi Prince reserved his highest praise for Zen in what can only be described as a distilled version of Suzuki's views: "The active and yet stoic Buddhism of the Zen-sect perfected and refined the ethos of the Japanese warrior, and gave him the highly ascetical note that still today is the essential feature of Japanese soldiery." Compare this with Suzuki's

own description in the German edition of his book, *Zen und die Kultur Japans*:

Zen discipline is simple, direct, self-reliant, self-denying, and this ascetic tendency goes well with the fighting spirit. The fighter is to be always single-minded with just one object in view which is to fight and not to look either backward or sidewise. To go straightforward in order to crush the enemy is all that is necessary for him. . . . Good fighters are generally ascetics or stoics, which means to have an iron will. When needed Zen supplies them with this.<sup>104</sup>

Still further, Albrecht had this to say about the role of the sword in Japanese culture:

Since ancient times, the Japanese sword has not only been a means of power, but a symbol for everything that the samurai served. The sword is the symbol of justice that the samurai was obligated to defend under all circumstances. The samurai class had the duty to promote social justice as well. There are countless legends of swords that recall our myths of swords in the Niebelungen tales. There are tales of swords that act on their own, without the necessity of their owners doing anything, of swords wielded as it were by a ghostly hand that struck down dozens of enemies. Other swords drew themselves from their sheaths and struck down unjust and evil foes.

Compare this with Suzuki who wrote:



The sword has thus a double office to perform: the one is to destroy anything that opposes the will of its owner, and the other is to sacrifice all of the impulses that arise from the instinct of self-preservation. The former relates itself with the spirit of patriotism or militarism, while the other has a religious connotation of loyalty and self-sacrifice. In the case of the former very frequently the sword may mean destruction pure and simple, it is then the symbol of force, sometimes perhaps devilish. It must therefore be controlled and consecrated by the second function. Its conscientious owner has been always mindful of this truth. For then destruction is turned against the evil spirit. The sword comes to be identified with the annihilation of things which lie in the way of peace, justice, progress, and humanity. It stands for all that is desirable for the spiritual welfare of the world at large.<sup>105</sup>

Albrecht repeatedly informed his readers, as did Suzuki, that the modern Japanese soldier is filled with the spirit of his ancient samurai forbearers: "The spirit of the samurai lives today with the same force that enabled Japan's army, an army of the whole people, to fight its many recent battles. The first requirement of the samurai is a readiness to give his life." Or as Suzuki expressed it, "the samurai's willingness to give his life away at any moment. . . [for] when the Unconscious is tapped it rises above individual limitations. Death now loses its sting altogether, and this is where the samurai training joins hands with Zen."

Unlike Suzuki, Albrecht does not explicitly identify the Japanese warrior's willingness to

die with Zen, yet he ends his booklet with the following explanation of the relationship between Germany and Japan:

National Socialist Germany is in the best position to understand Japan. We and the other nations of the Axis are fighting for the same goals that Japan is fighting for in East Asia, and understand the reasons that forced it to take action. We can also understand the driving force behind Japan's miraculous rise, for we National Socialists also put spirit over the material.

There can be no doubt that throughout his book Suzuki also "put spirit over the material." Similarly, there can now be no doubt that Handa Shin had a basis for his claim in November 1941 that "Dr. Suzuki's writings are said to have strongly influenced the military spirit of Nazi Germany." Just how strong the influence of his writings was, of course, is debatable. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that paralleling the military alliance between Germany and Japan was an attempt to form a *völkisch* religious alliance in which both Suzuki and Dürckheim, among others, played leading roles. Once again, just how effective or meaningful this religious alliance was in terms of its impact on military affairs is debatable, but, at the very least, the attempt on the part of both men, and those like them, is clear.





**Albert Stunkard**

Further, there can be no doubt that many Nazis, like Dürckheim himself, recognized in Zen the same *völkisch* transformation of Buddhism that they claimed Christianity had undergone in the process of "Germanizing" itself. This is despite the fact that many leading Nazis, starting with Hitler, secretly despised Christianity in any form. Anti-Christian Nazi leaders realized, however, they dare not publicly express their opposition if they were to retain the support of the large numbers of Germans who regarded themselves as Christians, both Catholic and Protestant.

For this reason, a *völkisch* (Germanized) version of Christianity would have to be tolerated in order to serve Nazi interests, at least in the short term. Accordingly, in

Dürckheim we see a kind of *völkisch* religiosity that while it had initially been inspired by Christianity, and employed Christian terms like "God" and "soul," nevertheless avoided reference to Jesus Christ, the Trinity and other central Christian tenets. Whether "Christianity" is an appropriate term to describe such a faith is certainly debatable. Further, thanks to his stay in Japan, Dürckheim's *völkisch* religiosity was expanded to include what he claimed to be Zen practice and insight.

