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SHIBUI: JAPAN CHIC AND POST WORLD WAR II AMERICAN MODERNISM

by

Meghan McLaughlin Warner

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in History
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Stephen Vlastos

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the United States' interactions with Japan between 1945 and 1965 to demonstrate how global processes have transformed American culture at home, as well as exporting it abroad. Through U.S. political, military and economic involvement – including postwar occupation, subsequent maintenance of military bases, and the opening of markets to Japanese exports – Americans gained unprecedented exposure to Japan and its culture. At the same time, Cold War pressure to engage other "free world" nations provided impetus to try and understand foreign cultures, like Japan's. While Americans across the economic spectrum took an interest in their new ally, it was members of the middle and upper classes who most typically embraced the Japanese arts of flower arranging, bonsai, filmmaking, architecture, and landscape gardening, and the philosophy of Zen Buddhism.

Many argued that Japanese culture reflected tastes and beliefs that they valued, including understatedness, an appreciation of nature, and a desire for serenity; they described these qualities using the borrowed term "shibui." In knowledgeable circles, the word became shorthand for a particular type of Japan-based aesthetic that embraced the design principles of modernism (clean lines, efficient use of space), while in other ways running counter to industrial modernity. For example ikebana flower arrangements were praised for their minimalism, and the fact that practicing the art was supposed to provide respite from the harried pace of the 20th century life.

An appreciation for Japanese culture, or the use of Japan-inspired aesthetics in the way a person decorated or dressed, came to signify a certain kind of modernist

refinement in postwar U.S. society. Consequently many suburbanites found shortcuts toward incorporating Japanese culture into their lives which enabled them to appear more stylish and cosmopolitan, without altering their lifestyle significantly. However, there were some components of Japanese culture that shibui enthusiasts conveniently ignored, and other uses to which it could be put, as demonstrated by Godzilla movies and Beat Zen. Taken together, each case study presented here reveals processes of transmission and translation in an often-overlooked direction, as well as uncovering previously neglected connections between U.S. policies abroad and the shifting layers of class and social identity formation at home.

Abstract Approved: ______________________________

Thesis Supervisor

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Title and Department

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Graduate College
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Meghan McLaughlin Warner

has been approved by the Examining Committee
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To Matt

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is of course could not be completed on my own without the helpful efforts of many other people who I would now like to thank. First of all, Prof. Stephen Vlastos, who began his support of my work before I even reached the University of Iowa as a member of the admissions committee. Since then, he has proven to be an unfailing source of sage advice and thoughtful criticism, in his roles as a field advisor, and later dissertation advisor. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee – Prof. Linda Kerber, Prof. Paul Kramer, Prof. Michaela Hoenicke-Moore, and Prof. Nick Yablon – for taking the time to read drafts and offer insightful suggestions. Finally, big thanks to the late Prof. Ken Cmiel for getting me started on this path and teaching me how to think like a historian, always with a smile.

This project would not have been possible without the financial support of The Matstushita International Foundation, The Center for Asian Pacific Studies at the University of Iowa, and a generous grant to the history department by alumnus Akira Noguchi. For helping me during my visit to Kyoto, I would like to thank Prof. Masumi Izumi at Doshisha University and the students in her seminar for their input on my work, Steve Ring for helping me navigate the Ryosen-an library, and Mitsue Fujita for her recollections of Ruth Fuller Sasaki. Most of all, domo arigatoo gozaimasu to Dr. Sohken Togami who helped me immensely in both his roles as retired professor of sociology and practicing zen priest, chauffeured me around Kyoto, and served as an incredibly generous host to a poor American researcher with a limited knowledge of Japanese.

At archives and libraries in the United States, I would like to thank Robin Everly and Nancy Luria at the National Arboretum library, Peter Haskel at the First Zen Institute, Pat Jonas and Betty Scholtz at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Abby Lester at the Sarah Lawrence College archives, and the staffs of the Japan Societies of Washington D.C. and Northern California for helping me to locate resources. I would also like to thank Iowa alumnus David Tucker, for passing along materials from his own project on Japanese architecture. Allie Uyehara of Ikebana International not only answered a number of my questions and directed me toward materials of interest, but also attended and provided feedback on my presentation on ikebana at last summer's SHAFR conference. Finally, thanks to Chiaki Sakai at the University of Iowa library, who seems to have kept this project continuously in the back of her mind, and has offered suggestions for sources over the past several years.

Last, but definitely not least, I could not have made it through this graduate program in one piece without the support – academic, moral and otherwise – of my fellow students. (Like an actress accepting an Oscar, I hope I don't leave anyone out). In the history department Matti Conn, Gabi von Roedern, Jeroen Laemmers, Josh Cochran, Jake Altman, Jake Hall, Brian and Angela Miller Keysor, John McKerley, Jo Butterfield, Mandy Trevors, and John and Annie Liss, have especially provided me with both helpful academic feedback as well as many opportunities to escape that realm from time to time. The members of the "Lou Henri Breakfast Club," Jennifer Ambrose, Kari Thompson, Gwen Gruber, Sharada Price, Larissa Werhnyak, Holly Savage, and Deena Huisman, served as a modern day interdisciplinary coffee klatch, and provided plenty of laughs. But final thanks go to my soon-to-be-husband Matt Mettler, who has been there for me

over the past five years, offering both support and new ideas for this project, but moreover believing in me through the ups and downs of the first stages of my academic career and picking me up when things looked low. I dedicate this dissertation to him.

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INTRODUCTION

When we first meet Bertram Cooper, of the fictional Sterling Cooper Advertising Agency on the AMC series *Mad Men*, we accompany his partner Roger Stirling and executive Don Draper to his office to discuss a personnel matter. But before they enter, Stirling and Draper both casually remove their shoes as if this is an act they have performed countless times, an idiosyncratic requirement of the boss with which everyone in the firm knows they must comply. Once inside, we discover why. Shoji screens, oriental pottery, zabuton cushions and a samurai suit of armor adorn the room, Japanese paintings hang on bamboo-covered walls, and a live bamboo plant sits in the window. Cooper has turned his personal space into a sanctuary of Japanese tradition, set apart from the fluorescent lights and aluminum furniture that fill the rest of the office, and he insists that his colleagues respect it by complying with Japanese practice of leaving their shoes outside. One can speculate that in his free time, he studies Japanese arts and literature, and indeed, on occasion he does begin sentences with the phrase "The Japanese have a saying…" As a character on an Emmy award winning television show that seeks to provide a time capsule of life in the New York advertising world circa 1960, he serves as a particular type who inhabited that world: the well-to-do Japan enthusiast. In the reality of the post World War II United States there were indeed many successful Americans who behaved in much the same way Cooper did, although perhaps not to such an extreme, enthusiastically embracing Japanese arts, practices, and ideas.

This dissertation seeks to uncover the lives of these people, the elements of Japanese culture they chose to consume, and what initiated their interest in Japan, in the

context of personal, societal, and global developments. It originally began as a project meant primarily to answer the question (which now seems to be more frequently asked every day) of how popular culture helped ease the transition from war to peace between the United States and Japan. I assumed I would discover favorable postwar depictions of Japan and the Japanese people that helped undo the hatreds of war and encourage appreciation of a new Cold War ally. Historians like John Dower, and more recently Naoko Shibusawa, had already shown how the American public became more receptive to this new image of a friendly Japan through positive portrayals in the mainstream media.[1] But when I began to get deeper into my sources, I discovered that not only did Americans look at Japan through newspapers, magazines, books and movies, but they integrated it into their lives by consuming its products, practicing its arts, and borrowing from its culture while trying to learn from it. Many watched Japanese movies and purchased Japanese furniture. Some took up Japan-inspired hobbies like bonsai cultivation and ikebana flower arranging. Others incorporated principles from Japanese architecture into the design of their homes, or turned to Zen Buddhism to provide themselves with a new outlook on life. In March 1960, Donald Keene, author, translator, Columbia professor, and one of the United States' foremost authorities on Japan, contributed an article to *The New York Times* Sunday magazine referring to this trend as a

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[1] John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in The Pacific War* (NY: Pantheon, 1986), part IV; Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining The Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also Gina Marchetti, *Romance And The 'Yellow Peril ': Race, Sex, And Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1993);Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and The U.S. Occupation of Japan* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999); Shelia K. Johnson, *The Japanese Through American Eyes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); James F. Hilgenberg, *From Enemy to Ally: Japan, The American Business Press & The Early Cold War* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), Hiromi Chiba "From Enemy to Ally: American Public Opinion and Perceptions about Japan, 1945-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1990).

Japan "craze." "The Gentleman in Gilbert and Sullivan who confessed that he did *not* 'long for all one sees that's Japanese' would find himself in the minority today," he began. "Almost any mention of Japan will bring exclamations of delight even at hardened cocktail parties, and rare is the home that lacks one or two 'oriental' touches." He went on to note the prevalence of hibachi stoves, chochin lanterns and shoji screens in American living rooms. New Japanese restaurants were opening up throughout the country, he claimed, and popular histories of Japan rivaled books on the Civil War in sales.[2]

As Japanese culture became ingrained in the fabric of many Americans' everyday lives, its transnational spread illuminates significant aspects not only of the United States' relationship with Japan, but of American domestic culture as well. Most notably, it reveals its permeability to foreign influence, a characteristic that many scholars tend to overlook. More typically, in discussing the twentieth century, academics tend to focus on the export of American culture around the globe. A significant body of literature exists on the topic of "cultural imperialism" that examines the spread of U.S. influence abroad, and the resistance it encountered, especially in Europe and Latin America.[3] This trend is

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[2] Donald Keene, "West Goes East – East Goes West," *The New York Times*, March 27, 1960, SM27.

[3] For European examples see: Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of The United States in Austria after The Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), *Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* ed by Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up The World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), *The Americanization of Europe: An Introduction* ed by Alexander Stephan (Boston: Berghan Books, 2006). While discussions of Latin American resistance are more plentiful for the interwar era, when the U.S. exerted its greatest influence in the region, several books also cover the postwar period, including Louis Perez, *On Becoming Cuban:*

understandable, considering that the United States has, and continues to, exercise hegemony throughout the world that is reinforced by the spread of its commercial culture. Yet it is nonetheless important to remember that, like every other place in the world, the U.S. is subject to international flows and exchanges, however uneven power relationships may be. Several prominent studies have recently emerged along these lines, by scholars like Daniel Rogers, Wanda Corn, and Kristen Hoganson, that explore the impact of foreign ideas, cultures and lifestyles on American social reform, artistic production, and everyday household consumption.[4]

The specific influence of Japan upon the United States can be found at a number of points over the past century and a half. In 1860, Americans were fascinated with the first visit of a Japanese delegation to the U.S..[5] At the turn of the century, a series of international exhibitions (i.e. world's fairs) and the popular travelogues of Lafcadio Hearn and Isabella Bird had helped create new waves of *japonisme*.[6] But the post World

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Identity, Nationalism, and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) and Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). For a more general discussion of the topic, see Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, "Shame on U.S.? Academics, Cultural Transfer and the Cold War: A Critical Review," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 24, no 3 (summer 2000), 465-94.

[4] Daniel T. Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Kristin Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Hoganson's introduction and conclusion also provide excellent discussion of the need to examine the impact of foreign culture on American domestic life.

[5] See Masao Miyoshi, *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to The United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

[6] See Hoganson, as well as Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: W.H. Rawls, 1963); Joseph Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and The Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (NY: New York University Press, 2000); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing The East: White Women and American Orientalism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jane Converse

War II craze was different in several significant respects. At mid-century, the United States appeared to be on top of the world on a number of levels. In 1941, *Life* and *Time* publisher Henry Luce labelled the 20th century "The American Century," a proclamation that seemed to be truly realized four years later as the U.S. emerged victorious and relatively unscathed from World War II, taking its place as the undisputed leader of the capitalist "free world." The advantages of this international position had domestic benefits as well. As the largest creditor from the war, and only industrialized nation whose infrastructure had remained fully intact, the U.S. economy thrived. Widespread prosperity allowed more Americans to enter the middle class income bracket than ever before in the nation's history, as consumption boomed and new suburbs blossomed throughout the country.

