ABSTRACT

WOMEN IN AMERICAN ZEN:
VARIATIONS ON ADAPTATIONS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

by Susan Irion

This thesis looks at accommodation of American Zen communities, specifically rejection or modification of Zen rituals from feminist concerns. The work looks at some traditional practices such as dharma transmission, bowing as well the encouragement stick. This work looks at how these rituals function in the Asian context and why they might be perceived as subject to elimination due to patriarchal bias. This thesis also looks at systems of control in the Japanese monastery as well as contrasting functions of the Zen teacher in the Asian and American contexts. Using a two-case approach, chapters two and three analyze the possible variations and motivations for these adaptations, and why women Zen teachers in America are at the forefront of this movement.
Women in American Zen:
Variations on Adaptations of Religious Authority

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Introduction

Contemporary interests in innovation within religious movements in the American context cross religious boundaries. As Buddhism is becoming important to the American religious landscape, many of the trends that scholars of religious innovation are tracking are clearly evident in the changing attitudes and rituals in Zen communities. Feminism is the focus of this thesis as one example of innovation because it of its special influence as a catalyst for societal attitudes that advocate changing religious systems. Feminism particularly adds a degree of legitimacy for radical modification of tradition and for this reason it has become a powerful force in relatively recent years in challenging the status quo.

This thesis uses a two case study approach in investigating the varieties of accommodation introduced by feminist women teachers affiliated with Zen. I will explore innovation by two such teachers: Jiyu-Kennett and Toni Packer. At different ends of the same spectrum, these teachers represent many of the concerns for an egalitarian solution to the problem of importing a religious system that supports patriarchy. Contemporary practitioners see this trend not only as a positive development for women but for Buddhism as a world religion. But orthodoxy will accommodate only so many changes before a conflict ensues. This thesis investigates which practices are rejected or modified, why this matters to women’s equality and how this is indicative of the innovations of American Zen.

Throughout this thesis I use the term “tradition” in reference to Zen and its practices. As scholars such as Bernard Faure have illustrated, there is hardly one specific tradition in Buddhism or Zen. Each group is concerned with legitimacy and orthodox traditions are often constructed. Tradition can mean different things for different groups; I will be using the term tradition as how the practitioners understand it to be. I want to avoid the ubiquitous quotation marks, which the reader would quickly find exasperating if not facetious.

The methodologies used in this thesis are from seemingly disparate sources. In order to provide a thick description of these phenomena I used a variety approaches to this topic and picked out common themes. This paper is concerned with both patriarchal biases and manifestations of changing attitudes in various cultures. I also searched for both legitimization strategies and critiques of institutional structures that these women may find questionable such as authority and hierarchy. Specific ritual forms such as dharma transmission, bowing, and the
encouragement stick are ritual changes that are indicative of the larger themes of questioning authoritarian traditions. Because these ritual forms threaten the institutions of Zen orthodoxy and authority, I have used some postmodern scholars such as Foucault and Faure. To give a background of the importance of maintaining traditions I used a variety of scholars writing from a History of Religions viewpoint as well as religious scholars interested in contemporary Buddhism in Japan (Reader, Arai) and Buddhism in America (Coleman, Seager, Preston). I am particularly interested in practitioner-feminist voices that are calling for change (Boucher, Friedman).

In chapters two and three, I rely heavily on both interviews and the work of two particular examples, Jiyu-Kennett Roshi and Toni Packer. Their influences are particularly important as they indicate the types of justifications for change. Jiyu-Kennett is a teacher who looks to venerable figures such as Dogen as her model. Toni Packer’s influences (Suzuki, Watts, Kapleau and Krishnamurti) are particularly iconoclastic which points to her fairly radical changes.

**Chapter one: Zen Practices and Cultural Contexts**

Japanese and American cultures are distinctive, yet it would be simplistic to imply that they are monolithic and stagnant. The intersections of these societies include both clashes and borrowing. American Zen practitioners both reject and adopt Japanese Zen practices through selective appropriation and these choices vary among groups in America. My primary focus will be on those practices that Americans, particularly women practitioners, often reject as authoritarian, hierarchical, and patriarchal. What is of particular interest to this thesis is the importing of a religious system from the Japanese culture into American culture that has some of the same problems with patriarchy, and some new modern challenges, but that is now conscious of its patriarchal and authoritarian heritage. This consciousness and quest for change can create a dissonance for those practitioners who want to maintain the integrity of the tradition, including its specific forms, rituals and beliefs.

Japanese culture has maintained a patriarchal bias for millennia. Particularly influential on Japanese gender roles, Confucianism infused Japanese culture with its clear-cut distinction
between genders and enforced hierarchies based on gender. Buddhism, already influenced by Chinese Confucian ideals, was imported to Japan by way of Korea in the sixth century. Over time, a resurgence of Neo-Confucian ideals contributed specific gender ideals to the formation of early modern Japanese sensibilities with regard to gender. By the Edo period, the subservient place of females was well established.¹

Buddhist practitioners often argue that the dharma² will adapt to whichever culture it belongs. They argue that it is characteristic of the unique truths of the Buddha’s teachings that the dharma will both conform to yet transform each culture it touches. Despite this theoretical universalism, sectarian rhetoric tries to explain their sect’s monopoly on what the true teachings mean. Each distinctive group will argue that they are practicing the unique form of Buddhism that is most “true” to the dharma or presents the dharma in its most advanced form.

As Buddhism was introduced to the Western world, it was allowed by orthodoxy some accommodations. However, because many years have passed since Buddhism was introduced to a new culture, which changes and how quickly they occurred are debatable. Because Buddhism has vague prescriptions for strictly orthodox belief and ritual, as a world religion a variety of Buddhisms have developed. More often than not, other Buddhist groups believe that these different forms of Buddhism are not truly Buddhism but some corruption of the dharma.

American Buddhism has yet to assert a distinctly unique form of this religion but has “Americanized” each of the chosen sects imported and transformed them to fit their needs. Because one of the unique features of American Buddhism is that women now have leadership roles, I am concerned with trends that reflect both general attitudinal challenges to authority and hierarchy that these women teachers see as “cultural baggage” from Asia as well as a general questioning of patriarchal traditions in Buddhism.

There are unique features of Zen that make this a particularly interesting debate. The Zen philosophical paradox of antinomian beliefs within the tradition, of irrationality and questioning

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¹ Neo-Confucian morality, in accentuating the different functions of sexes, accorded girls and women a subservient place in society. Although the phrase *danson johi* (respect the male, denigrate the female) may be the creation of a later date, the idea was clearly put into practice during the Edo period. See Michihiko Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), p.87.

² The Sanskrit word *dharma* means natural law or doctrine. It is most often used to refer to the path taught by the historical Buddha.
set within a strictly prescribed ritual activity, as well as a lack of a written canon can create conflict of orthodox ritual and belief. This dissonance has served Zen well as a means of distinguishing itself from other sects of Buddhism, yet some American practitioners use this same rhetoric to turn the tradition on its own head. The unique way in which Zen was introduced to America contributed to this phenomenon, through the writings of D.T. Suzuki and the Beat Poets. The emphasis of D. T Suzuki’s irrational Zen as an underlying philosophy of the religion was quickly embraced by the counter-culture of the 50’s and 60’s. While later in this thesis I will illustrate that this was hardly an accurate description of typical Zen practices, this “philosophy of the absurd” captured the imagination of writers and artists of mid-century America. The idealization of the absurd was not a completely new idea to the artistic world as many were familiar with the European Dada movement of inter-war Europe. But D.T Suzuki’s Zen legitimized it and gave it a spiritual dimension that spoke to the rebellion of suburbia and religious tradition for some post-war Americans.

After this period, Zen continued to appeal to highly educated people of liberal and non-traditional ideals. Coupled with the feminist influence of the 1970’s, the assumptions of traditional practices and ritual forms with patriarchal and authoritarian biases were rejected as unnecessary to the practice. However, not all practitioners agreed upon which, if any, practices should be changed on the basis of sexist authoritarianism. As women became teachers in Zen traditions, they made decisions about traditional practices based on their own concerns and communicated new forms of ritual to their students.

It is not my goal to argue for the inherent integrity of Buddhism as an egalitarian and non-sexist faith that has been corrupted by centuries of patriarchy. This has been the tactic of some feminist scholars, writing from within the Buddhist tradition, to show textual evidence that the religion was founded on the egalitarian ideals of an enlightened master. I find the task of reconstructing a legendary religious founder so steeped in hagiography not only fruitless but also implicitly racist. This “back to the wellsprings” ideal of the true meaning of Buddhism (before men “tainted” the original ideal with false patriarchal rules) is making a judgment on how Buddhism has falsely been practiced for twenty-five centuries. The argument implies that only now, in an enlightened (in the modern Western sense) age, in this feminist age, can we finally practice “true” Buddhism as it was intended. It also speaks to a subtle Protestant influence in
the general milieu of American spirituality and its trends.³ This tactic of Buddhist apologetics I believe is problematic in a scholarly sense but is of significance to those women practitioners who do read this rhetoric. As highly educated women, these practitioners appreciate this textual support for their own feminist concerns. These books and articles are popular within the Buddhist community for a reason. This idea of Buddhism as an inherently egalitarian tradition will be of significant importance in Chapter 2, on Jiyu-Kennet Roshi, who believed in this ideal wholeheartedly.

The first specific practice illustrated in this thesis is dharma transmission.⁴ This practice is a unique feature of Zen and a ritual form some deem as essential to Zen’s legitimacy. But encapsulated in dharma transmission, many believe, is patriarchal tradition that it is endemic to this traditional belief and cannot be simply reconciled with feminist concerns.

The patriarchal nature of Confucian ideals is of particular pertinence to the Chan/Zen tradition as terminology such as “patriarch” is still used to denote those specific venerable holders of the dharma transmission in the past. But this ideal, including the terminology, is infused with Confucian ideals of Chinese ancestor worship. Ideals still maintained in this tradition such as patriarch, lineage, and death rituals are redolent of Confucian ideologies. But if Confucian ideologies became some of the most treasured ideals of the Zen tradition, what does this say about the status of women and their potential to be a part of traditional Zen lineages?

Bernard Faure, in his book The Rhetoric of Immediacy, maintains that the lineages of the Chan tradition, the specific lines that monks held as their connection to the historical Buddha, were actually constructions of legitimacy. He contends that Chan itself is a varied blend of traditions (within and outside of Indian Buddhism), which needed legitimacy to maintain its specific truth claims.

³ The search for the recovery of religious origins and the purity of the source is a Protestant ideal that has influenced the American religious value system profoundly. Because this was the ultimate concern for the colonists, this idea has influenced, sometimes subversively, the religious value system beyond American Christianity and into other faiths practiced in America.

⁴ Dharma transmission is an important ritual in the Zen tradition in which a master confers upon a student the recognition that this student carries the same degree of internal knowledge as the Zen master. This “successor” or dharma heir is now empowered to carry on the teachings and later transmit this same recognition to his or her own appropriate student.
(Chan’s)... “primitive”(if not originary) teachings were not simply syncretistic, borrowing as they did freely from a variety of other currents (Madhyamika, Yogacara, Tiantai, Huayan, Pure Land, Daoism). They achieved in fact an uneasy ‘polytheism of values.’ In this sense, the orthodox claim in a ‘pure’ Chan is an amnesia, an active forgetting of origins, a repression or scapegoating of doctrinal features and historical figures. The (inclusive) hierarchy or (exclusive) unity it achieved was a violent one.  

Faure’s deconstructions of legitimacy claims are not widely read in the mainstream Buddhist community, perhaps because his findings undermine sources of authority within Buddhist traditions. Those within the community of believers that do read, and understand, his work, sometimes meet Faure with resistance. I am positing that some women and men in American Zen communities reject dharma lineage and transmission as particular to Asian forms of Buddhism. While some practitioners see the idea of an unbroken lineage of dharma transmitters as a link to the origins of this venerable tradition and as a means of revealing illegitimate or “incomplete” masters, others see it as antiquated, patriarchal, wrought with political corruption and generally flawed. Feminists in the Zen tradition are concerned with the exclusion of women in the lineages and wonder if they really want to be a part of an institution that has been so unfair in recognizing women’s accomplishments.

