

Views on *Dharmadhātu* in D. T. Suzuki's Huayan Thought

Visiting Researcher,
The Center for Shin Buddhist Studies, Japan
Makoto ITO

Abstract

Suzuki Teitaro Daisetz (鈴木貞太郎, 大拙 1870–1966), a distinguished Japanese Zen scholar and practitioner, is renowned for his scholarly work on the *Huayan Sutra* and Huayan thought which he perceived as aligning with the insights in the Zen tradition. Building on my previous paper, wherein I explored Suzuki's perspectives on *bodhicitta* (Ch. *putixin*, Jp. *bodaishin* 菩提心) and *shishi wu'ai* (Jp. *jiji muge* 事事無礙), this paper examines Suzuki's diverse—or potentially inconsistent—views concerning *dharmadhātu* (Ch. *fajie*, Jp. *hokkai* 法界) and *dharmakāya* (Ch. *fashen*, Jp. *hosshin* 法身). Our analysis commences with Suzuki's early conception of *dharmakāya*, as elucidated in the *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (1907), where he described it as a transcendent, universal entity possessing a will. This view was critically assessed by the Belgian Buddhist scholar Louis de la Vallée Poussin, who characterized it as “Vedāntic.” Next, we trace Suzuki's “redirection,” as hypothesized by Sasaki Shizuka, to either amend or uphold his earlier views, with a renewed emphasis on the concepts of *dharmadhātu*, *śūnyatā*, and Suchness, which eschew a substantial view of a transcendent, powerful entity operating behind the Huayan *dharmadhātu*. Nevertheless, Suzuki's interest in a transcendent power with a will resurfaces in his immediate post-war writings, albeit in a slightly altered form, wherein he posits the Amitābha Buddha as the source of the great loving heart (Ch. *dabeixin*, Jp. *daihisshin* 大悲心, *mahākaruṇā*) that emanates from the Huayan *dharmadhātu*. Another significant theme evident throughout Suzuki's various discussions on Huayan thought is his emphasis on “spiritual insight” (Jp. *reiseiteki chokkan* 靈性的直觀) which he elucidates as a product of non-discriminating wisdom and in relation to his theory of the logic of *soku-hi* (即非, is/is-not). Suzuki's views on spirituality as a means to transcend discriminating, dualistic thought and to achieve salvation from human anxieties are examined in the last chapter of the paper.

Keywords: D. T. Suzuki, *Huayan Sutra*, *dharmadhātu*, *dharmakāya*

Introduction

Suzuki Teitaro Daisetz (鈴木貞太郎, 大拙 1870–1966), popularly known in the West as D. T. Suzuki or Daisetz Suzuki,¹ is widely acknowledged as a pioneer in propagating Buddhism, especially Zen, to the Western world through his numerous writings published in English and through his public lectures and speeches which he delivered also in the English language.² Although Zen (including the Chinese tradition of Chan) was Suzuki’s main object of concern as a scholar, thinker, and Buddhist practitioner, he also elucidated Huayan thought and teachings in his writings,³ most notably in the *Essays in Zen Buddhism Third Series* (hereafter: *EZB3*) published in English in 1934. Suzuki argued that the “Chinese practical genius” brought the loftiness found in the *Huayan Sutra* “down again on earth” and that “we see the spirit of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* perfectly acclimatized in the Far Eastern soil” in the form of Zen (*EZB3*:106). He also co-edited and published a critical Sanskrit text of the *Huayan Sutra* with Izumi Hōkei (泉芳璟 1884–1947) in 1936.⁴ Suzuki continued to discuss Huayan thought in his various writings and lectures throughout his lifetime.⁵

¹ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki follows the order of dharma name, first name, and family name which is the most popularly known form in the West. For other Japanese persons I will put the family name first followed by the dharma name (for monks and priests) or first name (for lay persons) based on the Japanese custom, hence Shaku Sōen (釋宗演) and Sasaki Shizuka (佐々木閑), for example. The romanization of Japanese names and terms will be based on the Hepburn system unless an alternative transliteration is designated by those directly concerned, as in the cases of Otani University (大谷大學) and Shinshu Otani-ha (真宗大谷派), for example.

² After his initial awakening (Ch. *jianxin*, Jp. *kenshō* 見性) in 1897 under the Japanese Rinzai School master Shaku Sōen (釋宗演, 1860–1919), Suzuki was active in the United States between 1898–1908. He worked as an editor, translator, and writer at the Open Court Publishing Company in Illinois, run by Paul Carus (1852–1919). After returning to Japan, while he assumed professorship at universities, first in Tokyo and later in Kyoto, Suzuki continued to publish books in English until the late 1930s. Discontinuation of publishing in English may have been partly due to the death in 1939 of his American wife Beatrice (1878–1939), a scholar of esoteric Buddhism who co-edited the English journal the *Eastern Buddhist* at Otani University in Kyoto with Suzuki and who had most likely helped Suzuki in his English authorship. After the Asia-Pacific War, Suzuki returned to the United States to give a series of lectures at Columbia University, between 1952–57. For chronological facts on the life of Suzuki, see Bandō 1993, Grace 2014, and for a brief summary of academic studies on Suzuki up to the present, see Sueki and Toda 2016.

³ Following the terminology proposed by Kimura Kiyotaka (木村清孝), I utilize “Huayan doctrine” (華嚴教學) to mean the systematic ideas established by the people regarded as belonging to the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Huayan schools (*Huayan zong*, 華嚴宗) and “Huayan thought” (華嚴思想) as ideas in general based on and inspired by the *Huayan Sutra* (Kimura 1992, p. 2). Hence, for example, the ideas of Fazang (法藏) belong to the former, while those of Li Tongxuan (李通玄) belong to the latter. I add “Huayan teachings” (《華嚴經》的教說) as the teachings found in the *Huayan Sutra*.

⁴ Suzuki and Hōkei 1936.

⁵ A post-war discussion on Huayan thought by Suzuki can be found in his Columbia University lectures (1952–57). However, the content of the lectures are still understudied, with a full transcript edited by Richard M. Jaffe set to be published in August, 2025. Although the English transcripts and Japanese

During the long course of his career, Suzuki expressed diverse views on the central ideas found in the *Huayan Sutra* and Huayan thought. The inconsistencies, or rather reflections of multiple perspectives, that can be found expounded in his writings merit close investigation. In my previous paper (Itō 2024), I examined Suzuki's views on the concepts of the great loving heart (Ch. *dabei*, Jp. *daihi* 大悲 *mahākaruṇā*, hereafter: *mahākaruṇā* except in citations from Suzuki's work),⁶ desire for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*, Ch. *putixin*, Jp. *bodaishin* 菩提心, hereafter: *bodhicitta*), and the realm of reality⁷ (*dharmadhātu*, Ch. *fajie*, Jp. *hokkai* 法界, hereafter: *dharmadhātu*) expressed as the Huayan formula of unimpeded interpenetration of all individual things (Ch. *shishi wu'ai*, Jp. *jiji muge* 事事無礙, hereafter: *shishi wu'ai*). In my previous paper, I briefly mentioned how Suzuki's views transformed from his earlier understanding of these primary Huayan concepts centered on the initiative of the individual to his later ideas emphasizing the existence of a transcendent entity or power behind them. In this paper, I aim to put this 'diversity,' or 'inconsistency' of focus, into a coherent perspective. This shall be done by taking Sasaki Shizuka's hypothesis regarding the diversity of ideas in Suzuki's writings and by applying it to Suzuki's divergent views on the central ideas of the *Huayan Sutra*. Through this, we shall see how his diverse views on Huayan thought reflect Suzuki's multiple views towards what he believed to be the heart of Mahāyāna Buddhism at each juncture of his long scholarly career.

translation of his lectures of the Winter Term, 1952 and Spring Term, 1953 in which he mainly discussed Zen and the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 《大乘起信論》). Hereafter: *Awakening of Faith*) have been published (Shigematsu and Tokiwa 2016), it is premature at this stage for me to discuss Suzuki's views on Huayan thought elucidated in the lectures.

⁶ Although *mahākaruṇā* is typically rendered as "great compassion" (Ch. *dabei*, Jp. *daihi* 大悲) and *mahāmaītrī* as "great loving heart" (Ch. *daci*, Jp. *daiji* 大慈), I follow Suzuki's translation in the *EZB3*, except in instances where alternative terms are employed in his text, such as in the *Outlines of Mahāyāna*, where he mostly uses the term "compassion."

⁷ In a recent comprehensive analysis of the concept of *dharmadhātu*, Fujii Jun offers two general definitions of *dharmadhātu* based on early Mahāyāna sources: (1) as a synonym for the concept "all *dharmas*," which constitute the object of the Buddha's awakened cognition, and (2) as an expression denoting the essence or nature inherent in all *dharmas*. Concerning the *Gaṇḍavūha*, Fujii also observes that "instead of interpreting (*sarva*) *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavūha* solely as a spatial concept, we should understand this term as signifying either 'all *dharmas*' in a literal sense or 'totality of *dharmas*' in a more abstract sense" (Fujii 2025, p. 244, pp. 310–311). Although my translation of *dharmadhātu* as the "realm of reality" may carry a spatial connotation, I intend to mean "the reality of all phenomena in their entirety," while acknowledging a degree of spatial implication as an expression of the phenomenal. In his examination of the concept of *dharmadhātu* in the *Huayan Sutra*, Suzuki conceptualized it as "one great the Reality" and further described it as "the world of the *Gaṇḍavūha*," encompassing spatial-temporal dimensions, although not in the physical sense but as a spiritual intuition. This topic will be elaborated in sections 2-2 and 3-1. I would like to extend my gratitude to Doctor Fujii for his generous provision of the newly released volume *The Dynamic Non-Duality of Dharmadhātu: Elucidations of Buddhist Truth Expressions*. This volume, which he edited, includes his most recent scholarly contribution on the concept of *dharmadhātu* (See Fujii 2025).

