

## **“Beautiful Women Dig Graves”: Richard Baker-roshi, Imported Buddhism, and the Transmission of Ethics at the San Francisco Zen Center**

**Jason C. Bivins**

“I think you will have more difficulty in practicing zazen in America than we do in Japan.”

Shunryu Suzuki-roshi<sup>1</sup>

“Most changes that take place in the guise of development are dilutions, and often outright distortions, in the service of contemporary convenience and our own mental habits.”

Richard Baker-roshi<sup>2</sup>

In the autumn of 1983, Richard Baker-roshi went to Disneyland with his children. While there is nothing out of the ordinary about such trips in the United States, Baker’s journey exemplified a series of less conventional developments in American Zen Buddhism. Baker’s visit to “the Magic Kingdom” came on the heels of a vacation to the south of France to see Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and it also followed a series of celebrations with friends along the coast of northern California. These events occurred when Baker was to have walked from San Francisco to the Tassajara retreat, which Baker had intended as a time for uninterrupted reflection on the circumstances that had recently caused the board of directors at the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) to reprimand him severely.

Baker had been ordered by the SFZC board to take a leave of absence from his position as abbot, which he had held since late 1970 when founder Shunryu Suzuki-roshi named him as his successor.<sup>3</sup> Baker had allegedly engaged in sexual and financial misconduct, and, as a symbolic act of contrition, he had announced his intention to walk between the SFZC’s two most popular sites. Yet in the flamboyant and unpredictable style with which he had helped popularize a distinctly

American style of Zen, Baker strayed from his intended path. Such “scandals”—for this is how Baker’s erring was seen by many observers both inside and outside his community—are not uncommon in American religions; indeed, it may be an idiosyncrasy of Americans to focus disproportionately on the perceived moral or doctrinal shortcomings of religious leaders (particularly those from outside the Christian “mainstream”). What made Baker’s tribulations particularly significant, however, was the fact that they occurred during a period of intense public scrutiny of Asian religious communities in the United States. These associations have prompted critics of Baker and of the SFZC to note the institution’s commingling of religious and commercial interests and to suggest that Baker was merely a huckster trapped by his own avarice and ambition (a frequent charge against figures prominent in “nonmainstream” religions). Such observations, which I discuss in further detail below, ignore much of what is significant in the turmoil (or, as one practitioner referred to it, “the Apocalypse”) of the SFZC.<sup>4</sup>

The lens through which such episodes should be understood is not one of judgment or condemnation, though there is certainly much to be learned from the distinctions between Zen Buddhism as practiced in East Asia and that which has been embraced by American religious “consumers” since the 1960s. Nor is it particularly instructive to focus exclusively on the over-sized personality and public profile of Baker-roshi himself. Rather, this constellation of issues and events is best seen as part of the broader dynamics of the cultural importation of religious traditions and the transformations they undergo in these shifts. More specifically, the story of the SFZC illustrates the complicated relationship that many American practitioners have to Zen Buddhist ethics—as a binding feature of a “home” tradition—and the ways this relationship shapes the process of importation and adaptation.

In my explorations of these themes, I make a number of stops before arriving at the “Apocalypse” of 1983. First, I describe some of the theoretical and cultural issues surrounding the American appropriation of Zen (and, to some extent, of Asian religions more broadly). Second, I suggest an interpretive framework for understanding the patterns of these appropriations. The interpretive strategies employed by Baker and other community members recall a pattern established by the Transcendentalists, Victorian-era converts, and later by post-World War II intellectuals and artists (especially by the Beat writers). Third, I describe the practice and the place of ethics in the SFZC under Baker. Fourth, I show how the “scandals” that erupted in 1983 can be understood as issuing from the gaps in practitioners’ interpretations

of Zen. In other words, by privileging certain types of practice over others, and through a relative disregard for ethical questions, the SFZC was left without a language for assessing what had transpired among them. Finally, I discuss some of the ways the SFZC has responded to this crisis and the meanings this response has for thinking about religious transmissions and importation in the United States. My chronological focus is primarily on the events leading up to the “Apocalypse” and the mid-1990s, when the SFZC articulated its ethical sensibilities and procedural matters governing conflict resolution.

No discourse about American religions can avoid the problems of transmission, the dynamics of change and adaptation, or the influence of the American religious marketplace in reshaping religious traditions. One of the more important subplots running through these discourses is the status of religious ethics in the process of transplantation or “importation.” Certainly it would be inaccurate to suggest that religious traditions and their ethics are fixed or static prior to their transmission; no aspect of human cultures can be essentialized in this way. But there are nonetheless substantive changes that occur when religions are brought to the United States, many of which are products of the needs or anxieties of American religious “consumers.” In the case of imported Zen, would-be American practitioners have participated in an idiosyncratic (re)construction of a centuries-old tradition in order to accommodate or satisfy a specific set of contemporary needs and desires. This engagement with Zen has emphasized intellectual abstraction and indeterminacy over practical ethics, an interpretive strategy that partly shaped the crisis at the San Francisco Zen Center.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, such selective appropriations of Zen, and the emergence of communities whose practice is based on this understanding, may illustrate the evolution of “white Buddhism” or “Protestant Buddhism” in North America more generally. As I elaborate below, North Americans became enchanted by Buddhism in growing numbers during the 1950s. Amid a network of social meanings and expectations specific to young, alienated, elite Caucasians, this emerging audience for Zen Buddhism helped fashion a new religious idiom from the tension between their own desires and the particulars—ethical and otherwise—of Zen as it was transmitted. I am not suggesting that something is either “purely” Zen or “purely” American, two discrete and contained realities, nor that the scandals of the SFZC erupted *because of* the selective interpretations of American practitioners. Rather, I am pointing out that the meanings American Zen practitioners have sought often do not map easily onto the tradition they hope to appropriate. The gap between these sets of

meanings affords us a useful interpretive framework through which to explore the SFZC's complicated narrative.

One of the distinct characteristics of American Zen as found in the SFZC is its propensity for creolization. By creolization, I mean the process by which a "home discourse" or grammar, which contains its own set of nonnegotiable cultural demands, is fused with bits and pieces of vocabulary from other idioms.<sup>6</sup> The ways in which certain cultural or ethical convictions held by American Zen practitioners were melded with a very specific Zen Buddhist idiom, shaped largely by D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts in the 1950s, is an example of this process. From this point of view, the scandals of the SFZC can be seen as one result of a group's imposition of a singular set of meanings on a plural and heterogenous tradition, specifically to the exclusion (or, at the very least, to the significant marginalization) of that tradition's ethical content. As Stephen Prothero has shown with regard to the Theosophist Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, for example, those who seek out Asian religions have often already formed clear ideas about what a religious tradition means and how it can be appropriated for their particular needs.<sup>7</sup>

There is also a complicated relationship between American and Japanese understandings of the precepts. Zen Buddhism has, of course, often been the subject of religious improvisations, particularly in Japan. In highlighting these complications, I am not claiming that American Zen is adaptive whereas other expressions of the tradition are not. By examining the interpretive double movement as a central aspect of the Americanization of Zen (and specifically of the scandals at the SFZC), I do not mean to imply that Japanese Zen communities always and everywhere pay perfect attention to the precepts. Indeed, scandals have occurred in Japanese Zen as well (and, in the Soto School, quite recently). It is outside the scope of this essay to document fully the way in which the precepts functioned in Japan during the SFZC's formative period. I raise this issue to clarify my methodological and historical focus: while similar events may have transpired in both Japanese and American Zen, the latter's experiences can be read in the ways articulated herein.

Taking the above interpretive strategy as a point of departure, I refer to the patterns of meaning-making among SFZC practitioners—and among white importers of Buddhism more generally—as the "interpretive double movement": the ongoing process whereby those in search of an alternative to their religious culture impose their own idiosyncratic values onto an alternate religious tradition, all the while remaining paradoxically within the interpretive confines of the culture from which they hope to escape.<sup>8</sup> This double

movement shows how the lives and contexts of would-be practitioners influenced the ways in which they understood, appropriated, and practiced ethics at the SFZC. The attraction of Zen for many at the SFZC was precisely the extent to which it was seen as “wholly other” than traditions they had known. Zen seemed free from, among other things, the dead weight of an ethical system, of a rule orientation that—in the minds of importers—could only constrain rather than liberate. In this way, the stylistic quirks of practice at the SFZC reveal as much about adherents as they do about Zen. In particular, practitioners’ understanding of Zen has tended to privilege meditation above all other types of thought or activity, notably to the exclusion of ethical concerns. These processes are not absolutely unique to the United States; indeed, questions about Zen’s purported amorality, about the ways practitioners project their desires onto tradition, and about reconstructing tradition in new environments have long characterized Zen Buddhism. The story of the SFZC, then, is not one of “radical Americanization” but of a specific community’s historically and culturally idiosyncratic way of working through longstanding issues. Seen from this perspective, the ethical crisis surrounding Baker-roshi is indicative of the complicated and highly selective process of importing or adapting a religious tradition. It is to the historical sources of this interpretive pattern that I now turn.<sup>9</sup>

### **Rites of Passage: The Importation of Buddhism in America**

It is often said of Buddhism that it adapts to other cultures with uncanny ease, mingling with indigenous practices and values so as better to establish itself in a new territory. This commingling has certainly been evident in the history of American Buddhism, but the energy behind such adaptations has often come less from Buddhist immigrants from Asia or Asian-American Buddhists than from disaffected American “consumers” who seek in Buddhism an alternative to their own culture. Jan Nattier has described a useful framework for sorting through these distinctions. She writes that there are primarily three ways by which religious traditions travel: as imports (where “foreign” traditions are actively sought out by potential practitioners as alternatives to the religious traditions available to them in their own country), as exports (where the traditions travel via evangelization or proselytization), and as baggage (where the traditions are brought to another country by immigrant practitioners). My theoretical and historical focus is on the import mode, where “Buddhism is actively sought out by the recipient” whose initial familiarity with

Buddhism can come in a number of ways, but most commonly through engagement with texts.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Buddhism is perhaps unique among the religions active in the United States in that—at least in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—texts and philosophies were avidly consumed by Americans of Christian backgrounds long before there was a significant Asian-American population.<sup>11</sup> In other words, in many cases of religious importation, an audience must exist before a tradition can make inroads into a culture; a sufficient amount of cultural demand is necessary before religions can begin to circulate widely.<sup>12</sup> As will become more evident below, both the degree and the kind of demand in the case of imported Buddhism differ from the process undergone by other religions brought to the United States (though the specific dynamics of Buddhist importation in this country may have been replicated elsewhere in the West). And while many of the earliest SFZC practitioners came to the center because of contact with practicing Buddhists (or those who had studied with them), they nonetheless drew on the patterns of importation and interpretation I describe.