A related debate concerns the degree to which Suzuki shared a similar *völkisch* religiosity with reference to Zen and Buddhism. For example, the journalist Arthur Koestler published *The Lotus and the Robot* in 1960 following a visit to Japan. He criticized Suzuki for the same passages previously introduced, i.e., that Zen could be linked to any "ism" whatsoever, fascism included. Koestler was especially disturbed by Suzuki's claim that Zen was "extremely flexible to adapt itself almost to any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with." These passages, he claimed, "could have come from a philosophical-minded Nazi journalist, or from one of the Zen monks who became suicide pilots."<sup>106</sup> Had Koestler been acquainted with Dürckheim, he might well have replaced the word "journalist" with "cultural diplomat."

Further, in 1967 the distinguished scholar of Buddhism, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, criticized the same passages in an article entitled "Some Observations on Recent Studies of Zen." Werblowsky observed: "Dr. Suzuki forgot to add to the list of possibilities also Nazism with its gas chambers (as the annoying Mr. Koestler has rudely pointed out)."<sup>107</sup> While these European commentators, one a journalist and the other a scholar of Buddhism, may not have been aware of the *völkisch* discourse in Suzuki's writings, they certainly understood where this discourse could lead, including its connection to the Holocaust.

An American Buddhist scholar, Robert Sharf, also described what can now be recognized as the *völkisch* elements in Suzuki's writings:

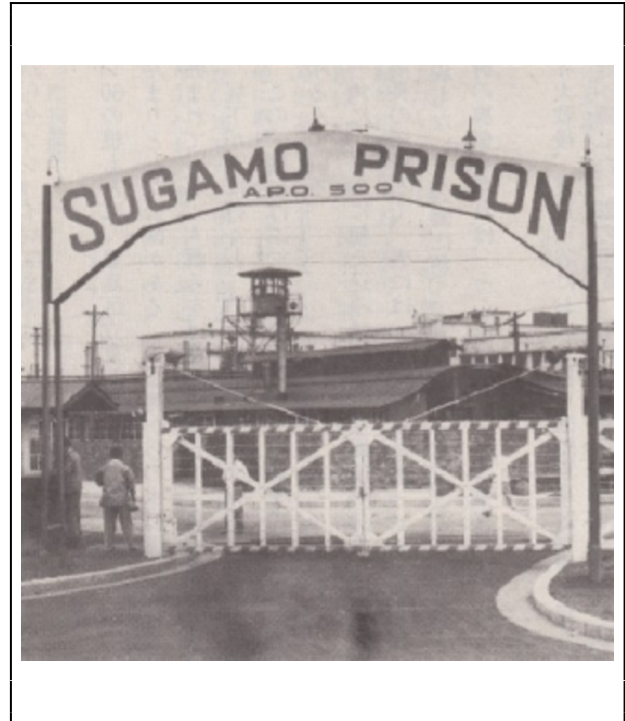
Suzuki would argue that Japanese "spirituality" is a more developed or refined form of a pan-Asian spiritual ethos, and while this ethos is linked with Buddhism, it was not until Chinese Ch'an [Zen] met the samurai culture of the Kamakura period that it would attain its consummate form in Japanese Zen. This theory allowed Suzuki to claim that only in Japan was Asian spirituality fully realized.<sup>108</sup>

Sharf also noted: "Western enthusiasts systematically failed to recognize the nationalist ideology underlying modern Japanese constructions of Zen."<sup>109</sup>

### Zen Spreads to the West

As noted in Part I of this article, it was Dürckheim who provided Albert Stunkard, an army medical officer at Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, with a letter of introduction to Suzuki, then living in a house on the grounds of Engakuji monastery in Kita Kamakura. Stunkard's visit initiated a stream of visitors to the Suzuki residence, one of whom was Philip Kapleau, subsequent founder of the Rochester Zen Center. Kapleau initially came to postwar Japan as a court reporter for the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal and would have been very well acquainted with the barbaric nature of Japanese fascism, including the "Rape of Nanking" in December 1937 and other war crimes and atrocities. Nevertheless, not only did Kapleau fail to investigate Suzuki's connection to a known Nazi like Dürckheim, he also went on to train and realize *satori* under Yasutani Haku'un, the same fanatically militarist and anti-Semitic Zen master that

Dürckheim had trained under.