It is likely that there is some Romanticization of the “exotic” for many Zen practitioners in America. In Romanticization, one can see a type of implicit or occasionally explicit racism. Some practitioners find appeal in the idea that they could be a part of dharma transmission that reaches back for millennia; they idealize Japanese lineages, mentally categorizing them in the so-called “mysteries of the east.” This was certainly more prevalent in the early history of Buddhism in America, influencing Transcendentalism, the Theosophical Society and privileged access to forms of knowledge cherished by the Victorian intellectual elite. Richard Hughes Seager in his survey *Buddhism in America* believes that the scholarship available on this history lends itself to seeing a kind of counter-culture lineage unique to the American context. But even

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a quick reading of this history reveals that it is fraught with Romanticization, racism, stereotyping, misunderstanding and mistranslation. Today, racism and Romanticization are not always as explicit as for the Theosophists of Madame Blavatsky’s day. But contemporary idealizations still make presuppositions about the cultures of Asia and its peoples.

Clearly, for many Zen practitioners, both male and female, the “exotic” nature of Japanese culture and traditions has been an appeal, particularly at those zendos that accentuate the Zen aesthetic. But what is traditional Japanese culture? Therein lies a deep problem, as American stereotypes and a surface understanding of Japanese culture tends to misconstrue Japanese culture. One assumption for the “Japanophile” is that “traditional” (i.e. the world of the geisha and kabuki theater) Japanese culture has gone unchanged for millennia. Even these two examples are remnants of elite groups of the past that stand now as virtual museum pieces, quickly becoming anachronisms in the rapidly changing landscape of Japanese society.

I do not want to imply that all who accept the legitimacy of Zen dharma transmission have these same motivations, and by no means are those who romanticize about Japan and Zen exclusively concerned with just this topic. It is necessary to appreciate the possible range of motivations for keeping a “tradition” intact, particularly one so foreign. Those who are interested in keeping the integrity of the religious ideals and teachings of Zen make many of the arguments for dharma transmission. Quick to point out the transitory nature of American’s interest in Zen, trying to safeguard it from charlatans, dilatants, and dabblers, official dharma transmission is understood as a diploma, a symbol of accomplishment, and insurance against “phony” teachers. This worry extends to Zen masters in Japan, who often have their own assumptions about the ability of their American “little brothers”.

In February of 2002 I attended the lecture of Fukushima Roshi, an abbot of a monastery in Japan and a frequent visitor to the U.S. He made a special point of complaining that there are a number of “incomplete Zen masters” in America and this can be quite dangerous. He contends that it takes twenty years for someone to become a Zen master: ten years to complete the koan work and ten years to deepen their own practice. While he currently has thirty American Zen disciples living with him in Japan, he explained that it takes an extra five years for Americans because they need to learn to read Japanese and Chinese. He blames those incomplete American masters’ own masters for giving their students Zen certificates too soon. Fukushima Roshi
believes that this causes a degeneration of Zen and that American Zen must have good leadership.

New is not always good. It must be the responsibility of Japanese Zen, like an older brother and American Zen is the younger brother. Stray and it must be set straight. For the next twenty or thirty years it will be the responsibility of Japanese Zen to check the growth of American Zen and it is then that it will grow into a great tree. 7

The tradition of the dharma transmission performs several functions. It gives unique legitimacy to Zen, not only among Buddhists throughout Asia, but within the many groups of Japanese Buddhists. Their lineage claims set Zen adepts apart from these competing Buddhist groups within Japan such as Tendai. The initiation into the institution of lineage also functions to enforce a sense of solidarity and gives resolve to the long and arduous austerities of the monk’s practice. There is another practical function of lineage in Japan because the overwhelming majority of Zen priests in Japan serve as funerary priests. The temple, after the Meiji Restoration allowed for married priests (not for female nuns), has now become a family run business and often the temple is passed on to the sons. As Ian Reader has shown, the Japanese temple makes its income largely from funerary fees, with the priesthood as a hereditary occupation.

The priesthood, both in Buddhism and Shinto, is largely hereditary: just as in the other professions, fathers are generally keen that their sons follow them, and the obligation on the temple priests to provide a successor is an added stimulus. 8

While these small temple priests are hardly the “patriarchs” of Zen, they are a part of a larger lineage, which is undermined when lineage is passed through bloodlines and not merit. This is not to say that the sons of the priests do not work hard, but there are some American practitioners who believe that that there are bound to be a few “bad apples” in this type of system.

7 Lecture at University of Cincinnati, Feb. 28th 2002
Faure argues that dharma transmission was a path to upward mobility for Chan adepts. China, a hierarchical and stratified society, offered the monk born with few opportunities for advancement a chance to “become somebody”.

The definition of masters and disciples, and what is supposed to be transmitted through them, is primarily social. Despite the constant reference to ultimate truth, it does not acquire its validity from some extra social criterion but is closely related to status. …In other words, they are not masters because they have realized the truth and can now teach it (although, of course, this may be the case); rather, they can teach the truth because, having been socially defined as Chan masters, what they teach has the performative power of being the truth.⁹

The fact that women have been excluded from this hierarchy has not heretofore been considered in light of the debate on the legitimacy of the lineage institution itself. In the American context, while some American women are becoming nuns and requesting ordination in their lineage, the overwhelming majority of American practitioners are laypeople who do not need to take formal ordination vows. Some practitioners want dharma transmission and the sanction to teach, while others teach without the legitimacy afforded by that diploma. Some observers have seen the problem of dharma transmission in America as evidence that this system may not be as foolproof as it may seem.

The most famous of these examples is Richard Baker Roshi and his dharma transmission from one of the most highly respected Zen teachers in America, Shunryu Suzuki. Shunryu Suzuki was the author of the popular book, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, a book that is still a strong seller. Founder of the large San Francisco Zen Center, this Zen master, originally from Japan, is rarely written about in a negative light and known for his straightforward yet warm personality. The only criticism of Shunryu Suzuki that I have read is his choice of dharma successor. Highly educated and intelligent, Richard Baker is reportedly quite charming. But some suggest that Baker lacks the integrity of his master. After the death of his teacher, Baker took over control of the SFZC and turned it into a highly profitable and high profile Zen Center. As interviewed in Helen Twarkov’s book *Zen in America*, Baker himself claims that he created

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for the Zen Center assets worth $25 million with an annual gross income of $4 million. Attracting high profile people to the SFZC was another of Baker’s most notorious qualities, including interesting the then governor of California, Jerry Brown. However, Baker began living an affluent lifestyle, a lifestyle not shared by the spartan accommodations of his students. But the most damaging to the integrity of his authority was the accusation that this married head of the SFZC was having affairs and they were being concealed from the sangha. In a move that was to redefine the authority of the Zen master in America, the Zen Center’s board of directors forced him to resign.

...The long interlocking history of Richard Baker has absorbed most—if not all—the basic issues to Zen in America: the nature of spiritual authority, dharma transmission, the relationship between enlightenment and personality, the American experiment of combining monastic tradition with communalism.  

Because of the high profile of the SFCZ and the ensuing scandal, some practitioners of Zen have questioned the reliability of this tradition of dharma succession and its likelihood of fostering abuses of power. The very esoteric nature of dharma transmission also contributes to the undermining of its authority, because it is not a public ritual and therefore not a transparent process.

One woman profiled in this thesis, Jiyu Kennet Roshi, received official dharma transmission from her master in Japan, realized it was unusual for a woman to do so in Japan and wore it as a testament to her hard work. However, upon teaching in America, she reportedly gave dharma transmission to over one hundred of her own students, undermining the elite nature of transmission of the teachings.

Toni Packer, while never formally receiving official dharma transmission from her teacher Phillip Kapleau Roshi, because he himself did not have it to give, did receive permission to teach. One cannot deny that that Packer trained intensely in the system that Kapleau set up, and for neither teacher has the absence of official dharma transmission ever deterred students from affiliating themselves with their centers.

Related to this concern for the legitimacy of the teacher’s credentials is the explicit and implicit power of the Roshi, teacher or priest. One of the controversies of Richard Baker’s

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scandal was an abuse of power, specifically that hierarchical power in the religious setting. The nature of power in religious settings could be a topic for volumes of work as it transcends religions as well as time. Most religions rely on a spiritual leader for guidance, instruction and some could even argue dependence, emotional or financial. What is of concern to this thesis is opposing understandings of authority within the Zen tradition as is imported to America. I am also particularly concerned with feminist women and their conscious rejection, and selective appropriation, of authoritarian power structures.

In the Zen tradition, often a teacher instructs the student until he or she has reached maturity in his or her practice. While that Roshi may always have an impact on that student’s life, he or she may not be the only teacher that student encounters. In Japan, the teacher is not necessarily chosen by the student, but serves that role by virtue of a leadership position as the head of a temple or monastery. He or she will be instructing all of the students in that temple until the student or teacher moves on. But of significance religiously, is the philosophy of Zen that includes questioning everything, including reality itself, which can also include the teacher.

This idea of questioning authority can create a significance dissonance for the practitioner in the American context. I contend that in the Japanese tradition one can question the teacher but only within certain implicit, culturally controlled bounds. What I am arguing is that while within the rhetoric of Chan and Zen is this explicit display of questioning authority, there are implicit cultural constraints on this questioning that do not translate well in the American context.

Before I speak of specific examples of this cultural dissonance, it may be helpful to have some background knowledge of the significance of power and authority in the context of religious teachers and the systems in which they operate. In Zen Buddhism, the Roshi or head of the monastery is both the disciplinarian and religious instructor. The monastery system itself is also interesting in that while it controls the students though intense physical and mental discipline, students are taught to see this discipline as crucial for their religious development. Monastic discipline is as important to the student’s training as zazen, or sitting meditation. The destruction of the ego is a primary goal of Zen practice. But while some may see it as forging the best monks and nuns, others may view the discipline as abusive. Coercive and internalized control also functions in these systems that may not be explicit yet maintain power all the same. The work of Michel Foucault is of value; although he specifically is looking at histories of the Western paradigm of authority, a reader can make some common connections with Zen
traditions. But care should be taken that not all complicities of authority in the Asian context be understood in universal terms.

Another argument that is often ignored when comparing religious authority across cultures is that economic power structures are radically different in the American Buddhist cultural context. The commercialization of Zen is most often cited as a dilution of a “pure” practice and a negative effect of an adaptation to a capitalist country with a free market. However, while a student may have to pay for her own sesshin, if she finds the experience a painful or exploitative one, she can simply get in her car and drive home. Because of both economic and democratic ideals valued by American Buddhist groups, many sanghas have a board of directors, which provides participants with a means of recourse from power abuses. Monks and nuns in Japan may not have that economic independence and may have to endure abuse without alternative options.¹¹

The value of Foucault’s work for this thesis is his emphasis on implicit power and control, which is significant to Zen practitioners in both cultural contexts. Zen Buddhism has historically emphasized the monastic path, a highly controlled environment with routine and discipline. It is often argued that serious work toward spiritual enlightenment occurs only within this rigorous environment, without distractions. Without the distractions of members of the opposite sex ¹² and day to day concerns of family and work, only then can the sheer numbers of hours be devoted to spiritual practice to achieve ultimate goals. Control of activity is of concern to Foucault and timetables of monasteries are models for those institutions of control such as the school, prison or hospital. Control of time includes that silence be observed at mealtimes and other breaks. Sleep is regulated, privacy in the monastery can be at a minimum, and the body is controlled.

The timetable is an old inheritance. The strict model was no doubt suggested by the monastic communities. It soon spread. Its three great methods—establish rhythms, impose particular occupations,

¹¹ In the modern era these traditional systems are changing and many Japanese monks and nuns have outside jobs and financial resources.
¹² This rule implies that heterosexual desire is the only sexual desire.
regulate the cycles of repetition—were soon found in schools workshops and hospitals.  

Even though the monasteries and schools that occupied Foucault were Western institutions, they apply to the concerns of this thesis. Not only are monasteries highly regulated in Japanese Zen but also the rejection of explicit control of the body, for example the kyosaku stick, in Western culture causes a conflict for those who want to follow the traditional monastery model. The overwhelming majority of Zen practitioners in the U.S. are lay meditators. Unwilling to take the vows of the monastic, lay practitioners meditate and participate in sesshins, like a monastic, yet live at home, work and raise families. Because they do not live in the monastery and are not dependent on the lay community or the monastery for food and shelter, the discipline is temporary. It is moreover on the practitioners’ terms, not those of the teacher and institution.

Foucault makes the compelling argument that in environments in which every moment of the day is regulated, complete control is obtained over time. Monastic life is one of the oldest Buddhist traditions, much has been written about the vinaya, the monastic rules, some of the oldest surviving texts in the Buddhist tradition. Zen monastic traditions in Japan also offer examples of exacting monastic regulations, such as those prescribed by the thirteenth century monk and founder of the Soto sect, Dogen. Even the minutest details are regulated in the Zen monastery, such as food, sleep, work, speech, and body cleanliness.