The audience that participated in the culture to which the SFZC belonged, and which, in many ways, accounts for the center's population during the 1970s and 1980s, was certainly shaped by the specific historical context of post-World War II America. Yet it is possible to see their double movement as heir to earlier, historically influential, and "demand-driven" appropriations of Asian religions. There is, in the "Concord Orientalism" of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, a historical predecessor for the strategies of cultural importation/appropriation later taken up by both the Beats and the SFZC.<sup>13</sup> Zen Buddhism did not appear in the United States, however, until the end of the nineteenth century, following a visit from Soen Shaku, the abbot of Kamakura's Engakuji Temple, to the World's Parliament of Religions.<sup>14</sup> The distinctive characteristics of Zen would significantly affect the interpretive double movement of later audiences, and it is necessary to discuss these distinctions briefly. In general, Zen has long been understood as a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, which "seeks direct access to Truth or Reality through meditation."<sup>15</sup> Zen certainly focuses on more than just meditation—including an emphasis on discipline, the necessity of ritual activity, and the ubiquity of community life to canonical understandings of the tradition—yet foregrounding meditation helps distinguish Zen from other variants of Mahayana Buddhism.

The origins of Zen are said to have begun when one of the Buddha's disciples, the Venerable Mahakashyapa, smiled as the Buddha gazed in silence upon a golden flower. From this episode,

Mahakashyapa was designated the first Zen patriarch. The knowledge embodied in Mahakashyapa's experience of enlightenment was handed down through a series of twenty-eight patriarchs until the Indian philosopher Bodhidharma is purported to have traveled to China in 520 C.E. There, Bodhidharma is said to have taught philosophy and the method of *Dhyana*, which the Chinese would later term *Chan*, and the Japanese would call Zen. The constitutive aspects of all these schools deal with the process of attaining *satori*, or enlightenment. By practicing meditation, living monastically, and entering into a relationship with a *roshi* (master), the Zen practitioner develops his or her abilities to perceive the "suchness" of reality beyond its concrete particulars and conceptual dualisms. While some authors insist that meditation is the only "essential" component of Zen, there are nonetheless images of the Buddha and perhaps bodhisattvas in most Zen temples, and a vast range of Zen practice involves rituals of prostration, repetition of vows, and chanting sutras, as well as commitment to an ethical code.

There are two schools of Zen, Soto and Rinzai, which are important to distinguish. Both schools aim at the experience of *satori* and consider *zazen* (sitting meditation) the proper method for attaining it, but they differ in terms of their practice. Rinzai is considered the more strenuous of the two schools. It understands *satori* as occurring suddenly and only after immersion in rigorous physical and conceptual labor. Rinzai emphasizes working on koans, conceptual conundra that are impenetrable by the processes of reason. Soto sees the attainment of *satori* as a gradual process to be achieved through the technique of *shikantaza*, or "just sitting." Soto "does not exclude the koans [central to Rinzai], but they are not studied systematically. Students practice the wordless, mantraless form of sitting meditation, or *zazen*, taught by Japan's preeminent master, Dogen Zenji (1200–1253)."<sup>16</sup> Zen practice is, therefore, not opposed to the incorporation of scriptures, the role and wisdom of a teacher, or rules of practice and comportment; these may simply be downplayed in favor of *zazen* and the cultivation of nondiscriminating, nondualistic habits of mind.

The SFZC practices Soto, and the imperative to "just sit" has been instrumental to the SFZC's erstwhile disregard for ethical precepts.<sup>17</sup> This understanding of Zen is again indicative of the interpretive double movement of elite Buddhists. In creolizing the discourses of American individualism and Zen Buddhism, this class privileges meditation as the essential path to enlightenment. Having access to sufficient money and leisure time, elite Buddhists from this period were often uninterested in features of the tradition that may bind their self-expression. Indeed, as is evident from the Concord Orientalists



above and will be shown with the Beats and the SFZC below, American preferences or commitments to possessive individualism, sexual freedom, or psychologies of personal growth are precisely what motivates many elites to seek out Buddhism in the first place, believing it to be a free-floating, nondisciplinary, and personalized tradition. The resulting bricolage of conceptual worlds may bear little resemblance to extant forms of Asian Buddhism and instead constitutes “the creation of an imagined and artificial East” that harmonizes with the needs of the importers.<sup>18</sup>

### **My Own Private Buddhism: Constructing a Cultural Alternative**

The receptivity of American Zen practitioners was shaped by a cultural ethos, coalescing in the mid-1950s, whose primary characteristic was disaffection with prevailing cultural norms and religious options. Insofar as disaffection and social alienation were motivating factors in the attraction to Asian religions, this ethos bears superficial similarities to that of the Concord Orientalists. But it is more distinct than it is similar. Central to the resurgence of interest in Asian religions, especially in Zen, was the subculture of the Beats. Literary figures such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, though they may have been dilettantes in a certain sense, were influential in making Zen “sexy” and transgressive. The Beats associated Zen with an attitude of “hip” disdain for what they saw as mainstream society. Zen was coupled—and sometimes even identified—with a mannered detachment from the materialism and conformity of postwar America. Through their casually creative interpretation and consumption of Zen, and later Tibetan Buddhism, American youths got “turned on” to a religious tradition that, as Jack Kerouac put it, was good for “kicks.”

There are some telling similarities between the Beat encounter with Zen and the Concord Orientalism described above. The elite audience for an imported religion almost always has a clear picture in its collective head of what constitutes the religious tradition under consideration; more often than not, this picture is formed through contact with a diverse variety of books rather than with practitioners themselves. As Thomas A. Tweed shows in *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, such projections onto Buddhism have a long history, one that includes not only the Transcendentalists but also Victorian religious practitioners attracted to the notion that Buddhism was not a religion but a philosophy.<sup>19</sup> This interplay between the familiar and the “exotic,” and the tensions of the double movement, can be seen in many phases of Buddhism’s spread in the United States.



Like the Concord Orientalists before them, the Beats orbited around a specific series of texts. Where Emerson and Thoreau had the translations of Richard T. Holbrooke and Romahan Roy, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac delved into the cultural distillations of Daisetz Teitōro Suzuki (and their followers investigated Alan Watts). It is important to understand two processes at work here, since they both substantively affected the transmission of ethics at the SFZC. First, the brand of Zen that was popularized by Kerouac and the Beats was the result of careful manufacture and dissemination on the part of cultural figures like Suzuki and Watts.<sup>20</sup> Second, one of the primary reasons for the attraction to Zen was the large-scale disaffection with what was understood to be “conventional” culture on the part of a certain class of American youths in the 1950s and 1960s. For many well-educated, upper-middle-class Caucasian youths who sought refuge from “square” society, the “creolized” Zen of the Beats and Suzuki represented a fashionable and compelling alternative.

In the fall of 1951, the manufacturing millionaire Cornelius Crane organized a series of seminars to be given at Columbia University by D. T. Suzuki. The lecture series lasted for more than two years and attracted some of the brightest intellectuals in postwar American culture: the émigré psychologists Erich Fromm and Karen Horney, the avant-garde composer John Cage, and Philip Kapleau, who would later become one of the most ardent advocates of “Americanizing” Buddhism. The popularity of the talks and the later widespread dissemination of Suzuki’s writings helped to create what is often called the “Zen boom” of the 1950s. During this period, the United States was enjoying a hitherto unknown economic abundance and a sense of ideological superiority following the Second World War. Production and wages were both increasing, while the overt political and social conflicts that had dominated earlier decades of the twentieth century were seemingly being addressed by the New Deal accommodation between labor and capital as well as mollified by a general cultural contentedness. These and other factors helped to strengthen a growing American middle class, whose finances, personal lives, and philosophical commitments were all becoming more fluid even as they possessed the appearance of stability. The expansion of wealth led also to more leisure time and the increased consumption of entertainment such as television, film, and paperback books.<sup>21</sup> It was in the context of this affluence and leisure that a disaffected generation came of age.