These conditions might suggest that the U.S. had the ability to ignore any outside influence. Yet in fact both domestic and foreign situations helped pave the way for Japanese culture to make inroads. Widespread prosperity made this particular wave of enthusiasm accessible to a large portion of the American populace, who now held an unprecedented power to consume both goods and leisure pursuits. Previously, interest in Japanese culture had tended to be limited to elite circles of those who could afford to travel to Japan or buy expensive imported goods. In the postwar era, the number of

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Brown, "The Japanese Taste: Its Role in The Mission of The American Home And in The Family's Presentation of Itself to The Public as Expressed in Published Sources – 1876-1916," (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1987); Myungkee Min, "Japanese/American Architecture: A Century of Cultural Exchange," (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1999); Neil Harris, "All The World A Melting Pot? Japan at American Fairs, 1876-1904," in *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America*, ed. by Neil Harris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 29-55. The latter notes that late 19th century American views of Japan also contained a tension between modernization and tradition in Japanese arts and culture, somewhat similar to shibui.

avenues through which Americans could learn about Japan greatly expanded. Japanese arts caught the interest of the growing popular magazine market, and editors proclaimed them fashionable. The Japan Societies of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, having suspended their operations during the war, revived in the 1950s to sponsor local educational events like public lectures and art exhibits.[7] Americans could also read about Japan through books published by Charles E. Tuttle. Founded in 1948 with offices in both Vermont and Tokyo, the company's purpose was to offer "books to span the East and West,"[8] and by the mid 1960s, it offered over 2,000 titles.[9] Also available from other publishers were the works of Tatsuo Ishimoto, a Japanese-American photographer, who sought to introduce Americans to Japanese art and design, as well as a similar series produced by the Japanese Society for International Cultural Relations (*kokusai bunka shinkokai*, today known as The Japan Foundation).

Encouragement for cultural exchange also stemmed from the United States' new international role during Cold War, which required a rethinking of its relationship with its former archenemy. For seven years after Japan's surrender in August 1945, the U.S. army occupied the country. For the most part, relations between the army and the civilian population were surprisingly cordial, especially considering the hate-filled propaganda that had fueled the war on both sides. Historian Eric McKitrick used the occupation of

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[7] Edwin O. Reischauer and Michael Auslin, *Japan Society: Celebrating A Century, 1907-2007* (NY: Japan Society, 2007), part II; "History of The Japan Society of San Francisco," pamphlet available at Japan Society of Northern California, San Francisco, CA.

[8] Tuttle Publishing Group, https://peripluspublishinggroup.com/tuttle/aboutus.php, accessed February 17, 2010.

[9] Figure obtained by running a search on WorldCat for publisher = "Tuttle" between the years 1948 and 1964.

Japan in his 1960 study of Reconstruction as a stark contrast to tense North/ South post-Civil War relations.[10] But as American policymakers saw communism looming as an increasingly greater threat in the late 1940s, they began to look toward Japan with a new set of concerns. The State Department and the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) shifted emphasis away from disarmament to rebuilding Japan so that it could play the role of a "bastion of freedom" in East Asia. They envisioned that after learning from its occupiers, Japan would become a model of U.S. style democracy. With aid from the United States, its economy could grow to show the region the benefits of capitalism, as well as provide an alternative trading partner to China and the Soviet Union. As a result, the U.S. not only reconciled with its former enemy, it also made it one of its most crucial friends, and something akin to a junior partner in the fight against communism.[11]

Once a peace treaty was signed in 1952, the American military continued to maintain a large presence on Japanese soil; the San Francisco agreement provided for the maintenance of bases throughout the archipelago. Over the next several decades, the United States used these sites as staging sites for further operations in the region, including the conflict in Korea, and later Vietnam. Servicemen were frequently sent to these Japanese stations for medical care or "R and R" and as a result, came to associate the country with respite and relaxation. By 1960, hundreds of thousands of American

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[10] Eric L. McKitrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 33-35.

[11] Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S. – Japanese Relations throughout History* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997), ch's 9-11; John W. Dower, "Occupied Japan and The Cold War in Asia," in *Japan in War & Peace: Selected Essays* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1995) and *Embracing Defeat: Japan in The Wake of World War II* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1999), ch 17; Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since The Occupation*, (NY: Oxford, 1997); Sayuri Shimizu, *Creating People of Plenty: The United States and Japan's Economic Alternatives, 1950-1960*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001).

military personnel -- and occasionally their families -- had been stationed on Japanese soil in some capacity.[12] When they returned home, they brought back with them nostalgia for the place they had left behind, as well as armfuls of souvenirs and a firsthand acquaintance with Japanese customs. It was through these channels that the craze began.[13]

In addition to founding more Japan Societies in more cities,[14]many returning soldiers and their families had taken up Japanese hobbies, and continued to practice them in the U.S., most notably ikebana and bonsai. The former is a form of flower arranging that tends to use plant material sparingly, and appears less "busy" than most Western arrangements. It was carried to the U.S. mainly by officers' wives, who founded clubs to practice their art after they returned to the states; the most prominent was the multinational organization Ikebana International. Bonsai, which refers to a process for growing miniature trees, was brought to the U.S. by enlisted men as well as officers' families. Open to a larger audience at the outset, in terms of gender and class, and spread through coverage in popular magazines as well as personal contacts, it succeeded in finding a larger stateside audience.

The most enthusiastic proponents of these Japanese arts claimed to appreciate them because of a particular paradoxical quality they possessed, simultaneously embracing and negating the modern. The term "modern" tends to be problematic for

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[12] For more exact numbers, see LaFeber, 316-317.

[13] Keene, "East Goes West – West Goes East," SM27.

[14] See *The Japan- America Society of Washington Bulletin*, archives available at The Japan-America Society of Washington, D.C., Washington, D.C.

scholars in that it can mean many things in many different contexts. In this case, I use it to refer to a specific cultural movement, which began in Europe in the late nineteenth century, rose to prominence in the United States in the 1930s, and by the 1950s had found ready acceptance in many avenues of American art, design, and intellectual ideas. Modern visual aesthetics sought to cast aside all previous assumptions of what it meant to be "beautiful," and admired functionality and efficiency above all else, avoiding ornamentation that appeared excessive or unnecessary. Modern art reduced the clutter of realistic figures to their abstract forms. Modern office layouts wasted as little space as possible to increase workflow. Modern furniture provided comfort without any extra frills and ruffles.[15] With the understated, simple design and minimalist clean lines of an ikebana arrangement or the literally restrained growth of a bonsai, Japanese arts appeared to follow the values of modern design, regardless of their centuries old influences.

However, many Americans were also beginning to find flaws in modernism, specifically that it was in danger of becoming soulless and inhuman. They appreciated that it advocated functionality, but also feared that it promoted mechanization, automatization and disposability, and wondered if the movement hadn't gone too far. In 1957, industrial designer George Nelson complained that the style had become too rigid and that some "polite expressions that tried for warmth [had] achieved only blankness."[16] For some, an antidote lay in Japanese traditional arts. Like all folk arts, they were handmade, and thus harkened back to a preindustrial past, which was perceived to be

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[15] See introduction to Terry Smith, *Making The Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[16] George Nelson, *Problems of Design* (NY: Whitney Library of Design, 1974), 186-187.

more honest and innocent. But there were two other long-held assumptions American observers had made about Japanese culture that added to its appeal. They were reinforced as many Japanese voiced them as well during the war years of the 1930s-40s, when ardent nationalists sought to promote a "pure Japanese spirit."[17] They claimed that the practice of Shinto, which includes worship of the natural world, put the Japanese people more in touch with nature than Westerners, and gave them an innate ability to resist the ills of a mechanized world. At the same time, Buddhism, which advocated calm meditation and self-restraint, had also allegedly endowed the Japanese with a greater appreciation for serenity, which could lead to clearer thinking and provide an antidote to the hurried pace of modern life.[18] Both of these qualities, some Americans believed, would inherently be reflected in Japanese arts. By using plant materials, ikebana and bonsai both suggested a respect for nature. Carefully practicing them was supposed to help instill a sense of peace.

In some respects, the mid twentieth century appreciation for Japanese arts resembled earlier trends like the turn of the century anti-modern arts and crafts movement, which claimed that a return to handicrafts could help stem the tide of

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[17] See Brian Moeran, "Japanese Ceramics and The Discourse of 'Tradition,'" *Journal of Design History* vol 3 no 4, 213-224 and Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and The Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "The Invention and Reinvention of 'Japanese Culture,'" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54(3), 1995, 759-780, Hashimoto Mitsuru, "*Chiho:* Yanagita Kunio's 'Japan,'" and H. D. Harootunian, "Figuring The Folk: History, Poetics, and Representation" in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* ed. by Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[18] For early examples of this line of thinking among American intellectuals, see Henning as well as Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan's Religions: Shinto And Buddhism*, ed. by Kato Kazumitsu (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1966).

encroaching industrialization.[19] Even the idea of combining folk art with modernist design values was not entirely new. European collectors in the early twentieth century admired so-called "primitive" art from Asia, Africa and the Americas for its use of abstract figures as well as its supposed naive honesty,[20] and the American Folk Art Movement of the 1930s found much the same attraction in the rural handicrafts of its own nation.[21]

But this particular use of traditional arts at this particular time rose to such popularity that Americans borrowed a word from the Japanese language to describe it: shibui. In its current Japanese usage, the word can be translated either as "tastefully austere" or "beauty in ugliness" and it is now typically employed when describing aging, yet still handsome male celebrities (a good Hollywood example might be Sean Connery.)[22] In the Edo period, it referred to a bitter flavor – in 1960, one American

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[19] See T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and The Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1981) pp. 220-241 in particular discuss the role of Japanese Buddhism in the movement.

[20] See Patrick Manning, "Primitive Art and Modern Times," *Radical History Review,* 33 (1985), 165-181; Lothar Honninghausen, "Landscape with Indians and Saints: The Modernist Discovery of Native American and Hispanic Folk-Culture," *Amerikastudien*, 37, 2 (1992), 299-323; *Recovering The Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, ed. by Andrew C. Gerstle and Anthony Milner (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic, 1994); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Europe, African Art, and the Uncanny," in *Africa: The Art of A Continent* ed. by Tom Phillips (NY: Guggenheim Museum, 1996),22-25; Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and The Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), ch 2, "The Avant-Garde and The American Indian."

[21] Corn, ch 6; Erika Doss "American Folk Art's 'Distinctive Character'" and Virginia Tuttle Clayton, "Picturing A Usable Past" in *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, And The Index of American Design* ed by Virginia Tuttle Clayton (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002).

[22] I was first informed of this usage by my friend and colleague at Iowa, Yuka Kishida, and later had it confirmed by Prof. Masumi Izumi's class of cultural studies students at Doshisha University, Kyoto.

journalist described it as the taste of a raw persimmon[23] -- and later began to referred to an acquired taste more generally. Since then it has held a range of possible meanings, from "astringent" to "refined and elegant." [24] When the word first appeared in English, in designer Jiro Harada's 1936 book *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture*, it was given a specific connotation, one close to "beauty in simplicity." Harada claimed that the word was "difficult to translate," but said that it stood for "quiet, delicate and refined taste, the beauty that does not show on the surface, austerity in art without severity…it is opposed to anything which is gaudy, crude or ostentatious."[25] Nineteen years later, in his own book on Japanese architecture, Museum of Modern Art director Arthur Drexler resurrected the term, and defined it as "an austere taste informed with a certain pleasurable melancholy."[26] Other writers began using it, including the editors of *House Beautiful* magazine, whose September 1960 issue featured articles entitled "How To Be Shibui with American Things" and "New Home Furnishings with The Shibui Concept of Beauty." Advertisers also picked up on this neologism and by 1964, "shibui" had become the brand or model name for a variety of products including: ceramic tile, interior wall paint, fiberglass dinner trays, "Wunda-Weve" nylon carpet, and women's underwear.[27]

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[23] John S. Robinson, "Seattle, Where Far East and Northwest Meet," *The New York Times*, May 15, 1960, X31.