Like Dürckheim, but unlike Herrigel, both Yasutani and Suzuki succeeded in leaving behind (or rather "burying") their wartime pasts, presenting themselves to the Western world as the epitome of Eastern spirituality. In the cases of both Dürckheim and Suzuki, this was mixed with equal claims of access to a transcendent, trans-historical, and universal spirituality. In 1961 Suzuki wrote: "The basic idea of Zen is to come in touch with the inner workings of our being, and to do this in the most direct way possible, without resorting to anything external or superadded. . . . Zen professes itself to be the spirit of Buddhism, but in fact it is the spirit of *all religions and philosophies*."<sup>110</sup> (Italics mine) By comparison, in his wartime 1944 book, *Nihonteki Reisei* (Japanese Spirituality), Suzuki argued for the utter uniqueness of Japanese Zen in what can only be described as a *völkisch* pretention to earthiness: "It was only when Chinese Ch'an met the samurai culture of the Kamakura that one finds the blossoming of 'authentic spiritual insight,' since the samurai, 'who had immediate connections to the peasantry,' represent a

culture 'coming from the earth.'<sup>111</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Suzuki never alluded either to the oppressive samurai-peasant relationship, including the right in early modern Japan to strike down any peasant who wasn't properly obeisant, or even to the militaristic character of the samurai. And it was utterly unthinkable that samurai, as members of the ruling class, would come into physical contact with the earth through toiling in the fields.

As for Dürckheim, unlike Yasutani, he did *not* continue his rightwing political activism, instead presenting himself in the postwar era solely as a spiritual/psychological healer. In fact, Wehr seemed perplexed by Dürckheim's thoroughgoing apolitical attitude in the postwar era, writing: "Surely, from then on [i.e., after the war] his emphatic restraint with respect to statements (in word and deed) that could be interpreted politically is striking. The question, however, is, if a person who experienced Being is not at the same time a contemporary with the duty not to shut oneself off to the larger social process?"<sup>112</sup> Much the same thing can be said about Suzuki's similarly apolitical attitude in the postwar period.

Nevertheless, when examined closely, traces of Dürckheim's wartime views are to be found in his postwar writings. For example, Dürckheim described the key Zen understanding of *hara* (J. lit. stomach), often referred to as the "seat of enlightenment," as follows:

When a man possesses a fully developed *hara* he has the strength and precision to achieve actions that otherwise he could never achieve, even with the most perfect technique, the closest attention, or the strongest will power. Only what is done with *hara* succeeds completely, just as life as a whole can be lived in perfection only when a man is truly one with

his primordial center. So every manifestation of it whether in battle, in art or in love succeeds for him who has gained *hara*.<sup>113</sup>



**Kamikaze with puppy**

While success in either the arts or love, thanks to being "truly one with [one's] primordial center" is not an ethical question per se, the same cannot be said of success *in battle*, the essence of which is to destroy the enemy. Yet, for Dürckheim, both during the war and even after it, all of these actions are conflated with one another without the slightest suggestion of incongruity, let alone moral difference. Thus, there is no hint that success in battle might conceivably conflict with the very first precept that all Buddhists, lay or cleric, vow to follow – to abstain from taking life.

In addition, it is interesting to note that even in the postwar period the suicidal *kamikaze* pilots



were a source of inspiration for Dürckheim. In 1949 he wrote that the *kamikaze* pilots proved "that already in life there is a dying of man that is not only a dying of life, but of death, too."<sup>114</sup> And in a conversation shortly before his death he called *kamikaze* pilots an example of a state of mind "beyond all duality" (G. *jenseits aller Dualität*).<sup>115</sup>

Needless to say, possession of a state of mind "beyond all duality" is tantamount to claiming that these typically teenage pilots were fully enlightened and ignoring the pressure they were under from their commanders to sacrifice their young lives. Nevertheless, this claim was by no means unique to Dürckheim. For example, in May 1945 the Sōtō Zen scholar-priest Masanaga Reihō described these pilots as follows: "The source of the spirit of the Special Attack Forces [*kamikaze*] lies in the denial of the individual self and the rebirth of the soul, which takes upon itself the burden of history. From ancient times Zen has described this conversion of mind as the achievement of complete enlightenment."<sup>116</sup>

The monumental death and suffering that accompanied World War II (aka the Pacific War in Japan) cannot be attributed to Zen any more than it can to Christianity. Yet, the Zen school's centuries-long connection to Japan's traditional warriors allowed wartime Zen leaders, Suzuki included, to play a leading role in support of Japanese militarism and fascism even though it was only one of many sects of Buddhism (and Shinto) to have done so. When taken as a whole, it is hardly surprising that, as noted above, Hitler would lament, "Why didn't we have the religion of the Japanese who regard sacrifice for the Fatherland as the highest good?"