As children of America’s postwar economic boom, this generation enjoyed a level of material comfort and social (particularly educational) opportunity that had hitherto been unknown in the

United States. Yet throughout the 1950s, increasing numbers of young people came to feel, perhaps as a result of the time afforded them for reflection and study, that the life options made available to them by mainstream American society were neither exciting nor existentially fulfilling. J. D. Salinger's character Holden Caulfield railed against the phoniness of the American mainstream; C. Wright Mills bemoaned the "cheerful robots" of the American workforce, bereft of meaningful connections to one another or to some larger sense of purpose; and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" constituted an impressionistic critique of the contradictions and deadening life options of postwar society.<sup>22</sup> Coincident with this disaffection was a sense that the existence of both the nuclear arms race and the struggle for civil rights in the American South were indictments of the achievements of American society. In short, as was stated in the Students for a Democratic Society's "Port Huron Statement" of 1962, "Our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss."<sup>23</sup>

In this context, Zen Buddhism was appropriated as a ready-made alternative to the self-understandings of American culture. But of what exactly did the Zen they encountered consist? According to Suzuki, through whose work the majority of this generation first gained access to the tradition, Zen was primarily concerned with the inexpressible, that which was impossible to conceptualize. It spoke to that substratum of human existence that modern industrial society had relentlessly covered over. Zen's primary aim was the experience of *satori*, which Suzuki characterized as encompassing "irrationality, intuitive insight, authoritativeness, affirmation, exhilaration, and momentariness."<sup>24</sup> While Suzuki did not wish to downplay the fact that this experience, and the meditative practice associated with it, was embodied in a living religious tradition, he was nonetheless careful to construct it in public as beyond the limitations of place, time, or doctrine. He, in fact, went so far as to assert that "Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy,"<sup>25</sup> a claim that allowed him to make his characteristic associations of Zen with psychoanalysis (particularly the Jungian idiom of holistic development) and with transgressive modernist art. This universalist strategy of both eviscerating Zen of some of its constitutive components while also enshrining it in a place of privilege among competing philosophical systems was a cultural move of enormous importance. Linking it with artistic and cultural expressions familiar to American audiences, Suzuki both emphasized Zen's otherness and enfolded it in the realm of the already-known.

Equally important was Alan Watts's later construction of "Beat Zen." In contrast to the "Square Zen," which was "hung up" on

the particularities of culture and doctrine, Beat Zen was essentially “easy and free-floating,” committed only to the platitude that Zen aims at freedom. Watts’s Beat Zen was self-consciously revisionist and Americanized, a fluid mode of expression that was “too timeless and universal to be injured” by the “hassle” that marred square culture and Square Zen. Beat Zen was, he claimed, “amazingly pure and lively” and could be accessed by any number of paths: through monastic living, by hopping freight trains, or simply in “digging Charlie Parker.” Just as America was, he reminded his readers, a free country, so too could Zen be accommodated within the frame of any individual lifestyle; Zen transgressed arbitrary constraints and boundaries, coming alive through the individual’s inclinations and self-expression.<sup>26</sup> Along with Suzuki, Watts aided in creating the impression of Zen as a tradition effectively divorced from devotional or doctrinal content, as simply a path toward experiential insight and self-expression. Because of the prominence of this interpretation, many laypeople who were serious about inquiring into Buddhism went from Watts’s work as a general inspiration to Suzuki’s work, which was understood to be more “authentic.”

By the late 1950s, this construction of Zen had become enormously popular. In literary circles, writers like Ginsberg and Kerouac had come to prize Zen as the philosophical—but, significantly, not devotional—accompaniment to their quest for release from the working world of American life. Suzuki’s characterization of satori seemed ideal to a crowd that was repulsed by the ever-encroaching bureaucratic rationality, sameness, and determinism of their culture. Ginsberg’s encounter began with Suzuki, who impressed him with the transgressive quality of satori. Gary Snyder was fervent enough to claim that, aside from *sesshins*, the extended periods of zazen meditation, “the rest of American Zen is talk.”<sup>27</sup> Jack Kerouac came to Buddhism through a library (curiously enough, via the works of Thoreau) and started to develop his own private Buddhism, which consisted of brewing tea, locking himself in his bedroom so his mother would not interrupt him, and sitting on a pillow to meditate for as long as the pain of his old football injuries would allow. The Beats, in short, had a mostly literary Buddhism that effortlessly accommodated “having dinner together, or just sort of hanging around together there in the yard and writing and talking and drinking wine and having a good time.”<sup>28</sup> For them, the obvious conclusion to draw about the Zen that had been presented to Western audiences was that it dovetailed nicely with their aversion to ethics as the backwash of a square society, providing a comfortable vehicle for the expression of their antinomianism.

### **Institutionalized Antinomianism: The Path to the Zen Center**

The Zen communities that, like the SFZC, emerged in the 1960s were not as breezy in their understandings of Buddhism as were the Beats, but they were, in many ways, just as selective. The Zen centers of this period were considerably more attentive to texts, traditions, and practices than were their immediate interpretative predecessors; but, like the Beats and the spiritually seeking jazz musicians they celebrated, these new Zen adepts were interested in a religious alternative that was wholly "other" than what they knew from their own culture of American monotheisms. If they did not share the Beats' dismissal of all ethics as "square," they still shared in the dominant understanding of Zen as affective and antinomian. Indeed, part of their attraction to this tradition depended on the belief that Zen was free from arbitrary devotional obligations, that it was anti-intellectual and anti-establishment.<sup>29</sup>

While the emphasis on practice was attractive to many SFZC practitioners, this practice was understood to be distinct from stuffy, rules-based piety. Additionally, the specific mode of Zen practice at SFZC was "clearly mixed up with rebellion against authority, including Christian and Jewish traditions."<sup>30</sup> Further, practice at the SFZC shared with other Zen communities formed during this period a sense of difficulty with the "unquestioned authority, power, and prestige" enjoyed by teachers in Asian communities.<sup>31</sup> The Zen of Suzuki, Watts, and the Beats yielded a literature that proved to be lasting and dynamic, exerting a significant influence on the audience that would eventually seek out a more established form of Zen practice. And, as noted above, this "timeless," "ahistorical," and "uniquely Asian" religion was in many ways the result of packaging for Western audiences and of the prior philosophical commitments of the audience themselves.

In the 1960s, many disaffected Caucasian youths became involved either in the radical politics of groups such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), or the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), or with the hippie "counterculture." For the latter in particular, Zen was seen as more hedonistic and transgressive than it was even by the Beats. While a similar range of cultural dissatisfactions drove each generation's interest in Zen, the hippies additionally associated Zen with a kind of experiential release that seemed to license experimentation with psychedelic drugs and sexual freedom: the discipline and rule-morality of "the West" was contrasted with the improvisatory and expressive qualities of "the East." The SFZC's appropriation of Zen was distinct from that of both the Beats and the hippie counterculture.

But they were significantly alike in their claims to be unshackled by history and society, to be beyond conceptualization and even beyond the limitations of Buddhism itself. One key to this distinction is found in the audience seeking out an institutional setting such as the SFZC. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as fractures became evident in the American left and in various corners of the counterculture, increasing numbers of young people—among whom would be many of those who went on to live in the SFZC—became dissatisfied with the routes out of American culture charted by the Beats and the counterculture. Like the members of groups such as SDS, those who went on to Zen centers were self-consciously rejecting certain aspects of American culture: its perceived materialism, spiritual emptiness, and rigidity. But this rejection was packaged in a very different way.

Partly out of attraction to the meditation-centered Zen of Watts and Suzuki, and partly out of an aversion to the growing violence and sectarianism of counterculture politics, the Zen center audience was concerned only with change on the level of subjective consciousness. Steven Tipton has noted how this concern with the individual psyche was, in many ways, continuous with the experimentation with psychoactive drugs that was relatively popular at the time.<sup>32</sup> This increasingly interior focus fed a growing hostility between political activists and the more spiritually inclined, both of whom were negotiating a similar set of conflicts with the American cultural mainstream. There are those who believe that this conflict between critics ultimately reshaped and polarized the American left, leaving those involved with radical politics enmeshed in often bitter sectarian disputes while others chose to evacuate the political sphere entirely. Todd Gitlin, a veteran of SDS and now a sociology professor at CUNY, biting describes the turn from radical politics to work on the self as a shift from “‘j’accuse’ to jacuzzi.”<sup>33</sup> Gitlin’s implication is that the world had failed to respond to the counterculture’s critique, so there were only two paths that remained: the attempt—by groups like the Weather Underground, the Diggers, or the Motherfuckers—to create dramatically, even violently, the kinds of confrontations they believed necessary to initiate change; or to retreat from movement politics into a kind of care for the self, of the sort practiced in Zen centers, with the hope that an amalgamation of good individuals could by itself constitute larger social transformations. This sort of dualism is far too simplistic to convey the complexity of this cultural moment. It suggests nonetheless that the path to the SFZC represented a new understanding beyond those extant in the counterculture, one that was still attracted to a kind of antinomianism but also embraced a style of disciplined living understood to be a self-evident desideratum.

Most of those who sought out the San Francisco Zen Center had been impressed with the idea that Zen was meditation and satori alone. Jack Kornfield, who would teach at the Insight Meditation Center in Massachusetts (as well as, briefly, at Naropa in Boulder, Colorado), saw the meditative path as "rather clearly excluding anything non-meditational from the real practice of the Buddha."<sup>34</sup> The attraction of this type of practice seemed to parallel the growing disenchantment with other attempts to detach from mainstream culture, which now seemed to budding Zen practitioners as paths that led only to contradiction, distorted intentions, and violence. In this context, ethics still represented, to many, only a glorified form of attachment to an increasingly recalcitrant social order, a conceptual artifice that was too one-dimensional ever to match reality's ceaseless flux, or a series of empty propositions that served only to mask individual interests. The extant desire for a cultural break now seemed charged with a greater sense of urgency.<sup>35</sup>

This much is consistent with earlier interpretative patterns. What was new in the drive to affiliate with Zen centers was the incorporation of and attraction to discipline. In 1951, John Cage had come away from Suzuki's lectures with a feeling of certainty, a conviction that, in Zen, he had discovered a way to compose music "with a means that was as strict as sitting cross-legged, namely the use of chance operations."<sup>36</sup> For Cage, the discipline and the enlightenment Zen promised were not attached to any cultural particulars but rather served to facilitate personal goals. It is this sense of discipline that influenced the new Zen practitioners: strictness of regimen existed for its own sake, without the burden of ethical decisions or obligations.