1. Issues Surrounding Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*

1-1. Views on Mahāyāna Buddhism in the *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*

In this section, we will briefly confirm the central ideas articulated by Suzuki in the *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (hereafter: *Outlines*), his first book written and published in English.⁸ In the next section, we shall see Sasaki Shizuka's discussion regarding the critique towards this work by the Belgian Buddhist scholar Louis de la Vallée-Poussin (1869–1938). Through an analysis of La Vallée-Poussin's critique, Sasaki proposed a hypothetical viewpoint to understand the objectives of Suzuki's subsequent writings.⁹

Suzuki published the *Outlines* in 1907, professing that the object of this book was first and foremost to “refute the many wrong opinions which are entertained by Western critics concerning the fundamental teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism” and additionally, to “awake interest among scholars of comparative religion” towards this Buddhist tradition (*Outlines*:v). In this book, Suzuki defined Mahāyāna Buddhism as follows:

It is the Buddhism which, inspired by a progressive spirit, broadened its original scope, so far as it did not contradict the inner significance of the teachings of the Buddha, and which assimilated other religio-philosophical beliefs within itself, whenever it felt that, by so doing, people of more widely different characters and intellectual endowments could be saved. (*Outlines*: 10)

Suzuki listed seven “principal features of Mahāyānism” which reflect his view of the “progressive spirit” and “broadened” scope of Mahāyāna Buddhism: (1) comprehensiveness, (2) Universal love for All Sentient Beings, (3) its greatness in intellectual comprehension, (4) its marvelous spiritual energy, (5) its greatness in the exercise of the *upāya* (i.e., skillful means) (6) its higher spiritual attainment, and (7) its greater activity (*Outlines*:62–63). He also pointed out the “ten essential features of Mahāyānism” according to the Yogacāra school tradition, such as the immanent existence of all things in the *ālayavijñāna*, the ideality of the universe, the “regulation of moral life” in the practice of the six Pāramitās, the ten spiritual stages of Bodhisattvahood, etc. Suzuki concludes the list with the “doctrine of Trikāya” as the “final characteristic to be

⁸ Suzuki's first publication in English was his English translation of the *Awakening of Faith* published in 1900.

⁹ Sasaki articulated his hypothesis in his afterword to the Japanese translation of the *Outlines* (Sasaki 2016).

mentioned as distinctly Mahāyānistic,” noting that “there is, it is asserted, the highest being which is the ultimate cause of the universe and in which all existences find their essential origin and significance. This is called by the Mahāyānists *Dharmakāya*” (*Outlines*:66–73).¹⁰

Suzuki conceded that the points he listed as the main characteristics of Mahāyāna Buddhism are “to a great extent saturated with a partisan spirit” and that “they are more or less scattered and unconnected statements of the so-called salient features of Mahāyānism” which do not “furnish much information concerning the nature of Mahāyānism as a coherent system of religious teachings” (*Outlines*:75). In an effort to “present a more comprehensive and impartial exposition” of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Suzuki discussed wide-ranging topics such as *nirvāṇa*, karma, Suchness (*bhūtatathatā*), non-ego (*anātman*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), *dharmakāya* and *trikāya* (Ch. *sanshen*, Jp. *sanjin* 三身), bodhisattva and bodhisattvahood, etc.

One idea that Suzuki used as a thread to weave together the diverse elements of Mahāyāna Buddhism was his view of *dharmakāya*. It aligns with the tenth characteristic Suzuki mentioned in the above list and reiterated in the concluding passages of the *Outlines* in the last chapter discussing *nirvāṇa*:

Theoretically speaking, *Nirvāṇa* is the dispersion of the clouds of ignorance hovering around the light of Bodhi. Morally, it is the suppression of egoism and the awakening of love (*karuṇā*). Religiously, it is the absolute surrender of the self to the will of the *Dharmakāya*. When the clouds of ignorance are dispersing, our intellectual horizon gets clearer and wider; we perceive that our individual existences are like bubbles and lightnings, but that they obtain reality in their oneness with the Body of Dharma. (*Outlines*:369)

Suzuki interpreted *dharmakāya*, also rendered the Body of Dharma in the above passage, as “the ultimate reality that underlies all particular phenomena” and contrary to an impersonal being of the *Brahman* in Vedāntism, it “is capable of willing and reflecting, or, to use Buddhist phraseology, it is *Karuṇā* (love) and Bodhi (intelligence), and not the mere state of being” (*Outlines*:46). He asserted that “this pantheistic and at the same time entheistic *Dharmakāya* is working in every sentient being, for sentient beings are nothing but a self-manifestation of the *Dharmakāya*” and that “all particular existences acquire

¹⁰ The styles of Sanskrit terms such as the use of italics and capitalization in the citations follow Suzuki's.

their meaning only when they are thought of in their oneness in the Dharmakāya” (*Outlines*:46–47). This view of the transcendence and immanence of *dharmakāya* as an ultimate universal being with a will became a central focus of critique by La Vallée-Poussin.

Sasaki Shizuka acknowledged that the *Outlines* is “a work that should be accorded an extremely important position in that Suzuki Daisetz, in his youth, asserted his own understanding of Buddhism to the West straightforwardly.”¹¹ Sasaki suggested that in this work, Suzuki “fully recounted his own [spiritual] state of realization [Jp. *kyōchi* 境地] taking the style of introducing the quintessence of Mahāyāna Buddhism to the Western world, utilizing his mastery of English at will,” and that it became “the starting point of his international activities.”¹² However, Sasaki elucidates that shortly following its initial publication, the *Outlines* was subjected to intense criticism from the Belgian scholar of Buddhism, Louis de la Vallée-Poussin, with whom Sasaki largely concurred. La Vallée-Poussin’s primary point of contention was directed at Suzuki’s portrayal of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which he perceived as being excessively Vedāntic.

1-2. Critique Towards the *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*

While reiterating his esteem of Suzuki’s learning, La Vallée-Poussin wrote that “the very interesting work of Teitaro Suzuki must be severely criticized: his Mahāyānism is, beyond what is useful or admissible, tinged with Vedāntism and with German philosophy” and that Suzuki “gives us as true Mahāyānism a pantheistic system much more Vedāntic and Hegelian than Buddhistic.”¹³ Although La Vallée-Poussin acknowledged that “there is Vedāntism in Buddhism” and that historically, “Mahāyānism finally merges into Vedāntism,” he argued that “it is not Vedāntism from the cradle, and it retains some characteristics owing to which it can be distinguished even when merged.”¹⁴

Mr. Teitaro Suzuki has “tout brouillé,” because he has admitted, without reflection, that the *Dharmakāya*—*id est*, the “Body of Law,” the true and unique body of the Buddhas and of all the saints who arrive at Nirvāṇa—of course a “non-body”—is

¹¹ Sasaki 2016, p. 471. The English translation of all citations from non-English sources (including Suzuki’s Japanese works) in this paper are by the present author.

¹² Sasaki 2016, p. 471.

¹³ La Vallée-Poussin 1908, p. 886, p. 887.

¹⁴ La Vallée-Poussin 1908, p. 888, p. 889.

the ultimate principle of the universe, the ontological substratum of movable phenomena: this is not true Mahāyānism.¹⁵

To prove this point, La Vallée-Poussin identified specific instances in the *Outlines* that he interpreted as Vedāntic. Notably, he criticized Suzuki's description of *dharmakāya* as "the spontaneous Will that pervades everywhere and works all the time, which always manifests itself for the best interests of sentient creatures."¹⁶ He further revealed that Suzuki quoted passages regarding "will, or rather vow, resolution (*praṇidhāna*)" from Mahāyāna sutras where "he adds after the word 'will,' *between brackets*, the talismanic words 'of the Dharmakāya.'" La Vallée-Poussin gave as an example a passage Suzuki summarized from the *Huayan Sutra*:

Painful as these sufferings are, I will not retreat, I will not be frightened. I will not be negligent, I will not forsake my fellow beings. Why? Because it is the will [of the Dharmakāya] that all sentient beings should be universally emancipated.¹⁷

The original text is from a verse on the confession of resolve expected of a bodhisattva: the bodhisattva resolves to take on the heavy loads of the suffering of all sentient beings and fulfill his will, or vow (Ch. *yuan* 願, *praṇidhāna*), of impartiality (Ch. *pingdeng* 平等) in the salvation of sentient beings. This will of impartiality "that all sentient beings should be universally saved" is that of the bodhisattva and not a transcendent being such as Suzuki's *dharmakāya*.¹⁸

¹⁵ La Vallée-Poussin 1908, p. 889.

