ZEN AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Also by Masao Abe

BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: Part One of
a two-volume sequel to *Zen and Western Thought*
THE EMPTYING GOD: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation
(co-author with seven theologians)
KITARŌ NISHIDA: An Inquiry into the Good
(co-translator with Christopher Ives)
A STUDY OF DŌGEN: His Philosophy and Religion
ZEN AND WESTERN THOUGHT
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A STUDY OF DŌGEN: His Philosophy and Religion
by Masao Abe (editor)

Zen and Comparative Studies

Part two of a two-volume sequel to
Zen and Western Thought

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Foreword

Steven Heine

This is the second volume of a two-volume sequel to the award-winning *Zen and Western Thought* (1985) by Masao Abe, the leading exponent of Japanese Buddhism in the West since the death of D. T. Suzuki and one of the major contemporary representatives of the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy founded by Nishida Kitarō. At the time of the publication of the original volume, Abe had for twenty years been lecturing at numerous American universities, including Chicago, Columbia, Princeton, Hawaii, and Claremont, and publishing in a variety of English-language journals of Buddhist studies and comparative religions, including *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, *The Eastern Buddhist*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Japanese Religions*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Numen*, *Philosophy East and West*, and *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, among many other scholarly outlets.

The central purpose underlying the collection of essays in *Zen and Western Thought*, edited by William R. LaFleur, is a clarification of the authentic spirit of Zen in light of the history of Buddhist thought and through critical comparisons with Western philosophy and religion. The book is divided into four parts: Zen and Its Elucidation; Zen, Buddhism, and Western Thought; Three Problems in Buddhism; and Religion in the Present and the Future. In each part, Abe draws on the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as expressed in a uniquely spontaneous, paradoxical fashion by classical Zen masters such as Lin-chi, Chao-chou, and Dōgen as well as his own mentor Hisamatsu Shin'ichi. Abe refutes several common misconceptions, including the views that Zen represents an anti-intellectualism or nihilism, and he contrasts the Zen approach to emptiness with the notions of Western philosophers which seem quite similar, such as Nietzsche's creative nihilism, Whitehead's process philosophy, and Tillich's 'courage to be' in the face of non-being. Through a comparative methodology, Abe constructs Zen philosophy as a spiritual foundation for humanity facing a critical turning point in history. He carefully explains that the notion of emptiness is not merely a form of negation in contrast to affirmation but a 'double negation' that negates and thereby surpasses the polarity between affirmation and negation.

Emptiness thus serves as a basis for a radical realism and a compassionate way of life which can function as a new dynamic and flexible cosmology for the global age.

After the publication of *Zen and Western Thought*, Abe published several volumes, including: his editing of a collection of essays in remembrance of D. T. Suzuki (*D. T. Suzuki: A Zen Life Remembered*, 1986); a translation with Christopher Ives of Nishida's first work (*Kitarō Nishida: An Inquiry into the Good*, 1990); his serving as the main contributor for a collection of essays on interfaith dialogue with eminent Western theologians (*The Emptying God: A Buddhist–Jewish–Christian Conversation*, 1990, edited by Ives and John Cobb); and his collected papers on Dōgen's philosophy of time, Buddha-nature, and the oneness of practice-attainment in comparison with Heidegger and Shinran (*A Study of Dōgen: His Philosophy and Religion*, 1992, edited by Steven Heine). As this is going to press, Abe is scheduled to publish a collection of his lectures in Japanese for the FAS Society, '*Kongen kara no shuppatsu*' (Departure from the Root-source), and a sequel to *The Emptying God* entitled *Divine Emptiness and Historical Fullness: A Buddhist–Jewish–Christian Conversation with Masao Abe* edited by Ives. Also, Donald Mitchell is compiling an anthology, '*Masao Abe: His Life of Dialogue*,' which will be a record of his dialogical activities in Japan and the West for the past four decades.

When Abe and I began planning the sequel to *Zen and Western Thought* at the request of Professor John Hick and Macmillan, we quickly realized that there was simply too much valuable material to contain in a single volume and we decided that it should be divided instead into several volumes. (In addition to the two-volume sequel, Abe is preparing a third volume, *A Study of the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, edited by James Fredericks, which will contain his explications and interpretations of Nishida and Hisamatsu as well as Tanabe Hajime and Nishitani Keiji.) The first sequel, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue* (1995), highlights Abe's participation in continuing ideological encounter and dialogue with a number of the most prominent Western theologians of the last half of the twentieth century representing a wide range of positions, including existential, mystical, process, kenotic, liberation and feminist theologies. The first and still the most important figure with whom Abe engaged in dialogue was Paul Tillich, the focus of one of the three sections in the volume. The remainder of the volume contains the record of his remarkable exchanges with Thomas Altizer, John Cobb, John Egan, Langdon Gilkey, Paul Knitter, Hans Küng and Marjorie Suchocki.

According to Abe, the forces of modernization, secularization and technologization continue to undermine traditional forms of religiosity while at the same time compelling a vibrant, mutually challenging encounter between Buddhism and Christianity, East and West, in pursuit of a universal and unifying global ideology that is also faithful to the integrity and the innate dissimilarities between the respective traditions.