The Japanese Zen monastery functions as a highly controlled environment in which sleep is sometimes kept to a minimum, which may have psychologically damaging effects. What is significant about the Zen timetable is the tradition of the discipline and the sense that violation of this tradition is tantamount to a form of heresy. Dogen’s rules for monastery living explicitly state that within monastery life, work, cleaning and cooking are the essence of the practice, not just meditation, not zazen, but the everyday tasks. Because of this concerted effort to maintain

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14 This is a bamboo stick about four feet in length, sometimes called the encouragement stick. It is rapped on a student’s back during intensive periods of meditation.
15 The most readily rejected practices by American zendos include physical violence such as striking or hitting practitioners. Although systems of control do not always include this explicit violence, this rejection of a seemingly cruel practice can be set as a precedent for rejection of other “traditional” Asian practices.
tradition including the asceticism, the aesthetic sparseness, the regulatory machine-like function of the group, and the uniformity of the monastics, visitors to monasteries often describe the experience as one of going back in time. Even a few small changes to rituals of the monastery are unacceptable to many orthodox Zen Buddhists.

Hierarchies are not foreign to Western culture, as Foucault aptly points out when speaking of the environment of an enclosed group such as the prison, school or cloister. These family-like sub groups of hierarchies can function in some of the most concentrated and coercive ‘technologies of behavior.’ The small group unit aids, for Foucault’s panoptical model, in total observation of each individual in systems that are too large for surveillance without these sub groups.

Ranks and hierarchies participate in power structures, yet subjects that have power over others in these hierarchies are still subject to discipline themselves. A higher ranking nun, for example, would most certainly have to answer to someone higher than herself, yet has power over the lower ranking nun. One would think that some abusive behaviors would be eliminated this way but in fact they are still perpetuated in these systems. More often than not, practices that may be deemed abusive by outsiders are often considered hard training, an important part of practice inside Japanese monasteries.

Using Foucault’s model, we can see that power systems create unique variations when applied to the Zen monastery. The Buddhist ideal of cessation of ego is often used as form of implicit control and explicit conformity. Any dissention, disgruntlement, anger or rebellion, is an assertion of the ego, signaling bad and immature ways of thinking. Demands for creature comforts or anything beyond he prescribed regimen are met with chastisement, with the argument that these statements reflect “attachment” to things or even ideals. This sort of system (and this is also pervasive for Buddhists outside of the monastery) is an internalized control system, sometimes externalized, that acts as a normative monitor, policing divisive voices.

Western Buddhists who read rhetoric that argues in Zen ‘one can question anything’ often are baffled when met with this kind of institutionalized resistance. But this idea of questioning the teacher is really for the most advanced students, not for beginning students, which would disrupt the hierarchical system. Most students of Zen are students by choice, in the hierarchical relationships of the Japanese monastery particularly; practitioners are familiar with the discipline and etiquette involved with training at a monastery. Some students welcome the
challenging, arduous discipline, arguing that this produces the best students, for those that are “serious” in their practice. Not unlike the military, some students believe that the most intense discipline makes for the best monks and even masters. In this sense it is very important which lineage the master belongs to and for the student to affiliate themselves with this particular lineage.

Paula Arai, in her book about Soto nuns in contemporary Japan, gives a sympathetic portrait of the arduous living conditions of the nun’s monastery. Because she is arguing for the equality of these women in their devotion to the monastic life, she gives a typical religious spin to the trials of living in such close quarters under strictly controlled conditions. She echoes the common Buddhist argument that arduous training wears down the ego and that difficult living is one of the most important aspects of practice, maybe even more important than zazen itself.

Arai, while supporting her thesis that contemporary nuns in Japan are proactively choosing the monastic path and its traditional discipline, reinforces the religious outlook of Dogen. “Through its structure, regulations, curriculum, practices, and human relations, the monastery serves as a crucible in which discipline melts down the façade of individualized selves to realize the beauty of the Buddhist teachings.” Arai sees herself as an advocate for the women she interviewed and her goal is to give voice to a group that she believes some scholars, have misunderstood.

While researching twentieth-century Soto Zen nuns in Japan, I heard many of them articulating a positive evaluation of their lives as nuns. I also observed many acting in ways that suggest this. What had been described as subservient, oppressive and submissive activity by some scholars was apparently experienced by many nuns as unfair treatment that has been or is being rectified, opportunities to dissolve the ego, and patient understanding of others’ misunderstanding of the Buddhist path.

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17 Paula Arai, Women Living Zen, p. 120.
18 She names Faure specifically as a contemporary Buddhist scholar that misunderstands the motivations of these monastic women.
In a typical passage of her book, Arai shows her fidelity to those who uphold the hierarchical ideal:

Theoretically everyone in Soto Zen is equal in terms of Buddha-nature, but Zen monasteries have made a high art out of the hierarchical structure that dictates the details of daily life. From where you take your slippers off, to where you place your towel in the bath, to which conjunction of verb you use when speaking with whom, all is determined by how long you have trained at the monastery and in which division you work…The strict hierarchy is designed to retrain one’s focus upon oneself. It demands one’s constant awareness of how one’s actions affect the people around one, and to act in response to what the environment requires, rather than what the self desires. \(^{20}\)

The Japanese monastery functions in the normative hierarchies that Japanese secular society is comfortable with, neo-Confucian societal structures typically based on age. While the Japanese monastery does not function on age but on length of practice and rank, one going into a Japanese monastery still has an overt precedent for hierarchy and the typical behaviors within that hierarchy. In the American context, while subtle hierarchies still function in American society, the average person attracted to Zen practice in the U.S. is less likely than their Japanese counterpart to trust hierarchical structures, including religious hierarchies.

Because Zen was presented in American popular culture without its strict hierarchical forms displayed, especially in D.T. Suzuki’s rhetoric of questioning rationality, it was missing key and essential information. At the highest levels of training, most likely during the private sessions of *dokusan*, one can question the teacher as illustration of one’s non-attachment to dogmatic ways of thinking. This questioning occurs within a regimented and controlled environment, sanctioned by the teacher as devolving a student’s growth, but only after many years of arduous and unquestioning discipline. The *dokusan* is also private, and so the intense questionings of the path or the teacher are not for anyone’s ears but the master himself/herself. American Zen reflects a wide variety of questioning ritual and dogma, but many practitioners

who label themselves Buddhist have not trained in an orthodox manner, and according to orthodox adherents they have not earned the “right” to question the teacher or the forms.

Women sensitive to feminist concerns, as in the case of dharma transmission, are suspicious of these hierarchical forms as they are often steeped in patriarchal biases. Suspicion of religious power abuses contributes to this rejection; moreover, many Americans classify Buddhism in a way that undermines the importance of monastic life and its disciplines. Many Americans believe that Zen Buddhism is not a religion, but a psychological prescription of philosophical ideas. The regimented structures steeped in tradition are seen as without intrinsic value, only as ways in which Zen was traditionally practiced. In this sense we see an intense dissonance between the ideals of Dogen that discipline is the key to practice, and the American who sees a philosophy that can be uniquely suited to their own lifestyle, one which generally does not include joining a monastery.

Many practitioners in America believe that the institution of Buddhism and the traditional forms directly conflict with the founder’s original spirit. Coleman is one such practitioner and he implicitly argues this in the beginning of his book on Western Buddhists.

As the great German sociologist Max Weber pointed out, once any charismatic religious teacher dies, the message must be ‘routinized’ if it is to continue. The inevitable result is a more formalized doctrine and some sort of established institutional structure. The paradox, often evident in Asian Buddhism, is that those same structures too easily become an end in themselves, preserving the letter but not the spirit of the founder’s teachings.  

Coleman, in a more theoretical sense, is using some of the same rhetoric as feminist Buddhist writers Boucher and Friedman. They argue that rejection of Asian traditional forms is revitalizing the religion, bringing the religion back to something that the founder had intended. Anti-traditional arguments are common in books by American practitioner-writers, even while some of the most popular titles (such as Shunryu Suzuki’s, Zen Mind, Beginners Mind) affirm orthodox forms and positions. What seems to be most prevalent for Buddhists in America is

Leonore Friedman, Meetings With Remarkable Women (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1987)
selective appropriation of specific orthodox forms such as sitting meditation (the most popular practice for Western American Buddhists) and rejection or modification of the forms that are the most problematic for practitioners. For some students, monastery living is a viable and desirable practice that they want to experience, generally on a temporary basis through meditation retreats.

Jiyu-Kennett Roshi established a successful monastery in California, one that continues to thrive today despite her untimely death. Students attracted to her monastery believe wholeheartedly in Kennett’s own vision of Zen practice, that realization can only be achieved through the arduous task and commitment of the monastic lifestyle. While she did welcome lay practitioners to the monastery, she believed that these lay students could only achieve the most elementary forms of kensho, or brief enlightenment.

Toni Packer never intended to establish a traditional monastery, aside from the fact that she was breaking from the traditional forms of Zen practice; she has always been a lay practitioner herself. Her students are not officially ranked, but from reading her books and interviews it seems to me that she has does have a few students that are closest to her. There are also people at Springwater with administrative and organizational duties; I suspect that these are long time students of Packer.

Both Kennett and Packer appear to have (or have had) charismatic leadership of their communities. Interviews of them published by popular American Buddhist feminist writers such as Boucher and Friedman suggest that their personalities are as important to a description of these teachers as their dharma credentials. Friedman prefaces her interview with Toni Packer with an amusing anecdote about meeting Packer for the first time.

I see two people walking up the drive. The tall one, a young man, introduced himself as Kevin. ‘And this is Toni,’ he says, I automatically say, ‘Hi Toni,’’ and then stop. ‘You mean Toni Toni?’ We all laugh. I have been taken aback because Toni of the powerful voice is just a person: in a knitted cap and down jacket, face pink from outdoors, smile welcoming me, eyes blue and very bright, short silver hair showing under the cap. Just a person. I recognize the voice, but the kindness in it now touches me. 23

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By the time that Friedman meets Packer for the first time, Packer is somewhat notorious in Zen circles; there is an element of celebrity as I read the interview. Packer is famous and her celebrity, her charisma, intrigues Friedman. Boucher too, is struck by the presence of Kennett Roshi, having met her once before. She describes her as “majestic” and having a “sense of contained power”. “I am greeted by a jocular-seeming woman in a brown robe who sports a short crew cut dappled with grey. She is as large and commanding as I remembered…” By choosing these words the reader may interpret a sense of deference, of awe by the interviewer, a suggestion of a cult of personality. But one should also note that these books of interviews are also written for general audience and may be literary devices to draw the reader into the atmosphere of the text.

The cult of personality, however, may not be completely out of place in speaking of American Zen teachers. I contend that the role of the teacher in these American Zen communities is of importance in understanding some of the modifications of Zen practices and rituals in the American context. For American students of Zen, the role of the teacher is different than that of the Zen master in the Japanese context. It is complex but is indicative of a broader sociological trend of contemporary American religious movements.

Due largely to the greater range of choices that Americans enjoy in decisions about religious affiliation, religious leaders in contemporary American Zen Buddhist circles tend to be charismatic and engaging authorities. Some American practitioners are particularly attracted to women teachers as a maternal model, one who embodies concern and compassion for her students. Some expect a Zen master to be an enlightened being, a great spiritual sage. With all of these attributes implicitly expected of the teacher, only the most dynamic are bound to attract the most students. I am citing this phenomenon as another dissonance from the Japanese cultural model and the explicit authority involved in the Japanese Zen master. The American master still participates in authority but implicitly. I can best illustrate the non-authoritarian style of contemporary American Zen leaders by focusing on two Zen Buddhist practices that are often modified or eliminated altogether in American Zen today: corporal discipline and ritualized bowing.

One very specific example of a traditional Japanese practice that is often eliminated or modified for American communities is the kyosaku, or encouragement stick. Also sometimes

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24 Sandy Boucher, *Turning the Wheel*, 137.
called the stick of compassion, it has a dubious history. The kyosaku is a long piece of wood, likely bamboo, used to hit repeatedly the student’s upper back during intensive periods of meditation. The stick’s reported benefits include correcting a student’s posture, relaxing the muscles of the neck and shoulders during long periods of meditation, and some claim that when wielded by a master for an advanced student it can even lead to enlightenment. Modern books on Zen tend to downplay another traditional use of the stick, which was corporal discipline. Phillip Kapleau, in the context of advocating the traditional use of the stick, implies that that the striking of monks is an old practice used in China. In what may be an apocryphal account from Dogen, who is said to have listened to a Chinese Zen master explain to him the importance of hitting the sleepy monks, it is said:

Formerly I used to hit sleeping monks so hard that my fist just about broke. Now I am old and weak, so I can’t hit them hard enough. Therefore it is difficult to produce good monks. 25

D.T. Suzuki, besides advocating the philosophical sophistication of Zen, was also arguing for the so-called sudden enlightenment school that Suzuki thought was embodied in Rinzai Zen. Because of this rhetoric, in his early work he often speaks of the stick or sometimes the master’s staff as the key to the final enlightenment, the final blow that breaks through the ego of the student. In *Practical Methods of Zen Instruction*, Suzuki illustrates numerous instances of blows from the staff or stick of the master.