[24] Email from Kim Brandt to the author, Jan 29, 2010 and email from Prof. Masumi Izumi of the Institute for Language and Culture at Doshisha University to the author, February 8, 2010.

[25] Jiro Harada *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* (NY: The Studio Publications, Inc., 1936), 46.

[26] Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan* (NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 74.

[27] Display ad 169 (Illini Ceramic Service), *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 13, 1961, N_A2; Martin Senor Paints ad, *House Beautiful*, Sept. 1960; Display ad 10 (Wieboldt's), *Chicago Daily Tribune*

These books, articles and advertisements were part of another facet of postwar Japan enthusiasm, as many American homeowners decided to borrow Japanese design concepts for their houses, gardens and furnishings. The trend began when architects came to appreciate the modernist efficiency of seventeenth-century *sho-in* style Japanese architecture in its lack of ornament, as well as its use of modular elements and multi-purpose spaces. Landscape designers similarly noted the Japanese tendency to engineer nature subtly in their garden designs, promoting a kind of "disordered order." As a result, design professionals sought to learn from and integrate Japanese styles, as well as promote them to the public through exhibitions like the Museum of Modern Art's "Japanese House in the Garden" in 1954. Many homemakers duplicated the practice on a smaller scale, often purchasing Japan-inspired furnishings for their functional qualities as well as their beauty and exoticism, at the prompting of fashionable women's magazines like *House Beautiful.* By the early 1960s, evidence of Japanese influences were visible in many middle class American homes.

In many cases, adding these distinctive touches helped homeowners create and project their social identity, as Americans have typically asserted their own personal style and status through the ways in which they decorate and present their homes. As such, the choices they make are infused with what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "cultural capital." In his study of this process, *Distinction: A Social Critique of The Judgment of Taste*, he argues that people signify to their peers to which social group they belong

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Nov 19,1964, 11; Display ad 228 (Wieboldt's) *Chicago Daily Tribune*May 17, 1964, W8; Display ad 51 (Gately's People's Store) *Chicago Daily Tribune* Sept 24, 1964, IND4. Rather appropriately, the logo for Shibui women's underwear is the Japanese character for female (女) rotated slightly to the right.

through their choice of "houses, furniture, paintings, books, cars, spirits, cigarettes, perfume [and] clothes."[28] He observes that these decisions do not necessarily correspond directly to economic means, but are more greatly influenced by upbringing, education, and the kind of people with whom someone wishes to identify. The "tastes" they create are systems of values and preferences that "distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar."[29] Each layer of society, he argues, develops its own standards and rules as to what characteristics make something aesthetically pleasing, or a good choice to eat, wear, or display.

The use and display of foreign culture in particular has long played a role in conveying personal status in the U.S. For most of American history, the ability to appreciate the foreign on any level was considered a mark of high social standing, as the expense of overseas travel or foreign language education prevented many lower class people from experiencing or appreciating it. As transportation grew more affordable and the global flow of consumer commodities increased, foreign culture became more accessible, but the ways in which Americans consumed specific imported arts and commodities continued to split along class lines. Anthropologist Theodore Bestor has noted this trend in his exploration of sushi consumption as a late twentieth century American fad, finding that only those Americans who came from a specific background embraced it. The consumption of sushi became a mark of distinction and a "sign of class

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[28] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of The Judgment of Taste,* trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 173.

[29] *ibid*. 6.

and educational standing," as it had moved "from an exotic, almost unpalatable ethnic specialty… to haute cuisine of the most rarefied sort."[30]

In addition to appreciating the foreign, many well to do Americans had long adhered to a refined, subdued aesthetic. Affluent tastes tended towards understated elegance and clean lines; gaudiness and ostentatious ornament were considered lower class. Also considered tacky were the legions of mass produced goods that flooded the postwar consumer economy. Thorstein Veblen had commented on this trend at the turn of the century, noting that members of "the leisure class" often preferred handmade to machine made goods, claiming they were higher quality.[31] This scorn for mass-produced merchandise increased in the 1950s as wartime advances in technology introduced just-add-water convenience foods, and made plastics more affordable and plentiful. The introduction of television created a new threat in its promotion of banal, mindless entertainment; it was far preferable to develop leisure pursuits that promoted mental stimulation or self-discipline. It was ideas like these that led David Reisman to make the telling comment in *The Lonely Crowd* that "any leisure that looks easy is suspect."[32] The fact that shibui suggested both minimalism and careful, handmade production made Japanese traditions an ideal fit for this upper class taste.

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[30] Theodore Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global," *Foreign Policy*, Nov/Dec 2000, 56-57; I also noticed recently that the Facebook application "White Trash Gifts," included a brick of Maruchan instant ramen. Perhaps this product would be other side of the class-based Japanese food consumption coin.

[31] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of The Leisure Class* (NY: Random House, 1899, 1934), ch VI.

[32] David Reisman with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 295. Cited in Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), chapter 4, which takes the quotation as its title.

Concerns about taste, social status and class standing were indeed prevalent throughout the postwar era, although some earlier accounts have suggested otherwise. When the 1950s first became a subject for historical study, it appeared to be conventional wisdom that widespread prosperity had created an "era of consensus." All of white America seemed to happily assume that they had achieved a true classless society where they could now all purchase the same goods, own the same kind of home, and achieve the same level of education.[33] However, more recent scholarly work has challenged this image, often by drawing attention to specific political, socioeconomic, ethnic or artistic groups who intentionally went against the so-called "mainstream."[34] Others have pointed to the significant differences in consumption patterns and personal beliefs within the vast swath of American society labeled middle class. It is important to remember that not every suburb of the time was the same. Some contained lavish homes individually designed by architects, others more affordable tract housing. Some members of the middle class didn't live in suburbs at all, but spacious downtown apartments. Instead of homogenizing tastes, these scholars argue, the influx of so many Americans into the middle-income bracket actually drove those who were already there to distinguish

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[33] See *Recasting America: Culture And Politics in The Age of Cold War*, ed by Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in The Cold War* (NY: Basic Book, 1988), Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and The Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Susan J. Douglas, *Where The Girls Are: Growing up Female with The Mass Media* (NY: Times Books, 1995) *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed by Erika Lee Doss (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (NY: Knopf, 2003).

[34] See for example, Belgrad, as well as *Not June Cleaver: Women And Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* ed. by Joanne Meyerowtiz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) and *Rethinking Cold War Culture* ed. by Peter J. Kuznik and James Gilbert (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

themselves further from the new upstarts. Education and "taste" came to matter to some people more than they had before. [35] Vance Packard examined this anxiety in his 1959 bestseller, *The Status Seekers*, which provided a popular sociological analysis of the varying levels of the American middle class. It was later parodied in a *Look* magazine cartoon in which a respectable-looking wife sets down Packard's book to ask her husband, "are we in the uppermost upper part of the lower middle class, or the mid-lower part of the upper middle class?"[36]

Postwar cultural critics, including Dwight MacDonald, Leo Lowenstein and Clement Greenberg, discussed this status hierarchy in terms of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" taste, often hurling scathing attacks at an emerging "middlebrow" culture.[37] In a 1949 article in *Harper's* magazine, managing editor Russel Lynes provided a useful model of how to understand what these words meant to contemporary Americans and how they functioned in terms of one another. He divided the population into four groups according to taste: highbrow, upper middlebrow, lower middlebrow, and lowbrow. Highbrows were not necessarily the wealthiest members of the population, but those who had the most cultural or intellectual capital. Typically university professors or artists, they held themselves above the fray of commercial culture, and claimed to produce and consume works for the sake of a higher understanding of truth, completely removed from

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[35] See Wilinsky and Belgrad, ch 10, also Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (NY: Basic Books, 1974).

[36] Reprinted in *American Social Classes in The 1950s: Selections from Vance Packard's* The Status Seekers, ed. by Daniel Horowitz (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1995). Pages 191-195 features a gallery of cartoons and advertisements illustrating both the popularity of Packard's book, and the prevalence of middle class class consciousness in the postwar era.

[37] Wilinsky, 84-86.

materialistic concerns. At the other end of the spectrum, lowbrows were working class Americans who knew what they liked, and didn't seem to care about the latest fashions or what other people thought of their personal taste. Upper middlebrows were the typically wealthy professionals known as "tastemakers," who did care deeply about commercial viability, and tended to be at the cutting edge of fashion. Lower middlebrows were the stereotypical suburban white-collar families who followed their lead. Hardly innovative themselves, they kept abreast of trends in order to appear sophisticated and hold on to some level of social status. [38] In a move that seemed to prove Lynes' point about the trickle down effects of culture, *Life* magazine later boiled down these ideas into a chart that laid out which forms of consumption each group enjoyed. For example, under "Entertainment," ballet was considered highbrow, theater upper middlebrow, Hollywood musicals lower middlebrow, and western movies lowbrow. When consuming alcohol, highbrows enjoyed a glass of red wine, upper middlebrows a dry martini, lower middlebrows bourbon and ginger ale, and lowbrows, a glass of beer.[39]

The most outspoken proponents of shibui tended to come from the upper-middlebrow echelons, and included museum directors, magazine editors, film critics, organization leaders, and prominent designers. The rest of the shibui consuming demographic consisted of suburbanite lower middlebrows. Both groups were typically college educated and tended to live in well-appointed houses or apartments in or near large cities. But as sociological studies published in the wake of *Distinction* remind us, as

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[38] Russel Lynes, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," *Harper's,* Feb 1949, 19-28.

[39] "High-brow, Low-brow, Middle-brow," *Life*, Apr 11, 1949, 100-101.

does Lynes' article to an extent, it is not solely concerns of class that help create tastes. Other factors including gender, age, ethnicity, and politics, have their roles to play as well.[40] Regional differences in particular seemed to affect how willing people were to embrace the shibui aesthetic, as those who dwelled in coastal cities were typically more likely to be enthused about unfamiliar looking cutting-edge fashions than those living in the middle of the country. White Americans on the West Coast, in some rural areas as well as urban, were particularly susceptible to Asian influences, as their region played host to large numbers of immigrants from across the Pacific.

Gender could also be a factor. As shibui qualities included the supposedly female virtues of restraint, serenity, and subtle beauty, the movement attracted equal, if not greater numbers of women as it did men. This circumstance speaks to broader issues about the role of women in postwar international affairs. Betty Friedan's assessment of her generation's situation as being confined to the home, presented in *The Feminine Mystique,* had long been accepted as a true characterization.[41] Another longstanding assumption persists that women had no place in diplomatic relations, as they were excluded from officially participating in the field. However, this study offers a cast of female actors, consciously working in various capacities to promote the cause of U.S./Japanese friendship, as well as good taste and character development. Some, like Ikebana International founder Ellen Gordon Allen ran bi-national organizations that promoted cross-cultural exchange. Others worked in their position as military wives

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[40] For an excellent overview of this literature, see Tony Bennett et al., *Culture, Class, Distinction* (NY: Routledge, 2009), ch 1.

[41] See in particular Tyler May, Spiegel and Douglas.

stationed overseas to teach their friends about Japan when they returned home. Homemakers did their part as consumers to reflect a cosmopolitan outlook in the furniture they decided to buy. As scholars like Joanne Myerowitz, Daniel Horowitz, Emily Rosenberg and Donna Alvah have shown, women did indeed have a role to play outside the home and across the globe.[42] Remembering that not all work outside the home necessarily involves a salary and expanding the definition of what it means to be involved in international exchange reveals that such practices were hardly an exclusive masculine domain, even under the supposedly strict gender codes of the postwar era.