Although Hitler is long gone, it is astonishing that even in the postwar period both Dürckheim and Suzuki, not to mention Yasutani, succeeded so well in promoting the "unity of Zen and the sword" in the West. That

is to say, promoting a form of a Zen shorn of its *ethical roots* in Buddhism, most especially the first precept proscribing the taking of life. It was, moreover, a form of martial spirituality that few if any of the disciples and students of these teachers either seriously questioned or took the time to research carefully.

Many Zen practitioners in the US and other Western countries reject the charge that the unity of Zen and the sword is not a Buddhist teaching. Well-known Zen figures Gary Snyder and Nelson Foster, for example, claim that when Suzuki spoke of the sword in relationship to Zen, "he [Suzuki] was speaking metaphorically, not of tempered steel and bloody death but of a figurative sword and the revivifying, transformative experience of 'body and mind falling away.' When the sword plays this sort of role in human life, obviously it is not a weapon of self-defense or an instrument of killing."<sup>117</sup>

Inasmuch as Westerners were unaware of Suzuki's wartime writings, it is not surprising that they accepted Suzuki's postwar explanation of the manner in which Zen metaphysics infused the body of swordsmanship. Nevertheless, there were a few critics who refused to hold Suzuki blameless for his conflation of Zen and the sword. In 1959 Suzuki defended himself in the publication of an enlarged edition of his original 1938 work, now renamed *Zen and Japanese Culture*:

Inasmuch as Zen is a form of Buddhism and Buddhism is professedly a religion of compassion, how can Zen endorse the profession of the swordsman? This is a criticism we frequently hear from the readers of my books. But I hope they now have come to understand what lies underneath swordsmanship and how this is related to the training of Zen. For



as most students of Oriental culture may understand by this time, whatever field of art the Japanese may study they always emphasize the importance of the "subjective" side of it, giving to its technique a secondary almost a negligible, consideration. . . . Thus the sword is no longer the weapon to kill indiscriminately, but it is one of the avenues through which life opens up its secrets to us.<sup>118</sup>

In order to aid his readers "to understand what lies underneath swordsmanship and how this is related to the training of Zen" Suzuki's 1959 edition expanded one of the chapters in his 1938 book, i.e., "Zen and Swordsmanship," and added an entirely new chapter, i.e., "Zen and Swordsmanship II." In his expanded chapter a still defensive Suzuki writes:

There has been much misunderstanding in the West as regards the spirit, function and discipline of the samurai . . . . The perfect swordsman avoids quarreling or fighting. Fighting means killing. How can one human being bring himself to kill a fellow human being? We are all meant to love one another and not to kill. It is abhorrent that one should be thinking all the time of fighting and coming out victorious. We are moral beings, we are not to lower ourselves to the state of animality. What is the use of becoming a fine swordsman if he loses his dignity? The best thing is to become a victor without fighting.<sup>119</sup>

If this quotation suggests that Suzuki became a pacifist in the postwar period, this is not the case, for he continues:

The sword is an inauspicious instrument to kill *in some unavoidable circumstances*. When it is to be used, therefore, it ought to be the sword that gives life and not the sword that kills. . . . The point is, however, to utilize the art as a means to advance in the study of the Way (*tao*). When it is properly handled, it helps us in an efficient way to contribute to the cultivation of the mind and spirit. . . . The sword, therefore, is to be an instrument to kill the ego, which is the root of all quarrels and fightings."<sup>120</sup> (*Italics mine*)

This is the same Suzuki who explained the "essence of Zen" to his Imperial Officer readers in June 1941 as follows:

The character of the Japanese people is to come straight to the point and pour their entire body and mind into the attack. This is the character of the Japanese people and, at the same time, the essence of Zen. . . . It isn't easy to acquire the mental state in which one is prepared to die. I think the best shortcut to acquire this frame of mind is none other than Zen, for Zen is the fundamental ideal of religion.

As noted above, a translation of the entire article is available [here](#).

While Suzuki's postwar metaphysical explanations of the relationship of Zen and the sword were widely accepted in the West, there were critics at home, familiar with his wartime writings *in Japanese*, who were unwilling to do so. The Rinzaï Zen scholar-priest Ichikawa Hakugen described Suzuki, starting as early as

the first Sino-Japanese of 1894-5, as follows:

[Suzuki] considered the Sino-Japanese War to be religious practice designed to punish China in order to advance humanity. This is, at least in its format, the very same logic used to support the fifteen years of warfare devoted to "The Holy War for the Construction of a New Order in East Asia." Suzuki didn't stop to consider that the war to punish China had not started with an attack on Japanese soil, but, instead, took place on the continent of China. Suzuki was unable to see the war from the viewpoint of the Chinese people, whose lives and natural environment were being devastated. Lacking this reflection, he considered the war of aggression on the continent as religious practice, as justifiable in the name of religion. . . .