The rigor and vitality of Zen Buddhism that is still present in the Rinzai school of Japan comes from the three blows of Obaku so mercifully dealt out to his poor disciple. There is in fact more truth in a blow or a kick than in the verbosity of logical discourse. At any rate the Zen masters were in dead earnest whenever the demonstration of Zen was demanded. 26

It is rare to read any contemporary accounts of American Zen masters advocating the use of the stick, especially for anything other than awakening the energies during a particularly long sesshin. However in translations from older written works such as Hakuin’s *Wild Ivy*, the shippei or staff is consistently used as a tool for the sectarian argument against Soto Zen’s zazen.

Even random blows from an old women’s broom led to one of Hakuin’s realizations. It is generally agreed that for contemporary practitioners in America, the stick is only used with permission of the recipient.

Some practitioners, many of whom have specific feminist concerns about the explicit display of violence involved in the use of the stick, are anxious to give up this particular practice. Maureen Stuart Roshi would gently massage the shoulders of her students, which was a creative way to produce the reputed muscle releasing benefits of the *kyosaku* without actually using the stick. This clearly subverts the fear of the stick and negotiates a different relationship between teacher and student. Toni Packer, while likely the recipient of the stick at some point under Kapleau’s tutelage, promptly abandoned the use of the stick at her own Springwater retreat center. That Packer was not only concerned with the recipient of the stick but also with the mental states of the one wielding the stick indicates that Packer felt ambivalence about traditional ritual forms that reinforce the Zen master’s authority through exercises of power over the student.

Another practice that American Zen practitioners have eliminated or modified is the practice of bowing. While some practitioners may see the practice as an antiquated and uniquely Asian ideal, bowing is of importance in orthodox Japanese Zen practice.

Bowing is a very serious practice. You should be prepared to bow, even in your last moment. Even though it is impossible to get rid of our self-centered desires, we have to do it. Our true nature wants us to. After zazen we bow to the floor nine times. By bowing we are giving up ourselves. To give up ourselves means to give up our dualistic ideas. So there is no difference between zazen practice and bowing. ²⁷

Bowing in the American context takes on additional meanings not found in the Japanese cultural milieu. One implicit problem with bowing not specifically addressed by most practitioners is their religious upbringing. Particularly for those raised in iconoclastic Protestant denominations, bowing to either the image of the Buddha or the teacher can feel awkward. Even

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though many practitioners may have rejected the Christian faith and declared themselves Buddhists, the modeling of childhood beliefs still persists.

Rejection of formalized bowing is also an indication of the lay-oriented trend in American Buddhism. Bowing tends to act as a social lubricant for close-knit monastery communities. It is a part of a broader pattern of etiquette that serves to limit awkward social interactions by making hierarchical relationships between monastic residents clear. But again, feminist practitioners are wary of this hierarchical ranking. Some practitioners are well enough informed to know that one of the nine special rules for nuns in Buddhist orders calls for nuns to bow to any monk of any rank without his reciprocal bow. As clear evidence of this sexist injustice, bowing then becomes a highly charged symbol of submission that is being rejected or deemphasized.

Bowing, the first significant practice questioned by Toni Packer, was examined when she had students bowing to her as a teacher. She wondered whether her students were putting her above themselves as an image. Packer abandoned much of the etiquette of traditional Japanese zendos as she continued to build the community at Springwater. She did not outlaw bowing, but it was optional.

For some American Buddhists, particularly those introduced to Zen through the martial arts, bowing may add to the formality of the zendo and its mystique. For those who see formal Japanese ritual forms as “authentic” Zen, bowing can emphasize this formality and its cache. In Japan, because bowing is more common, it does not take on this labeling effect.

The nonhierarchical structure that is being championed by many feminist practitioners is appealing to a variety of American Zen students because it also a part of the general cultural framework of the American ideal. “America has no homegrown traditions of monasticism, and America’s populist spirit leans toward a nonhierarchical structure. The individualism of the Buddhist path also appeals to many Americans.” 28 The ideals of intense skepticism appeal to the modern American Buddhist. Coupled with post-modern feminist suspicion of institutionalized structures of control, overt symbols of power and control like the stick and bowing are being eliminated.

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Chapter 2 Jiyu-Kennett

One specific example of a woman teacher in American Buddhism who made significant changes to the liturgical style of Zen rituals is Jiyu-Kennett Roshi. In some ways she embodied orthodox training, at least in outward appearance, classic robes, shaved head and a commitment to the monastic path. But she also represented adaptations to the American context at her Shasta Mountain Abbey in California. Championed by Sandy Boucher in *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* as a successful blend of Asian Zen forms in the West, she was a self-described feminist who was committed to initiating American women into the Zen institution.

Kennett is often called *Reverend* Roshi Jiyu Kennett, which reflects one of her unique adaptations to Western culture and is indicative of her long membership in the Church of England. Raised in England and schooled at an expensive boarding school, she obtained a degree in music and worked as a musician within the Church of England, which would later directly influence her changes in chanting in the Zen monastery to the Gregorian-like chants she composed. She claims she may have become a priest in the Church of England had they not barred women from the priesthood. In some ways this claim has underlying significance to her future religious life, her feminist views on her role as a religious as well as her understanding of Buddha nature, which had a distinctly theistic spin. Kennett’s influences are reflected in the specific linguistic changes she made once in America, such as calling herself *Reverend* and giving that title to her most advanced students.

Kennett Roshi’s life story is unique. While working in London as an organist, Kennett became involved with Buddhist groups in England, particularly from the Theravada tradition, and took her precepts from a Sri Lankan monk. As she became more heavily occupied in the London Buddhist Society, she then by chance met Zenji Roshi, the Abbot of the Sojjji Temple, one of the primary training centers for Soto Zen monasticism in Japan. In her autobiography, she names him the Very Rev. Keido Zenji, using her own anglicized terminology to establish his high rank. In 1960, Zenji Roshi visited England to look for Westerners to train in his temple and invited Kennett to come to Japan as his disciple. This event was a rare honor for a foreigner and
even more rare for a woman. When she accepted, Kennett became the first woman to train at Sojiji since the fourteenth century.\(^{29}\)

On Kennett’s journey to Japan she planned a visit to Malaysia where she received an award for one of her music compositions. It was there that she was initiated into the Chinese Buddhist Sangha and received the Bodhisattva precepts. Given the name Sumitra (True Friend), when she reached her final destination in Japan, it was translated into Japanese as Jiyu (Compassionate Friend) as she officially became the disciple of Koho Zenji. She also received the religious family name of Houn after receiving her dharma transmission, which name her disciples still retain.

Considering that it had been six hundred years since a woman had trained at Sojiji, much less a Western woman, there was controversy during Jiyu Kennett’s eight years in Japan. Kennett repeatedly asked Zenji if she could train in one of the female monasteries but he refused. According to a disciple who wrote the biography as a preface for one of her books, “…knowing that unless she trained at Sojiji and did everything that the men did, it could be said in the future that things had been made easy for her.”\(^{30}\) Kennett’s biographer claims that she consistently faced discrimination in the monastery for being both a woman and a foreigner, but that her spiritual progress was rapid. In 1963, she received dharma transmission from Zenji and later she became his dharma heir and holder of his lineage. After which, Kennett became Sojiji’s “Foreign ambassador,” ordaining Western monks and eventually having her own temple in Japan, which was then and still would be considered an anomaly for a Western woman.

Despite having her own temple, she was still plagued with others’ doubts as to the authenticity of her position and was sent to another Soto Zen master to verify her understanding, which he did confirm. Zenji’s goal for her was to send the dharma to the West and after his death she frequented the U.S., Canada, and England. In 1969, she decided to settle in the San Francisco area and eventually founded the Shasta Abbey in California as well as other branch monasteries under the title Order of the Buddhist Contemplatives in North American and Europe.

Kennett felt very much a part of the Soto Zen tradition and believed that her changes were consistent with the teachings of both her own master and Dogen. Various factors contributed to Kennett’s liturgical changes: her authority as an official dharma heir, her

\(^{29}\) James Coleman, *The New Buddhism*, p. 68.
feminism, the sanctioning of her teacher (a well respected authority), Kennett’s own charisma and the circumstances of transplanting to Northern California in the early 70’s. She believed that these were simple adaptations to the Western context, almost like translating from Japanese to English. But, as anyone who does textual studies surely knows, translation equals interpretation and selective editing. Because of this, Kennett’s monastery was “very unorthodox even by Western standards” according to Coleman.

Her efforts to adapt Soto traditions to Western culture had given Shasta Abbey and its affiliates something of the flavor of the Church of England. Their priests are referred to as Reverend, traditional Buddhist texts have been set to music based on Gregorian chants, and Christian terminology, including some explicitly theistic language, is often used to illustrate Buddhist concepts. 31

For Boucher, these liturgical changes are positive developments, as her goal is radical change in American Buddhism. In the new egalitarian Buddhism that Boucher seeks, women will have power and will change tradition, as much as they feel is necessary. While Boucher is interested in the specific changes that Kennett had implemented, she is most intrigued by changes due to feminist concerns. She notes that at Shasta Mountain women and men train together and the “issue of woman’s spiritual path is addressed.”

I had never, in my life as an American female, been in an environment in which women were equally visible and equally responsible with men. Of the approximately fifty monks who inhabit Shasta Abbey, half are women. Women and men wear the same robes and shave their heads. In the hierarchy women take on the same responsibilities as men, with a number of women having been given the title of “roshi” by their teacher. 32

In this instance Boucher sees that Zen institutions in which women are completely included can be a powerful testimony to an egalitarian Western Buddhism. But this is not always consistent in her book; usually she advocates a more radical departure from orthodox

practices. Throughout her interview with Kennett, she, like Kennett, sees these changes through a feminist understanding of how to marry equality within the structure of Zen monastic life. Kennett, like Boucher, saw movement toward equalitarian Buddhism as being in the spirit of the Buddha. Kennett specifically uses references to Buddhist scriptures in justification of her egalitarian-minded changes, as this excerpt from Boucher suggests:

The Buddha had said that women could make it, she said, and as far as she was concerned, all the rest was simply trappings from the Indian culture of the Buddha’s time. She tells the story of the monk Ananda’s having asked the Buddha whether women who had gone forth into the nun’s life could reach the highest level of enlightenment. The Buddha replied, ‘Women, Ananda, having gone forth…are able to realize…perfection.’

There are two books of which Kennett is credited as the author, *Roar of the Tigress* and *Zen is Eternal Life*. *Roar of the Tigress* is actually a compilation of transcribed dharma talks recorded by her disciples and published after her death. Kennett had a unique interpretation of Zen practice and philosophy, she saw Zen as a religion and not simply a philosophy of the East. Some of the outstanding critiques of Kennett Roshi remain because of her theistic take on Zen. Possibly as a response to American’s understanding of Zen through Suzuki and the Beat Poets, Kennett contended that Zen was indeed a religion and not atheistic. It seems that Kennett considered atheism as contradictory to a world religion and saw Zen in terms of a theistic interpretation. In her work, Jiyu-Kennett outlines that the Unborn, Uncreated, the Cosmic Buddha is indeed that which theistic religions call God. She claims the misunderstanding that Buddhism is atheistic came from disparaging remarks of Christian missionaries who gave that impression. But she claims they misunderstood the scriptures and the Cosmic Buddha is the ‘Lord of the House’.

As one can imagine, this clearly theistic understanding of Buddhist doctrine sets Kennett Roshi apart from other Zen teachers in America. Her transcribed text does not imply that this is a new understanding of Zen for American audiences but reflects her own understanding of Buddhist ‘theology’ while a student. It is unclear whether she clearly expressed this conception of the Unborn to her own master while a student or after she was on her own. Her idea of God is

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not unlike the mystic tradition of the theistic religions that use the concept that we are “of” God, “of” the Eternal. Envisioning a mystical conception of the deity as this amorphous eternal presence, perhaps her master did not find an incongruity with her notion of God and Zen practice. Perhaps because Zenji Roshi was interested in spreading the dharma to the West, one might speculate that he found Kennett’s theistic understanding an effective means of interpreting Buddhist doctrine in a Western context and a useful way of spreading Zen doctrine.