¹⁶ La Vallée-Poussin 1908, p. 889. The citation is from *Outlines*: 275.

¹⁷ La Vallée-Poussin 1908, p. 890, *Outlines*:370. The passage is from the Chapter on the Ten Transference of Merit (Ch. *Shi huixiang-pin* 〈十廻向品〉) in the *Huayan Sutra*: 我當代受無量苦惱，不以苦故，其心退轉，恐怖懈怠，捨離眾生。何以故？我爲眾生，荷負重擔，滿平等願。(T09, No. 278, 489b25–27).

¹⁸ Although the Chinese text of the *Huayan Sutra* does not clearly indicate the subject who wills for the impartial salvation of sentient beings, clearly, it is the bodhisattva's own will, even though, admittedly, it takes the will of the Buddha also called Vairocana Buddha in the sutra—or more comprehensively, will of all Buddhas which could be expressed more symbolically as that of the *dharmakaya* or a universal will—as an ideal model to emulate. In the cited passage, Vajraketu Bodhisattva (Ch. *jingangchuan pusa* 金剛幢菩薩) is preaching the virtues of a bodhisattva's vow (*praṇidhāna*) after having being introduced into and exited from a profound meditative state thanks to the divine supportive powers of the Buddha. The Buddhas in the sutra remind Vajraketu Bodhisattva that all Buddhas underwent the same process (爾時，金剛幢菩薩承佛神力，入菩薩明智三昧正受。入正受已……十方各百萬佛剎微塵數等世界諸佛，如汝神力故，乃能入是三昧正受。又盧舍那佛本願力故……爾時，諸佛各申右手，摩金剛幢菩薩頂。摩其頂已，時彼菩薩即從定起，告眾菩薩言。(T09, No. 278, 488a19–488b22). The supportive powers of

Other points of contention include Suzuki's inaccurate understanding or translation, according to La Vallée-Poussin's interpretation, of concepts such as *bodhicitta* and *tathāgata-garbha*. Furthermore, he suggests that the *Outlines* "seems to be inspired by the views of the 'school of the mantras' (Shin-gon-shu), which agrees with the theosophical principles of the Tantrism."¹⁹

How should La Vallée-Poussin's criticisms of the *Outlines* be assessed? Sasaki Shizuka commented that La Vallée-Poussin's critiques are generally acceptable: "The various thoughts Suzuki explains as the characteristics of Mahāyāna Buddhism in this book cannot be applied to Mahāyāna as a whole; if we may look for a correspondence, we find it only in late esoteric Buddhism [Jp. *kōki mikkyō* 後期密教] advanced in Hinduization....I realize that much of the Mahāyāna Buddhism Suzuki recounts is, actually, his creation which is not even remotely close to Mahāyāna Buddhism."²⁰

Despite the noted differences in content between Suzuki's exposition of Mahāyāna Buddhism and that of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, Sasaki recognized a degree of "closeness [Jp. *shinkinsei* 親近性] to Japanese Buddhism."²¹ Sasaki observed that Japanese "readers may not feel so much strangeness towards the depiction of Mahāyāna Buddhism that Suzuki presents....[including] the existence of a singular principle of the universe that manifests ubiquitously with the will to save all sentient beings; the instantaneous nature of enlightenment, which suggests that one can achieve the spiritual state of realization [Jp. *kyōchi* 境地] of a Buddha in an instant by recognizing one's own Buddha nature [Jp. *bussō* 仏性]; and a form of *tat tvam asi* nature [Jp. *bonga-ichinyōsei* 梵我一如性] that perceives the will of the universe as being reflected within each and every individual."²² In this regard, Andō Reiji's positive assessment of Suzuki's ideas may substantiate Sasaki's observations. Andō noted that within the *Outlines*, one can discern, "based on the interpretation of the *Awakening of Faith*,²³ the organic interconnections among 'tathatā,' 'ālaya-vijñāna,' and 'tathāgata-garbha,' [revealing] a rigorous structure wherein 'tathatā,' as the ultimate truth of the universe, is, as it is, the

the Buddhas constitute a significant element of the teachings in the *Huayan Sutra*. In this context, these powers may be collectively and symbolically represented as those of the universal truth (*tatathā*), *dharmadhātu*, or, in a personified expression, the *dharmakāya*. However, they should not be construed as emanating from a foundational substantial entity, nor a fundamental source, or essence, of all phenomena.

¹⁹ La Vallée-Poussin 1908, pp. 892–893.

²⁰ Sasaki 2016, p. 482.

²¹ Sasaki 2016, p. 485.

²² Sasaki 2016, p. 485.

²³ Influences of the *Awakening of Faith* in Suzuki's Huayan thought merits further examination.

mind (*‘ālaya-vijñāna*) and [simultaneously] the womb [Jp. *botai* 母胎] (*tathāgata-garbha*) of all phenomena in nature.”²⁴ Sasaki concluded that Japanese Buddhism shares a closer affinity with Hindu philosophies, such as Vedānta, and that Suzuki's attempt to explain Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism through the framework of Japanese Buddhism based on his own personal experience of enlightenment (in Zen) was ultimately unsuccessful.²⁵

How then did Suzuki address La Vallée-Poussin's critique? Although there is no evidence that Suzuki actually read the critical review at the time, Sasaki believes that Suzuki became aware that his own ideas expounded in the *Outlines* were not universal enough to be applied to Mahāyāna Buddhism in general; hence he sought to bury this work by denying permission for reprints in English or as a Japanese translation.²⁶ Sasaki further argues that Suzuki pursued two directions to address the limitations he identified: firstly, he sought to refine his own ideas to achieve a more precise comprehension of Buddhism; secondly, he chose not to alter his own ideas but rather to restrict their applicability from the broader realm of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Buddhism in Japan or the Far East, regions where Suzuki's central ideas were relevant. Sasaki noted that “per [La Vallée-]Poussin's observations, Suzuki reduced the overly Vedāntic elements, and further introduced it to the West, presenting it as a form of thought unique to Japan.”²⁷

Sasaki believes that either of the two solutions was applied at Suzuki's discretion in his subsequent publications. In some works, the will to save all sentient beings is limited to the level of the resolve of a bodhisattva and not to the will of a transcendent, singular principle of the universe. In other works, such as the *Japanese Spirituality (Nihonteki Reisei* 《日本の靈性》) published in Japanese in 1944, the second method is utilized, allowing Suzuki to “maintain the force of his own thought by limiting the sphere of thought from a universal stage to a local field.”²⁸

²⁴ Andō 2019, p. 32.

²⁵ Sasaki 2016, pp. 484–485. Tokiwa Gishin offered a rebuttal to the critiques advanced by La Vallée-Poussin and Sasaki regarding Suzuki's *Outlines* (Tokiwa 2009, 2019). His arguments encompass several key points: their interpretations of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* failed to correctly capture the significance of the *tathāgata-garbha* theory; Vedānta philosophy was established under Buddhist influence rather than the reverse; they neglect to mention the *Huayan Sutra* as the contextual background to Suzuki's perspectives on concepts such as the *dharmakāya*, *bodhicitta*, and *prañidhāna* (see fn.18 for my view in part on this issue). Furthermore, Tokiwa contests Sasaki's choice to extensively analyze Suzuki's conception of Mahāyāna Buddhism in general, neglecting Zen. Tokiwa argues that Suzuki's approach to Buddhism is inseparably linked to his approach to Zen. However, Tokiwa does not directly address Suzuki's conception of the *dharmakāya* as a universal ultimate entity with a will, with which Suzuki claims that one must regain identity. This is a significant omission in Tokiwa's critique.

²⁶ Sasaki 2016, pp. 486.

²⁷ Sasaki 2016, p. 487.

²⁸ Sasaki 2016, pp. 486–487.

This leads us to the central focus of this paper: by applying Sasaki's hypothesis, which of the two directions can be discerned in Suzuki's varied perspectives on Huayan thought, and how are these two orientations manifested within them? Our analysis will concentrate on the pre-war publication *EZB3* and the pertinent essays Suzuki authored immediately after the Asia-Pacific War.