Indeed, for twenty years, nobody at the SFZC talked much about ethics, which doubtless was part of the attraction to the lifestyle it offered. The center's origins are traced to the arrival of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, author of the popular *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, in the United States just as the Zen boom was cresting in the late 1950s.<sup>37</sup> Supposedly related to the Buddha by way of Mahakashyapa, Suzuki began his long stay in this country as the leader of a sizable group of immigrant Japanese at a temple in San Francisco's Japan Town. This space was intended to serve as a ritual space for Japanese immigrants and for the Nisei-Sansei community; but, when Suzuki began to devote much of his time to American Buddhist converts who sought to sit zazen with him, this led to a break with the temple and the subsequent formation of the SFZC. Suzuki was apparently entranced by the openness of America and of its "beginner's mind," and, as he became one of the first Buddhist teachers in the United States, he concentrated largely on the zazen and the koans that were so popular among disaffected youth.<sup>38</sup>

Suzuki had come of age in an era of new ethical questions in Japanese Zen. Part of the first generation for whom clerical marriages were permitted, Suzuki's familiarity with the gray areas of tradition doubtless shaped his engagement with the American religious context. When he met young Richard Baker in 1961, Baker had just received his M.A. in Japanese history from Berkeley. With a biography comparable to that of many who would later join him at the SFZC—including an affluent but unstable childhood in New England, working for the bohemian Grove Press, and serving in the merchant marine before finally entering academics—Baker was eager to hitch his restless wagon to Zen's rising star. Unlike some earlier generations of practitioners, early Zen center adepts like Baker and Reb Anderson were not developing their ideas about the tradition on the basis solely of texts; they were drawn in by contact with Buddhist practice and practitioners. Forming an instant connection with Suzuki, Baker soon became a disciplined meditator as well as an energetic organizer and entrepreneur for the Zen cause. The more popular Zen became as a viable alternative to prevailing norms in the San Francisco Bay Area, the more it seemed to bear Baker's imprint.

In 1965, Suzuki agreed to allow Baker to sponsor the Berkeley Poetry Conference, which was quickly followed by a conference on the effects of LSD. Part of Baker's message was that openness to acid and poetry helped create a "background for Buddhism" in the United States.<sup>39</sup> Suzuki's and Baker's presence had been attracting increasing numbers of followers in the Bay Area, and, by 1966, there was justification for finding a permanent home for their brand of Zen. Baker organized a fundraiser that raised sufficient resources to purchase a Zen Center. Not raised, however, were any doubts about American Zen's strong affiliation with the counterculture I have described: the event was sponsored by the heir to the Xerox Corporation, and music was provided by Janis Joplin and the Jefferson Airplane. With the proceeds, Suzuki and Baker purchased Tassajara Retreat, which joined the City Center on Page Street to become the first Zen training grounds in the West.

Following such enormous cultural successes and inroads, in 1967, Suzuki announced that he wanted Baker to succeed him as abbot of the Zen center. Two years later, Baker prepared for this eventuality by studying with masters in Kyoto, and he was ordained as a priest in 1970.<sup>40</sup> Soon thereafter, however, he learned that Suzuki was mortally ill with stomach cancer and had to rush back to San Francisco for two important ceremonies: Baker received Suzuki's transmission (the confirmation that he had understood the dharma that Shunryu Suzuki had taught him) to become roshi and Suzuki's transmission of



temple lineage. Though Baker had made attempts to obtain certification within the living tradition of Zen by studying in Japan, his tenure as abbot following Suzuki's death was markedly American in its inclinations, embracing many of the practitioners' desires and demands within the vocabularies and idioms they understood as Zen Buddhist but which bore strong traces of American individualism or even Protestantism. Whereas, in Japan, many individuals oversee each center or monastic community, and there is also a larger culture whose awareness of tradition might protect against distortions or lacunae, in America, the dharma was transmitted to one man.

As teacher of the SFZC community, Baker-roshi was able to create impressive amounts of energy surrounding the center. Where Suzuki had been a quietist, wanting only to help Americans on the path to enlightenment, Baker was aggressively social in his efforts to support the SFZC (indeed, there were those who felt that this strategy contradicted some of the center's self-understandings). There is little doubt that these efforts were primarily responsible for attracting an audience to SFZC, which boasted not only a sometimes creolized devotion that might not have been plausible outside the United States but also claimed to have the best hot tubs in California.<sup>41</sup> In the early days, SFZC was "populated by hippies . . . [who played] musical beds."<sup>42</sup> And one adept went so far as to admit that they "were taking tons of acid, of course, and the question was, How do you permanently have this state of mind?"<sup>43</sup>

Many students complained that this orientation of Baker's led him to be remote to their emotional or even devotional needs, but all were pleased that his connections were paying dividends in terms of financial stability and cultural legitimacy. Baker-roshi petitioned the center's board of directors to acquire the Green Gulch property as an additional "sangha" or monastic community. He also used his tenure to set up Zen center businesses at which his students could work (as a gesture toward "right livelihood") at sewing, farming, baking, or at the center's organic foods restaurant, Greens. According to Baker, engagement in this sort of work helped to promote the Zen emphasis on "mindfulness," which was understood here as attention to mundane tasks. As the Zen center grew in popularity and abundance—there was at one point a four-month waiting list to eat at Greens, while lectures at Green Gulch consistently drew outsiders who were interested in Zen's "spiritual aesthetic"—the cost of maintaining its customary lifestyle increased.

By the first few years of its institutionalization, SFZC had "translated its spiritual practice into cultural, retail, and social experiences" that dovetailed with the needs and expectations of a disaffected,

counterculture audience. Baker was quite open about his tweaking of belief and practice. He asserted that Zen “clergy” “can’t conceive of Zen in the militaristic Japanese way that excludes anyone.”<sup>44</sup> There was a sense, then, that ethics was both militaristic and exclusive (two big turn-offs for potential adepts). Riding on Baker’s marketing instincts, the early stages of developing the American sangha proceeded in the absence of a board of directors or any kind of robust administrative presence. The focus was on Baker’s zeal for Americanizing—and growing—Zen (and, significantly, even after the crisis, many of the SFZC’s attempts at response—including Gestalt theory, communications theory, and various forms of psychoanalysis—were still quite Americanized). Even though there were clear ethical indications—for example, in the content of the Eightfold Path—the SFZC audience was so adamant about what it saw as dogma that many even rejected the term “religion.”<sup>45</sup>

### **The Ethics of Spontaneity**

Despite this increasing “worldliness,” life at the SFZC remained a popular refuge for those inclined to reject the typical options offered by American society. Yet the longer this lifestyle was defined by the idiosyncratic leadership of Baker-roshi, the more it enshrined the counterculture-driven understanding of Zen outlined above. The regimen of the SFZC was comprised of communalism, semimonastic discipline, and a focus on zazen as the privileged mode of practice. Its organization was, unlike the Zen of Japan, almost entirely self-contained and lacking the external “checks” of a network of institutions and a culture familiar with its precepts. This relative isolation has important implications to be fleshed out below. The SFZC maintained multiple sites, under the tutelary head of the roshi and the SFZC board of directors, and established informal connections to local Bay Area politics. The “audience” at the center remained almost exclusively comprised of highly educated white students seeking a break from the mainstream culture.

The dominant understanding was that Zen plays down doctrine in favor of enlightenment-oriented meditation that is only loosely regulated by encounters with the roshi and the boundaries of monastic life. These three elements were seen as structuring a way of life that seeks freedom from the concepts and limitations that constrain conventional existence. Satori was here understood as the recognition of what Steven Tipton calls “acosmic monism,” the notion that there exists an essential unity to all of reality that is free from material particulars. Meditation was thus supposed to generate a type

of awareness that is free from ostensive reference, from self-interest, and from attachment to particulars.

This understanding of Zen practice omits a number of the tradition's constitutive features (such as ritual devotion and doctrinal formulation) because of its overriding conviction that Zen aims at experiential release. Practitioners at the SFZC were concerned about practical discipline; indeed, the fairly standard daily regimen at the center—morning services, rituals of bowing, and chanting, for example—was highly valued. But practice was seen as a self-evident good, not so much a function of a larger ethos as a vehicle for the meditation-centered Zen that may be interpreted through a psychological lens. A Zen that privileges meditation in this specific way—unhinged, that is, from larger doctrinal commitments—is left to focus exclusively on an experiential or interpretive dissolution of the ethical problems that brought many practitioners to the SFZC. In order to avoid a kind of collective solipsism, however, the SFZC had to articulate a common set of rules to which all practitioners had to adhere. The meditative path, in other words, had to be supported by Buddhist moral precepts.