The history of Buddhism’s reception in the West is illustrated in Faure’s book *Chan Insights and Oversights*. Kennett and Faure would agree that Zen was introduced to the West through the writings of Christian missionaries who were hardly objective observers. As Faure illustrates, the Jesuit missionaries he cites are employing a multi-layered rhetoric, one that emphasizes the atheistic elements of Buddhism as well as rhetoric against the Quietist elements of Zen. Faure is most concerned with deconstructing the rhetoric of these early encounters with the Zen tradition. Because it was easiest to compare this “other” religion based on the philosophies and understandings in which the audience would have an understanding, it is reasonable that these early works compare Zen to elements in Christianity. Faure is equally concerned with introductory writings of Buddhism in America, which present less negative views of Zen. But these early investigations of Zen philosophy were not necessarily more accurate.

Because this view reached America at the West’s first real exposure to Zen in the early twentieth century, Faure is highly critical of D.T Suzuki’s rhetoric which begins to establish Buddhism as a superior philosophy that can stand up to post-Enlightenment rationality. In this era, any theistic emphasis was deemed unable to stand up to the new rationalistic paradigm. In addition, D.T Suzuki is advocating the specific Rinzai rhetoric as well as a subtle nationalistic agenda in that Eastern philosophies match and possibly even surpass Western Philosophy.

If the Western standpoint represented an Orientalism “by default,” one in which Buddhism was looked down upon, Suzuki and Nishida, among others, represent an Orientalism “by excess,” a “secondary” Orientalism that offers an idealized, “nativist” image of a Japanese culture deeply influenced by Zen. 34

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Faure believes that Suzuki’s influence is overestimated but I believe he means it is overestimated as a positive introduction to Zen. I would suggest that D.T. Suzuki’s influence is not overestimated, as his books were the first initiation to Zen thinking for many of the current generation of Zen teachers. I do, however, agree with Faure in that Suzuki’s writings constitute a highly biased introduction to Zen.

It was in this Suzuki-dominated era that Kennett Roshi came to teach her understanding of the dharma. She interpreted Buddhist doctrine through her own ‘quasi-mystical’ understandings of God and contemplation, which would have received an enthusiastic response from religious seekers in California in the 1970’s. I contend that for feminist women in America there are a multitude of understandings of the Buddhist path that are compatible with feminist interests. At times these paths may appear contradictory, but there is a spectrum of practices that are agreeable to American Buddhist students and the feminist minded Buddhist teacher. One reason why I picked seemly disparate biographies in this thesis is to illustrate the varieties of adaptations in the American context. Yet both of these women, Kennett and Packer, reflect the varieties of religious accommodation to the newly informed feminist movement of the 1970’s.

In Kennett Roshi’s understanding of Zen for example, she envisioned Zen as a religion that could accommodate egalitarian ideals while incorporating mystical visions of God coupled with the work ethic of self-salvation. She appealed to those women who wanted complete inclusion in the old institution, unlike what she saw implemented in Japan, and even her own experiences with exclusion from the religious hierarchy of the Church of England. She believed that through intensive work and a complete commitment to the monastic Zen path, one could achieve enlightenment and subsequently both spiritual and literal empowerment. In this sense, Kennett did not feel completely disgusted with religion itself, as she worked as a musician for the Church of England for years, but felt disenfranchised by the institution for being female. In understanding this part of her biography one can see why she retained so many theological and liturgical concepts from her religion of origin.

By contrast, as illustrated by Toni Packer in Chapter 3, those who wanted to distance themselves from organized religion and were interested in the most philosophical elements of Zen without the institutional accoutrements would be attracted to Packer’s method of Zen practice in the form in which it ultimately evolved. This too, embodies a feminist ideal for those women who are suspicious of institutions that are perpetuated by patriarchy. Packer’s liturgical
changes are more radical, as is to be expected; yet because of the antinomian introduction of Zen to America, her ways are still acceptable to many American Buddhists, except for the strictly orthodox.

Orthodox Buddhists did not always view Kennett’s changes positively either, perhaps because although her training appeared to be orthodox, her changes seemed to be uniquely idiosyncratic. She did not know, of course, that her changes would be deemed idiosyncratic. They were made with the most practical concerns in mind. Because her highly respected master sanctioned her training, Kennett was confident in her innovative and accommodating changes of Zen practice to fit in the Western world.

Throughout her books, but particularly in her book *Zen is Eternal Life*, Kennett Roshi consistently justifies her views by citing Dogen. As she was trained in one of the most prestigious Soto monasteries in Japan, this is understandable. What is interesting is that those who employ Dogen’s texts often want reforms toward orthodoxy, as Dogen’s rules for practice and monastery living are notoriously strict. But Kennett Roshi uses Dogen not unlike the nuns in contemporary Japan that Arai reports on, as the ideal model of a Zen master who was also egalitarian.

Because Dogen himself was an innovator in adapting Chinese Zen practices into the Japanese context, Kennett Roshi believed that the best ancient Zen masters were not bound by one system of learning and had to adapt to let spiritual growth develop rather than be forced. At a time when the young are seeking a religion that means something to them personally, rather than one that requires rigid adherence to doctrine and old rules, Dogen’s insistence upon finding freedom, perfection and peace of spirit within oneself, amidst the struggle of everyday life and within the structure and times in which one lives, is as relevant as it was when he lived…

She advocated Soto as the spirit of common people’s Zen and said “Soto Zen is ideal for the present-day religious revival in America.”

35 In the context of this essay she was clearly making a rhetorical case against the “forced” and harsh systems of koans employed by the Rinzai method, including the implicit and explicit violence of Rinzai training.
In *Zen is Eternal Life*, Kennett gives specific excerpts from Dogen’s rules for monastic living, in fact a good one third of the book consists of her translations of Dogen’s rules and standards. She translated the text herself and admits it is not a perfectly translated text from Japanese but done in the “spirit” of Dogen, for without these interpretations the book “would lose much of its true feeling and flavour.” By incorporating this into her book she is clearly advocating the monastic regimen of Dogen’s Zen, but she does make it clear in the first third of the book that some adaptations to the Western mindset are understandable and necessary. In this introduction to Zen practice, she speaks of nearly all of the ritual adaptations introduced in Chapter One of this thesis including her dramatic dharma transmission.

Because of her traditional training in Japan (as traditional as it could be considering she was a Western woman in a Japanese male monastery) she does not advocate radical changes but she is concerned with feminist issues of enfranchisement. Her brand of feminism invites inclusion into the male system rather than rejecting the system. Also, her teacher seems to be a man with a similar viewpoint, one who believed in the traditions of the forms but also believed that these practices may be newly “uncluttered” in American Buddhism from their Japanese idiosyncrasies. In the preface to one edition of *Zen is Eternal Life*, Kennett explains that although she is fairly accurate in translating Dogen’s rules, for the purposes of reference in this book, in actuality, these rules are adapted to fit the needs of the American language and culture.

I believe that it was Koho Zenji’s fond hope that, when Zen came to America, it would come as a pure bride, uncluttered by attachment to its former ethnic connections. After seventeen years, we now know that this is possible…

As a recipient of dharma transmission and lineage holder, Kennett was a firm believer in the power of the master-disciple relationship. In her book she explains that Shakyamuni Buddha did not need a honshi, or teacher, but that in modern times a teacher is essential for proper training to protect himself and the public from not fully realized teachers. She believes that ultimately the work has to be done by the student, but teachers aid in pointing the way.

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37 Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life*. From the preface.
38 It should be noted that Kennett did not always use gender inclusive language. Her brand of feminism might be best described, for those who came of age during WWII as “Rosie the Riveter” type feminism. Like others who saw themselves breaking into male domains at this time, Kennett was not necessarily sensitive about the use of exclusionary language.
…In this day and age, it is essential that a person present himself to a master for certification in order to protect the public from fraud if he wishes to act as a priest after realizing the Truth by himself. Many honshis act as catalysts for their disciples; they do it by means of acute observation and spiritual intuition, not by any magical power, although it may seem that they possess extraordinary powers to the ordinary man or woman.  

She makes it clear that in Asia, as she perceives it, there is a different orientation to the student teacher relationship that does not translate well in the Western world. Despite these difficulties and inclinations not to trust a teacher, the Western student must overcome this inclination not to trust in order to advance his practice. She says that teaching techniques such as saying one thing and doing another or fairly harsh treatment are not uncommon in Japan. Kennett believed that these methods might work well based on the individual’s “spiritual sickness” which the master can diagnose and treat. She was convinced that this system may be a sign of a good master and that his actions come from compassion. “Every doctor knows that when patients are suffering from hysteria it is better to slap them than to make a fuss of them—this is not cruelty, it is kindness.” The irony of this particular example in the context of this thesis is oddly amusing and while Kennett makes claims to feminism she was both a product of her time and her standards. The quote is consistent with her personality based on the body of her work. It also points out that in terms of feminist ideals, a variety of interpretations occur. Just as Buddhism in America has a variety of ideals and manifestations, so does feminism.

Kennett believed in traditional dharma transmission, but this did not undermine her goal of including women in the clergy. Kennett believed that Buddhism, even more so than Christianity, had access to enfranchisement for women priests. The fact that this is not reflected in reality in Japan, in her belief, is due to Japanese prejudices. This is a common belief by many contemporary Western Buddhists as well as a source of debate for Buddhist scholars. Kennett believed that the religion itself was not inherently exclusionary but had grown that way from traditional customs.

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40 Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life*, p. 47.
…The difference between Christian and Buddhist monasticism; the former does not permit nuns to become full priests, but the female unsui in Zen is expected to become the priestess of a temple. The ideal in the Buddhist scriptures is that male and female are alike in the Buddha Mind and so men and women can go up the ranks of the priesthood equally. Unfortunately, Japanese custom (or prejudice, whichever word you prefer) gets in the way of the female far more often than it should with the result that there are not nearly as many full priests among the women as there should be and those who have made it have much poorer temples than the men.  

When interviewed by Boucher, Kennett explains that her own graduation ceremony to priesthood was unusual in the sense that it was done in public, which was unusual for women priests in Japan. She claims that when it was done for women, one would pay more for the certificate and the ceremony was private. She explained to Boucher that the insistence to do her ceremony in public was a conscious decision on her master’s part. Kennett also claimed that it was done for the benefit of women in Japan.

My master said, ‘We’re going to do it in public, because this is totally wrong.’ And he forced the issue. I have never done a ceremony with more terror inside of me, than that one with twelve men down each side, each one with the curtains drawn over his eyes as is to say ‘I’m not here.’

The encouragement stick is used at Shasta Mountain Abbey only by permission of the student. Kennett discusses the stick in reference to the monitor and the responsibilities of this job; having now realized compassion, the monitor must now turn this mental state into action. In a larger sense, she consistently reiterates the necessity of the teachers who must be “cruel to be kind.” She explains the misunderstood role of the Disciplinarian as a type of Avalokitesvara, one with the thankless job of beating the trainee monks twice a month to spur

41 Jiyu-Kennett, Roar of the Tigress, p. 75.
42 Sandy Boucher, Turning the Wheel, p. 137.
43 For Mahayana Buddhists this is the name of the bodhisattva associated with compassion.
them to greater efforts and to teach them “that praise and blame are but two sides of the same coin.”  

Changing from the traditional use of the stick to permission of the student seems to be the trend of most zendos in America. Perhaps it may be simply the legal implications of the use of corporal discipline that may explain this or because American students would insist on their permission. Kennett also insists that zazen should not be painful, in accordance with Dogen’s wishes. Involuntary movements due to muscle spasms should never be corrected with the stick. She claims that in large Zen temples in Japan the trainee will be hit with the stick if he moves, but for the most part the kyosaku is in the hands of a capable person. She does concede that occasionally the stick finds it way in the hands of a beginner in the disciplinarian’s office with “unfortunate results.”

While it is not talked about in great length in her interviews, bowing is one of the traditional practices maintained at Shasta Abbey. Kennett makes only a small reference to it in her own books. But Leonore Friedman makes mention of it in an interview with another female instructor at the Abbey, Reverend Teacher McGuire, a trained psychologist, who mentioned the psychological stumbling block of gassho, or bowing practice:

“But the stubbornness that arose in my fists when I was first required to gassho!” she said. “You learn how much resistance there is. You learn what you have to look at. At some point the inner and outer gassho come together. But until then it’s a form of internal medicine.”