But perhaps the strongest determining factor in an individual's embrace of the shibui aesthetic was their worldview. With origins as far away as Japan, these arts were still viewed by many Americans as strange and foreign, something different than what they had grown accustomed to. Some members of the upper classes, often those with "old money," continued to hold on to their staid traditional European family heirlooms, preferring them to the newly arrived imports. It would be hard to picture them taking up bonsai cultivation, or decorating their living rooms with shoji screens. Many shibui proponents tended to consider those with more conservative preferences out of touch. They wanted to set themselves apart by embracing different traditions, proving that they were more open-minded, willing to keep pace with changing times, both in terms of aesthetics and global politics. This connection was made explicit by one Portland, Maine

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[42] *Not June Cleaver*; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American left, The Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press,1998); Emily Rosenberg, "Walking The Borders," *Diplomatic History* 14 (Fall 1990), 116-124; Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and The Cold War, 1946-1965* (NY: New York University Press, 2007).

columnist, who explained to her readers in 1954, “Foreign policies and ‘white papers’ are often couched in phrases that the public does not grasp. But when we hear the music, see the dancing, view the home décor, fashions and other attitudes of daily living in Japan, and find them agreeable and understandable, that is carrying national policy to its destination.”[43] The consumption of shibui arts reflected a desire to reach across the globe and further alliances by promoting international understanding on a personal level.

However, much of the scholarship on the American postwar geopolitical outlook has primarily characterized it as a “culture of containment” that arose out of the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Historians have argued that attempts to contain communism abroad had their counterparts at home, as Americans tried to deflect and eradicate subversive elements – like domestic communists and sexual deviants -- that might weaken their country from within, essentially creating a bunker mentality.[44] As the Shibui Movement highlights efforts to bring foreign influence directly into the American home, instead of trying to keep it out at all costs, it suggests that a different outlook existed simultaneously. Complementing the attempt to keep the Soviet Union and its satellites at bay, many Americans envisioned a “Free World” made up of those nations that had rejected communism, with the United States at the center, acting as a benevolent, but nonetheless powerful, leader. This notion found more popular, and rather arrogant,

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[43] “’Teahouse Geisha’ Is Giving Thanks in Modern Kimono,” *Portland Evening Star- Telegraph*, Apr 9, 1954, Museum of Modern Art Public Information Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 525.

[44] The most fundamental and well-known book in this vein is May’s *Homeward Bound*. Other examples include: *Recasting America*, Spigel, *Make Room for TV,* Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*; *Looking at Life Magazine;* Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and The Disillusioning of A* Generation (NY: Basic Books, 1995).

expression in Ricky Nelson's 1961 number one hit single "Travelin' Man," in which the American troubadour had a "pretty senorita" in Mexico, a "fraulein" in Berlin, and a "China doll" in Hong Kong.[45] Participating in the creation of the U.N., Eleanor Roosevelt referred to this globalist sentiment as the "hub-and-spoke system,"[46] but in the mainstream media of the time, it commonly became known as "One Worldism," making reference to Wendell Willkie's bestselling *One World.* Published in 1943, and recounting a trip around the northern hemisphere in the midst of World War II, it laid out the Republican politician's view for a postwar world, in which imperialist dominance gives way to universal liberty, open markets, and mutual understanding.[47] In her own book, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in The Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, literary scholar Christina Klein gives it the more academic label of the "ideology of integration." She explores how benign depictions of Asia in American popular journalism, movies and musicals "represented the Cold War as an opportunity to forge intellectual and emotional bonds with the people of Asia and Africa. Only by creating such bonds, [advocates] suggested, could the economic, political and military integration of the "free world" be achieved and sustained. When it did turn inward, the global imaginary of integration generated an inclusive rather than a policing energy." [48]

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[45] "Travelin' Man," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travelin_Man, accessed February 17, 2010.

[46] Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for The World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 267.

[47] Wendell L. Willkie, *One World* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1943).

[48] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23. For other examples of this impulse at work, see Borgwardt's discussion of the Roosevelt's attempts to reach out to weaker nations in the formation of the

In practice, this One Wordlist ideal manifested itself in many different forms, some of which appeared to emphasize its promotion of cross-cultural understanding over its establishment of the United States as an enlightened hegemon, and vice versa. In regard to shibui culture, such differences are most clearly illustrated in the case of the "Zen Boom" of roughly 1957-1960. Many upper and middle class Americans drew parallels between Zen beliefs and contemporary relativist currents in intellectual thought, finding Zen's rejection of a personified deity and acceptance of uncertainty more suited to the moral outlook of the postwar world than traditional Christianity or Judaism. However, many disparate forms of American Zen emerged. At one end lay serious practitioners, who adopted Zen as a new religion and engaged in regular meditation sessions. They gathered at places like New York's First Zen Institute – headed by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, a well-known advocate of strict practice -- where they held meditation services under the guidance of a Japanese Zen teacher. At the other end were those who had read in magazines like *Time* and *The New Yorker* that Zen had become chic, and learned just enough about it to appear knowledgeable at cocktail parties. Those in between engaged in less committed, but nonetheless sincere spiritual quests, reading books by D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts in search of philosophical ideas they could apply to their lives. Artists, like the painters from the Seattle-based Northwest School and author J.D. Salinger, incorporated Zen themes such as anti-materialism and a longing for serenity into their works.

U.N. and Christopher Endy's discussion of efforts to form an "Atlantic Community" in *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Those who insisted on strict practice and complete understanding and authenticity tended to come from society's upper strata, and had the available leisure time to devote to daily meditation lessons, or to learn Chinese in order to translate historical Buddhist texts. Those in the middle were more likely to be working professionals who integrated Zen into their lives as best they were able. Some, like psychologist Erich Fromm, incorporated it into his work, developing new forms of therapy based on Zen techniques. This pattern held true for other aspects of the shibui movement as well. For instance, in the field of design, architects incorporated techniques from Japan into new homebuilding styles. Across the range of Japanese arts, those who sought to recreate authentic forms, or at least adhere to authentic principles, also had a tendency to look down upon anyone who would grossly deviate from what they perceived as Japanese tradition, accusing them of dilettantism or a lack of respect.

Usually they were referring to shibui enthusiasts from the lower-middlebrow ranks who tended to play fast and loose in their cultural borrowing. Often lacking the resources and spare time available to many upper middlebrows, they nonetheless wanted to learn about Japan or to appear urbane and sophisticated. As a consequence, they were more likely to adapt Japanese cultural imports in a way that fit the demands of their lifestyle. In addition to taking up Zen philosophy without the time consuming routine of daily meditation, they used newly developed horticultural techniques to make bonsai growing easier, or built shoji screens out of plastics more durable than the original rice paper. These examples appear to suggest a certain degree of arrogance in that many consumers in the U.S. found Japanese traditions worth studying, but in some respects out of touch, and could definitely benefit from a little American ingenuity. This line of

thinking would have indeed been well suited to the ideology of integration. Attempting to take some suggestions from a foreign culture, with the caveat that it not contradict familiar American lifestyles too strongly, these lower-brow consumers treated Japan in a manner suitable to its junior partner status in the struggle for international freedom.

Yet this is not to imply that higher-brow shibui enthusiasts were wholly innocent of U.S. chauvinism; in fact, questions remain as to how authentic their interpretations of Japanese culture actually were. Most treated them as timeless, unchanging arts or ideas, and few seemed willing to accept the fact that these cultural forms, as they were practiced in Japan, were constantly updating, often incorporating influences from the Western world. Those who advocated "traditional" bonsai cultivation, the principles of Japanese architecture, and Zen Buddhism, often did so with the assumption that they had remained exactly the same for centuries, ignoring the reality that they had changed with technological innovation and exposure to outside influences.[49] The supposedly ancient form of Zen Buddhism promoted by scholars like D.T. Suzuki was actually formulated during the Meiji era intentionally to attract Western converts. Design professionals treated the historically specific *sho-in* style as if it were the universal way to build Japanese homes, despite the fact that most postwar construction in Japan followed Western architectural models. If they did mention the appearance of more Western styles, it was usually to lament the encroachment of modernity that was soiling an allegedly pure

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[49] For other examples of Western art enthusiasts treating Japan as a timeless land of tradition, see Moeran; Peter McNeil, "Myths of Modernism: Japanese Architecture, Interior Design and the West, c1920-1940," *Journal of Design History*, vol 5 no 4 (1992), 281-294; Anna Jackson, "Imagining Japan: The Victorian Perception and Acquisition of Japanese Culture," *Journal of Design History*, vol 5 no 4 (1992), 245-256.

Japanese culture. In pushing aside these developments, most upper-middlebrow shibui proponents exercised their own version of American hubris, suggesting that Japanese culture was mired in the past, as only the West was capable of effectively changing and adapting over time.[50]

In doing so, they also created a distinct vision of life in Japan that complemented their own tastes. In their view, Japan embodied the love of nature, the appreciation of subtlety, and the striving for calm restraint that they advocated in their own society. In the particular case of Japanese cinema, it was difficult to tell which came first, the actual content of a film, or the shibui ideal of what it qualities it should have possessed. The first Japanese movie to arrive in America following the war, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon,* appeared on U.S. screens in 1951. It was followed three years later by both Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* and Teinosuke Kinagusa's *Gate of Hell*. All three were screened in exclusive art house venues that lent them a refined air and a good degree of cultural capital. They also enjoyed a great deal of critical acclaim and relative box office success for foreign films. However, when *Rashomon* first appeared, some reviews reflected lingering wartime Asian stereotypes, and described the movie primarily as bizarre. It was not until the idea of shibui began to circulate more widely that critics universally praised the films for their modernist subtlety and well-composed photography. Later movies even met with criticism that they were too "American,"

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[50] For an excellent discussion of how the assumption of timelessness can be used to exercise hegemony in international relations, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

lacking the artistic attributes that had come to make up the accepted understanding of Japanese culture.

In addition to this perception of Japan as a static cultural entity, and all of the uses to which it was recruited domestically, the notion of shibui also addresses my original research question regarding the newly forged peace between the United States and Japan. A number of scholars have explained how mainstream media depictions of the Japanese people led the American public to become more receptive to idea of Japan as a new ally.[51] Americans had long held a collection of assumptions about Japan and Asia in general, both positive and negative, as exemplified by Ruth Benedict's (in)famous dichotomy of the chrysanthemum and the sword.[52] On the one hand, the Japanese were thought to be artistic, skillful and wise. At other times, they were duplicitous, inscrutable, and coldly inhumane.[53] Depending on the circumstances, portrayals of Japan could emphasize one set of stereotypes over another. Dower argues that in the immediate postwar period, images of diminutive or childlike Japanese made the country appear less menacing and helped Americans accept the idea that its goals in Japan were not to punish, but to aid and instruct. Shibusawa and film scholar Gina Marcetti add that Japan

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[51] See footnote 1.

[52] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and The Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

[53] For a more thorough discussion of American stereotypes of Asians, see Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), esp. ch's 1,3, &5, Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (NY: Basic Books, 2002), Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in The United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988) ; Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), ch 4's discussion of *The Cheat*.

was also feminized in much of the American media, again to make it appear more non-threatening, in some cases by evoking the archetype of the vanquished woman who embraces her conqueror with open arms.[54]

The Shibui Movement suggests an alternative to this interpretation by casting Japan in the role of teacher, or to employ another Americanized Japanese term, "sensei." As Japan began to recover in the years following its surrender, the "natural" hierarchies of gender and age would have been less applicable as it gained a larger share of power and respect on the world stage. The sensei image appears more suited to these changing times, as it granted the Japanese people a level of authority as the wise keepers of timeless practices who had much to teach Americans. However, this is not to say that Japan necessarily came to be viewed as superior, or even equal, to the U.S. This teacher could also appear old and impotent, someone ready to regret the folly of his past, admit that his best years were behind him, and step aside. In this new metaphorical melodrama, the United States still appeared to be the hero, but instead of the damsel, Japan looked more like the aged master, willing to bestow his wisdom on to someone younger and stronger, and let them take up the torch of progress.