The logic that Suzuki used to support his "religious conduct" was that of "the sword that kills is identical with the sword that gives life" and "kill one in order that many may live." It was the experience of "holy war" that spread this logic throughout all of Asia.<sup>121</sup>

And in perhaps the greatest irony, it was Dürckheim's letter of introduction to Suzuki in postwar Japan that directly launched the "unity of Zen and the sword" into the American mainstream. In Europe, Dürckheim had his own contribution to make.

## Series Conclusion

Let me begin by expressing my deep and

sincere appreciation to Professor Karl Baier of the University of Vienna. His research on the *völkisch* nature of one major strand of Nazi religiosity as it related to Count Karlfried Dürckheim has been a true revelation to me, one that has provided an invaluable prism through which to view not only Nazi but Japanese wartime spirituality as well. I can only hope that readers share my appreciation of Prof. Baier's insights as expressed in Part II of this series.

WW II, in all its manifestations, was the greatest bloodletting in recorded history, with an estimated death toll of some 60 million human beings or 2.5% of the world's population. Of this number, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union caused the death of somewhere between 22 to 30 million Russians while Japan's invasion of China took the lives of 10 to 20 million Chinese. Additionally, German dead amounted to between 7 and 9 million soldiers and civilians while Japan lost a total of approximately 3 million of its people.

In pointing this out, it is not the author's intent to suggest that Count Karlfried Dürckheim or D.T. Suzuki, let alone any of the other Zen-related persons featured in this series, were directly responsible for this unprecedented carnage. None of these persons killed so much as a single human being in this conflict. Yet, this does not mean they were innocent either.

Both the Nazi and Japanese military leadership were deeply aware of the importance of what the Japanese called *shisō-sen* or "thought war." In his writings, Suzuki noted that Zen had long "passively sustained" the samurai in battle, i.e., by enhancing their mental concentration and facilitating their acceptance of death. It was this readiness to die that Suzuki, together with his many fellow Zen leaders, sought to inculcate in Japan's modern soldiery and, through his translated writings, among the Nazis as well.

For his part, Dürckheim might well be

described as Suzuki's "alter ego" among the Nazis, promoting the Japanese warrior's embrace of death as an ideal model for German soldiery. At the same time, within Japan, Dürckheim tirelessly sought to strengthen the bonds of unity and mutual support between the wartime allies.

In the midst of the massive destruction their countries faced at war's end, not to mention the horrendous destruction their countries inflicted on others, how did these two men react? In the midst of defeat, were they filled with remorse? Or bitterness? Or disillusionment? Did they recognize or repent of the contribution each of them had made to the outcome?

In Dürckheim's case, he wrote the following to a friend in the last days of the war: "The immeasurable suffering of Germany will bring the German people to a higher level and help give birth to a better, less materialistic nation."<sup>122</sup> One wonders whether the "immeasurable suffering" Germany *imposed on others*, especially the people of the Soviet Union, not to mention Jews, was of any concern to him. As for the German people, Dürckheim appears to believe they found themselves in their abject position due to having been overly "materialistic," a condition that, *thanks to the war*, they would now be able to overcome despite, or perhaps due to, the immeasurable suffering they had experienced.

As for Suzuki, in the months and years following the war he, too, would discover an admirable dimension to Japan's wartime actions. In his 1947 book, *Nihon no Reiseika* (The Spiritualization of Japan), he wrote: "Through the great sacrifice of the Japanese people and nation, it can be said that the various peoples of the countries of the Orient had the opportunity to awaken both economically and politically."<sup>123</sup> To the extent that Western colonialism in Asia was weakened as a result of the war, there is a degree of truth in Suzuki's assertion. However, he failed to

recognize the immense suffering of the Chinese, Korean and other Asian peoples who had endured *Japanese* invasion and colonial rule.

In words written for the consumption of others, there is always the danger they may be directed more toward pleasing the writer's audience than as an expression of the author's own true feelings. Consider this terse entry in Suzuki's diary on August 15, 1945, i.e., the formal date of Japan's surrender: "The meaningless war has thus dramatically [been] brought to an end."<sup>124</sup> What was it that made the war "meaningless"? Was it because Japan had lost the war? Or because Japan should never have started the war? Or because it had been a mistake to attack such a powerful nation as the U.S.?