Despite this recognition, though, the SFZC's attitudes toward the precepts notably exemplified their broader cultural/religious creolization and the interpretive double effect. The Five Precepts (no taking life, no taking what is not given, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no taking of intoxicants that are conducive to heedlessness) were certainly not overlooked. But it was not until after the Baker-roshi episode that they were given concrete particulars or linked conclusively to other areas of SFZC practice. Until then, the precepts were largely read as a set of individual directives. This reflected the status of American Zen communities, which, contrasted with extant Asian Buddhism, were relatively isolated and unresponsive to a larger community and were often focused on the individual's quest for self-improvement.<sup>46</sup> The mixture of the experiential and the rule-driven, enshrined in the practice and the formulation of the precepts, created an obvious tension for the residents of the SFZC. Living rightly now required living by a series of rules, yet it was a deep-seated ambivalence about the very idea of rules that had motivated many of the practitioners to follow Zen in the first place. Many students identified ethics, as a broad generic category, with the very social conventions from which they sought distance, perhaps even as "the detritus of dualistic thinking."<sup>47</sup>

To negotiate this tension, rules were reinterpreted at the Zen center as emerging from the locus of the meditative self whose essence is expressed through Zen orthopraxy.<sup>48</sup> General precepts and

rules of order were seen as instrumental to moving the student along the meditative path; in order to avoid the problems of arbitrary authority, these rules were seen as expressions of the true nature of existence. Once reality is perceived as it really is, these rules could be seen merely as *ex post facto* descriptions of compassionate behavior; for the adept, in other words, the question of adhering to the precepts was irrelevant when reality is experienced in its "suchness."

Following from the counterculture's antinomianism, this understanding of meditative insight and Zen practice yielded an interpretation of ethical deliberation as spontaneous self-expression in response to situational particulars. This spontaneity was understood as more than simply "doing your own thing," since it claimed to be bounded by the rules and precepts. But it is significantly linked to personal intuition rather than to a binding set of social or institutional norms. When Tipton interviewed students at the "Pacific Zen Center," the language most often used describing such activity centered on intuition, knowing something in your heart, or self-generating knowledge.<sup>49</sup> This language suggested that an ontology that recognizes only endless flux and inconsistency relies on feeling and experience as the only viable forms of knowledge. The practice of *zazen* (which establishes a unity of the mental, the physical, and the environmental) induced a changed state of mind in accordance with this ontology, which decreased self-interest and the influence of external particulars as it increased self-awareness and one's "thereness" in a given situation. *Zazen* was, thus, a continuous process that helped develop what Tipton calls an "intuitive certainty," obviating the need for ethical deliberation. When confronted with an ethical dilemma or with disagreement, it "just goes away" because change is constantly occurring.<sup>50</sup>

Much like the valuation of discipline for its own sake, first expressed above by John Cage, this path helped constitute a disciplined rejection of what is understood to be "conventional." With regard to "mass society," the decision to inhabit a semimonastic community showed a desire to be seen as part of an association that was, religiously and organizationally, "other" than the mainstream. It represented, in the words of one student, "an unconditioned response to a conditioned world."<sup>51</sup> Residents relished their rejection of individualism, materialism, and pride, with the concomitant participation in a lifestyle they believed was communal and nonjudgmental. Further, the SFZC explicitly attempted to reevaluate traditional gender roles and to promote a vigorous egalitarianism that they saw as absent in mainstream American society. Finally, the practitioners saw their efforts to become "monks in the world" as a living alternative to

bourgeois adulthood. They held in disdain the social stratification in the society outside the Zen center and, as an antidote, commended evaluation based only on one's meditative skills.

Despite the fervent insistence that these responses are "unconditioned," they actually represented very American improvisations on what was already a distinctly modified tradition, part of the broader process of the interpretive double movement. First, it is unclear to what extent the SFZC's communalism actually managed to uproot the individualism that its members brought to their practice. As many students have noted in interviews, the exclusive focus on meditation was, in many ways, an absorption in the individual, the devolvement of practice onto a single practitioner. The distinctly American language of possessive individualism was retained. Asked to describe the experience of zazen, responses were entirely framed in personal terms: "I am a medium, it's me who's there in the situation, it's my karma."<sup>52</sup> This is not to suggest that first-person language was absent from Zen prior to its Western encounters but that there were contradictions in the practitioners' self-understandings. Second, the very idea of a timeless or "unconditioned" response to the world was the result of the packaging of Zen for a Western audience. Third, the gender egalitarianism that was a source of pride for the center (aside from the question as to whether or not it really existed) was never present in Japanese Zen, further contributing to American Zen's distinction from that tradition. Finally, the construction of the category of "monk in the world" represented an explicit rejection of the radical politics from which many practitioners had fled and is not analogous to Japanese Zen roles.

From this idiosyncratic appropriation of Zen, there are several implications for moral behavior. First, because of the counterculture fetish for antinomianism, "you can't have any rules," in the words of one student.<sup>53</sup> As shown above, the practitioner at the SFZC was not obligated to abide by a thick set of moral imperatives; he or she simply had to "choose to be there and then follow the schedule."<sup>54</sup> Beyond the framing of meditation with disciplined behavior, the practitioners at SFZC had largely cut themselves off from external authorities to which recourse might be made in complex ethical situations. The rules of comportment and practice were not coextensive with ethical precepts; indeed, one gets a sense that the practitioner's obligations were minimal beyond adherence to the rigid, almost militaristic discipline that formed the boundaries of Zen center practice. The goal for the individual practitioner was to reach a state where rules were not needed and where spontaneous action from a person

with requisite insight was sufficient to navigate the choppiest ethical waters. Yet it is unclear what the student was supposed to do prior to attaining that state, since rules had been so thoroughly undermined and since the process or path had been thoroughly conflated with its endpoint or goals.

Second, the privileging of meditation as the highest form of practice implied that all change, whether social or intellectual, could occur only from within. This led to a dearth of attention to what might be called "social issues." It is clear, for example, that the idea of compassion is part of the basic self-understanding of the Mahayana Buddhist; yet that concept once received comparatively little elaboration by SFZC practitioners. In the center's early decades, there was almost no attention to social service initiatives that might be squared with this idea of compassion.<sup>55</sup> This relocation of ethical activity to the interior space of the individual, while it clearly had a social dimension, is also evidence of the selective process by which Zen had been appropriated. It is unclear, to put it bluntly, whether the sense that ethical rightness follows from proper practice was an "authentically" Zen understanding or another American improvisation on this tradition. Students at the SFZC frequently used the language of "cultural and experiential integrity" to describe the purity of their lifestyle in comparison with the mainstream (often paradoxically coupling this with claims that "Zen doesn't exclude anything").<sup>56</sup> Yet the language of authenticity and integrity has a distinctly Western inflection. It is, at any rate, uncertain how this notion of change got "cashed out" in social terms.

Finally, this appropriation of Zen had implications that shaped the obligations of the roshi. Unlike in Japanese society, where both an extant network of religious institutions and a broader culture work to establish social expectations and behavioral limits for the roshi, in the United States, the roshi was, during this period, a free-floating authority figure. Despite Suzuki-roshi's transmission of the dharma (and, with it, the mantle of authority) to Richard Baker, there were no clear guidelines established for the roshi's practice other than (1) the roshi had to maintain some form of relation with students and (2) the roshi had to avoid two prohibitions concerning sexual relations. This rather limited and indeterminate set of obligations was significant: since most students understood themselves as trying to emulate the roshi, the lack of an ethical feedback loop had potentially severe implications since the roshi never engaged in dialogue about behavioral norms and since the students themselves were too often uncritical in their assumption that the roshi was a spiritual exemplar.

### Beautiful Women Dig Graves

The story of SFZC practitioners' appropriation of Zen became even more fascinating when, in 1983, they were suddenly forced to confront their own interpretive lacunae. When Paul Hawken came to the center, seeking an alternative to the wealthy entrepreneur's life he had been leading, he quickly took up a friendship with Baker-roshi, who personally supervised Hawken's meditation in a way he did not for most other students. Throughout the course of their friendship, Hawken's business background was increasingly put to use organizing life at and raising funds for the center. As this relationship developed, centering on the needs of the institution, Baker's relationship with his students became increasingly strained. His absences had already been considerable for years, as he fraternized with California's political and cultural elite, drumming up support for his various endeavors; but now he was almost entirely absent. His students responded by committing less to the rigors of practice. When present, he seemed to underscore his authority; indeed, one practitioner reports that, during this period, "Baker-roshi said clearly many times, 'If you don't like it, leave. This is not a democracy.'"<sup>57</sup>

As Baker and Hawken expanded the Zen center's operations, there emerged a series of visible contrasts within the communal life of the practitioners. Baker frequently made use of limousine and chauffeur services when entertaining visitors and guests at the center. His expenses ran as high as \$2,500 a month, with an annual administrative budget approaching \$180,000. From these Zen center funds, Baker often withdrew money for his personal travel and for paying his personal assistants. At one point, he even convinced the center to contribute \$10,000 toward his daughter's tuition at Brown University. There are also frequent reports from this period that Baker ignored the advice of Zen Center treasurers and spent hundreds of dollars on personal books (later boasting that his duties as roshi permitted him virtually no time to read for pleasure). Finally, there was the car. Baker petitioned the board of directors to purchase a \$21,000 BMW for him to commute and receive distinguished guests (Downing notes the cognitive dissonance in seeing Buddhist monks bowing to a white BMW).<sup>58</sup> The board refused, but Baker proceeded with the purchase.