The current volume returns to the basic structure and methodology of *Zen and Western Thought* in exploring the fundamentals of Zen religious experience, Zen and Western philosophy, current methodological issues in Zen studies, and the relation between Zen and Japanese culture and spirituality. Part One demonstrates the historical and ideological connections between Śākyamuni's basic doctrine of dependent co-origination and the Mahāyāna notion of emptiness, particularly as expressed in the Mādhyamika school and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, which serve as the background for the Zen view of *Nirvāṇa* realized in each and every impermanent moment (*setsuna-soku-nehan*). Abe contrasts the Zen experiential approach to emptiness with Western monotheistic notions of an objectifiable, transcendental theology which tend to generate dualities, and he stresses how Zen is based on an intensely subjective realization of Awakening, which overcomes polarities between knowing and speaking, living and dying, being and non-being, good and evil, the momentary and continuity, natural and supernatural and *Nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.

The second part critically explores affinities and divergences with Western thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Whitehead and Jung, each of whom in his own way tends to privilege being, substance, eternity, and enduring selfhood in contrast to the Zen emphasis on emptiness, insubstantiality, impermanence, and selflessness. Part Three, greatly influenced by Hisamatsu's philosophy of the FAS movement, demonstrates that Zen is neither a museum curiosity nor a disengaged method of contemplation. Rather, Zen, if properly interpreted, offers a viable approach for resolving contemporary social problems by virtue of the Bodhisattva's compassionate sense of commitment and responsibility based on the non-duality of self and world. In a historical era defined by pluralism, the flexibility of Zen's non-sustantive, non-dualistic philosophy can function as a paradigm for a tolerant, open-ended discourse required of all ideologies, whether religious, philosophical, scientific, or secular, seeking to overcome dogmatic, one-sided insistence.

Finally, Part Four examines the development of Zen in the context of Japanese religiosity marked by an interplay and syncretism between Buddhism and Shinto from the time Shōtoku Taishi introduced Buddhism into Japan through the development of the Kyoto School. In particular, Abe shows how Zen's formation in Japan during the Kamakura era in which samurai culture came to be dominant gave rise to a different approach emphasizing both ascetic discipline and aesthetic expression than is found in the Ch'an school in Sung China. In this section, as throughout the book and indeed his entire *oeuvre*, Abe makes a twofold plea for a better understanding of Zen on the part of the West and for an enhanced approach by Zen based on a critical self-reflective stance inspired by its encounter with the West.

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Finally, as in the case of editing *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, I greatly appreciate the efforts of the editors at Macmillan, and I am especially thankful for the opportunity to assist Masao Abe in the collection and dissemination of his eminently valuable work on Zen Buddhist and comparative studies.

Preface

Not relying on words or letters,
An independent self-transmitting apart from any teaching;
Directly pointing to the human Mind,
Awakening one's Original Nature, thereby actualizing
Buddhahood.

This expression, attributed to Bodhidharma, captures the fundamental significance of Zen theory and practice in the context of Buddhist thought and the field of religion in general. Almost all forms of Buddhism, especially in East Asia, rely on a certain *sūtra* or scripture as the source of truth. According to this standpoint, that which has no basis in scriptural authority cannot be called truth. Thus, almost all forms of Buddhism may be referred to as schools of 'Buddha's word.' By contrast, Zen does not rely on words or letters and directly points to one's mind as the universal Buddha Mind, and that is why Zen has sometimes been referred to as the school of 'Buddha mind.' This implies that Mind is self-transmitting independent of any particular *sūtra* or doctrinal teaching.

Due to this trans-linguistic, trans-scriptural character, the notion of 'comparative studies' with regard to Zen may seem quite alien. However, in the modern age, comparative studies is extremely important in understanding the nature of world philosophy of religion, and this approach can and must also be applied to an elucidation of Zen. The traditional Zen standpoint beyond words should be framed and analyzed in light of cultural history and comparative philosophy. The title of this collection of essays, which I wrote over a period of two decades, highlights the sharp contrast and conflict as well as the areas of compatibility and complementarity between Zen and comparative studies. In Part One, Fundamentals of Zen, I elucidate the meaning of Zen as a self-transmission of mind in its own terms. These essays take up the topics of 'ordinary mind is Tao,' life and death and good and evil, emptiness, selfhood, and education. On the other hand, in the essays in Part Two, Zen, Buddhism, and Western Thought, I situate Zen in a comparative philosophical context thought discussions of the Aristotelian notion

of Substance, Whitehead's notion of process, and Plato's idea of Form (eidos). Focusing on the problem of death, the article on 'The Problem of Death in the East and West' tries to elucidate the essential characters of Platonism, Christianity and Buddhism, especially Zen, through a systematic comparative approach.

In Part Three, Current Issues in Buddhism, I pick up a number of contemporary topics such as monotheism versus monism, time and self, human rights and religious tolerance from the angle of comparative studies. Finally, Part Four, Zen and Japanese Culture, attempts to clarify the role of Zen in terms of the intellectual history of Japan from ancient literature and Tokugawa Shinto thought to modern philosophy.