Or perhaps Suzuki meant it was a "senseless" war in that so many people had died for nothing. Readers must decide this for themselves, for we simply don't know Suzuki's inner thoughts. That said, Suzuki does provide a bit more insight into his war-related thinking in a series of diary entries in March 1945 describing the near daily, relentless incendiary bombing of Tokyo and other major Japanese cities by hundreds of B-29s. On March 13, 1945, i.e., some five months before the end of the war, he writes:

[March] 13 Tu. / 40°-55° Overcast all day. / Mostly reading. / Rei came in morning in response to my telegram. Reported about heart-rending sights in Tokyo and extents of ruins caused by the fires. / Mrs Okamoto (Mitsu-ko) dropped in wishing to get information about Tokyo. They both stayed to lunch. / Sad stories of the suffer[er]s heard on every side, is this war worth all that?<sup>125</sup>

As Japan's cities turned to ashes, accompanied by massive loss of mostly civilian life, Suzuki was no doubt but one of many Japanese asking this same question. Yet, had Japan been *winning* the war, instead of losing it, would the war have then been "worth all that"? While Suzuki does not address this question he does add in the same entry: "The war caused by ambitions of ignorant and power-thirsty militarists."<sup>126</sup>

Suzuki's supporters will no doubt point to these words as proof of his longstanding opposition to World War II. If so, the question must be asked what Suzuki's reaction was to the *outbreak* of the war between Japan, the U.S. and England four years earlier? At the time of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, i.e., December 8, 1941 (Japan time), Suzuki confided to his diary:

[December] 8 Mo./47°- 64°/ Fine weather. / Japanese-American conference reported failure. State of war between Japan and America and England declared in the Western parts of the Pacific. All things move along a line of the inevitable. Human powers altogether helpless to shape their own course of action. / Makino, grandson of Count Makino and student of the Peer's school called.

<sup>127</sup>  
..

Here Suzuki effectively claims that war with the U.S. and England was *inevitable*. While, on the one hand, Suzuki was no war enthusiast, he nevertheless fails to criticize Japan's military masters for having started the war. How could Japanese military leaders, or anyone else, be held responsible when, according to Suzuki, "Human powers altogether helpless to shape their own course of action"?

As for Suzuki's attitude toward Japan's full-

scale invasion of China in July 1937, we know nothing since entries for the first 196 days of 1937 are, for whatever reason, missing from the Matsugaoka-published version of his wartime diaries.<sup>128</sup> It is clear, however, that Suzuki was aware of Japan's invasion and the linkage being made to *Zen-Bushidō* ideology. In his 1938 book Suzuki writes:

There is a document recently talked very much about in connection with the military operations in China. It is known as the *Hagakure* which literally means "Hidden under the Leaves," for it is one of the virtues of the samurai not to display himself, not to blow his horn, but to keep himself away from the public eye and be doing good for his fellow-beings. To the compilation of this book, which consists of various notes, anecdotes, moral sayings, etc., a Zen monk had his part to contribute.<sup>129</sup>

While these comments don't prove Suzuki supported the invasion, they do suggest that Suzuki had no objection to the linkage being made. And if only in hindsight, it is almost grotesque to even intimate that the Japanese soldier in China was "doing good for his fellow-beings."

What can be said with confidence is that in light of both Dürckheim and Suzuki's postwar writings, neither man expressed the least regret, nor accepted the least personal responsibility, for their moral blindness in having promoted the unconditional acceptance of death on behalf of two aggressive, totalitarian states. As this series has revealed, each one contributed to the greatest war and accompanying loss of life in world history. And, of course, the same thing can be said about Yasutani Haku'un and Eugen Herrigel. All four



men, and many others like them, were indeed "kindred spirits."

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### This is the third in a three part series.

I. Brian Daizen Victoria, [D.T. Suzuki, Zen and the Nazis](#)

II. Karl Baier, [The Formation and Principles of Count Dürckheim's Nazi Worldview and his interpretation of Japanese Spirit and Zen](#)

### See also

Brian Daizen Victoria, [Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki](#)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the development of the political relationship between Germany and Japan, see Krebs, Gerhard. "Von Hitlers Machtübernahme zum Pazifischen Krieg (1933-1941)" in Krebs, Gerhard / Martin, Bernd (ed.): *Formierung und Fall der Achse Berlin-Tokyo*. München: Iudicium 1994, pp. 11-26.

<sup>2</sup> The term "social question" usually refers to all of the social wrongs connected to the industrial revolution, especially the emergence of class struggles that threaten the unity of a society. In Germany, the concept of "Volksgemeinschaft" (a community of the people) was promoted as the Nazi alternative to deep divisions within modern society. Thus, the Nazis were interested in learning how their Anti-Comintern partner Japan dealt with this issue.

<sup>3</sup> Wehr, "The Life and Work of Karlfried Graf Dürckheim." Available on the Web. (accessed October 23, 2013).