Some students who saw Baker driving the BMW were aghast that he seemed to lead a life so clearly contradictory to their aspirations of selflessness and humility. But many of them were assuaged by Baker's wit and worldliness. Yet when Baker appropriated center funds to build a luxurious guest house, at which he often stayed with visitors, some students began to resent the contrast between their voluntarily



humble lifestyle and Baker's apparent indulgences. To be sure, there were still many students who looked upon Baker as a model of perfection. Yet, when Thich Nhat Hanh visited the SFZC in the early 1980s, many students have attested to thinking, "There's a *real* monk."<sup>59</sup> As Katy Butler has noted in her memoir of the SFZC, critics of Baker's lifestyle were censored, no doubt partly because, without the example of a larger community or tradition, Baker was the only authority to which students could appeal.<sup>60</sup>

Then, in 1983, people learned that Baker-roshi had been involved in an affair with Paul Hawken's wife. Some disputed whether or not she reciprocated Baker's feelings, but, regardless, he had consorted with her on several occasions. When Hawken found out, he was outraged and immediately took the matter to the board of directors. Though usually acquiescent, the board confronted Baker with the charge that he had violated his duties and abused his status as roshi. According to most reports, Baker appeared not to take the charges very seriously. The board was angered over his apparent lack of respect for their authority and inquired further into the charges. As it turned out, Baker had been involved in many affairs with his students over the years. Many at the Zen center were outraged at learning this, but they lacked an ethical language for articulating these feelings.

Prior to this incident, the Zen center had held to a fairly modest code for determining unacceptable sexual behavior: as long as one could maintain a relationship without deception, manipulation, or impairment of the partner's spiritual growth, then there were no clear causes for objecting to it. Baker maintained that he had stayed within these boundaries, yet, when the charges were revealed, the community quickly became polarized. There were defenders and critics of Baker in almost equal numbers, and many claimed that Baker was guilty of sexualizing his relationship with his students. Apparently, however, Baker himself could not fathom the reasons for his students' distress. In a state of confusion, the SFZC board returned Paul Hawken's stock (with which he had helped to increase the center's financial solvency), and Hawken agreed not to sue for clergy malpractice. The board immediately ordered Baker to leave the center, and, in November 1983, he was shut out of the community.

It was at this point that Baker embarked on his penitential walk to Tassajara, and Disneyland, and the south of France. During this time, students were angered that Baker did not seem sufficiently humble, honest, or vulnerable. When he returned, however, Baker apologized in public before the statue of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi and resigned from his post as abbot on December 21, 1983. For years, the SFZC had been esteemed as the very model of organization and propriety, but

now it was charged with unchecked political ambition, misuse of community funds, sexual impropriety, and excessive materialism.

My detailed exploration of these events at the SFZC is not intended to undermine its practitioners or to suggest that this specific instance of American Zen is somehow "inauthentic." The events and the issues can be partly understood, however, as effects of the interpretive double movement. The center's initial inability to grapple with these issues stemmed in part from their selective understanding of Zen, whereby importers of a religious tradition who seek to escape the confines of their home culture inevitably appropriate that religious tradition using the fundamental grammar of their own society. In the process of this creolization, they had consigned ethics to the realm of spontaneity or had omitted it altogether from their definition of Zen practice.

When it became clear that Baker-roshi had exceeded the boundaries of the master-student relationship, the students' own religious practice seemed to have been jeopardized; the residents of the SFZC were without recourse to a larger institutional network and could not check their experience against the expectations of a broader society. When it became apparent that Baker-roshi's use of communal funds and his attempts to place the life of the institution before those of his students, the practitioners most vulnerable to his actions found themselves bereft of a conceptual framework for evaluating what was going on and without a deliberative process by which they might navigate such conflicts. These scandals surrounding Baker-roshi clearly raised questions about the American roshi's relationship with students and about the consequences of institution-building. Yet there are also issues pertaining to gender that arise.

One of the unique aspects of the SFZC's creolization was its emphasis on gender egalitarianism, which was indigenous to the United States. But in important ways, this commitment was given no more than lip service at the SFZC. When Baker-roshi finally responded to the charges against him, he observed that he had initially stayed away from Paul Hawken's wife because of "that thing Jack Kerouac said, 'Beautiful women dig graves.'"<sup>61</sup> Aside from being an obvious reference to one of the intellectual sources for the SFZC's brand of Zen, this quote testifies to a deep inattention to gender at the Zen Center.<sup>62</sup> Following the revelation of scandals at the SFZC, female practitioners stepped forth in considerable numbers to express their longstanding discomfort with the power structure there. Katy Butler, a reporter who once practiced with Baker-roshi, wrote that she had come to Zen wanting "to drop the games I used to survive in the 'outside world' but had later come to feel particularly threatened as a woman."<sup>63</sup>

Butler claims that women who hope to escape the ubiquity of sexual power are often more vulnerable to advances from teachers like Baker. As it did for many practitioners, such needs led to a situation in which it was “too easy to project a host of desires, hopes, fantasies . . . onto him.”<sup>64</sup> These psychological motivations were not limited to female practitioners, but many have claimed that Baker-roshi was particularly inattentive to women’s issues and unaware of his reliance on male power to deal with them. Meredith Cleaves, an incest survivor, came to the SFZC hoping to escape the repressive family patterns she had suffered in childhood. Yet she found the same sort of coercive relationships at the Zen center. The rhetoric of gender egalitarianism, she claims, was actually used as a way to avoid discussion about women’s issues or about sensitive issues such as her struggle with incest. This sort of restraint on conversation tended to privilege the males who, like Baker, were already in power and replicated a dysfunctional family that was “centered around a man who was profoundly insecure” and consequently abused his relationships with those around him.<sup>65</sup> Another practitioner, Yvonne, claims that “Dick was physically punishing students for behavior that was his for his entire life as a Zen practitioner . . . [which conveyed his sense that] *I am above the rules. The rules for you do not apply to me.*”<sup>66</sup> However, criticism of Baker was suppressed in the name of institutional stability. Questions of gender and power were simply devolved onto issues of practice, so that fierce, militaristic discipline tended to underwrite a way of life that was hostile to women. Cleaves recalls that only the women who strove to be “masculine” were treated favorably, while Lane Olson claims that the silence of female leaders was described as “perfect balance.”<sup>67</sup>

Female practitioners, then, felt doubly shocked to learn of Baker-roshi’s misdeeds. Not only did his actions throw light on the SFZC’s lack of attention to ethical precepts, it was disturbing that incidents of such magnitude were required to bring such matters into focus. Baker-roshi had violated the code governing interpersonal relations—no deception, manipulation, or impeding another’s spiritual progress—but the community itself had participated in a kind of conspiracy of silence that served to widen the ethical gaps in their lives. This is not to place the blame on the above female practitioners but rather to claim that the students’ own needs, the roshi’s isolation from community feedback, and the nearly exclusive focus on meditation all worked together to divert attention away from ethics and the precepts. It was this inattention that initially prevented meaningful and productive discussion of what had transpired.

### Out of Ethical Silence

Clearly, then, a rigorous engagement with Buddhist precepts and ethical particulars only followed the duress occasioned by the scandals. This represents one potential outcome of the interpretive double movement. The SFZC has attempted, following Baker-roshi's departure, to cope with these crises of self-understanding and to erect barriers against their repetition: by appointing new superiors, by hiring facilitators for conflict management, and by attempting to democratize the center's organization. Further, the years following the crisis have seen a marked increase in interest in Buddhist history and traditions. Contrasted with the community's early endorsement of D. T. Suzuki's "timeless" and "ahistorical" Zen, the complication of their self-understandings has occasioned a yen for more refined knowledge of Zen traditions and texts.

During this period, scandals like the one in San Francisco became somewhat commonplace in the United States. Yet, unlike the responses to similar crises in Los Angeles and elsewhere, the SFZC has done a considerable amount to articulate ethical particulars, to systematize them into a coherent code for practice, and to devise methods for dispute resolution.<sup>68</sup> Though the initial responses to Baker's shortcomings were as varied as the community itself, the center states clearly in its pamphlet *Ethical Principles and Grievance Procedures* (all of which is now available on the SFZC's Web site) that "these principles have been developed in response to specific historical problems and concerns which have arisen in the sangha."<sup>69</sup> While the authors are careful to note that this more robust concern for ethics is limited and not intended to supersede extant forms of community practice, they have clearly rethought the relationship between ethics and Zen practice. For twenty years, concern with ethics was minimal at best at the center and thought to be secondary to developing the sort of disposition discussed above. Now, the ethical precepts "are so intimate a part of Zen practice that they have traditionally been called the 'blood vein of the ancestral lineage.' Indeed, there can be no Zen practice without rootedness in these precepts."<sup>70</sup>

Ethics has become central since the initial scandals of the 1980s and continues to evolve within the life of the SFZC to this day. The center adopted a series of documents addressing both principles and procedures on November 10, 1996. These documents are still normative, though changes have been made since their adoption. Not only has there been a sharpening of principles, there has also been a new reckoning with historical sources. For example, SFZC literature (including its Web site) is now significantly focused on ethical principles and highlights

some orienting texts from Suzuki-roshi on the distinction between the “negative, prohibitory side” of “American Precepts” and their positive, “generating” dimensions. If rooted in these positive aspects, community life is an expression of the sixteen bodhisattva precepts, which the SFZC now acknowledges as the “blood vein” of Zen. Openly admitting that its reformulations have been prompted by its own communal history, the ethics statement still leaves room for adaptation and modification of the principles in the future.