2. D. T. Suzuki's Pre-war Views on *Dharmadhātu*

2-1. Citations from the *Huayan Sutra* in the *Outlines*

Before we analyze Suzuki's ideas in *EBZ3*, let us first consider his references to the *Huayan Sutra* in the *Outlines*. As *dharmakāya* is a central theme in the text, Suzuki's references to the sutra are centered thereon, utilizing the sutra to substantiate his arguments regarding the nature of *dharmakāya*. In Chapter Nine: *Dharmakāya*, Suzuki defines *dharmakāya* as follows:

The Dharmakāya is a soul, a willing and knowing being, one that is will and intelligence, thought and action. It is, as understood by the Mahāyānists, not an abstract metaphysical principle like Suchness, but it is living spirit, that manifests itself in nature as well as in thought.... Further, Buddhists ascribe to the Dharmakāya innumerable merits and virtues and an absolute perfect intelligence, and makes it an inexhaustible fountain-head of love and compassion; and it is in this that the Dharmakāya finally assumes a totally different aspect from a mere metaphysical principle, cold and lifeless. (*Outlines*: 222-223)

Following this, Suzuki says that “the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* gives some comprehensive statements concerning the nature of the Dharmakāya”(Outlines:223) and cites a passage from the Chapter on the Inconceivable *Dharma* of the Buddha (Ch. *Fo busiyifa-pin* 佛不思議法品) of the *Huayan Sutra*:

The Dharmakāya, though manifesting itself in the triple world, is free from impurities and desires. It unfolds itself here, there, and everywhere responding to the call of karma. It is not an individual reality, it is not a false existence, but is universal and pure. It comes from nowhere, it goes to nowhere, it does not assert itself, nor is it subject to annihilation. It is forever serene and eternal. It is the One, devoid of all determinations. This Body of Dharma has no boundary, no quarters, but is embodied in all bodies. Its freedom or spontaneity is incomprehensible, its

spiritual presence in things corporeal is incomprehensible. All forms of corporeality are involved therein, it is able to create all things. Assuming any concrete material body as required by the nature and condition of karma, it illuminates all creations. Though it is the treasure of intelligence, it is void of particularity. There is no place in this universe where this Body does not prevail. The universe becomes, but this Body forever remains. It is free from all opposites and contraries, yet it is working in all things to lead them to Nirvāna. (*Outlines:223–224*)²⁹

The above passage from the *Huayan Sutra* reveals the pervasive nature of *dharmakāya*, which signifies a pervasive, universal principle (*dharmatā*) governing all phenomena (“no boundary, no quarters, but is embodied in all bodies”). Although, admittedly, the term *dharmakāya* takes a personified expression as *dharmabody*, or Body of Dharma in Suzuki's rendering, Suzuki further posits that it is “a soul, a willing and knowing being, one that is will and intelligence, thought and action.” Moreover, he claims that the *dharmakāya* ascribed with “absolute perfect intelligence” is “an inexhaustible fountain-head of love and loving heart.” Suzuki's interpretation is subjective and cannot be corroborated by the passage from the *Huayan Sutra*. His intention to depict the *dharmakāya* as an absolute entity with a will, wisdom, and “love and loving heart” is further evident in his translation of the phrase “[the *dharmakāya*] has [but] one characteristic, [which is] devoid of characteristic” (*yixiang wuxiang* 一相無相) as “it is the One, devoid of all determinations,” where “the One” implicitly suggests an absolute personified entity which transcends “all determinations.”

²⁹ The original Chinese text of the *Huayan Sutra* is as follows: 於三界中無所染污。隨因緣應一切普現。非實非虛、平等清淨。非去非來、無爲無壞。清淨常住。一相無相。是法身相、非處非方、一切身身。自在無量、妙色無量。攝一切身、作種種身。隨方便身、普照一切。具足智藏而無種種分別。其身充滿無餘世界。說一切法界雖動非動。清淨法身。非有非無、非滅非不滅亦非不現而化眾生。(T09, No. 278, 599b14–23). The punctuation in the Chinese text is adjusted to fit with Suzuki's translation. Suzuki reads the passage “一相無相是法身相非處非方……” as “一相無相。是法身相非處非方……,” and translates it as “It is the One, devoid of all determinations. This Body of Dharma has no boundary....” However, it is more natural to read it as “一相無相、是法身相。非處非方……,” which can be translated as “it has [but] one characteristic [which is] devoid of any characteristic; this is the characteristic of *dharmakāya*. It has no boundary....” The term *xiang* (相, Skt. *lakṣaṇa*), translated here as “characteristic,” can also be translated as “mark,” “attribute,” or “sign.” (Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 463l). Suzuki fails to translate the phrase “清淨法身” (*Dharmakāya* which is pure), and summarizes the phrases “非有非無、非滅非不滅亦非不現” simply as “It is free from all opposites and contraries.”

Regarding “love and loving heart,” Suzuki cites from a verse in the Chapter on the Virtues of the Bodhisattva of Initial Arousal of *Bodhicitta* (Ch. *Chufaxin pusa gonde-pin* 初發心菩薩功德品): “with one great loving heart/The thirsty desires of all beings he quencheth with coolness refreshing.”³⁰ Suzuki utilizes it to assert that “every existence, great or insignificant, is a reflection of the glory of the Dharmakāya and as such worthy of its all-embracing love” (*Outlines*:233). However, the above lines from the verse are a praise of the unfettered powers of the bodhisattva (Ch. *pusa zizai li* 菩薩自在力) whom the sutra calls “true child of the Buddha” (Ch. *zhenfozi* 真佛子).³¹

From the preceding analysis, it is apparent that Suzuki employed the *Huayan Sutra* to substantiate his claim that *dharmakāya* represents “an absolute existence which pervades the universe and exercises unfettered powers.”³² It is noteworthy that certain elements of his English translation of the Chinese text of the *Huayan Sutra* exhibit a degree of deliberate ‘adaptation’ or ‘interpretation’ rather than an ‘accurate translation.’

2-2. Suzuki’s Views on *Dharmadhātu* in the *Essays in Zen Buddhism Third Series*

Between 1927 and 1934, Suzuki published a series of books titled *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. In the *First Series* (1927), Suzuki discussed the early history of Zen in China, enlightenment and meditation in Zen; in the *Second Series* (1933), he discussed the *koan* (Ch. *gong’an* 公案), some major Zen texts such as the *Wumenguan* (《無門關》), and touched upon Pure Land teachings and *nembutsu* (Ch. *nian fo* 念佛). The aim of the *Third Series* (1934) was “to trace the relationship which exists between Zen and the two chief Mahāyāna sūtras, the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and then the transformation through which Indian Buddhism had to go while adapting itself to Chinese psychology.”³³ Our analysis will focus on Suzuki’s examination of the *Huayan Sutra* in the *EZB3*. In the initial four chapters of the *EZB3*, Suzuki addresses themes such as the bodhisattva-ideal, bodhisattva’s abode, and *bodhicitta*,³⁴ drawing extensively from the Chapter on Entry into the *Dharmadhātu* (Ch. *Rufajie-pin* 入法界品) of the *Huayan Sutra*. This approach contrasts with his selection in the *Outlines* of passages from various other chapters of the *Huayan Sutra*.

³⁰ 具足大悲心，清涼除渴愛。(T09, No. 278, 454a14).

³¹ T09, No. 278, 453c29, 544a02.

³² Sasaki 2016, p. 427. The citation here is a comment by the translator Sasaki.

³³ *EZB3*:3, Preface to the 1953 edition. For different editions of *EZB*, see the list of reference sources at the end of this paper.

³⁴ In the *EZB3*, Suzuki translated *bodhicitta*, a central topic in the volume, more correctly as “the desire for Enlightenment” as opposed to “intelligence-heart” in the *Outlines*.

Although the central focus of Suzuki's discussions on the *Huayan Sutra* in the *EZB3* is *bodhicitta* and concepts related to bodhisattvahood, such as *mahākaruṇā* and *prañidhāna*, the concept of *dharmadhātu* also figures as a central idea rather than *dharmakāya*, which Suzuki extensively discussed in the *Outlines*.

In the first chapter "From Zen to the *Gaṇḍavyūha*," Suzuki comments on the relationship between the two traditions:

When all is said, Zen discipline consists in realizing the Unconscious [Ch. *wuxin* 無心] which is at the basis of all things, and this Unconscious is no other than Mind-only [Ch. *weixin* 唯心, Skt. *citta-mātra*] in the *Gaṇḍa[vūha]* as well as in the *Laṅkā[vatāra]*. When Mind [Ch. *xin* 心] is attained not as one of the attainables but as going beyond this existence dualistically conceived, it is found that Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and all sentient beings are reducible to this Mind, which is the Unconscious. (*EZB3*:74)

Suzuki equates the "Unconscious" of Zen with the Huayan notion of "Mind-only," which is an expression of the emptiness of all phenomena. Suzuki explains the mind-only theory based on *Wangjin huan 'yuan guan* (《妄盡還源觀》) which he believed was authored by Fazang (法藏, 644–712) and listed "three characters" of the mind designated as One Mind (Ch. *yixin* 一心, Skt. *ekacitta*):

Existentially viewed, every particular object, technically called 'particle of dust' (*aṇuraja*) [Ch. *weichen* 微塵], contains in it the whole *Dharmadhātu*. Secondly, from the creational point of view, each particle of dust generates all kinds of virtues; therefore, by means of one object the secrets of the whole universe are fathomed. Thirdly, in each particle of dust the reason of *Śūnyatā* is perceivable. (*EZB3*:72–73)³⁵

Suzuki evidently regarded *śūnyatā* as a central concept in the *Huayan Sutra*. From the second characteristic, it is possible to discern his recognition of the theory of mutual identity and interpenetration (Ch. *xiangji xiangru* 相即相入), a defining feature of

³⁵ Suzuki is summarizing the "three universals" (Ch. *sanbian* 三遍) which are as follows in the original Chinese text: 一塵普周法界遍、一塵出生無盡遍、塵含容空有遍 (T45, No. 1876, 637c17–638a29). The third point is explained as the particles being without essence and hence empty (謂塵無自性即空也。T45, No. 1876, 638a29).