- <sup>4</sup> Goettmann, *The Path of Initiation: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Karlfried Graf Durckheim*, p. 29.
- <sup>5</sup> Wehr, "[The Life and Work of Karlfried Graf Durckheim](#)." Available on the Web. (accessed October 23, 2013).
- <sup>6</sup> Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim. Ein Leben im Zeichen der Wandlung*, p. 96.
- <sup>7</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p.35
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-37.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.
- <sup>10</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, p.96.
- <sup>11</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 25, 2011, p. 60.
- <sup>12</sup> Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, p. 55.
- <sup>13</sup> Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, frontispiece.
- <sup>14</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, frontispiece. See Otto Tolischus, *Tokyo Record*.
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 25.
- <sup>16</sup> Suzuki, "A Buddhist View of War." *Light of Dharma* 4, 1904, pp. 181-82.
- <sup>17</sup> See, for example, Suzuki's frequent references to the identity of Zen and Japanese character in "[Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki](#)." Available on the Web.
- <sup>18</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol 2, Ch. XLVIII.
- <sup>19</sup> Satō, "Brian Victoria and the Question of Scholarship," p. 150.
- <sup>20</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, pp. 36-37.
- <sup>21</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 26, 2012, p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim. Ein Leben im Zeichen der Wandlung* p. 97.
- <sup>25</sup> Dürckheim *Der Weg ist das Ziel*, pp. 41-42.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>27</sup> See Dürckheim: *Der Weg ist das Ziel. Gespräch mit Karl Schnelting in der Reihe "Zeugen des Jahrhunderts,"* pp. 41-42.
- <sup>28</sup> Wehr, "[The Life and Work of Karlfried Graf Durckheim](#)." Available on the Web. (accessed October 23, 2013).
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>32</sup> Wehr, '[The Life and Work of Karlfried Graf Durckheim](#).' Available on the Web. (accessed October 22, 2013).
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 13. Note that Awa Kenzō had died in 1939 after a prolonged illness. Thus it would have been impossible for Dürckheim to have received instruction from him.
- <sup>34</sup> Dürckheim, *Der Weg ist das Ziel*, pp. 43-44.
- <sup>35</sup> Yamada Shoji shared this information with the author in a personal interview with the author in the common room of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies on October 18, 2013.
- <sup>36</sup> Yamada, *Shots in the Dark*, pp. 44-45.



<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Yamada, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Wehr, "[The Life and Work of Karlfried Graf Durckheim](#)." Available on the Web. (accessed October 22, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> In terms of Zen's alleged connection to the "martial arts," the historical reality is that Zen (Ch. Chan) was introduced to Japan as an independent strand of Buddhist practice in the 13<sup>th</sup> century just when the warrior or samurai class had wrested political power away from the emperor and aristocracy. For reasons that D.T. Suzuki and others have elaborated, Zen practice appealed to the warrior class and, as a result, was patronized by them. Warriors especially looked to Zen training as a method of overcoming their fear of death. Thus, Zen's true connection was to a specific social class whose occupation was fighting (and dying in) the wars of their feudal lords, wars typically involving the use of the sword. To the extent that Zen has a connection to the "martial arts" it is a connection to fostering a mental attitude allowing one to wield the sword without fear or hesitation.

<sup>46</sup> For further discussion of this topic see Yamada Shōji's article, "The Myth of Zen in the Art of Archery."

<sup>47</sup> Yamada, *Shots in the Dark*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> Herrigel's enthusiasm is also attested to by my collaborator, Karl Baier, who has had the opportunity to review his wartime essay, "*Die*

*Aufgabe der Philosophie im neuen Reich*."

<sup>49</sup> Herrigel, "Nationalsozialismus und Philosophie," p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Goettmann, *Dialogue on the Path of Initiation: The Life and Thought of Karlfried Graf Durckheim*, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Yamada, *Shots in the Dark*, p. 207.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Victoria, "Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki." Available on the Web at: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Brian-Victoria/3973>.

<sup>57</sup> Wehr, "The Life and Work of Karlfried Graf Durckheim." Available on the Web at: <http://www.stillnessspeaks.com/assets/books/1/Karlfried%20Graf%20Durckheim%20Becoming%20Real.pdf> (accessed October 23, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim – Ein Leben im Zeichen der Wandlung*, p. 120.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> Contained in an e-mail to the author from Hans-Joachim Bieber on June 15, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 21, 2007, p. 114.

<sup>69</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 23, 2009, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 23, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 25, 2011, p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 23, 2009, pp. 30-40 inclusive.

<sup>75</sup> Dürckheim, *Der Weg ist das Ziel: Gespräch mit Karl Schnelting in der Reihe "Zeugen des Jahrhunderts,"* p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 43. Since the question of archery as a form of Zen practice has already been addressed, it is unnecessary to repeat it here.