But of course, this picture was far from complete. Japan was in fact gaining strength, especially economically, throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Many elements of Japanese life (even traditionally) were in actuality loud, gaudy and tacky, often resembling lowbrow American tastes. One wonders, for instance, how shibui enthusiasts might have interpreted the common sight of a noisy, flashing pachinko parlor. Arthur

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[54] Shibusawa, intro; Marchetti, ch 7.

Koestler, a Hungarian-British essayist, published a travelogue of Japan in 1960 entitled *The Lotus and The Robot* in which he chastised shibui proponents for focusing exclusively on the staid traditions of the past. In his own work, he devoted several chapters to Japan's modern Westernized aspects, and as a result painted a picture of Japan that was far more busy, hectic, stressed and confused than shibui depictions would suggest.[55]

These other faces of Japanese culture could not remain hidden from Americans for long, as niches did indeed emerge for them in the U.S. in the late 1950s. The members of the countercultural artistic Beat Movement decided Zen could in fact be loud and raucous, as they rejected shibui notions of serenity and restraint in creating their own version. Beat Zen intentionally flew in the face of the values that upper-middlebrow Americans held dear, and chose to emphasize Zen's penchant for spontaneity as a form of rebellion against conformity. But undoubtedly the biggest example of un-shibui Japanese culture to ever reach U.S. shores was Godzilla. At fifty meters tall and breathing atomic fire as he trampled Tokyo beneath his mammoth scaly feet, the monster was anything but subdued and elegant. The original 1956 film *Godzilla: King of The Monsters* was followed by other giant monster movies, all of which played at drive-ins instead of art houses. Their venue, as well as the fact that their distributors frequently relied on voice dubbing and hasty editing, often made them appear cheap on a number of levels, marking them as symbols of decidedly lower class taste. But in their embrace of excessiveness over restraint, as well as their appeal to youth, both Beat Zen and monster movies also

[55] Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and The Robot* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

better anticipate the present-day embrace of anime and manga among (mostly) American children and teenagers, and eventually proved to outlast the Shibui Movement as the twentieth century drew to a close.

CHAPTER I: FRIENDSHIP THROUGH FLOWERS: AMERICANS' APPRECIATION OF IKEBANA AND BONSAI

During the occupation, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* featured a regular cartoon series drawn by Bill Hume called "When We Get Back Home From Japan." The one panel comic depicted humorous scenes of American servicemen back in the States clinging to Japanese words and habits. They were collected in a book published in 1953 with commentary by fellow *Stars and Stripes* contributor John Annarino, in which he explained this phenomenon of Japanified G.I.'s:

> The servicemen in Japan have a word for it. They call it "Asiatic." It means that they've been in Nippon for too long. Their American customs have thrown in the social towel, and Japanese customs have been tagged the winner… Outsiders tend to look upon Japan as a strange and unusual country, but the serviceman who has lived in and loved the life of Nippon doesn't see it that way at all. His viewpoint is native. He is magically impressed with the colorful, charming country, and when he gets back to his home he left in America, it is apparent that the impression has been a very lasting one… When he returns stateside and once more settles in Albuquerque or Schenectady or Columbia or Punxsutawney, the Japanese customs he has cultivated buck the customs of America.[56]

Examples of such customs, according to the cartoons, included: bowing, wearing *geta* (wooden sandals), sitting and sleeping on the floor, eating raw fish with chopsticks, and removing their shoes before entering the house. Servicemen in the book also used words

[56] Bill Hume and John Annarino, *When We Get Back Home From Japan* (Tokyo: Pacific Stars and Stripes, 1953), 2, 8; University of Iowa Special Collections, Iowa City, IA.

like "sayonara," "doozo" (please), "dai jobu" (okay), and "moshi moshi" (telephone greeting), appearing confused when their wives and children didn't understand what they were saying.

Although most of Hume's situations were exaggerated for comic effect, their underlying assumptions were true to life. As part of a peacetime force, the hundreds of thousands of American military personnel who were stationed in Japan throughout the postwar era had ample opportunity to interact with their local surroundings and become acquainted with Japanese lifestyles and culture. In *Unofficial Ambassadors*, Donna Alvah has explored this process and argued that military families often viewed themselves as spreading American values abroad while promoting international cultural exchange and understanding.[57] This chapter continues that story by examining how they maintained this latter role once they returned home. Their American friends and family undoubtedly found the new practices learned strange and exotic, but in a few cases, they were also intrigued, and decided they wanted to learn more themselves. This proved to be the case for two particular Japanese pursuits that arrived in the U.S. via the military: ikebana flower arranging and bonsai miniature tree cultivation. Both became fashionable among upper-middle class Americans, as they took on new lives in a new context on a foreign shore. I focus on how each art form was able to achieve such high levels of appreciation, paying attention to who promoted them and why, and how they were received. Both practices promoted the shibui aesthetic, however bonsai in particular illustrates how some shibui art forms could stretch the limits of the movement's precepts, as they moved into

[57] Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and The Cold War, 1946-1965* (NY: New York University Press, 2007).

the realm of "lower middlebrow" consumption, and began to stray from their supposedly pure origins in finding a wider audience.

Ikebana: An Art for The Modern Well-Heeled American Woman

Ikebana, a form of Japanese flower arranging, dates back at least as far as the fifteenth century.[58] Its most fundamental rule is that each arrangement must contain plant materials of three varying lengths that represent heaven, man, and earth.

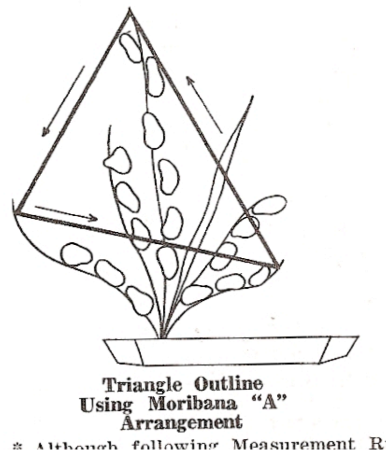

Figure 1: Diagram of triangular arrangement. From Ellen Gordon Allen's *Japanese Flower Arranging in a Nutshell*

[58] Minobu Ohi, *History of Ikebana* trans. by Seiko Aoyoma (Tokyo: Shufunotomo Co. Ltd., 1962), 4.

Over time, several major styles of ikebana have emerged. The first and oldest is *seika*. This style follows the strictest rules of placement, and always involves displaying plant material in a shallow dish and holding it in place with a spiked metal plate called a needlepoint holder. The next oldest style is *nageire*, which is always displayed in a tall vase. A third style, which became the most popular in the United States, is called *moribana*. A more modern style, it did not emerge until the nineteenth century, and did not adhere very strictly to any set of rules, except that arrangements must be displayed in a shallow container.

Figure 2: Three styles of ikebana, *seika, nageire* and *moribana.* Source: Norman Sparnon, *Japanese Flower Arrangement*

The most recent version of moribana circa 1950 was free-style, in which, as the name suggests, the only requirement was that materials be arranged in a triangular asymmetrical form. Outside of that guideline, any type of material could be used in any type of container.[59] By the mid-twentieth century, some Japanese arrangers were creating designs that used no live flowers at all, but consisted of objects like reeds or driftwood, creating pieces that looked more like sculpture than a typical flower arrangement. These styles were further divided into numerous schools, each with its own master who created individual guidelines for arranging.

During World War II, nationalists labeled ikebana as a symbol of what they considered the unique Japanese character, and most ikebana masters were recruited as propaganda agents throughout the colonies. Consequently, when American military vehicles first pulled up outside the home of renowned master Sofu Teshigahara following the war, he feared they were there to arrest him for collaboration. Instead, they were there at the behest of General MacArthur's wife, to request that he offer an exhibition of his works at the Ernie Pyle theater.[60] The display quickly caught the eye of many wives of other military officers stationed in Japan. Most military posts offered arts and crafts education classes, and their organizers soon began hearing frequent requests for ikebana lessons. By 1955, according to a *Chicago Tribune* correspondent, "Japanese flower arrangement has by far the greatest attraction" of any art form. "Classes meet all over

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[59] See Rachel Carr, "1-2-3 of Japanese Arrangements," *The New York Times*, May 4, 1958, X26 and Lida Webb, *An Easy Guide to Japanese Flower Arrangement Styles* (NY: Hearthside Press Inc., 1963).

[60] Dore Ashton, *The Delicate Thread: Teshigahara's Life in Art* (NY: Kodansha International, 1997), 142 and "Ikebana International Presents Our Flower Master Advisors," *Ikebana International Magazine*, Spring 1957, 47, available at the National Arboretum Library, Washington, D.C.

Tokyo in private homes, clubs, recreation centers, and even in temples."[61] *Tokyo Monthly* magazine reported two years later that about one half of all women living in security forces housing had taken at least one course on ikebana. It also pointed out that the wives of diplomats and businessmen living in Japan had taken up the practice, some of them even becoming trained experts in the field.[62]

When these women returned to the U.S., they brought their new hobby with them, and offered demonstrations and classes among their friends. Later, institutions including department stores, garden clubs, YWCA centers, churches, and sorority alumnae associations offered more formally organized classes.[63] Displays also appeared in public commercial spaces, in particular, bank lobbies. In 1959, a Houston bank owner commissioned ikebana master Houn Ohara to create a nine-foot tall six-foot wide arrangement that captured his impression of the Texas Gulf Coast as seen from the air. The exhibit was originally scheduled for one day, but public reaction was so favorable, that it remained on the main floor for an extra three days.[64] In 1964, another large arrangement graced the entrance of the Manufacturers Hanover Bank in Manhattan. A free-style arrangement, it consisted of a ten-foot magnolia tree decorated with pine and

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[61] Edith Weigle, "Japanese Close-Ups," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb 6, 1955, 16.

[62] Makoto Kakao,"Ikebana International Reprints from Tokyo Monthly 'Art Around Town,'" *Ikebana International Magazine*, Spring 1957, 36.

[63] See Edith Wiegle, "Japanese Artist to Lecture on Flower Arranging," *The Chicago Daily Tribune* Mar 3, 1960, C4; [Display ad 8] (B. Altman & Co) *The New York Times*, Sept 14, 1961, 9; "Garden Club Plans Exhibit of 'Ikebana,'" *The Chicago Daily Tribune* Oct. 26, 1961, 58; "Courses and Shows on Schedule," *The New York Times,* Sept 24, 1961, X28; "Events Offered To Homemaker," *The New York Times*, Oct 21, 1961, 14; "Alumnae Club Will See Flower Arranging Art," *The Chicago Daily Tribune* Apr 3, 1963, B3.

[64] Report from Houston chapter, *Ikebana International Magazine*, Apr 1959, 42.

juniper branches, metallic painted leaves, plastic flowers and a peacock feather, and was eye catching enough to garner coverage in *The New York Times*. [65]

With such prominent exposure, Ikebana's popularity quickly grew among those with an interest in flower arranging. By1960, expert Helen van Pelt Wilson declared in *Flower Grower* magazine "Any evaluation of the course of flower arrangement today must take account of one overwhelming trend – interest in Japanese styles… [They] are predominant."[66] In 1963, the *Chicago Tribune* listed ikebana as one of the three most popular flower-arranging styles in the country.[67]

Probably the biggest driving force behind its rise was the organization Ikebana International (I.I.). At first consisting mainly of the wives of officers and diplomats stationed in Japan, within only five years, its membership expanded worldwide. The club was founded by Ellen Gordon Allen, a woman whom colleagues described as possessing seemingly boundless energy and organizational skill. She moved to Tokyo in 1950 with her husband, an army general in the occupation. A friend in Washington D.C. had advised her to study Japanese flower arranging, and she found herself immediately drawn to the art. Her appreciation grew after her husband left Japan to fight in the Korean War, and she found practicing ikebana helped to sooth her nerves as she worried about his safety. She threw herself into the pursuit so completely that she simultaneously studied

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[65] David Anderson, "Ikebana Experts Show Skill Here," *The New York Times*, Feb 22, 1964, 46.