Huayan thought. This theory enables us to perceive infinite potentialities within the individual, in contrast to Suzuki's proposition in the *Outlines*, where he posited that the will of a transcendent being is the source of all phenomena and their workings. However, we must approach this point with caution, as Suzuki interprets the mind as One Mind (Ch. *yixin* 一心) based on the *Wangjin huanyuan guan*. He describes it as "ultimate reality, by nature pure, perfect, and bright," and asserts that it is through its sustaining function that "the existence of a world of particulars is possible; and from it originates all activity, free and illuminating, making for the virtues of perfection (*pāramitā*)" (*EZB3*:72). Although within the East Asian Buddhist tradition, the concept of One Mind has frequently been regarded as an absolute, foundational reality or the essential source of all phenomena, Suzuki does not mention it as a transcendent entity possessing a will—"a soul, a willing and knowing being" (*Outlines*:222) as he did in the *Outlines*. Nevertheless, this issue may merit further scrutiny.³⁶

Next, Suzuki's conception of *dharmadhātu* in the *EZB3* needs clarification. Among numerous accounts of *dharmadhātu*, Suzuki noted two aspects. First, he posits that "the Dharmadhātu, which is the world of *Gaṇḍavūha* is assuredly a transcendental one standing in no connection with the hard facts of life" (*EZB3*:85). However, he also notes that this view of *dharmadhātu* as disconnected from the realities of our lives has an objective:

...the Mahāyāna expects us to first clear off all the obstacles that rise from our obstinacy in taking the world of relativity as the ultimate limit of reality. When the veil is lifted, the obstacles are swept away, and the self-nature of things presents itself in the aspect of Suchness;³⁷ ... When this is done, the world of the *Gaṇḍavūha* ceases³⁸ to be a mystery, a realm devoid of form and corporeality, for it now overlaps this earthly world; no, it becomes that 'Thou art it', and there is a perfect fusion of the two. The Dharmadhātu is the Lokadhātu, and its inhabitants—that is,

³⁶ In the *Wangjin huanyuan guan* the One Mind is explained as embracing all mundane and supra-mundane phenomena and that it is the essence ("body", Ch. *ti*, 體) of the great comprehensive characteristic of *dharmadhātu* (是心即攝一切世間出世間法，即是一法界大總相法門體。T45, No. 1876, 637b296–27).

³⁷ If this passage is interpreted as conveying the revelation, or perception, of *dharmadhātu*, it is plausible to consider Suzuki's understanding of *dharmadhātu* as overlapping with two possible interpretations of *dharmadhātu* identified by Fujii Jun, specifically, "an expression denoting the essence or nature inherent in all *dharmas*" and "totality of *dharmas*," in this case, as perceived by the Buddha (Fujii 2025, p. 244, p. 311).

³⁸ I have changed "ceased" in the original text to "ceases".

all the Bodhisattvas, including the Buddhas—are ourselves, and their doings are our doings. (EZB3:85)

We may find a “Vedāntic” tendency in Suzuki’s use of expressions such as “that ‘Thou art it’” and the “perfect fusion” of the transcendent and mundane realms of *dharmadhātu* and *lokadhātu*. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, as previously discussed, Suzuki maintained that, from the perspective of the Mind-only theory of the *Huayan Sutra*, the truth of *śūnyatā* can be discerned in all individual entities within this world. Furthermore, we notice a positive interpretation of the concept of Suchness, understood as “the self-nature of things,” which becomes apparent through a perspective unencumbered by “obstinacy” towards the mundane world.³⁹ This contrasts with Suzuki’s earlier view of Suchness. In the *Outlines*, it was seen as an “abstract metaphysical principle” lacking the “living spirit” of the *dharmakāya* regarded as “a soul, a willing and knowing being, one that is will and intelligence, thought and action” and the source of “innumerable merits and virtues” (*Outlines*:222-223). Here, it is this Suchness which enables each individual thing, or “the particle of dust,” to “generate all kinds of virtues” and through which we are able to fathom “the secrets of the whole universe” (EZB3:72–73).

Suzuki argued that the acknowledgement of both the transcendence and down-to-earthiness of *dharmadhātu* and the Suchness of all things leads us to arouse our concern towards the sufferings of all sentient beings. As discussed in my previous paper,⁴⁰ when Maitreya opens the doors of the Vairocana Tower for Sudhana, that is, when we acquire the right view and enter into the realities of *dharmadhātu*, we come to see the realities of life in a new light:

No more sitting on the summit of reality (*bhūtakoti*), in the tranquility of absolute oneness, do we review the world of turmoil; but rather we see both the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas shining in the sweat of their foreheads, in the tears shed for the mother who lost a child, in the fury of passions burning against injustice in its multifarious forms—in short in their never-ending fight against all that goes under the name of evil. (EZB3:85–86)

³⁹ “Suchness” here can be paraphrased as *śūnyatā* seen from a positive perspective which acknowledges the mutual identity and interpenetration of all things.

⁴⁰ Itō 2024, p. 211.

Suzuki further illustrates this spiritual attainment by introducing a verse by a renowned lay Tang dynasty Zen practitioner Pang *jushi* (龐居士, 8–9c):

How wondrously supernatural!
 And how miraculous this!
 I draw water, I carry fuel! (EZB3:86)⁴¹

Suzuki refers to the *Record of Linji* (*Linji lu* 《臨濟錄》) to explain the verse:

‘There are’ he says, ‘some student-monks who look for Mañjuśrī [Bodhisattva] at Wu-tai Shan (五臺山), but they have already taken the wrong road. There is no Mañjuśrī at Wu-tai Shan. Do you wish to know where he is? There is something this very moment at work in you, showing no tendency to waver, betraying no disposition to doubt—this is your living Mañjuśrī. The light of non-discrimination which flashes through every thought of yours—this is your Samantabhadra [Bodhisattva] who remains true all the time. Every thought of which, knowing of itself how to break off the bondage, is emancipated at every moment—this is entering into the Samādhi of Avalokiteśvara [Bodhisattva]. Each of them functions in harmonious mutuality and simultaneously, so that one is three, three is one. When this is understood, you are able to read the sūtras.’⁴² (EZB3:86)

We see wisdom, impartiality, and emancipation at work within the individual. Suzuki, citing authentic, reliable Zen sources he is well acquainted with,⁴³ makes no mention of a transcendent being conferring these merits on us. He further elaborates on the relationship between the individual and the universal, commenting as follows:

⁴¹ 神通并妙用，運水及般柴。(T51, No. 2076, 263b12) from the *Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (Ch. *Jingde chuandeng lu* 《景德傳燈錄》).

⁴² This is from the 7th lecture (Ch. *jizhong* 示眾). 有一般學人向五臺山裏求文殊，早錯了也。五臺山無文殊。爾欲識文殊麼？祇爾目前用處，始終不異，處處不疑，此箇是活文殊。爾一念心無差別光，處處總是真普賢。爾一念心，自能解縛，隨處解脫，此是觀音三昧法。互為主伴，出則一時出，一即三，三即一。如是解得，始好看教。(T47, No. 1985, 498c26–499a03).

⁴³ Suzuki notes that the “method of Zen differs from that of the *Gaṇḍavūha*, but as both agree in spirit, the one will prove complimentary to the other when we endeavor to study Buddhism comprehensively as it has developed in the Far East” (EZB3:90). Suzuki appears to qualify his own examination of Mahāyāna Buddhism by confining the scope of his study to Buddhism as it evolved in East Asia. This choice aligns with Suzuki’s second orientation subsequent to the *Outlines* as identified by Sasaki Shizuka. Nevertheless, given that the subject is the “development” of Buddhism, Suzuki may be attempting to integrate the fundamental characteristics of Mahāyāna Buddhism as it was established in India with those that evolved in East Asia.

The fundamental insight of the *Gaṇḍavūha* is known as Interpenetration⁴⁴....Each individual reality, besides being itself, reflects in it something of the universal, and at the same time it is itself because of other individuals. A system of perfect relationship exists among individual existences and also between individuals and universals, between particular objects and general ideas. This perfect network of mutual relations has received at the hand of the Mahāyāna philosopher the technical name of Interpenetration. (*EZB3*:87)

In the above discussion by Suzuki, a distinctively different approach can be discerned from the one he took in the *Outlines* to elucidate some of the fundamental ideas of the *Huayan Sutra* and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Here, the emphasis is on the attainment of enlightenment (entry into the realities of *dharmadhātu*) of the individual bodhisattva (albeit in mutual interaction with other individuals and universal principles). The focus is not aimed at the “will” of a transcendent, universal being that Suzuki had earlier expressed as the “*dharmakāya* with a will.” In the *EZB3*, the defining concepts of his perspective are twofold: Firstly, the truth of the emptiness of all phenomena, or Suchness, which was not a focal point in the *Outlines*; and secondly, the assertion that the virtues of wisdom and impartiality (or “love and kindness,” as previously articulated by Suzuki) are inherent within the individual’s mind.

One final point needs to be examined before we conclude our analysis of the *EZB3*. In the section summarizing the characteristics of the *Huayan Sutra* and “the Mahāyāna teachings generally,” Suzuki mentions what he calls “one great Reality.”