<sup>77</sup> See related entries in Suzuki, "English Diaries," Nos. 21, 23, 25, 26.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, p. 488.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of Suzuki's earliest approach to both the emperor and Count Makino, see Victoria, "The 'Negative Side' of D. T. Suzuki's Relationship to War," pp. 113-14.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Victoria, "Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki." Available on the Web at: <http://japanfocus.org/-Brian-Victoria/3973>.

<sup>81</sup> Arai, "Shūsenzen tainichi doitsujin no taiken," p. 112.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, this question has been discussed in recent years by Kubota Ji'un, then abbot of the Zen organization Yasutani created in the postwar era, i.e., the Sanbō-kyōdan (Three Treasures Association). This discussion is available on the Web at: <http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Apology.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 168.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>93</sup> Dürckheim, "Fukan-Zazen-Gi. Ein Text des Zen-Meisters Dōgen, erläutert von Meister Hakuun Yasutani, übersetzt aus dem Japanischen von Fumio Hashimoto," pp. 73-91, and "Über die Übung des Zen. Vorlesungen von Zen-Meister Hakuun Yasutani Roshi, englische Übersetzung von Philipp Kapleau, aus dem Englischen übertragen von G. von Minden," pp. 93-118.

<sup>94</sup> Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim: Ein Leben im Zeichen der Wandlung*, p. 217.

<sup>95</sup> Yasutani, "Glückwunsch zum 70. Geburtstag von Graf Dürckheim von seinem Weggefährten," pp. 475-478.

<sup>96</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 25, 2011, p. 68.

- <sup>97</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 26, 2012, p. 3.
- <sup>98</sup> Suzuki, *Zen und die Kultur Japans*, p. 9.
- <sup>99</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 47. The quoted material extends to the bottom of p. 50 in the English edition. In the German edition, *Zen und die Kultur Japans*, the quoted material begins on the middle of p. 60 and extends through the top of p. 63. I also wish to extend my appreciation to Sarah Panzer at the University of Chicago who made me aware of this article and provided the newspaper clipping.
- <sup>100</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 49.
- <sup>101</sup> Maltarich, *Samurai and Supermen: National Socialist Views of Japan*, p. 155.
- <sup>102</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 226.
- <sup>103</sup> Albrecht, *Das Geheimnis japanischer Kraft*. All quotations taken from this booklet appear in the partial, non-paginated English translation available on the Web at: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/japan.htm> (accessed October 16, 2013).
- <sup>104</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 35
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.66-67.
- <sup>106</sup> Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot*, p. 271.
- <sup>107</sup> Werblowsky, "Some Observations on Recent Studies of Zen," p. 321.
- <sup>108</sup> Sharf, "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited." Available on the Web at: [http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/whose%20zen\\_sharf.pdf](http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/whose%20zen_sharf.pdf).
- <sup>109</sup> Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism." Available on the Web at: [http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/whose%20zen\\_sharf.pdf](http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/whose%20zen_sharf.pdf).
- <sup>110</sup> Suzuki, "A Reply from D. T. Suzuki," *Encounter* 17, No. 4, 1961, p. 44.
- <sup>111</sup> Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism." Available on the Web at: [http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/whose%20zen\\_sharf.pdf](http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/whose%20zen_sharf.pdf).
- <sup>112</sup> Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim – Ein Leben im Zeichen der Wandlung*, p. 129.
- <sup>113</sup> Dürckheim, *Hara* (audio version).
- <sup>114</sup> Dürckheim, *Japan und die Kultur der Stille*, p. 51.
- <sup>115</sup> Dürckheim: *Mein Weg zur Mitte*, p. 122.
- <sup>116</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 139.
- <sup>117</sup> Foster and Snyder, "The Fog of World War II -- Setting the Record Straight on D.T. Suzuki," *tricycle*, summer 2010. Available on the Web. (accessed December 29, 2013).
- <sup>118</sup> Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, pp. 160-61.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132-34.
- <sup>122</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 167.
- <sup>123</sup> Wehr, *Karlfried Graf Dürckheim: Ein Leben im Zeichen der Wandlung*, p. 120.
- <sup>123</sup> Suzuki, *Nihon no Reiseika*, p. 7.
- <sup>124</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 23, 2009, p. 101. For a summary of Suzuki's postwar comments on the war see Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 147-52.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>127</sup> Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 21, 2007, p. 86.

<sup>128</sup> See Suzuki, "English Diaries," No. 25, 2011. Had I received permission to visit Matsugaoka Bunkō, the whereabouts of this missing half-

year plus of Suzuki's diary is one of many questions I would have liked to ask. Japan's full-scale invasion of China resulted from an incident that began on evening of July 7, 1937.

<sup>129</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, pp. 45-46.