[66] Helen van Pelt Wilson, "Flower Arrangement Trends for 1960," *Flower Grower*, Jan 1960, 88.

[67] Edith Weigle, "You Too Can Learn the Art of Flowers," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 4, 1963, G8.

both seika arranging and the Ohara school of moribana, at a time when such a division of interests was almost unheard of among Japanese arrangers.

Figure 3: Ellen Gordon Allen receiving her certificate of graduation from master Houn Ohara, 1951. Source: *Our Founder's Story*

Following her husband's two-year tour in Asia, Allen embarked on a new career teaching American women the art of ikebana. After her return to the U.S., she founded several local clubs, taught classes, and published a short book entitled *Japanese Flower Arrangement in A Nutshell.* She also traveled to Japan and made her first efforts to start an organization to promote ikebana to non-Japanese people. She approached several instructors, including Ohara, and made remarkable headway for someone who did not speak the language, but her husband's reassignment to Italy put a temporary halt to her plans. Upon his retirement in 1954, Allen returned to Japan to continue her ikebana

study. In August 1956, a Japanese friend asked her to deliver a speech at a local officers' club. While there, according to I.I. lore, she surveyed the room, gauged a positive reaction among the audience, and spontaneously decided to invite them all to found a new ikebana club. A week later, twenty-one women came to the meeting room of Allen's hotel. In an atmosphere of camaraderie, they excitedly discussed plans for their new organization. Allen then took charge and assigned officer positions to each woman present, and Ikebana International was born. [68]

The organization's earliest members were a close-knit group of women living in the Washington Heights security forces housing area in Tokyo.[69]Within several months, it began to branch out, forming local chapters in the U.S. The first was in Washington D.C., Allen's hometown. Others quickly followed, and in the next year, chapters appeared in St. Louis, Nashville, Los Angeles and New York. The group also established a foothold in a number of smaller towns like Cleburne, Texas, Panama City, Florida and Lake Charles, Louisiana. Most of these were near military bases, and thus had a ready audience of officers' wives. One founding member's hometown of Chinook, Montana, a town so small it did not have its own flower shop, even beat out the larger cities of Atlanta, Boston, Seattle and San Francisco in chartering its chapter.[70] By 1959, the

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[68] Ellen Gordon Allen "The Magic Carpet of Ikebana International" in "Ikebana International: Our Founders Story and History of Chapter #1," pamphlet published by Ikebana International, Chapter #1, Washington D.C., 1976, and Hollistar Ferretti, *Friendship Through Flowers: The Ikebana International Story* (Tokyo: Ikebana International, 1986), ch 1.

[69] Fay Kramer, "From My Ikebana Notebook, "*Ikebana International Magazine*, Spring 1960, 22-23, 42.

[70] See index in Feretti, 109-111 and DeB Longbotham, "Ikebana International Reports A Triumphant Tour,"*Ikebana International Magazine*, Spring 1957, 49.

number of local groups wanting to join was so large that the organization developed a complex system for approving new chapters, involving three separate stages of application and review by headquarters in Tokyo before a chapter could officially be recognized. Once established, they maintained close ties to Tokyo, sending regular dues and correspondence, and receiving the monthly newsletter and semi-annual magazine.[71]

Figure 4: Map of Ikebana International chapters in the U.S. in 1962. Source: *Ikebana International Magazine*

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[71] After a group of "members at large" approached Tokyo they would be given a questionnaire , mainly to ascertain if genuine interest (in terms of members and finances) was strong enough to meet the requirements to become a "prospective chapter." If so, they were next required to identify at least six members and complete another round of paperwork. Once that was accomplished, and the board of directors approved, they achieved the status of "potential chapter," subject to a period of probation decided upon by the chapter's coordinator at headquarters. Once that had elapsed, they were finally an official chapter of I.I. See "Ikebana International: A Resume" and Ruth Dillon "What's Your Querie, Dearie?" (immediately following) , *Ikebana International Magazine*, Fall 1959, 44-49.

In the mid-1960s, I.I. had established 71 chapters worldwide, in the U.S., Japan, Italy (where Gordon Allen maintained ties), England, Hong Kong, and Australia.[72]

For many local groups, interest in ikebana spread like a virus. In 1958, instructor Seiko Ogawa visited Chinook as part of a national tour, and described her experience in I.I.'s magazine: "After the exhibit so many people came to thank me and to shake my hand. There were many elderly ladies in the audience and many of them had tears in their eyes – they said it was the first time in their lives they had seen Japanese ikebana and had enjoyed it so much."[73]While not every small town chapter's experience was so lachrymose, many followed a similar pattern. One woman or group of women who had studied ikebana in Japan would demonstrate the art for her friends, who became intrigued. They wanted to learn more and practice their hobby with other like-minded women, and decided to form a chapter.[74] In large cities, I.I. furthered its popularity by sponsoring a variety of activities to promote the practice and appreciation of ikebana, including demonstrations, exhibits, public lectures, flower shows and house and garden tours. [75] They also sponsored multi-city lecture tours for Ogawa, Ohara, and Australian

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[72] for a complete list of chapters see Feretti, 109-110.

[73] Longbotham, "Ikebana International Reports A Triumphant Tour," 49.

[74] A lot of the correspondence in the regular feature "Ikebana International Reprints Letters from Abroad" in *Ikebana International Magazine* recounts stories like this, see Spring 1957, 52-53, issue no 2 (no date), 44-45, Apr 1959, 10-11.

[75] See "Ikebana International: Our Founders Story and History of Chapter #1;" "The Week's Events," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1958, X39; "Japanese Ikebana Show Opens," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 6, 1964, S2; "Master of Floral Arrangement Here For Two Programs. "*The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 16, 1960, B2; "Japanese Flower Arrangers to Display Their Ancient Art," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov 5, 1961, SW_A4; "Floral Displays in Westchester Will Be Viewed," May 13, 1962, 99.

ikebana master Norman Sparnon. [76]In 1959, the group's reputation received a further boost when *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine sent a reporter to Tokyo headquarters, and produced a three-page article on the organization, accompanied by color photographs.

I.I. had begun among a group of affluent, educated women, and most later members belonged in the same social category. There was some racial diversity among its ranks as a number of Asians joined the organization. Some Japanese women had ties to the American military in Tokyo or Okinawa through employment; others were wives of U.S. servicemen. Japanese-American women, who may have grown up with exposure to ikebana, also joined.[77] However, there was far less variation in regard to gender. Founding member Allie Uyehara recalled "Mostly women joined Ikebana International at the outset, as in those days women had the time to become involved in such things, whereas men were the bread winners and did not participate."[78] Contemporary middle class gender roles dictated that women not seek employment outside the home, and those who had the money to hire housekeeping help indeed often found themselves with more leisure time than their husbands. Moreover, it was considered inappropriate for American men to be interested in flowers. In his1960 book, Sparnon complained of "The notion more or less prevalent in Western nations that the appreciation of floral beauty, or of

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[76] see *Ikebana International Magazine*, Kayla Costenoble, "Ogawa Sensei Makes Third Trip to America," Apr 1959, 8-9; Ruth Dillon, "Around the World with Houn Ohara," Apr 1959, 4-7; Costenoble, "The U.S. Meets The Sparnons," Spring 1961, 30-31.

[77] for a collection of examples of Asian members see the chapter reports in *Ikebana International Magazine*, Spring 1960, 33-43.

[78] Allie Uyehara, personal email to the author, Jan 18, 2008.

nature itself, is necessarily a womanly weakness to which the male must never succumb."[79] This prescript of masculinity would explain why a female *New Yorker* reporter covering an ikebana class discovered a husband patiently waiting for his wife, keeping a safe distance outside the door.[80] It also reveals why women so dominated I.I.'s ranks that one male applicant felt the need to ask: "Will you accept an American man into your membership?"[81]

Demographics also remained relatively consistent in regard to socioeconomic class. The price of tools and materials typically kept ikebana out of reach of working-class women. According to Uyehara, "It is expensive to take lessons [and] purchase the equipment, plus fresh flowers, so it is the well-to-do that join."[82] This proved to be the case when New York's Museum of Natural History offered classes in 1960. The course was limited to only 15 students, and cost $20 (approximately $140 in 2008 currency) to enroll for four weeks.[83] The *New Yorker* reporter attending the class discovered that the woman working next to her was quite wealthy, owning a country home near the Stockbridge Bowl and a membership in the Berkshire Garden Center.[84]

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[79] Norman Sparnon, *Japanese Flower Arrangement: Classical and Modern* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1960), 29.

[80] "Arranging," *The New Yorker*, April 16, 1960, 33.

[81] Mr. William Kinsler, letter in "Ikebana International Reprints Notes From Abroad," ed. by Mrs. Merrill Dillon, *Ikebana International Magazine*, issue no 3 (no date), 37. Since the man in question was the director of the American Floral Art School, there is little doubt that he was indeed accepted.

[82] Allie Uyehara, personal email to the author, Jan 18, 2008.

[83] "Museum to Start Class in Floral Art," *The New York Times*, Mar 16, 1960, 41.

[84] "Arranging,"33.

As white women of taste, many ikebana practitioners perfectly fit the mold of shibui enthusiasts. Indeed, many were attracted to ikebana because they found it beautiful in a refined, elegant way, like fine art. In *Japanese Flower Arrangement in A Nutshell*, Gordon Allen quoted a fellow flower expert who wrote "'the creation of a good arrangement of flowers, based on the fundamental principles of design, blending with nature's rhythmic line and grace, can be an experience as enriching and satisfying as a fine picture.'"[85] Specifically, many praised its subtle aesthetics. In another of the many ikebana "how-to" books of the era, author Nina Clark Powell listed the ingredients of the art as "the subtleties of thought, the suggestions of ideas, the symbolism" and "an appreciation of clean line."[86] Rather than being filled with the brightly colored flowers of a traditional Western arrangement, ikebana was more subdued, creating a minimalist design, and using less material. This aspect of the art was parodied in a *Stars and Stripes* cartoon in which a young boy attends his mother's ikebana class, and comments on the instructor's pruning techniques, declaring: "I think she's wasting an awful lot."[87]

Rachel Carr, an American ikebana master and guidebook author who had lived in both China and Japan, justified the practice in *Flower Grower.* "The reason for this appeal to western taste is precisely the quality of simplicity and restrained beauty so

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[85] Ellen Gordon Allen, *Japanese Flower Arrangement in A Nutshell* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co. 1955), 50.

[86] Nina Clark Powell, *Japanese Flower Arrangement for Beginners* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 84.

[87] Sanae Yamasaki , cartoonist, *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, reprinted in *Ikebana International Magazine*, Fall 1959, 24.

Figure 5: *Stars and Stripes* cartoon depicting an ikebana class. Source: *Ikebana International Magazine*

typical of Oriental art… Behind a Japanese arrangement lies the answer to its graceful beauty and effortless charm – simplicity."[88] By eschewing the loud, busy and gaudy, in favor of sparer and more austere designs, ikebana met the first qualification of a shibui art.