The Shasta monastery presents an interesting hybrid of traditional Zen forms and rituals and unconventional changes implemented by Kennett Roshi. For example, the monks and nuns wear traditional Zen robes but in a variety of colors. While a hierarchy remains, titles coincide with those of the Church of England and are not divided by sex. While she wholeheartedly believed in dharma transmission, Kennett Roshi apparently bestowed it on so many of her students as to undermine its exclusivity. She did not see these changes as odd but as a natural adaptation to Zen practice in America.

44 Jiyu-Kennett, Zen is Eternal Life, p. 45.
45 Jiyu-Kennett, Zen is Eternal Life, p. 45.
46 Leonore Friedman, Meetings with Remarkable Women, p. 189.
In the Far East the platform is covered with a thick straw mat: we use carpet...this is us; this is Throssel and Shasta. It is not the way of Sojiji, and it is not the way of Eiheiji, and yet it is identically the same Way. We’re all doing identically the same thing; we’re just finding our own best method of doing it. 47

How many of these changes were done strictly from feminist concerns? Most were done from a distinctly practical sense. She explained that carpet is cheaper than tatami mats in America, and so the flooring became carpet. However, Kennett did define herself as a “vehement feminist” and talks at length of the discrimination she had to endure. She believed that both Asian and Western misogyny had precluded women from full participation in the religious life, but that this was not the Buddha’s intent:

Our School of Buddhism treats men and women equally because the Buddha Himself made it very clear that there was no difference between the meditation of a man and a woman, nor of the end result thereof. He couldn’t do much about the local customs: customs are far harder to change than religious teachings! So in early Buddhism you do have some distinctions made between men and women, but we don’t have to follow those customs. 48

Sympathetic to this view, authors Boucher and Friedman emphasize Kennett’s feminist dimensions more so than Kennett does in her own books. While Kennett does make mention of this, it is not her sole emphasis. Friedman and Boucher emphasize the changes taking place in American Buddhism as a natural and positive development of Buddhism’s natural variation of the dharma to a new land, which includes as one of its primary changes egalitarian revisions.

Boucher and Friedman tend to ignore some of the most problematic examples of Kennett’s retention of tradition. Perhaps they did not even realize how much she retained the orthodox view of the teacher and the student’s reliance on the teacher. Jiyu-Kennett is used as an example of a fairly traditional monastery that has adapted to the American context in stressing women’s inclusion into the institution. Kennett is touted as a woman in authority and her authority includes changing forms and ideas that best fit feminist ideals.

47 Jiyu-Kennett, Roar of the Tigress, p. 259.
48 Jiyu-Kennett, Roar of the Tigress, p. 286.
In my case, at Shasta Abbey, I have created, if you like, an oasis. Or I’ve tried to make an oasis—where people are really equal. That’s bringing the essence of Buddhism rather than women shall walk three paces behind, we shall use chopsticks, we must all sit on the floor, chairs are illegal, going round with a loincloth instead of an ordinary pair of undershorts. I mean, my god, all of these things are not us! The norm for religious dress in this country is a collar turned backwards and a shirt. Why have we got to go around pretending we’re Japanese or Chinese or Thai?  

This quote is an excellent summation of advocacy for change in Western Buddhism and indicative of the perspective of many of the most vocal American practitioners. After the profound influences of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 60’s and 70’s, the ways in which many Americans view hierarchies and power relations were forever transformed. The fact that Buddhism in America would reflect these changes to less hierarchical and more inclusive practices indicates both the type of liberal minded people attracted to Buddhism in America as well as a larger demographic of slowly changing roles for women in all aspects of American religion.

As practitioners believed that Buddhism would naturally adapt to the Western environment, American Buddhists believed that the dharma could easily adapt to the new benchmarks of an enlightened society. Included in this is the emphasis on rational inquiry (this will be especially emphasized in Chapter 3), a new racial, class and feminist consciousness and a sophistication that could adapt to a rapidly changing modern environment. Buddhism was believed to fit this modern and demanding bill for it to be welcomed by highly educated and liberal minded Americans. After time, these changes take on momentum and become tradition and orthodoxy. However, what is the overwhelming belief of American practitioner-authors such as Coleman, Boucher, and Friedman is that somehow this new American Buddhism is in the spirit of the original founder. This is what Kennett wholeheartedly believed and was able to legitimize to her students. On one end of the spectrum, Kennett reflects those who want inclusion into the venerable tradition while discarding the seemingly unimportant and blatantly patriarchal elements of Zen as it is practiced in Japan. In chapter 3, I will explore the implications of a

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rejection of almost every orthodox practice in Zen that embodies the romantic antinomian ideal of Zen in American practitioner’s eyes.

**Toni Packer Chapter 3**

Toni Packer represents the kind of teacher that many feminist practitioners of Zen are inclined to follow because she distances herself from the institutional structures of organized religion. Toni Packer’s books are popular for both men and women in American Zen, perhaps because they reveal a way of looking at Zen from a completely non-traditional mode of inquiry. Packer has a name for this system, although she would loathe calling it a system, called “meditative inquiry.” She sees herself breaking from the forms of traditional Zen, of Buddhism, of dogma, structure, hierarchy and authority. Influenced by the philosophy of Krishnamurti, Packer believes that the investigation of “Truth” can only be achieved without structures or systems. It is because of this conviction that she prefers not to be called a Buddhist. She believes that labels represent affiliation and are divisive. Because of her skepticism about dogma, Toni Packer expresses the inchoate concerns of many Americans who are interested in Zen but hesitant to dogmatically accept a new system of beliefs. For feminists concerned with distancing themselves from the institutional and “Asian” patriarchal structures of the liturgy of Zen, Packer’s philosophy is a refreshing take on Buddhism that does not compromise feminist concerns.

Toni Packer’s life story is an important indicator of her philosophical leanings. A child in Nazi Germany, half Jewish, she found her Christian faith dissonant with the reality of her lack of security in wartime. After moving to the U.S as an adult, Packer completed graduate work in psychology but found her real interest lay in the theoretical works of Freud, Jung and Joseph Campbell.

During this phase of autodidactic inquiry she discovered Buddhist thought through the literary works of Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki. But Packer’s life changing discovery came through reading Phillip Kapleau’s *Three Pillars of Zen*. His meditation instructions intrigued her because it was her first encounter with an actual physical action relating to Buddhism, not just mental philosophical concerns.
Joining the Rochester Zen Center, Packer dove into a fairly traditional Zen practice of koans, *sesshins* and *dokusans* under Kapleau’s tutelage. For years, Packer worked within the traditional forms of Zen meditation and hierarchy. But as she became an advanced practitioner and teacher Packer began changing some traditional practices.

As her teaching duties increased during Kapleau’s frequent absence, Packer gradually made small changes. Kapleau wanted Packer to replace him in Rochester, as he wanted to move to a warmer climate. Feeling immensely conflicted about continuing in her Roshi’s footsteps, she was introduced to the ideas of Krishnamurti (profiled later in this chapter), whose writings, she believed, confirmed some of her own suspicions of the unquestioned ceremonial and formal practices in the Zen tradition. Fascinated by Krishnamurti’s antiauthoritarian philosophy, she devoured his work and attended many of his talks. Packer did not abandon Zen at this time, but rather found Krishamurti’s philosophy congruent with her understanding of Shakyamuni’s insistence on self-reliance. She believed that the heart of Buddhist philosophy was to question everything, including the forms. An attachment to form, for Packer, was a reliance on a system that was both hierarchical and attached to its own tradition. While this made logical sense to Packer’s own development in her practice, in her work as instructor, these small changes began to violate some sacrosanct traditions such as hierarchical seating arrangements.

Kapleau Roshi was disturbed by these changes as he was trained in a traditional manner in Japan. In Japan, he explained, a new teacher would never be so bold as to make such fundamental changes:

> ...A new teacher would have never dreamed of changing anything. That would have been outright impudence. What you do in *dokusan*, he said to her, is up to you. But the forms are another matter. ‘We’ve created something here.’

Despite this quote from Kapleau, there is conflicting evidence about Kapleau’s own philosophical leanings toward changing forms. The above quote indicates that he wanted to keep the “pure” Zen practice that he learned in Japan. But Kapleau had made enough changes to the liturgy that he received criticism and ultimately broke from his own master, the famous Yasutani Roshi, because he made too many accommodations, such as changing chants to English.

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A brief history of Yasutani’s influence in American Zen has relevance to Packer’s history. Yasutani, critical of the ossified nature of institutionalized Zen as it was practiced in Japan, and known for revitalizing the teachings of Dogen, was trained in both the Rinzai and Soto schools as well as receiving dharma transmission from Harada Roshi. But Yasutani eventually formed his own school; he believed it was more in the spirit of Dogen’s teaching. His ideas about how this new style should work happened to fit perfectly with the emerging American style of Zen. Yasutani combined the zazen of Soto and the koans of Rinzai. He accommodated lay practitioners and deemphasized the ceremonial life of the temple. He also taught both male and female students, including two Americans who would eventually play major roles in American Zen: Phillip Kapleau and Robert Aitken. Kapleau was Yasutani’s first American student in Japan and *Three Pillars of Zen* is a testament to Yasutani’s teaching and style.

According to Richard Seager, after founding the Rochester Zen Center in 1966, Kapleau made innovations in the name of Americanization:

- He encouraged his students to retain American dress, gave them Anglicized dharma names, and used English translations of sutras in the course of training, a particular innovation that drew Yasutani’s criticism.  

Aitken received dharma transmission from Yasutani’s successor after Yasutani’s death. Aitken would go on to make similar changes to the liturgical style of his own sangha in Hawaii, including using gender inclusive language, but this was well after the death of Yasutani.

Kapleau is considered part of the Harada-Yasutani lineage, but it seems he was denied official dharma transmission. Packer is also part of that lineage but ultimately would reject the concept of dharma lineage entirely. “Truth itself needs no lineage, it is here, without past or future.”  

There seems to be an odd irony in Yasutani’s criticisms of Kapleau for introducing innovations, given that Yasutani himself was a man who founded his own school of Zen. Perhaps Yasutani believed that he was a type of Buddhist revivalist, innovating Zen but ultimately bringing it back to its pure roots in Dogen. According to this theory, Yasutani may have been using religious elements to preserve nationalistic pride. Yasutani’s most productive

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51 Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America*, p. 94.
52 Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America*, p. 94.
years were during the American occupation of Japan, which must have had an impact on anyone wanting a religious revival in an institution very much associated with the nation and its people. Those were tumultuous years, and while Yasutani had American students, he seems to be most offended by changing the chants from Japanese to English.

If there is a subtle lineage here, it is one of innovation for the sake of purification. Each teacher of this line from Yatsutani through Kapleau and then to Packer believes that his or her changes are excising the unnecessary rituals from Zen, revealing an accessible but ultimately “purer” Zen. In this sense, Packer was much like her teacher, who seemed at times to both champion her changes and criticize her. Kapleau did seem to be greatly distressed at the physical and emotional break caused when she eventually left the zendo he founded. That ultimately she would take many of his former students and form her own center seemed to cause distress for all of the parties involved, including the students.

According to Friedman, who has interviewed Packer for both her own book on women in Buddhism and to write the biographical forward to one of Packer’s books, this conflict and confrontation of the growing discord in the zendo before the separation was painful and exhausting. Raising these concerns, changing these practices, was not to create controversy but a result of her belief that she was ultimately cutting through delusion. Unwilling to “go backward,” Packer saw the prostrations, the rakusus (garments that indicate rank and spiritual achievement) and special seating as lending themselves toward separation and hierarchy.

After a confrontation with Kapleau Roshi and members of the zendo, Toni Packer suspected that her time at the Rochester Zen Center was limited. But Kapleau Roshi wanted her to stay; she was to have complete freedom to teach and work in the manner of her own choosing. However, a problem began to manifest in Packer in which she realized that she could never really stay because she was questioning her own Buddhist beliefs. How could she stay teaching meditative inquiry in this zendo when she was abandoning Buddhism?

Unless you are really set on discovering, if anybody supports you in not discovering, you won’t do it. Which I found in Zen. The system is very supportive to not questioning some things. Even
though it claims to question everything you question everything
and you ‘burn the Buddha,’ but then you put him back up! 53

Eventually, when Packer left the Rochester Zen Center it was likened to a schism.
Coleman believes that this split was the first ‘major upheaval of the 1980’s’ that shocked the
American Buddhist world, quickly followed by the drama of the San Francisco Zen Center.
Coleman writes that the split at the Rochester Center was not unlike a divorce, with some
students staying, some following Packer to her new center and yet others dropping out of Zen
practice altogether from disillusionment.