...in the world of the *Gaṇḍavūha*, known as the Dharmadhātu, individual realities are enfolded in one great Reality, and this great Reality is found participated in by each individual one. Not only this, but each individual existence contains in itself all other individual existences as such. Thus there is a universal interpenetration, so called, in the Dharmadhātu. (*EZB3*:99)

The term “one great Reality” makes us incredulous as to whether Suzuki may be resorting back to his earlier notion of a transcendent being with a will. However, the above passage can be taken as an elucidation of the notion of mutual identity and

⁴⁴ Sugihira Shizutoshi translates this term as *sōsoku-sōnyū* 相即相入 (Ch. *xiangze xiangru*). See the Japanese translation of *EZB3*, p. 103.

interpenetration (*xiangji xiangru* 相即相入) and the theories of “unimpeded interpenetration of principle and phenomena” and “unimpeded interpenetration of individual things” (*lishi wu'ai* 理事無礙 and *shishi wu'ai* 事事無礙. Hereafter: *lishi wu'ai* and *shishi wu'ai*). Nevertheless, there is an element of transcendence, or something spiritual, involved in the awakening to such realities. Suzuki argues that this “is not a philosophical interpretation of existence reached by cold logical reasoning, nor is it a symbolical representation of the imagination. It is a world of real spiritual experience” and that “Spiritual experience is like sense-experience. It is direct, and tells us directly all that it has experienced without resorting to symbolism or ratiocination. The *Gaṇḍavūha* is to be understood in this manner—that is, as a document recording one’s actual spiritual life” (EZB3:100).

Suzuki elaborates on the above claims regarding “Reality” and spiritual intuition in a later chapter. There, “Reality” is confirmed to be the truth of emptiness as grasped by “spiritual insight”:

The Dharmadhātu, which is the world of *Avataṃsaka*, is the one which reveals itself to our spiritual insight—an insight attainable only by transcending the dualism of being (*asti*) and non-being (*nāsti*)....Interpenetration is then directly perceived without any medium concepts, which is to say, not as a result of intellectualization.

It is also in this sense that this world constructed by the notions belonging to the category of causation is declared by Mahāyāna Buddhists to be empty (*śūnya*), not born (*anutpāda*), and without self-nature (*asvabhāva*). This declaration is not a logical reference, but the intuition of the Mahāyānist genius....Emptiness is a Mahāyāna perception of Reality itself. (EZB3:155)

Suzuki’s exposition of the perception of “Reality itself,” or the revelation of *dharmadhātu*, through spiritual insight is significant. This approach prevents a substantial view of *dharmadhātu*, not only by acknowledging emptiness as “Reality itself” but also by perceiving the Huayan *dharmadhātu* as a “vision” or “image” rather than a substantial entity akin to Suzuki’s *dharmakāya* as articulated in the *Outlines*. Let us conclude our examination of Suzuki’s pre-war perspectives on *dharmadhātu* with his own summary of the topic:

Lastly, we must remember that there is a sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) behind all these spiritual phenomena that are going on in Jetavana, and also behind all those transformation-Bodhisattvas who have gathered around the Buddha. This power comes from the Buddha himself. He is the great centre and source of illumination....The Buddha of the *Gaṇḍavūha* is, therefore, called Mahāvairocana-Buddha, the Buddha of Great Illumination. (*EZB3*:100–101)

The Buddha, whom Suzuki identifies as the source of “Great Illumination,” is the preacher of the *Huayan Sutra*. It remains uncertain whether Suzuki perceived this Buddha as analogous to the *dharmakāya* discussed in the *Outlines*, given that the Buddha, referred to as *Vairocana* in the sutra, is often interpreted as a transcendent, omnipresent *dharmakāya* within Huayan doctrines. Nevertheless, based on the analysis presented in this paper, it appears reasonable to conclude otherwise. From the perspective of Sasaki Shizuka's hypothesis, Suzuki's reorientation of focus can be discerned: it has transformed from the acknowledgement of the existence of a substantial transcendent being to a closer look at the relationship between the *dharmadhātu* governed by the universal principle of *śūnyatā* and the individual bodhisattvas, their intuition, actions, and the virtues they exercise. Suzuki's emphasis on the Buddha's sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) may be another case of redirection of perspective, securing a position for a transcendent power at work in (or behind) the Huayan *dharmadhātu* in a different and more plausible way than the idea of the *dharmakāya* advocated in the *Outlines*. One question that remains is what actually does Suzuki mean by “real spiritual experience”? We shall revisit this issue following an examination of some of the foundational concepts in Suzuki's later works.

3. D. T. Suzuki's Post-war Views on *Dharmadhātu*

It appears that towards the end of the Asia-Pacific War, Suzuki started to contemplate the potential contributions of Buddhism to the reconstruction of Japan and the world. This contemplation followed the cessation of hostilities through which “the ego of individual self, ego of the state, ego of the race [Jp. *koko-ga* 個己我, *kokka-ga* 國家我, *minzoku-ga* 民族我]”⁴⁵ manifested themselves and clashed in devastating ways. Soon after Japan's defeat, Suzuki proceeded to publish an array of books that addressed the subject from diverse perspectives: *Construction of a Spiritual Japan (Reiseiteki Nihon no Kensetsu* 《靈性的日本の建設》, 1946), *Main Purport of Buddhism (Bukkyo no Tai'i* 《佛教の

⁴⁵ *Main Purport of Buddhism*:111.

大意》, 1947), and *Spiritualization of Japan* (*Nihon no Reiseika* 《日本の靈性化》, 1947). In these works, the teachings of the *Huayan Sutra* figure prominently, most notably in the *Construction of a Spiritual Japan* and the *Main Purport of Buddhism*. In addition, Suzuki published an essay in a magazine in June of 1946, entitled “The Significance of Huayan Thought in This Age” (“Gendai ni okeru Kegon Shisō no Igi” 《現代における華嚴思想の意義》).⁴⁶ However, in contrast to the title’s implications, Suzuki’s primary focus in this essay is on the major doctrinal issues of Huayan thought, aligning with the ideas he previously discussed in the *EZB3*. He offers a cursory discussion of their contemporary significance toward the end of the essay, which we shall subsequently consider.

The *Main Purport of Buddhism* was based on two lectures Suzuki gave to the emperor and the empress on April, 23 and 24, 1946.⁴⁷ The first lecture was on the great wisdom (Jp. *Daichi* 大智, *mahāprajñā*) which he discussed by outlining Buddhist doctrines such as the law of dependent origination and *śūnyatā*, mind-only, and *karma*, etc.⁴⁸ The second lecture was on *mahākaruṇā* in which he discussed *dharmadhātu*, focusing on the Huayan world-view of *shishi wu’ai* and subsequently, *mahākaruṇā*.

In the *Construction of a Spiritual Japan*, Suzuki presented his view of reconstructing Japan based on Huayan thought by applying the basic tenets of the *shishi wu’ai* world-view to the prospected new social structure of Japan. He sought to present an alternative framework to the pre-war theory of National Structure (Jp. *kokutai* 國體). The *Spiritualization of Japan* is derived from a series of public lectures delivered at Otani University in Kyoto in June 1946. These lectures were compiled with the intention of supplementing the *Construction of a Spiritual Japan*, primarily addressing philosophical and doctrinal issues related to Shinto, National Structure, and nationalism. In the concluding chapter, Suzuki extensively cautioned against the widespread belief in the supremacy of science, machinery, and intellect, emphasizing the importance of fostering spirituality grounded in values such as liberty, initiative, and morality.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ First published in the magazine *Tenbō* (《展望》) in June, 1946. Citations from the essay are from the *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshū* 《鈴木大拙全集》, vol. 22.

⁴⁷ An English version based on the lectures, but different from the Japanese version, was published in Britain as *The Essence of Buddhism* in 1946, which Suzuki found unsatisfactory. The Japanese version shall be referenced in this present paper.

⁴⁸ Suzuki also touched upon his original theory, which he called the “logic of *soku-hi* [is/is not]” (Jp. *soku-hi no ronri* 即非の論理) (*Main Purport*: 70–71).

⁴⁹ *Spiritualization of Japan*: 389–420.

3-1. View of *Dharmadhātu* in the *Construction of a Spiritual Japan*

As discussed in my previous paper (Itō 2024), in the *Construction of a Spiritual Japan* (hereafter: *Construction*), Suzuki advocated applying the Huayan world-view of *shishi wu'ai* to the Japanese society as a template for building an egalitarian, democratic society.⁵⁰ With pre-war Japanese society—and probably those of Western powers—in mind, Suzuki argued that “a collective life organized upon the principle of power (Jp. *chikara* 力) leads to strained circumstances without exception. Power does not allow for rivalry (Jp. *taikō* 對抗); one always tries to defeat the other” (*Construction*:137). In contrast, the *dharmadhātu* of the *shishi wu'ai* was, in Suzuki's interpretation, a world where each and every individual not only existed side by side—“this aspect featuring the distinction of each individual is spatial” according to Suzuki—but they were also “mutually unimpeded (Jp. *muge* 無礙).” This allows for a dynamic relationship between individuals that truly establishes *dharmadhātu*—hence “we must see the dimension of time in the unimpeded [relationship]” (*Construction*:139).