For many I.I. members, ikebana arrangements were about more than learning a new art form, or creating tasteful displays for their home. Embracing the "imaginary of integration," they saw it as a way to promote unity and cultural understanding between the United States, Japan, and around the world. Gordon Allen's friend, and later I.I. president, Wayne E. Todd reported that their founder envisioned the organization as "a People to People program through flowers," referring to the Eisenhower administrations

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[88] Rachel E. Carr, "Japanese Arrangers Are Masters of Line, Balance, Form, Harmony," *Flower Grower*, Aug. 1961, 36.

attempt to encourage international personal exchanges.[89] At the end of Gordon Allen's speech delivered at the first meeting of I.I., she declared "I see no reason why Ikebana International cannot become a veritable garland of flowers surrounding the world with beauty and binding us together in real and lasting friendship – a magnificent contribution from Japan to the world at large!"[90] Stella Coe, founder of the London chapter, summed up this sentiment in the more pithy slogan "Friendship through Flowers," which soon caught on among I.I.'s ranks.[91] Some expressed it when they wrote letters to the organization's headquarters "I am proud of the beautiful job you did for international relationship [sic]" remarked Miss Helene Hashmill of Washington, North Carolina.[92] To which Mrs. Thomas N. Tanimoto of Monterey, California added "I feel that I.I. can bind all nationalities in peace through one object, flowers."[93]Their efforts toward this goal were recognized by U.S. Ambassador to Japan Douglas MacArthur II, when he wrote a note of congratulations to the organization in 1960, asserting "it might be said that flowers, like music, speak a universal language."[94] But the Japanese government

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[89] Wayne E. Todd, "One of My Memories of Ellen Gordon Allen" in *Our Founder's Story and History of Chapter #1*, 38.

[90] Ellen Gordon Allen, "Ideas on Establishing an International Ikebana Association" in *Our Founder's Story and History of Chapter #1*, 36.

[91] Ellen Gordon Allen, "A Tribute," in *Our Founder's Story and History of Chapter #1*, 47.

[92] "Ikebana International Reprints Notes from Abroad," ed. by Merrill Dillon, *Ikebana International Magazine*, vol I, no 2, 44.

[93] "Ikebana International Reprints Notes from Abroad," ed. by Merrill Dillon, *Ikebana International Magazine*, vol 1, no 3, 36.

[94] Douglas MacArthur II, "100 Years of Friendship," *Ikebana International Magazine*, Fall 1960, 9.

bestowed an even higher honor on the group when in 1965 the First Secretary of the Japanese Foreign Cultural Division of the Japanese Foreign Ministry awarded Ellen Gordon Allen the Order of the Precious Crown, fifth class for the group's work in helping to spread Japanese culture around the globe. The luncheon and award ceremonies were attended by a number of Japanese nobility, including the internationally famous Crown Princess Michiko.[95]

On a much smaller and more personal scale, some enthusiasts credited ikebana with the ability to offer spiritual respite in stressful modern times. Gordon Allen called ikebana "an antidote to worry" and reminded readers that "Japanese flower arrangement was not practiced solely for the satisfaction of arranging flowers beautifully according to the rules, but because the art became imbued with a deep philosophical and religious significance."[96] These spiritual qualities could offer solace to Americans leading hectic lives. In another guidebook, Lida Webb claimed that the Japanese people had a more spiritual appreciation of nature than Westerners did, adding, "In the stress of this scientific industrial age, we need opportunity to turn now and again to the peace and tranquility to be found in nature. Through the ages nature has been a source of refreshment to man's spirit."[97] In using natural plant materials to create works of beauty, she argued, ikebana could revive this long lost connection.

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[95] Ferretti, 67.

[96] Gordon Allen, *Japanese Flower Arrangement in A Nutshell*, 52.

[97] Webb, 139.

It also encouraged retreat from postwar American life by providing a form of "character-building" leisure. Unlike more passive, and allegedly banal pursuits, like the still-novel activity of TV viewing, the practice of ikebana could cultivate patience and self-discipline. Gordon Allen tried to assure readers that ikebana was "extremely easy and simple to learn." Yet on the same page, she mentioned "obstacles confronting any beginner" and advised students to "be patient, persevere and work hard."[98] A 1955 cartoon by Anne Cleveland, an illustrator who lived in Japan with her husband, a British international businessman, depicts some of these early obstacles. After admiring an arrangement, her character Mrs. West (very probably based on herself), tries her own hand, only to find herself pulling out a hacksaw, attempting to strangle a branch, and eventually creating a jerry-rigged arrangement that includes tangles of string and a nailed up two-by-four.[99]

Van Pelt Wilson argued that these exacting demands of ikebana study built character and skill, and claimed "there is no better discipline than that offered by a study of the traditional Japanese styles."[100] Carr also explained in one *New York Times* article that ikebana study in Japan was a lifelong pursuit. Most experts began their training in childhood, and once they received a master's degree from their chosen school, still required years of practice before they could create distinctive or original

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[98] Gordon Allen, *Japanese Flower Arrangement in A* Nutshell, 9.

[99] Anne Cleveland, *It's Better with Your Shoes Off* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1955), 41-46.

[100] van Pelt Wilson, 91-92.

arrangements.[101] This adherence to rigor was further reflected in the institutional makeup of I.I., with its layers of bureaucratic hurdles that required informal groups to prove their devotion before they could become chapters.[102]

While they praised ikebana for these anti-modern aspects, many American enthusiasts nonetheless recognized that the art was constantly changing and updating. In many ways, it was starting to show evidence of interaction with American styles. This was probably due to the fact that most of the Japanese ikebana masters who supported I.I., like Ohara and Tomoyuki Minomura, particularly appreciated more modernist freestyle arrangements.[103] Teshigahara, most notably, had a reputation as a supporter of the Japanese avant-garde. The father of neorealist director Hiroshi Teshigahara (most famous for his 1964 film "The Woman in The Dunes"), the great hall of his Sogetsu ikebana school played host to displays of cutting edge art and theater throughout the postwar era. As the son of a prominent ikebana master himself, as a youth he provoked his father's ire by declaring he wanted to create his own school that would allow for more individualistic expression.[104] In 1953, he explained to a *New York Times* correspondent how Western techniques had begun to influence his arrangements. "Americans put many flowers in one vase. Japanese use few flowers. Mr. Teshigahara has combined the two tendencies. Americans use garden flowers. The Japanese like twigs. Again Mr.

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[101] Carr, "A Japanese Art," X42.

[102] see footnote 71.

[103] "Ikebana International Presents Our Flower Master Advisors" and Margaret Cromer, "My Sensei Tomoyuki Minomura," *Ikebana International Magazine*, vol 1, no 3, 40-41.

[104] See Ashton, Ch's 1, 3, 9.

Teshigahara has borrowed a bit from each. He believes the combination of American mass and Japanese line will make for the best style."[105] He also later told I.I. members that he created his own school of ikebana because "the centuries-old style of flower arranging, stiff and formal as it had to be, was getting outmoded" and could not keep pace with the encroaching Western influence on Japanese living.[106] The result was a style that followed fewer rules, and incorporated more flowers and plant material found outside of Japan.

In some cases, both Teshigahara and Ohara modernized their works to the point that they resembled sculpture more that flower arranging. The display in the Manhattan bank provides one example. Others could be found in Sparnon's coffee table book on ikebana.[107]

Figure 6: Examples of freestyle arrangements from Sparnon's *Japanese Flower Arrangement*

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[105] "Flower Arranging in Japan Complex," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1953, 8.

[106] "Ikebana International Presents Our Flower Master Advisors," 5.

[107] Sparnon,166-191.

In 1962, Rachel Carr visited a show of such pieces at an Osaka department store. She saw arrangements that incorporated varied materials including scrap metal, wood, iron wheels, concrete, engine mufflers, rope, and cork. Later reporting in *Flower Grower*, she wrote, "New forces of expression in the modern movement have invaded the traditional arts… Now the realm of Ikebana encompasses free expression approaching the abstract and extending to avant-garde sculptures, mobiles and reliefs that may, or may not, include flowers." While such arrangements signaled a departure from the more traditional methods that she practiced, Carr was nonetheless an admirer of the new modernist designs:

> By cutting loose from set formulae the modernist is freed from the limitations of reality. Flowers and foliage when fused into interpretive designs are knotted, twisted, massed, dyed, bleached and stripped purposefully to banish all distinguishable features. Pure from and color seem to obey their own laws, resulting in masterful control of rhythm, balance and harmony. The scope of creative vision is endless. [108]

Helen van Pelt Wilson also praised the new expressive nature of free style ikebana. She contrasted the quiet simplicity of traditional schools with newer arrangements that "mirror[ed] the harassed modern spirit, its desperation, revolt and fury, the brutality of the times reflected in truncated limbs and inverted designs."[109]

But freestyle arrangements did not speak to everyone in such poetic language. In fact, it drove some people to dislike ikebana who might have otherwise been indifferent

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[108] Rachel Carr, "New Directions in Japanese Floral Art," *The New York Times*, Sept 23, 1962, 151 and "New Dimensions," *Flower Grower*, August 1963, 35-37.

[109] van Pelt Wilson, 88.

to more traditional arrangements. Indeed, most American women who practiced the art tended to prefer more familiar floral-based designs in their own work. One customer who saw the display at Manufacturers Hanover Bank was heard to remark: "All you need is an old worn-out cedar tree and lots of attachments. Give me a Christmas tree any day."[110] In another *Stars and Stripes* cartoon, a husband stands above his wife's arrangement, which consists mainly of artfully arranged twigs and stumps and asks "I know it's modern but where are the flowers?" His smug expression coupled with her obvious annoyance reveal that his query was less a genuine question than a comment on the arrangement's unusual appearance.[111]

Figure 7: *Stars and Stripes* cartoon depicting freestyle ikebana. Source: *Ikebana International Magazine*

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[110] Anderson, 46.

[111] Sanae Yamazaki, cartoonist, *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, reprinted in *Ikebana International Magazine*, Apr 1959. 55.

In 1964, Robert C. Cherry, President of the Florists' Telegraph Delivery Association (commonly known by its initials FTD) wrote an editorial in *New York Times,* in which he complained of the lack of actual flowers used in ikebana arrangements, and derisively referring to it as "the straw and scrap metal school."[112] Of course, Cherry most likely had ulterior motives for his critique, as a rise in the popularity of avant-garde arrangements would have undoubtedly cut into his sales.

Nonetheless, ikebana tended to provoke various reactions from the Americans who encountered it. They interpreted it alternatively as ancient or modern, dramatic or serene, beautiful or strange. But rather than expand its audience, more commonly ikebana's hard-to-categorize characteristics marked it as a challenging hobby that was not for everyone. Not only were men and working class women largely excluded outright, but becoming skilled at ikebana also required a woman to possess a certain level of persistence. As a result, ikebana remained an exclusive and refined art in America, reserved for those with the time and the talent to master it. According to such women, the practice of ikebana allowed them to create original and expressive flower arrangements that were sophisticated, spiritual and subtly tasteful, and could never be anything but shibui.

[112] Robert C. Cherry, "More Flowers, Please," *The New York Times*, Feb 16, 1964, X23.

Bonsai: An Art for the Busy Suburbanite

The same cannot necessarily be said for bonsai, another Japanese horticultural art that became popular with a wider audience than ikebana. Properly pronounced like “bone sigh” (as guidebooks of the time liked to remind readers), it is also a centuries-old practice, whose earliest known record is dated 1310.[113] Bonsai trees are grown in miniature size to mimic the picturesque twisting and knotting of full-grown trees. One popular how-to book described a bonsai specimen as “a forest tree seen through the wrong end of a telescope.”[114] Trees are kept small through techniques like the use of shallow pots and special fertilizers, and the strategic pruning of roots, branches and buds. Sometimes plants are also purposely twisted into artful shapes using wire wrapping and other training methods. Once they attain the desired shape, specimens must be meticulously cared for on a daily basis, to maintain the fine line between proper dwarfing and starving the plant. In order to keep their size, they can only receive a small amount of water at a time. If a tree misses this regular watering for only a day or two, it could easily dry out and die. Some remarkable bonsai grown by masters are put on display and treated as works of art. In October 1962, a thief managed to steal one from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden valued at $2,000 (approximately $13, 720 today).[115] But most specimens were

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[113] Kan Yashiroda, “The Amateur Bonsai Fancier,”in *Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees* Kan Yashiroda ed., (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1959 – unless otherwise noted), 81.