Packer’s method of meditative inquiry is a kind of intensely deep questioning that is
steeped in the Buddhist tradition. While questioning everything, including what it means to call
yourself a Buddhist, some of her admirers and students would say that her methods are the
philosophical essence of the dharma. 54 The Zen tradition of non-attachment to anything,
including the teacher, could create a cognitive dissonance for some Zen students. One might ask,
“If I do not take refuge in the tradition, the rules, and the path, will I become an idiosyncratic ego
fueled heretic or do I become a Buddha, free from the shackles of dogma and duality?”

After leaving Kapleau Roshi in 1981, Toni Packer and her students started the Genesee
Valley Zen Center. This center would later drop the Zen from its name as indicative of Packer’s
increasing distance from traditional Zen forms. Soon after establishing this new community, this
same group bought a large parcel of land, 200 acres, near Springwater, New York. Now called
simply Springwater, this is the center where Packer continues to give talks and retreats.

Toni Packer realizes that she is both respected and reviled in the Western Buddhist
community. Her books are popular, though not as popular as Thich Nhat Hahn or the Dalai
Lama; she continues to publish slim volumes of her teachings, one paperback as recently as
2002. She was asked to give a talk at the First Buddhism in America conference in 1997. Her
talk was called “Meditation—Moment to Moment” and in it Packer insisted that real knowledge
does not come from a specific technique, path or teacher.

53 Toni Packer, The Work of This Moment, p. xxi.
54 Although phrased in different ways, most Zen Buddhists believe that some of the last words of
the historical Buddha admonished those who cling his physical presence as a teacher as the only
vehicle for enlightenment. His final teaching is that ultimately, liberation can only be won
through diligence and self-discipline.
We learn the truth in spite of different paths. Because the truth has nothing to do with a path. This truth is not caused by a path and waking up to it. Who knows why there’s waking up. It’s the miracle of humanity, of the universe, that there is such a thing as waking up to the truth.\footnote{Compiled by Al Rapaport, \textit{Buddhism in America: Proceedings of the First Buddhism in America Conference}. (Boston, MA: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1988) p. 243.}

Toni Packer is given a special mention in James Coleman’s book, \textit{The New Buddhism}, as an important Western Buddhist teacher who no longer calls herself a Zen teacher. Even though the Springwater Center no longer calls itself a Zen center, Coleman contends that any Western Zen student would feel quite comfortable at Springwater. Despite the lack of Buddhist iconography, bowing, chanting and incense, he argues that the students still do a form of Buddhist practice there without the cultural trappings of traditional Japanese Zen. “…Somehow you can’t help feeling that the heart of Buddhism is still flourishing there.”\footnote{James Coleman, \textit{The New Buddhism}, p. 83.}

During retreats they have the same schedule of sitting and walking meditation you would find at any Zen center. Although Toni Packer doesn’t call herself a teacher anymore, she still gives a daily talk during retreats and gives a long series of private interviews, just as a Zen master would. The meditation room (it’s no longer called a zendo) has the same polished wood floors with the same square pads and round meditation cushions. The cooks even use the same vegetarian menu they used at Rochester Zen Center before Packer’s group split off.\footnote{Ibid.}

Packer’s early influences in philosophy are hardly conventional orthodox Buddhist figures but this was typical for the times. When reading the biographies of many American Buddhist teachers or long time practitioners, one will find that the works of D.T Suzuki and Alan Watts are frequently cited. But the interested reader at the time would not know that these two authors hardly represented traditional orthodox Buddhist doctrine, especially if it was the reader’s first exposure to Buddhism. It could be argued that if were not for these authors’ emphasis on the non-rational and the fantastical, Buddhism may have not caught on with...
interested young people of the 50’s and 60’s counterculture. The counter-culture’s exposure to Zen was to a preconceived notion of a philosophy that coincided with their valorization of an unconventional and alternative view of reality.

As mentioned previously in this thesis, D.T. Suzuki is known for translating the culture of Zen into an accessible Western idiom. Eck credits him with initiating Zen in America as a religious movement: “He is not a meditation master, but he was steeped in the traditions, arts and culture of Japanese Zen and sometimes called ‘the first patriarch of American Zen.’” But Eck does not recognize Suzuki’s idealization of Zen. This idealization of the mythic past of the Chan/Zen tradition, emphasizing sudden, non-rational enlightenment, Faure argues, is a “pious reconstruction of the ‘golden age’ of Zen by post-Meiji Japanese scholars such as D.T. Suzuki…”

Suzuki never really claims to be unbiased about the Zen tradition. Writing within that tradition, he implies that Zen is the living embodiment of the Buddhism. “The claim of the Zen followers that they are transmitting the essence of Buddhism is based on their belief that Zen takes hold of the enlivening spirit of the Buddha, stripped of all its historical and doctrinal garments.” But Suzuki never lets on to the reader that the Zen tradition is steeped in a long historical and doctrinal tradition, long ritualized with patriarchal lineages. To the naïve reader, the Zen way of thinking has every monk in a non-doctrinal, non-rational path to complete enlightenment. This must have been appealing to countercultural youths as they were distancing from the mainstream in economic, religious and cultural roles. Faure’s critique of Suzuki’s idealization of Zen monastic training accurately describes the discrepancy between Suzuki’s ideal Zen and the actual training in Japanese monasteries.

Alan Watts’ books on Zen introduced many interested readers of Packer’s generation to Zen Buddhism’s philosophy. Watts is associated with but not always included in the list of “Beats”. Watts was trained to become an Episcopalian priest. Through circumstances in his life with the Buddhist Society of London, meetings with Suzuki and his friendship with Joseph Campbell, he was introduced to Zen aesthetics and became involved with the Beats in San Francisco. Like many of the Beats, he had an idealized view of what Zen philosophy was and

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made the hubristic mistake of believing he was an expert on Zen without full exposure and knowledge of its full and rich traditions:

> The great Asian ways that I am speaking of do not, strictly speaking, have any creeds. They do not involve belief. That is to say, they do not involve committing themselves to certain positive opinions about life. Almost to the contrary, they abandon ideas and opinions because they are concerned with not ideas, not theories, but experience; experience in the sense almost of sensuousness, for instance, as they say, you drink water and know for yourself it is cold.  

This quote, typical of his work, is problematic on several levels. It lumps all “Asian” thought into the experience of a few Zen monks and ignores their rich traditions of text and ritual. It romanticizes Zen by contrasting it with the flaws of “faith” (a problem many Western minds were having with Christianity since the age of Enlightenment) and overlooking Buddhism’s long and rich tradition of faith. Watts’ description seems to rely heavily on Suzuki’s description of the Zen “way.” It’s doubtful that Watts had ever met a Zen priest (I don’t think he would have included the fact that these traditions are without ‘opinions’ otherwise). What Watts manages to do is to take an already distorted view of Zen and conform it to the ideals of the new thinking of the Beats, which was anti-establishment, and might be described as a form of religious surrealism.

Despite the fact that Watts’ and Suzuki’s description of Zen ignore the strict traditions of Buddhism and Zen, there are plenty of American Buddhists who believe in this stream of thought. Indeed, this interpretation of Zen continues to hold sway today and is probably one reason Zen enjoys continued popularity. Many young Americans interested in exploring a new religious tradition would probably not find the intensely ritualistic and rigorously traditionalist Zen appealing. The Buddhist tradition of patriarchal and clerical control, for example, would hardly appeal to feminist-minded women.

Kapleau’s *Three Pillars of Zen* is a book that illustrates the practices of Zen monks, especially zazen, in a “non-mystical” sense. This book was for many Americans their first exposure to reading about an actual Buddhist practice. Today, sitting meditation is so popular for

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Western Buddhists in America that a common theme in many current books on Buddhism seems to be that sitting meditation is the primary criterion for anyone who wants to label him or herself Buddhist. Contrasting this with the fact that meditation in Asia is generally reserved for the elite few (monks and nuns with the time and resources to devote to long periods of intensive training) gives an indication of the prominence that lay meditation has in the West.

The other seminal influence on Toni Packer was the philosophy of Krishnamurti. Krishnamurti’s philosophy is premised on the idea that self-knowledge is hampered by dogma:

To know oneself as one is requires an extraordinary alertness of mind, because what is is constantly undergoing transformation, change, and to follow it swiftly the mind must not be tethered to any particular dogma or belief, to any particular pattern or action.

If you would follow anything it is no good being tethered. 62

Krishnamurti was “found” as a young boy in India by members of the Theosophical Society and raised to be a new messiah-like guru. Droves of people from all over the world would come to hear him speak, to be near him. While still a relatively young man, he had a “spiritual awakening.” But actually it was a unique spiritual awakening in that he would become an advocate of ecumenical philosophy and believe that reliance on a guru is ultimately ego affirming and destructive. For the next sixty years, Krishnamurti would advocate his non-sectarian philosophy as the individual’s search for truth, which gradually and collectively would lead to world peace. Most importantly for this thesis was his emphasis on breaking free of dogmatic thinking, guru worship and any constraints on thinking that emphasize dependence on another. He argued that dependence on systems and teachers was ultimately an affirmation of the ego, and often security and safety are traps for affirming the self and thus ultimately debilitating. These ideas make perfect sense given his rejection of the messiah-role the Theosophists gave him. It was only after training in the Zen tradition for many years that Toni Packer came across the teachings of Krishnamurti.

‘Veils started dropping from my eyes.’ All her questions were stretched further. In Krishnamurti’s words was the clear and simple expression of truth without the use of any religious trappings whatsoever. It became inescapably clear to her that

while the Zen tradition claimed an absence of symbols, dogma, rituals and creeds, at the very same time an elaborate system of ceremonies, etiquette, beliefs, transmission of teachings, and devotional activities was an important, often compulsory, and amazingly unquestioned aspect of the actual training.  

Krishnamurti believed that anything resembling the truth must come from only us, freely. Any master or system cannot reveal self-knowledge, nor does self-discipline lead to that self-knowledge: it is only an assertion of ego. “We follow authority—if not that of a person, then of a system, of an ideology—because we want a result which will be satisfactory, which will give us security.”  

Krishnamurti is particularly critical of reliance on the guru for spiritual development. In the Zen tradition, great reverence is paid to the teacher as one who embodies the dharma, someone who has had some enlightenment experiences (*kensho*)—perhaps not complete enlightenment (*satori*) but spiritual experience and internal knowledge. Both Zen master and guru are endowed with more personal authority by virtue of their lineage than religious leaders in traditions where authority is more diffuse. A Zen master is revered and respected, which occasionally causes consternation for some American Buddhist practitioners who feel uncomfortable in showing deference to a spiritual master in such overt ways as some of the traditional etiquette afforded the Zen master.

Krishnamurti’s critique of reliance on spiritual authority resonated with some of the doubts that Toni Packer had already internalized. One can see a profound influence of Krishnamurti’s philosophy in Packer’s books and interviews. For example:

- The moment you find a technique you become attached to it and there is no longer any open listening. The mind clings to methods because it finds safety in them. Real questioning has methods, no knowing—just wondering freely, vulnerably, what it is that is actually happening inside and out.

Packer’s method of teaching is an amalgamation of her many years of rigorous Zen training and the influence of reading and listening to Krishnamurti. But she does not necessarily

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63 Toni Packer, *Work of This Moment*, p. xviii From the preface by Leonore Friedman.
64 Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom*, p. 47.
65 Toni Packer, *Work of This Moment*, p. 17.
advocate the rigorous training that she took; she feels it is unnecessary to follow a regimented path to find the truth of internal knowledge. In fact, she feels that reliance on any specific path, like Zen training, is a crutch that must be overcome in order to clearly see the truth. “We learn the truth in spite of different paths! Truth has nothing to with a path.”

There is certain irony in authority figures advocating a reliance on self-knowledge only. Both Krishnamurti and Toni Packer are consistently exhorting the reader to not rely on their advice but to rely on self-knowledge as the only key to the truth. But this technique of rhetoric is not without precedence and has a long history in the Buddhist tradition. Current writers on the subject of Buddhism in America contend that Toni Packer is still a teacher of Buddhism, albeit a non-sectarian form, and she is still included as a teacher of Buddhism in books on the subject of prominent women teachers. It is not the purpose of this thesis to insist that Packer is indeed a Buddhist without the label, but in the American Buddhist community she is considered a teacher of techniques of Buddhist training, and a highly respected one at that.

Packer does not attribute her adaptations to specific feminist concerns and she makes little reference to the feminist wave of the 1970’s. But Packer was already an established teacher of Zen during the 70’s and has briefly mentioned in interviews that she had worked her way through the prejudices of gender years before. Packer makes some overt references to feminism in her books and she has had an opportunity of power to make these changes that take for granted feminist concerns. Particularly, after Packer began her own retreat center, she did not need approval of a higher authority to make any liturgical changes. Packer’s emphasis is one of a deeper philosophical concern, which in some ways legitimates her changes for American practitioners in a way that explicit feminist rhetoric may not.