How then is such a society a “spiritual” one? In the *Construction*, Suzuki defines “spirituality” as a tentative name (Jp. *kemyō* 假名) expressing the “non-discriminative wisdom” (Jp. *mufunbetsu-chi* 無分別智, [*nirvikalpa-jñāna*]), a wisdom or its function that transcends dualistic thinking. Suzuki argues that in the self-awareness (Jp. *jikaku* 自覺) of “discriminative wisdom” (Jp. *funbetsu-chi* 分別智, [*vikalpa-buddhi*]), “there are the subject of wisdom and the object of wisdom.” In such self-awareness, “one sees something which is not the self that exists outside of the self” (*Construction*:160). In other words, “discrimination is fetters, or illusions, non-discrimination is *bodhi*, or *nirvāṇa*, or enlightenment, or establishment of faith (Jp. *shinjin ketsujō* 信心決定), or rebirth in the Pure Land (Jp. *jōdo ōjō* 淨土往生)” (*Construction*:162). This view of a spiritual understanding of *dharmadhātu*, which is based on non-discriminatory wisdom, aligns with Suzuki's fundamental perspective elucidated in the *EZB3*. In this work, Suzuki wrote that such an insight is “attainable only by transcending the dualism of being (*asti*) and non-being (*nāsti*)” (*EZB3*:155).

However, two points warrant further consideration. Firstly, in the essay “The Significance of Huayan Thought in This Age” (hereafter: “In This Age”), published three months prior to the *Construction*, Suzuki observes that “the contemplation of the *shishi*

⁵⁰ For the role and position of the emperor in Suzuki's view of a new Japanese society based on the *shishi wu'ai* world-view and criticisms of his view, see Itō 2024, Section 1-2.

wu'ai world-view (Jp. *jiji muge kan* 事事無礙觀) is not founded upon general intellectual discrimination (Jp. *chiseiteki funbetsu* 知性的分別); rather, it emanates from spiritual intuition." He emphasizes that "we must not forget that, although this acceptance, this affirmation, is simple in form, it is, in fact, something that has undergone the logic of *prajñā-soku-hi* (Jp. *hannya soku-hi* 般若即非)" ("In This Age":145). As previously noted in my paper, the logic of *soku-hi* (is/is not) has been criticized by Okimoto Katsumi, who contends that it is based on a misinterpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Okimoto denounced Suzuki's argument as relying on an implausible logic wherein "an absolute opposition (JP. *zettaiteki na tairitsu* 絶對的な對立) is [directly] unified by the function of intuition without any mediation (Jp. *mubaikai ni* 無媒介に)." According to Okimoto, Suzuki interpreted the formula of "A is not A. Therefore, it is A" from the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature as signifying that "denial is simultaneously affirmation,...this standpoint of 'not' (Jp. *hi* 非) is immediately that of 'is' (Jp. *soku* 即)." However, Okimoto interprets the formula as meaning that "the world (of phenomena as we know of) is not the (true) world (but no other world exists apart from this temporary phenomenal world)."⁵¹ In Okimoto's view, there is no necessity to employ Suzuki's logic of "*prajñā-soku-hi*." In light of Okimoto's critique, the validity of Suzuki's "spiritual intuition" and his comprehension of the Huayan *dharmadhātu* must be scrutinized.

Secondly, Suzuki's association of the attainment of non-discrimination with rebirth in the Pure Land represents a perspective absent from his pre-war writings. Takemura Makio has observed that the new Japanese society envisioned by Suzuki was neither totalitarian, as was characteristic of pre-war Japanese society, nor individualistic, as Suzuki perceived certain Western societies. Instead, it was a society in which "all individuals perfectly fulfill themselves (Jp. *enjō* 圓成) and respect each other"—"a form of society that must be realized for the sake of true human existence."⁵² Takemura emphasized that Suzuki recognized the necessity of cultivating "self-awareness of an existence greater than oneself and others" as a fundamental basis for promoting mutual respect among individuals. Suzuki wrote as follows:

In the world of power, it is impossible to acknowledge and respect the values of humanity and the self-initiative (Jp. *jinkakuteki jishuteki kachisei* 人格的自主的

⁵¹ See Itō 2024, fn.20, Okimoto 2017, pp. 250–251.

⁵² Takemura 2018, p. 42.

価値性) of the individuals. Unless one comes up against something higher than power, such a presence of the mind would not arise solely from within power. Also respecting others because one respects the value of oneself is a product of the self-awareness that oneself and others both live within something ever greater (Jp. *ori ōi narumono* より大なるもの)...To be embraced by something ever greater means denying oneself by it. In other words, by denying oneself, one lives within an ever-greater thing. Moreover, one stands there facing others at the same time. When one sees others in oneself and sees oneself in others, the relationship that arises between the two is a respect for each individual's human character (Jp. *jinkaku* 人格). (*Construction*:138)

Suzuki does not elaborate on what he actually means by an “ever-greater thing.” This idea was further developed in his lectures at the Imperial Palace. Next, we turn to the *Main Purport*, which is based on the imperial lectures.

3-2. View of *Dharmadhātu* in the *Main Purport of Buddhism*

As Takemura Makio noted, Suzuki asserted that “the Buddha's *mahākaruṇā* is the essence of what establishes both oneself and others in transcendence of them both” and “the basis on which the world of *shishi wu'ai* is established is *mahākaruṇā*.”⁵³ Suzuki reveals this perspective in the following passage from the *Main Purport*:

The power that moves the *dharmadhātu* of *shishi wu'ai* is nothing other than *mahākaruṇā*. It is this *mahākaruṇā* that enables the human individual ego [Jp. *ningen no koga* 人間の個我] (or the individual self [Jp. *koko* 個己]) to break through its limitations and broadly embrace and [also] be embraced by [Jp. *hen'yō shōnyū* 徧容摂入] the many other individual egos....Therefore, when they are hurt, so is oneself....This is not done with deliberate consciousness but becomes so naturally. (*Main Purport*:103–104)

What is *mahākaruṇā* by which “the world of *shishi wu'ai* is established”? Notably, it is not something that individuals, as bodhisattvas, cultivate in the manner typically anticipated in the teachings on bodhisattvahood, nor as articulated in Suzuki's *EZB3*. At the outset of the chapter entitled ‘Great Loving’ (Jp. *Daihi* 大悲), Suzuki first elucidates the relationship between *mahākaruṇā* and personality:

⁵³ Takemura 2018, p. 44.

There are two Great Pillars that support the great architectural construction called Buddhism. One is called *prajñā* or great wisdom, the other is called great loving heart [Jp. *Daihi* 大悲] or great compassion [Jp. *Daiji* 大慈]...The essence (Jp. *tai* 體) of the notions that wisdom is identical to loving heart and that loving heart is identical to wisdom [Jp. *chi soku hi, hi soku chi* 智即悲、悲即智]...can be described as personality [Jp. *jinkakusei* 人格性]; great wisdom and great loving heart are living things. In particular, when considering the great loving heart, we must think of a living personality. Needless to say, this is not a personality that can be seen through discriminative wisdom. As it emerges through spiritual self-awareness, it may be regarded as a godhead [Jp. *shinkaku* 神格]....That which lives the logic of *soku-hi* [即非, is/is-not], this I will posit as the Absolute One [Jp. *zettaiteki issa* 絕對的の一者].... This *kāya* manifests itself in various forms in the world of intellectual discrimination, precisely because it is inconceivable [Jp. *fukashigi* 不可思議, *acintya*]. (*Main Purport*:78–79)

In the above passage, both great wisdom and *mahākaruṇā* are envisioned in the form of personality. Although Suzuki's perspective suggests that the ultimate origin of both great wisdom (*mahāprajñā*) and *mahākaruṇā* is *dharmadhātu* itself, he does not identify it as *dharmakāya*, as he did in the *Outlines*. Instead, he attributes a more tangible personality to *mahākaruṇā*, embodied in the form of the Amitābha Buddha. In one passage, he notes that “what makes the Huayan *dharmadhātu* function is no other” than *mahākaruṇā* and that “Buddhists always give it a personified appearance. The Amitābha Buddha is a personality as such” (*Main Purport*:107). Suzuki designates the Amitābha Buddha as one possible example of how *mahākaruṇā* might be envisaged in the form of a person. However, as the lecture proceeds, Suzuki exclusively speaks of Amitābha as the personified form of *mahākaruṇā*.