While the SFZC has not made substantive alterations to its formulation of doctrinal particulars since 1996, the tone of the literature’s descriptions may be significant. The precepts themselves have been subject to a reformulation that both removes some of the previous individualist gloss and addresses some of the specific issues raised by Baker. This change in tone is notable in the description of the Three Refuges. Taking refuge in the Buddha now has implications for authority within the community. “Fundamentally everyone is equally the expression of Buddha Nature.” This statement does not represent a weakening of the American idiom of egalitarianism but, rather, a more specific application of this impulse; indeed, this formulation can be seen as encouraging democratization of authority or internal accountability. This is expressed even more strongly in the description of refuge in the sangha, where emphasis is placed on full and open communication and on ensuring that “everyone’s concerns and ethical inquiries are fully heard.”<sup>71</sup> This is an explicit reversal of earlier practice and is almost an exhortation to create the feedback loop between authorities and community that was previously absent. Further, the more inclusive language can be seen as representing greater concern for gender and family in contrast to the earlier view of the deracinated meditative self.

The Three Pure Precepts have remained essentially vague but with slight shifts in meaning.<sup>72</sup> Refraining from harm is unpacked into three separate categories: self, others, and environment. Doing good is now understood as the “effort to live ethically” and singles out the virtues of “confession, repentance, atonement, and reconciliation.” Saving all beings is understood as an exhortation to place the needs of living beings before the needs of institutions, which should be balanced with larger concerns. (For example, the community appears to be amplifying its ecological concerns with greater frequency, as events like the 2006 lecture series, “Touching the Earth,” suggest.) Most of these descriptions, whether intentionally or not, fill gaps that were exposed during the SFZC’s scandals.

The Ten Essential Precepts continue the Zen center’s revisionism. What had previously been described as “no attachment to

fulfillment" is now restored to a concern with sexual misconduct. A number of passages—for example, that "it is considered a misuse of authority, responsibility and sexuality for a Zen Center to engage in sexual behavior with his or her student"—seem to take cues specifically from Baker. The precept goes on to forbid a teacher from sexual relations with former students until six months after their student-teacher relationship has ended and also to forbid any sexual relations within the first six months of a student's residency.<sup>73</sup> Thus not only the content of the rule, which is considerably more stipulative than before, but also the idiom itself has changed following Baker's scandals. The student-teacher relationship is bounded by specific rules of practice, grounded by an ethic of communication and consensual dialogue, and supported by emphasizing the "integrity of students' rights." The commitment to inquiry and discussion, which so many practitioners felt was lacking prior to the crisis, is evident throughout the text. Especially significant here is the fact that "no lying" is now described as "truthful communication," emphasizing that all residents are "entitled to straightforward, complete information" concerning their behavior, status, or performance in the community.<sup>74</sup> This reads almost as if it were a metaprecept reflecting the recent importance of procedural transparency at the SFZC. Further, what was previously formulated as "no dwelling on past mistakes" now promotes "respectful speech," particularly encouraging the use of mediation. Two additional precepts, against seeking personal gain and against materialism, seem tailored to undercutting some of Baker's traits. Finally, the precept against abusing the Three Treasures is indicative of another important shift, for it no longer describes the process of awakening as an exclusively interior one but gives it a social or communal edge.

These lead to a much more sustained definition of procedures for articulating grievances and for reconciliation. The formal procedures are intended to cover both administrative errors and member misconduct. Guidelines for conflict resolution include: (1) "stating the actual" (which is fact based and casuistic, eschewing generalization); (2) "being heard" (emphasizing openness and accessibility); (3) "restating what was heard" (in order to guarantee transparency and consistency); (4) "confession"; (5) "facilitation" (including mediation and arbitration); and (6) "seeking advice" (an acknowledgment that going beyond conventional authorities, even outside the sangha, can be of use).<sup>75</sup>

This recognition of communal needs as a link to resolving disputes and airing disagreements represents a widening of the community's self-understanding to include considerably more communication

than existed prior to the scandals. In addition to these recommendations, the statement establishes the functions of the Ethics and Reconciliation Council and outlines formal procedures for airing grievances. The council is designed to provide advice and information, to train residents on Buddhist ethics, and to ensure equal access to the grievance process. Council members are appointed by the board of directors from nominations submitted by the community. The formal procedures for airing grievances are as follows: (1) resident(s) must file a formal, written complaint with the council; (2) the council must review the nature of the complaint and determine the proper procedures for addressing it; (3) a grievance committee is then formed, if the council deems it necessary, with partial input from the parties to the complaint; (4) the designated convener organizes hearings whereby the complaint is reviewed; (5) when all information has been presented, an executive session is held until the grievance committee arrives at a consensus regarding the complaint; (6) a period of thirty days follows wherein either party to the complaint has a right to make an appeal for re-hearing; (7) finally, the committee makes a nonbinding recommendation to both parties on the proper steps to reconciliation, which range from private apology and psychological therapy to public censure and suspension from certain positions of responsibility.<sup>76</sup>

The statement on ethics constitutes a fascinating re-revisionism on the part of the SFZC. It is also possible to see this as a tentative completion of the original interpretive double movement. For what is evident in this new set of commitments is that American Zen Buddhism, at least as represented by this particular community, has begun responding to the exigencies of its immediate cultural context. The early emphasis on egalitarianism and communitarianism has not disappeared, but it has been resituated in a wider, and very Western, context. Much of the formal language describing grievances and reconciliation is intelligible within any democratic society, since it is explicitly legalistic and participatory in its character. Hence, one might reasonably conclude that, while the early creolization of the SFZC eventuated in scandal and omission, other results may occur as well.

Rick Fields has echoed this claim in his acknowledgment that scandals such as those at the SFZC have "resulted in a valuable reexamination of the place of Buddhist practice in American society . . . [and] have cut through romantic projections and thrown American Buddhists back on their meditation cushions."<sup>77</sup> This reexamination seems to result in a relaxing of the discourse that proclaims Buddhism as "timeless" or as "easy and free-floating" and a strengthening of the



recognition that remapping Buddhism in the West may require rigorous attention to particulars.

My aim in this article has not been to participate in, or make a normative evaluation of, the importation and reimagination of Zen Buddhist ethics in North America. Rather, I hope to have commended some interpretative tools—the double effect, the exchange between consumer desire and cultural particulars—by which we might trace and report the transmission of religions and the new shapes these traditions often take as they seek to situate themselves in a religiously complex, protean culture. Beyond the value these modifications impart to practitioners, these transformations serve as useful angles of vision onto the study of religious transmission and importation by American audiences. Rather than rewriting a narrative of the “Americanization” of Zen Buddhism, following shifts in the idiom of “consumer” desire (most notably through the interpretive double movement and the SFZC “Apocalypse”) helps to uncover a complicated intersection of discourses, desires, and practices that combine the idioms of “home” and “other.” In a time of increasingly unstable boundaries and ever-shifting social locations, such close attention to the construction of American religious identities—both imported and home-grown—may serve as a useful point of orientation for critical, interpretative transmissions.

## Notes

I am grateful to my friends and colleagues Richard M. Jaffe and D. Neil Schmid for reading this essay and offering such helpful advice.

1. Quoted in Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambala Press, 1992), 230.

2. In “The Long Learning Curve: An Interview with Richard Baker-roshi,” *Connection Magazine* (Winter 1994): 34.

3. Studies of Buddhism in North America typically use terms such as “abbot,” which are appropriated from Christian models of classification. I use this terminology here because it is customary in the field and, indeed, is fairly common in the discourse of converts to Buddhism in North America.

4. Michael Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 2001), xiv. It is worth noting here that Downing’s text, while a useful source of information on the SFZC, projects a highly idealized and static version of Japanese Zen.

5. Downing's version of the contrast is between "groovy" and "gravitas."

6. A useful source for understanding the cultural, as opposed to the merely linguistic, dimension of creolization is Ulf Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," *Africa* 57, no. 4 (1987): 546–59.

7. Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steel Olcott and 'Protestant Buddhism,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (Summer 1995): 281–302. On Olcott's role in the globalization of Buddhism, see Gananath Obeyesekere, "Buddhism," in *Global Religions: An Introduction*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–77.

8. The term "double movement" has its origins in Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, but the uses to which I put this term are obviously quite distinct from Kierkegaard's.

9. As this is not a work of ethnography, I rely on secondary sources to fashion my interpretation of these events. Aside from Downing, there has not been much substantive treatment of the SFZC's history. What little there is can be found in larger histories of American Zen, which are of limited use in focusing on the scandals. It is for this reason that I rely on secondary sources such as news media articles written between the 1980s and 1990s and on Downing's book (which, while admittedly selective and impressionistic as a history of the institution, usefully devotes considerable space to the voices of practitioners themselves). My claim, then, is not to represent the attitudes and the voices of all students at the SFZC during the relevant period; even if this were possible, which it is not, it would be an unhelpfully totalizing gesture. Rather, my aim is simply to construct one interpretive frame—of necessity a partial one—through which to examine these events, their histories, and their consequences.

10. Jan Nattier, "Visible and Invisible: The Politics of Representation in Buddhist America," *Tricycle* 5 (Fall 1995): 43.

11. This may distinguish American double movement from versions of it that occur elsewhere in Zen's history. Indeed, as Downing writes, "For 2,500 years, the Buddhism that filtered into the West was the provenance of scholars, philosophers, curators and collectors, and poets." Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 53. As later importations occurred, the idioms of white Buddhism became more populist, but much of the bias and rescripting present in the earliest importations remained.

12. My use of the term "audience" is distinct from that of Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge in their *The Future of Religion*

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). As opposed to the more colloquial usage, Stark and Bainbridge use “audience” as part of a typology of new religious movements. As opposed to a fully developed new religious movement (with rigid structures of belief, authority, and community life) and to a “client cult” (where religious practitioners interact with a religious leader and adhere to identifiable beliefs and practices, but where participation and exit are voluntary), an “audience cult” refers to a loose-knit cluster of beliefs or practices that make few demands on practitioners, instead existing as “services” of which interested “consumers” may avail themselves.