I suspect that Packer saw overt feminism as a form of derision and labeling, but those Buddhist practitioners who did experience a feminist awakening continue to revere Packer as a pioneer woman in American Zen. Lenore Friedman, in her own book, *Meetings with Remarkable Women Buddhist Teachers in America*, places her interview with Packer prominently in first place. Packer’s changes, she contends, are motivated by religious concerns, not by explicitly feminist interests. But women practitioners who advocate such reforms often cite Packer’s example as the paradigm for addressing overtly patriarchal Japanese traditions. One

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thing that this type of feminism does not consider is that American culture still has its own
problems with patriarchy. Consider this statement by Friedman:

In what unique and perfect form would the Dharma flourish here, now? In some places there has already been a shaking-free from
Asian forms and a collective searching for more authentic, indigenous ones.  

Friedman and other similar authors are stereotyping and denying that America participates in patriarchy as much as Asian cultures do by advocating this new way as the “authentic” way to practice Buddhism. As suggested earlier in this thesis, this statement also implies an American arrogance that this “new and improved” form of Buddhism would be the type that Shakyamuni would approve.

One practice that Packer began to examine in her critical examination of received forms of Zen liturgy is bowing. She questioned whether such rote motions are empty of meaning and have the effect of swelling the ego of the teacher:

She had learned that bowing could come from a place of selflessness. Prostrating before an altar or before Roshi in dokusan could happen out of emptiness. But now, when students came to her and bowed to her, were they seeing her clearly or putting her above them as an image? And could she be sure she was not feeling herself thus raised up? What images were being created in both their minds? Even though she was wary of—aware of—these things, students might not be.

Bowing is a common concern for American Zen practitioners. While some feel it is a good exercise to subjugate the ego, others believe it comes from a deep respect and love for their teacher. Still other newcomers to Zen practice probably find something exotic in this suggestion of the Japanese old path, and yet others probably find this practice distasteful and authoritarian.

In David Preston’s work on the sociological functions of the Los Angeles Zen Center, Social Organization of Zen Practice, he describes the initial reluctance of some new students to

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67 Leonore Friedman, Meetings with Remarkable Women, p. 24.
68 Leonore Friedman, Meetings with Remarkable Women, p. 48.
practice traditional forms such as bowing. He gives an insider’s look into the social pressures of the zendo using sociological theory.

Some beginners have strong aversion to some ritual forms, like bowing or holding the hands in the position the Japanese call *gassho*. A common sentiment is, ‘I’ll sit but I won’t do that other hocus-pocus.’ The problem is that there is strong social pressure (however subtle) in the zendo to conform closely to ritual prescriptions. Refusal to do the offensive ritual is noticed and makes the beginner uncomfortable, whereas doing it brings frustration and what Goffman calls mortification. ⁶⁹

Preston ultimately advocates ritual practice as a way of squelching the self that arises by resisting the practice. While he uses a theoretical model for the continuation of the practice, his advocacy and rationale for pushing through resistance to the form follows traditional Zen explanations of the importance of the practice.

As a long time student of a regimented and traditional zendo, Packer fully realizes the social pressure of ritual forms. She understands all of the typically Zen rhetoric about ego and its assertion against things like bowing, but she believes that the conditioning of continuing the rituals without deeply questioning these practices is ultimately more harmful than seemingly ego-fueled choices.

When we join a spiritual group or training center, there is usually a host of activities, ceremonies, etiquettes, rituals, vows and so forth that we are expected to participate in. There’s no real freedom to choose whether to participate or not. Any hesitancy is equated with ‘ego,’ while participating in what is demanded in spite of doubts is called ‘lowering the mast of ego.’ The mind quickly becomes conditioned to the new ceremonies and to the expected ways of relating to ‘teachers,’ ‘senior disciples,’ ‘advanced students’ and ‘beginners.’ In fact we have already been conditioned to these patterns at home, in school, at work, in

church, and so forth. Now there is reinforcement of old patterns in a new place. One sees the venerated teacher participate fully and sanction what is going on.  

Packer believes that in this conditioning, the student is encouraged to not question and to believe that doubting is giving in the ego. Ultimately our insecurities of belonging to the group are overcome by this conformity.

The observations of Packer’s are not unlike the systems of control addressed by Foucault and introduced in chapter one of this thesis. Bodily systems of control, through conformity, perpetuate normative standards of behavior for each successive wave of beginners. Through this pressure to conform, through “tradition,” the group will exert pressure on the newcomers. While this subtle system of control is not done by physical force, the pressure to conform is a working and useful system of power nonetheless.

For Packer, blindly following the group or master expresses the ego’s need for acceptance and security. Neither person can ever refute the true motivations of the other party; it becomes a mobius strip of rhetoric about the ego. This is an interesting problem for contemporary Western Buddhists, perhaps one that can never truly be solved.

Other ritual forms were also rejected or modified by Packer. Chanting, she believed, was becoming meaningless and robotic. The words chanted had lost meaning. By changing the words to English to accommodate the rituals in the American context, ritual chanting had cost Kapleau his relationship with his master. Once Packer had her own center, she decided to eliminate the practice altogether. By claiming she is not a Buddhist, she can freely make these choices without the repercussions of a traditional zendo, but there is an interesting dynamic that is going on that one may not pick up if one solely reads her books. She claims not to be a Buddhist, but her books are always found in the Buddhism section of the bookstore. She has been asked to guest speak at conferences concerning Buddhism in America, and she is consistently referenced in books about Buddhism in America. According to Coleman, Springwater in some ways is still run very similarly to Rochester Zen Center. But claiming no lineage and even staying out of the tradition, Packer can make radical changes without repercussions from any Zen authority.

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70 Toni Packer, *Work of This Moment*, p. 11.
Packer was also concerned with the continued use of the *kyosaku* stick at Springwater and its impact on the psyche and bodies of both the student and the disciplinarian. By this admission she is implying that Springwater was, at least at one time, more of a traditional zendo than she ever admits. Packer was not only concerned with the recipient of the stick but also with the mental states of the one wielding the stick. For Packer, deep questioning, rather than this physical contact, is a better way to arouse the energy that is the reputed benefit of the *kyosaku* stick. “The use of the stick was reverentially referred to as an act of compassion. But did stick wielding really arise from compassion? And didn’t energy awaken naturally in the course of questioning?”

The encouragement stick is more than just a source of potential violence that American feminists find problematic. For Packer, it is a ritual that asserts hierarchy, tradition, and a system. Packer is essentially a deconstructionist, suspicious of systems. Because so many systems have perpetuated the status quo, perpetuating patriarchy, racism and so forth, Toni Packer’s teachings are appealing to feminist Buddhist practitioners. While she says very little herself about specific feminist concerns, she was asked to give a talk at the Providence Zen Center Conference on Women in American Buddhism in 1984, in which she constantly questioned institutions, systems, and the status quo. Packer appeals to both feminists and skeptics of both sexes who are reluctant to follow any system blindly; often this is what they found so frustrating in their religions of origin.

It is the very identification with a system—as comes up with the word *Zen*—that brings about separation, conflict, and violence among human beings. The shared feeling of having something better, something superior to others, is common to religious and secular organizations. A Zen teacher once said to me: ‘if you didn’t have the deep conviction that your religious tradition was the best of all, you wouldn’t belong to it. Why not be proud of it?’

With her rejection of forms, including dharma transmission, strict sitting postures, hierarchy, devotion to the master, and bowing, Packer offers, for many, a refreshing take on Zen, a kind of preview, many think, of what Buddhism will become in the West. Because the “New

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71 Toni Packer, *Work of This Moment*, p. xvii.
72 Toni Packer, *Work of This Moment*, p. 54.
Buddhism,” as Coleman aptly calls this phenomenon, rejects ritual and hierarchy, it seems well positioned to correct the excesses of power imbalance so endemic to institutionalized religion. It seems that current American Buddhists are beginning to understand that Zen and other forms of Buddhism are much more than the Beats’ ethereal descriptions of expanding consciousness, that Zen is a part of a long tradition, just as dogmatic and traditional as any other world religion, but many refuse to continue such traditions in America. For many practicing Buddhists, American Buddhism must conform to the ideals of democracy, feminism, and racial equality and stand up to rational inquiry. Stagnant and distasteful traditions, such as exclusion of women for example, must be excised, extracted like a diseased canker that never truly belonged to Zen or Buddhism in the first place. For this new generation, American Buddhism can be a fresh start, reconciling the new ideals of liberalism, freedom and egalitarianism with Zen. Advocates for this ideal ask “Isn’t that what Buddhism has always done”?

Complete realization is rare indeed, and the actions of even the greatest teachers must be questioned when they appear wrong. Of course, it takes great courage to stand up and challenge a powerful and revered teacher, but those raised in the individualistic culture of Western democracy seem uniquely suited to the task. 73

Those who advocate radical changes to Zen for the sake of dropping the cultural baggage that they find so distasteful in Japanese Zen idealize Packer. Patriarchal traditions are the most often cited need for reform. Attitudes toward feminism have changed radically in a short period of time, and the feminist commitments among American Buddhists are consistent with the generally progressive values of this highly educated, fairly affluent demographic. These commitments are drastic enough to marginalize most advocates of traditionalism with its misogynist baggage.

### Conclusion

In importing a religious system to a different culture, certain types of accommodation to the ways of that culture are inevitable. The focus of this thesis is specific feminist concerns for the elimination or modification of rituals in Zen as it is practiced in America. A newly formed

feminist consciousness justifies a need for radical transformations as well as acting as a gateway for rejecting other elements of orthodoxy. Because this rejection includes discarding elements of Asian culture deemed problematic by American feminists, an investigation of how these systems function in the Asian context was necessary. These rituals have specific functions that have worked well in Asia but can become charged symbols of patriarchal tradition for American Zen students. As American Zen women teachers have gained prominence as leaders of their own centers and communities, they tend to reject traditions that they feel are either unnecessary or too problematic for their students. Dharma transmission, for example, serves in Asia as a direct link to the founder of the religion. But in the American context, it can become an exclusionary institution that has a history of disenfranchising women.

The first chapter of this thesis investigates various factors that contribute to the disregard for maintaining an exact replica of Zen as it is practiced in Asia. I looked at the role of ritual forms in maintaining authority structures in the context of Japanese Zen monastic life. Because control and abuse of authority is often a key justification for discontinuing problematic traditions, the theoretical work of Foucault proved helpful in understanding some of the more subtle systems of control and how they might apply to the Zen monastery. Investigating Foucault and Faure’s post-modern methods of critically looking at how institutions of control function are of interest to feminists who are suspicious of traditional systems. The American embrace of post-Enlightenment rationality coupled with subtle but persistent Protestant ideals of excising “unnecessary” rituals contrary to the founder’s ideals also adds a layer of justification in eliminating liturgical rituals and changing Zen in the American context, as I showed in discussing the kind of Buddhism favored by American Buddhists steeped in the writings of D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts.

Chapters Two and Three looked at innovations introduced by Kennett-Roshi and Packer as two case studies of accommodation in American Zen communities. The two women profiled in this thesis had different approaches to accommodation, with Kennett on the traditional end of the spectrum and Packer on the radical end. This variety also represents the range of concerns for feminists, from inclusion into a reformed system to rejection of systems entirely. The process of adopting religious systems from other cultures always includes variation and dissent. However, because Zen appealed to many feminists, many practitioners immediately wanted to take the perceived Asian patriarchy out of their Buddhism. The desire to change Zen to reflect
feminist sensibilities is not peculiar to a few specific teachers but reflects a large segment of Zen students.

American Zen Buddhists are interested in other innovations not discussed in this thesis. Specifically, liturgical rituals that blend Zen rituals with other religious beliefs include, for example, the Christian interest in meditation, Goddess worship and Native American beliefs. American Buddhism tends to blend rituals and beliefs with other Buddhisms imported to America, a practice rarely done in Asia. Zen’s unique form of meditation is a popular ritual co-opted by secular and religious seekers alike. Scholars currently debate about what unique forms Buddhism will take in America, but I believe that this thesis indicates some important trends. American Buddhism strives to be more democratic and inclusive. Zen Buddhism in America has roughly the same number of women teachers as men. This suggests that an exceptional form of Zen has already taken shape, a new form that rejects overt authoritarian structures and practices in its quest for egalitarianism.

Bibliography

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