The vow⁵⁴ of Amitābha wills to make the Huayan *dharmadhātu* appear on this land (Jp. *shido* 此土). The *dharmadhātu* perceived through spiritual intuition means the Pure Land of Amitābha. And Amitābha is nothing other than each and every one of us. If we beat the *shishi wu'ai* into one totality, it becomes Amitābha, and if the great loving heart of Amitābha is divided into the pearls that each and every individual thing is [Jp. *koko-jiji no shinju* 個個事の眞珠], we sentient beings

⁵⁴ The original Japanese term is *seigan* 誓願 which Suzuki also translates as “prayer,” but I have followed his translation in the *EZB3*.

will each be decorative ornaments [Jp. *shōgon* 莊嚴] of the Pure Land. (*Main Purport*:111)

In any case, the forty-eight vows on the part of Amitābha (or the countless vows made over the course of countless *kalpas*), the constant *nembutsu* (prayer [Jp. *oinori* お祈り]) and repentance on the part of sentient beings—in them, the essence of religion is exhausted. Both are nothing but the manifestations of great loving heart, which serves to establish the Huayan *dharmadhātu*. (*Main Purport*:121)

In these passages, we see the notion of *dharmadhātu* transformed into a richly described, yet somewhat metaphysical, idea; it is simultaneously the Amitābha Buddha, its Pure Land consisting of each and every sentient being, and essentially the manifestation of *mahākaruṇā* itself. Although this is not the simple image of the *dharmadhātu* personified as a transcendent universal being with a “will” called *dharmakāya*, as Suzuki posited in the *Outlines*, it diverges significantly from the ideas articulated in the *EZB3*. In the *EZB3*, Suzuki described *dharmadhātu* as discerned through spiritual contemplation, illustrated by the image of the Maitreya's Tower. Suzuki contended for the identity of *dharmadhātu* and *lokadhātu*, and posited that the sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of *dharmadhātu* is constituted by the bodhisattva's vow (*praṇidhāna*) or *bodhicitta* alongside knowledge (*jñāna*). Furthermore, he emphasized the crucial role of *mahākaruṇā* of each and every bodhisattva (*EZB3*:179–189). Suzuki's emphasis on the establishment of closer ties between *dharmadhātu* and a transcendent being, specifically the Amitābha Buddha, finds greater resonance with his perspective on the *dharmakāya* articulated in the *Outlines*. Suzuki's second direction subsequent to the publication of the *Outlines*, as hypothesized by Sasaki Shizuka in his critique of the *Outlines*, can be discerned in Suzuki's treatment of the *dharmadhātu*, where he maintains his early beliefs regarding a foundational transcendent entity.

What, then, motivated Suzuki to advocate for a personified interpretation of *dharmadhātu* in the *Main Purport*, with a notable degree of passion in his expression? One plausible explanation lies in his pronounced emphasis on the religious experience, which is more oriented towards individual spiritual salvation. This approach stands in stark contrast to the emphasis on the fervent commitment to the salvation of other sentient beings, which Suzuki elaborated on in the *EZB3*. Suzuki's anxiety is evident in the following passage.

.....there is a vague sense of insecurity at the very bottom of our hearts that we cannot completely erase. There is a sense that we cannot feel fulfilled by just being who we are—a being merely of intellectual discrimination (Jp. *chiseiteki funbetsu* 知性的分別) and moral duty. I do not know what it is, but there is the feeling that we need something more, a being which transcends humans and which has the most intimate relation with humans; there exists on our side a sense of *longing* towards that....This *longing*, this feeling, this anxiety, constantly demands a solution. It is simultaneous with this solution that Amitābha truly relates to my being. (*Main Purport*:121–122)

Notably, these are words uttered by Suzuki in the spring of 1946, barely eight months after the devastating defeat of Imperial Japan, when the country was still under allied occupation, with a new democratic Constitution yet to be written. In order to get a possible glimpse of Suzuki’s inner mind, the concluding words of the lecture may give us a clue: “One says, ‘Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace.’ This is an outflow of great loving heart equivalent to decorating the Pure Land (Jp. *jōdo no shōgon* 淨土の莊嚴). What will save the world from now on is this great loving heart. And the great loving heart must also be the great wisdom” (*Main Purport*: 144).

The acknowledgement of our limitations and the existence and the sustaining power of something “larger than ourselves” holds significant importance, not only for Suzuki and the Japanese populous in the immediate post-war period but also for many individuals facing conflicts, divisions, and anxieties in the contemporary world. However, the compatibility between the recognition of the transcendent power of an existence “larger than ourselves,” as expressed in the form of Amitābha, and Suzuki’s earlier advocacy for individuals to strive for spiritual realization akin to that of the young Sudhana in the *Huayan Sutra*, warrants further examination. In the *EZB3*, Suzuki asserted that the attainment of bodhisattvahood, as illustrated by Sudhana’s spiritual journey, reveals “the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas shining in the sweat of their foreheads,...in the fury of passions burning against injustice in its multifarious forms...in their never-ending fight against all that goes under the name of evil.”⁵⁵ Following the path of the bodhisattva requires us to ultimately join the “Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas” in their efforts towards the salvation of all sentient beings. Although this aspiration might seem beyond reach, the *Huayan Sutra* continues to encourage its pursuit.

⁵⁵ *EZB3*:85–86.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examined some of D. T. Suzuki's writings wherein he discussed some of the central teachings and concepts of the *Huayan Sutra* and Huayan thought. Based on the initial interest in scrutinizing the 'diversity' or 'inconsistencies' in Suzuki's understanding of certain concepts in the *Huayan Sutra*, such as *bodhicitta* and *mahākaruṇā*, we analyzed how Suzuki understood the Huayan concept of *dharmadhātu*. Through this, we have been able to clarify the following points:

In the *Outlines*, the first book authored by Suzuki in English, the focus is on *dharmakāya*, which is occasionally depicted as a personified expression of *dharmadhātu*. Suzuki understood *dharmakāya* as a transcendent and universal entity with a "will." In our analysis of the critique by Louis de la Vallée-Poussin regarding this interpretation, as discussed by Sasaki Shizuka in the 'translator's afterword' to his Japanese translation of the *Outlines*, we confirmed that Suzuki's English translation of the Chinese text of the *Huayan Sutra* exhibits a degree of 'adaptation' in his effort to buttress his view of a highly personified *dharmakāya*, which La Vallée-Poussin criticized as 'Vedāntic.'

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we examined Suzuki's interpretation of the Huayan *dharmadhātu*, which became the center of focus in place of *dharmakāya* in his later works. From the perspective articulated in Sasaki's hypothesis regarding the two directions that Suzuki pursued in response to critiques of the *Outlines*, we observed that in the *EZB3*, a reorientation of view is evident. This reorientation is characterized by a pronounced emphasis on the teaching of *śūnyatā* and Suchness, an implicit acknowledgement of the Huayan doctrine of mutual identity and interpenetration (Ch. *xiangji xiangru* 相即相入).

Throughout Suzuki's writings on the *Huayan Sutra*, and potentially on other topics, a recurring theme is his emphasis on "spiritual insight" or "spiritual intuition." Although there are reasons to question this concept when viewed through Suzuki's logic of *soku-hi* (is/is-not), spirituality remains a significant element in his interpretation of the *Huayan Sutra*. In the *EZB3*, the concept of "spiritual intuition" is closely associated with his interpretation of *dharmadhātu*, grounded in the fundamental principle of *śūnyatā*. There, he underscores the importance of individual bodhisattvas' intuition, actions, and the virtues they exercise. Conversely, in Suzuki's post-war works, such as the *Main Purport*, the notion of "spiritual intuition" led him to assert the identity of *dharmadhātu* with the Amitābha Buddha and the *mahākaruṇā* it emanates. His discussions on *dharmadhātu*,

although not a complete revival of the personified concept of *dharmakāya* he advocated in the *Outlines*, seem to underscore the presence of a transcendent power with a “will” (in this context, *mahākaruṇā*) in personified form, which he equates with *dharmadhātu*.

In his post-war writings, Suzuki asserted that we must acknowledge the existence of a power that is “larger than ourselves.” We observed that his endorsement of faith in the Amitābha Buddha as the transcendent source of *mahākaruṇā* was linked to Suzuki’s significant anxiety and concern with spiritual salvation during the immediate post-war period. Within this framework, we observed that Suzuki’s perspective was also grounded in a strong conviction that the Huayan world-view of *dharmadhātu* articulated in the form of *shishi wu’ai*, could contribute, and indeed should, be utilized in the construction of a more egalitarian and compassionate society in the aftermath of a globally devastating war.

Suzuki wrote in the concluding passage of the essay “In This Age”: “If *dharmadhātu* is reflected in the [mundane] world, and the Pure Land is reflected in the *Sahā* world, the Huayan world-view must immediately be our world-view....If people are in confrontation with the monarch,⁵⁶ if nations are in confrontation the world, and if there is no interaction [among the people] of unfettered perfect interfusion [Jp. *en’yū jizai* 圓融自在], nor mutual embracing, nor interpenetration [Jp. *hen’yō* 徧容, *shōnyū* 攝入], the destruction of the human race is inevitable” (“In This Age”:148). From a soteriological standpoint, it would be prudent to allow readers to determine which of Suzuki’s varied interpretations of the concept of *dharmadhātu* (and *dharmakāya*) they find the most compelling. However, whether one perceives *dharmadhātu* as synonymous with Amitābha Buddha and its Pure Land, representing something “larger than ourselves,” or conceives the sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of *dharmadhātu* as being constituted by the Buddha (or Buddhas) and the vow (*praṇidhāna*) or *bodhicitta* of each and every bodhisattva, the Huayan perspective—characterized by unfettered mutual embracing of all individuals and an emphasis on *mahākaruṇā*—remains profoundly relevant in an era marked by widespread division and conflict among individuals, societies, cultures, and nations.

⁵⁶ This statement could be taken as reflecting a conservative view of imperial rule, one that confers a human yet still a special status on the emperor. This view was also reflected in his plan to apply the *shishi wu’ai* world-view to the reconstruction of Japan, which Ichikawa Hakugen criticized. See Itō 2024, p. 204.

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