13. My source for this term is Alan Hodder, “Concord Orientalism, Thoreauvian Autobiography, and the Artist of Kouroo,” in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*, ed. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999), 190–226. A detailed discussion of this particular predecessor would require another paper altogether. It is worth noting, however, that Emerson and Thoreau specifically responded to what they believed were corrupting or degrading changes in American culture by embracing heavily interpreted versions of Hinduism and Buddhism, seizing upon them as ready-made alternatives to the “mainstream,” vehicles for self-expression that were free of the “limits” of Western spirituality. Thoreau and Emerson absorbed the idioms of Asian religion only after having previously sutured what they believed to be the meanings of those idioms to their extant critique of American life; they had made up their minds about what they expected to gain from Asian religions from the very start. The result was a fusion of the vocabulary—but not necessarily the ethics or even the ritual practice—of Hinduism and Buddhism with the Transcendentalist obsession with self-expression. This critique was clearly reductive in many ways, focusing on self-expression, the good life, and philosophical wisdom; yet the character of their interpretations and the social uses to which they were put helped establish a pattern for importing Asian religions that is broadly similar to that of the postwar era. See also Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First and Second Series* (New York: Vintage Books/Library of America, 1990); Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981); and R. K. Dahwan, *Henry David Thoreau: A Study in Indian Influence* (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., 1985).

14. Eiki Hoshino, “The Birth of an American Sangha: An Analysis of a Zen Center in America,” in *Japanese Religions in California: A Report on Research within and without the Japanese-American Community*, ed. Keiichi Yanagawa (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Department of Religious Studies, 1983), 30. On the role of Shaku and other global Buddhists

during this period, see Richard M. Jaffe, "Seeking Sakyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 65–96. Jaffe's essay gives a clear sense of the ways in which cultural constructions and reinterpretations of Zen were taking place in Asia as well as in the United States.

15. Emma Layman. *Buddhism in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), 54. See also Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka, eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann, *Western Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen R. Prothero, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late Twentieth-Century Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), has an informative chapter on Buddhism in post-World War II America.

16. Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 25.

17. While the juxtaposition of Soto and a relative disregard for ethical precepts is helpful in understanding the SFZC's particular history, this juxtaposition cannot explain all such crises in practice at other centers. For example, the Los Angeles Zen Center, which has a mixed Rinzai-Soto lineage, has experienced similar kinds of problems (and, apparently, less thoroughness in responding to them).

18. Nattier, "Visible and Invisible," 45. Most forms of Japanese Buddhism have attracted the belief that they are amoral religious systems. For example, these kinds of interpretations clustered around Jodo Shin Buddhism in the early twentieth century. Indeed, one could also point to longstanding debates about the role of the precepts (specifically, whether or not they must be followed by one who has achieved awakening) and the relevance of karmic cause and effect that stretch back nearly to the inception of Zen as a distinct tradition. I am indebted to Richard M. Jaffe for this contextual point.

19. See Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

20. See Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions* 33 (August 1993): 1–43.

21. There was a fascination in the 1950s popular culture with the exotic and the horrible. In pulp literature, comic books, motion pictures, and in the ideological imagination as well, the mysterious other (whether in the form of communists from the East, the third world savages encountered by American soldiers in war movies, or the horrible monsters of the atomic era in comic books) enjoyed a marked prominence.

22. Many readers have noted the Buddhist influences on Salinger's novels, particularly *Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey*.

23. Quoted in James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 329.

24. Quoted in Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 205.

25. *Ibid.*

26. All Watts citations from *ibid.*, chap. 10.

27. *Ibid.*, 220.

28. Philip Whalen, quoted in *ibid.*, 214.

29. Interestingly enough, these same impulses would surface later in the poststructuralist fascination with Nagarjuna and the concept of emptiness. See, for example, Harold Coward and Tobay Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

30. Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 247.

31. James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.

32. Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 121.

33. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 433.

34. Quoted in Charles Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (1993): 197.

35. For a discussion of this cultural break, see R. E. Gussner and S. D. Berkowitz, "Scholars, Sects, and Sanghas," *Sociological Analysis* 49, no. 2 (1988): 165.

36. Quoted in Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 196. Those familiar with Cage's music will recognize that "chance operations" was but one of many methods the composer used, albeit an extremely significant one for him.

37. Hereafter, the Suzuki referred to in the text is Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, not D. T. Suzuki.

38. Shunryu Suzuki was not the only Japanese immigrant to participate in such processes of transmission. Suzuki was assisted for a time by Dainin Katagiri and Kobun Chino Otagawa-roshi at the SFZC. Additionally, Suzuki had arranged for Tatsugami-roshi, a famously rigorous teacher at Eihei-ji in Japan, to lead sessions at Tassajara (students apparently responded poorly to his rigors, both at Tassajara and on visits to Eihei-ji). Because of Suzuki's prominence, his writings, and his links to Baker, I have focused primarily on his role in these processes. These teachers and missionaries collectively played a part in shaping the American audience for Zen as well as the distinctive ethical understandings at the SFZC; and they did so over time in exchanges with the young practitioners who eagerly sought out their teachings.

39. Lewis MacAdams and A. Atterbury, "Love Conquers Zen," *California* (March 1988): 75.

40. Baker went to the famous Eihei-ji Temple on Suzuki's recommendation but, apparently, could not withstand the institution's strict discipline. He walked out of Eihei-ji and ended up in Kyoto, where he became involved in the import/export trade and purchased a number of significant artworks with which he later adorned the SFZC, partly to serve as a conversion device for new students and partly to signify the SFZC's authenticity. It is said that Baker asked students, who were given a monthly stipend of \$50, to make a contribution to purchasing the art.

41. Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, xix, 107.

42. *Ibid.*, 128.

43. *Ibid.*, 174.

44. *Ibid.*, 129.

45. *Ibid.*, 147.

46. *Ibid.*, 102. Many practitioners later reported, however, that even the reinterpreted Precepts were widely flouted at SFZC. See *ibid.*, 166ff.

47. *Ibid.*, xi.

48. On this point, see Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties*, 109.

49. It is widely thought that Tipton's "Pacific Zen Center" is not as much an aggregate, as he suggests, but is really the SFZC.

50. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties*, 138.

51. *Ibid.*, 114.

52. *Ibid.*, 110.

53. *Ibid.*, 116.

54. *Ibid.*, 137.

55. It seems worth mentioning that the Zen center is located on Page Street in a somewhat downtrodden section of San Francisco, where the realities of political and economic disenfranchisement are evident.

56. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties*, 170.

57. Quoted in Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 215.

58. *Ibid.*, 34.

59. This material is available from numerous sources, but I draw mostly from MacAdams and Atterbury, "Love Conquers Zen."

60. Katy Butler, "Events Are the Teacher," *CoEvolution Quarterly* (Winter 1983): 117.

61. In MacAdams and Atterbury, "Love Conquers Zen," 80.

62. Serious attention to this issue would warrant its own essay. Yet I discuss it here, however briefly, as another important lacuna in the SFZC's importation of Buddhism. Important to my understanding of this issue has been Sandy Boucher, *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

63. Butler, "Events Are the Teachers," 116.

64. Boucher, *Turning the Wheel*, 247.

65. *Ibid.*, 250.

66. Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 97. Italics in original.

67. Boucher, *Turning the Wheel*, 254.

68. See Coleman, *New Buddhism*, 87.

69. *Ethical Principles and Grievance Procedures* (San Francisco Zen Center, 1996), 1.



70. Ibid., 1.

71. Both from *ibid.*, 2.

72. Ibid., 4.

73. Ibid., 6–7.

74. Ibid., 8. Interestingly, the February 1995 draft of the statement also includes the students' right to information about community decisions. In the final version of the statement, however, there is more emphasis on the confidentiality bounding certain conversations among teachers and practice leaders. Further, the injunction to see "each Sangha member, regardless of seniority or level of commitment, as Buddha" has been replaced by the recommendation that consultations are "done in a sensitive, fair and respectful manner." I leave it to the reader to make conclusions as to the significance of these alterations.

75. All citations are from [www.sfzc.org](http://www.sfzc.org).

76. Above material from *Ethical Principles*, 15–25.

77. Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 367.

---

**ABSTRACT** There is little reckoning with the development of religions in the United States without confronting the related processes of importation and appropriation. This article explores these processes specifically as reflected in the story of the San Francisco Zen Center. Partaking of an interpretative ethos established by the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists and refined during the 1950s "Zen boom," the architects of the SFZC's communalism shaped this complicated tradition specifically for disaffected young practitioners seeking an experiential path beyond their middle-class, Judeo-Christian backgrounds. It was during the 1983 scandals surrounding SFZC leader, Richard Baker-roshi, that many of the interpretive lacunae—specifically, a relative inattention to ethical languages—became readily apparent. This article accounts for these scandals historically (by situating them in the history of American appropriations of Buddhism and of the religious disaffection of the post-World War II period) and theoretically (by reading the SFZC's patterns of transmission and interpretation through the category "interpretative double movement"). This double movement among practitioners captures the ways in which those in search of an alternative to their religious culture impose their own idiosyncratic values onto another religious tradition, all the while remaining paradoxically within the interpretive confines of the culture they hope to escape. Reading this complicated history—including both its "scandals" and their aftermaths—through such categories sheds light on the ways in which American religious exchanges are enacted and identities constructed.



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.