[114] Yuji Yoshimura & Giovanna M. Halford, *The Japanese Art of Miniature Trees and Landscapes: Their Creation, Care and Enjoyment* (Rutland, VT: Charles E, Tuttle Co., 1957), 21.

[115] “Tiny Trees,” *The New Yorker*, Jan 12, 1963, 22.

far more modest, and found their homes on the patios and in the living rooms of suburban American homes.

Figure 8: Several examples of bonsai. Kyoto botanic garden,2008. Source: author's collection

American interest in bonsai began like ikebana, among the military forces stationed in Japan. Kyuzo Murata, the "Father of Modern Bonsai in Japan," described a visit paid to him in 1945 by two American men riding in a jeep. At the time, his local customer base was so impoverished by the war that he felt ready to close his nursery. Naval lieutenant Leo R. Ball and war correspondent John R. Mercier arrived at his gate curious to see his famed bonsai garden. Murata claimed that their interest and the praise they gave to his collection gave him the hope to keep his business open, which later regained its full strength.[116] Dr. and Mrs. Herman F. Froeb serve as another case of an

116 "Kyuzo Murata: The Father of Modern Bonsai" http://www.users.qwest.net/~rjbphx/Kmurata.html, copy of article found at Brooklyn Botantic Garden library collection, Brooklyn, New York.

armed services couple who took an interest in bonsai while in Japan. He was stationed in Korea while she lived in Tokyo, where she spotted a fascinating Sargent's juniper bonsai, which they purchased and brought back to their home in New York.[117] By 1953, curiosity was strong enough throughout the American community in Japan that the U.S. embassy in Tokyo invited bonsai master Yuji Yoshimura to stage a demonstration. The event generated so much interest that Yoshimura agreed to offer classes to American military families, assisted by his German colleague and translator Alfred Koehn. One I.I. member who took his course described it as "a must for foreigners in the Tokyo area," as it attracted about three hundred students in its first several years.[118]

Figure 9: Yoshimura's bonsai class. Source: *Ikebana International Magazine*

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[117] *Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees*, 1953 edition, 221.

[118] Gertrude H. Stewart, "Yuji Yoshimura Authors Book on Bonsai," *Ikebana International Magazine*, vol I no 2 (no date), 50.

When most bonsai enthusiasts returned to the U.S. with their plants, however, many soon discovered that without advice on the proper care for their trees, they were beginning to wilt or get sick. For those in the New York area the most logical place to seek help was the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG), since it had already established an interest in Japanese horticulture. Since 1914, it has been the home of a three and a half acre Japanese garden. In addition, in 1925, retiring nurseryman Ernest F. Coe of New Haven, Connecticut donated his collection of thirty-two bonsai trees to the BBG. Knowing this, former military personnel began arriving at the garden in the late 1940s with their dying plants looking for answers on how to cure them. Director George Avery was at a loss at first, but decided to seek out other botanic experts to help him assemble a handbook on the care of bonsai. His reply from most American specialists was the same: "Bonsai is for the birds – and the Japanese."[119] He then turned to Kanichiro Yashiroda, a Japanese colleague with whom he regularly corresponded. Yashiroda agreed not only to offer his own advice, but to recruit other Japanese experts to contribute articles (including Yoshimura). Once assembled, the handbook was translated into English and published in 1953. Over the following ten years, it proved to be the BBG's most popular publication.[120]

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[119] Elizabeth Scholtz, "Accentuate the Positive,"(original publication and date unknown), BBG library collection.

[120] *ibid.*, also "Bonsai," *Brooklyn Botanic Garden Annual [sic] Report 1961-1964*, 14-16, Robert Hubert, "Frank Okamura: Bonsaiman and Teacher" (publication and date unknown), and Thad McGar "Bonsai at BBG- Eighty Years of Tender Loving Care" *Brooklyn Botanic Garden Volunteer and Staff Newsletter*, Apr 2005, 4, 24, all at BBG library collection.

The Garden also began to hold periodic exhibits of bonsai grown by local amateurs,[121] and in 1953, it organized the first bonsai classes in the United States to be offered outside of the Japanese-American community. [122] Their first instructor was curator Frank Okamura. A Japanese-American landscape gardener, he was originally hired at the BBG in 1947 to tend the Japanese garden. He soon felt the need to add bonsai cultivation to his repertoire when former G.I.'s began approaching him for advice, assuming that his ancestry automatically qualified him as an expert.[123] Nonetheless, he wholeheartedly devoted himself to his courses, as was eventually recognized by the Japanese government for his contributions to cross-cultural understanding when he received the Order of the Sacred Treasure, sixth rank in 1981. (Incidentally, his daughter Mihoko also embarked on a career bridging American and Japanese cultures, serving as D.T. Suzuki's secretary in the 1960s)[124] The next summer, Yashiroda agreed to come to New York to teach classes. At the time, he was head of the public garden in his home village of Kawaga-ken, which is how he first came into contact with Avery. Earlier in life, he had studied horticulture at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London. It was

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[121] *Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees,* 56.

[122] "Orchids in The South -- Other Activities," *The New York Times*, Jan 17, 1954, X21.

[123] Hubert and McGar.

[124] Interview with Elizabeth Scholtz, former BBG director of adult education, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn, NY, July 15, 2008.

there that he first learned English and developed an affinity for teaching Westerners the art of bonsai, making him an ideal instructor for the BBG. [125]

Figure 10: Frank Okamura in the 1980s. Source: BBG Newsletter

In 1958, the Garden recruited Yoshimura to offer his popular Tokyo classes in the U.S. Once he arrived, he embarked on a new career as Japan's most prominent bonsai ambassador. As the son of a bonsai nursery owner, he had spent all of his life around miniature trees, and had received formal training from the Tokyo Horticultural School.[126] Once his course in Tokyo gained a strong reputation among foreigners, he published a book on bonsai cultivation, with the aid of one of his most skilled pupils,

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[125] George S. Avery Jr., "Intriguing Subject – Intriguing Teacher, " *The New York Times*, Aug 7, 1955, X36.

[126] Thomas S. Elias, "History of The Introduction and Establishment of Bonsai in the Western World,"75-76, paper available from National Bonsai Foundation at www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/images/bulletins/vol17no3.pdf.

Giovanna Halford.[127] Following his first round of classes in Brooklyn, he took another position at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, offering instruction to Philadelphia area bonsai enthusiasts.[128] Later that year, he founded a bonsai company in upstate New York, and returned to teaching classes at the BBG. In 1963, he helped to found the Bonsai Society of Greater New York, and embarked on a lecture tour that included stops in Cleveland, San Francisco, and southern California.[129] Throughout his career, he accomplished more than any other single bonsai master to bring his craft to a new American audience.

Thanks to the efforts of experts like Yoshimura, Okamura, and Yashiroda, gardening hobbyists across the country were encouraged to try their hand at bonsai cultivation. Elizabeth Sholtz, director emerita of the BBG, remembers that people would fly to New York from other large cities like Washington D.C., Boston, and Chicago to participate in their bonsai classes. [130] Bonsai grower George F. Hull provided a more detailed description of bonsai's reach in his 1964 book *Bonsai for Americans*. "If a map of the fifty states were used to chart the interest made evident by bonsai organizations and by public reaction seen in attendance to exhibits, the large bright dots would be found on the West Coast, with concentration in San Francisco and Los Angeles areas… with a strong mark at Denver, Colorado, a scattering of dots in the mid-continent cities, and a

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[127] Yoshimura & Halford, 1.

[128]"Courses, Lectures & Other Notes," *The New York Times*, Jan 11,1959, X46; "Tours, Courses and Lectures, "*The New York Times*, Apr 26, 1957, G7.

[129] Elias, 76-77.

[130] interview with Elizabeth Scholtz, the author, July 15, 2008.

number on the East Coast, with a special mark at New York City." He went on to mention several, more geographically scattered bonsai enthusiasts he knew living in rural areas in Georgia, Virginia, Kansas and Tennessee. [131] Most of the major cities he mentioned hosted bonsai related activities like exhibits, demonstrations, and club meetings.[132] One example was the Midwest Bonsai Show, held in 1960 in the city of Dundee, Illinois, near Chicago. In addition to a large display of bonsai specimens, the event featured an amateur plant competition, and a lecture by Japanese expert Kaneji Domoto. [133] By 1962, so many bonsai clubs had formed throughout the country that their leaders decided to form a national umbrella organization called Bonsai Clubs of America. In 1964, *Sunset* magazine featured a list of bonsai groups in Northern California that included nine separate clubs and societies in the Bay Area alone.[134]

Many Americans found they appreciated bonsai, as they might have ikebana, for its refined shibui characteristics. In 1957, Frank Okamura told *The New York Times* "every tree has its own art… every bonsai, like any good artistic creation, has truth, goodness and beauty."[135] Others praised its understated qualities. In an early postwar guidebook to bonsai published by the Japanese Travel Bureau, author Norio Kobayashi remarked that "Here, as in other branches of Japanese art, sobriety is the

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[131] George F, Hull, *Bonsai for Americans: A Practical Guide to the Creation and Care of Miniature Potted Trees* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1964), 33-36.

[132] *ibid.*, 34-35.

[133] [Article 6 – no title] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 28, 1960, NB.

[134] "How to Share The Bonsai Hobby," *Sunset,* March 1964, 236.

[135] "Study in Planned in A Japanese Art" *The New York Times*, Feb 2, 1957, 21.

keynote…Appreciation of the beautiful as expressed by the Japanese is characterized by a love of subdued effects." He added that Japanese taste "can best be explained as the reverse of garish and gaudy."[136] In 1963, *House & Garden* magazine added "the sole aim [of bonsai] is to enhance the plant's essential beauty but without corruption or distortion."[137] As a result, bonsai became came to represent a level of subtle, sophisticated taste. One 1959 magazine advertisement featured a model sitting next to a bonsai tree, placed there to signify the elegant fashionable nature of her Pomona brand tile living room.[138]

In addition to its attractive look, bonsai was prized for its more transcendental qualities. Okumura insisted "there must be harmony in bonsai," and lectured his students on the five spiritual aspects it contained: humanity, justice, courtesy, wisdom and fidelity.[139] He also felt that the practice of cultivating bonsai "would be beneficial to many of us in the today, caught up as we are in the rapid tempo of time."[140] Renowned Japanese actor and miniature bonsai (*mame*) grower Zeko Nakamura added in the BBG's handbook: "It seems to me that this pursuit is good for hasty men in big cities in this hurried age; I feel such impatient men learn to be deliberate as they become interested in

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[136] Norio Kobayashi, *Bonsai- Miniature Potted Trees* (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1950), 126.

[137] "Bonsai: Nature in Miniature," *House & Garden*, November 1963, 264.

[138] Pomona Tile ad, *Sunset*, July 1959, 165.

[139] Hubert.

[140] *Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees*, 1953 edition, 196.

growing mame bonsai."[141] The demanding, philosophical practice of bonsai would force the grower to slow down and take time for reflection, something that few Americans seemed to be doing in the postwar era. Like ikebana, bonsai could serve as an antidote to both the stress and occasional mindlessness of modern life.

But there were also significant differences in how bonsai cultivation and ikebana arranging were practiced in the United States, the main one being that bonsai proved to be far less exclusive. For one thing, far more men became interested in the art. In Japan, bonsai was most popular among middle-aged businessmen,[142]and was spread to the United States by male military personnel. Once established in the U.S., since it dealt with trees, it seemed to fit into the category of landscaping as well as gardening, a pursuit that due to its association with the outdoors, large tools and mud, was more easily accepted as a manly activity. I.I. member Gertrude H. Stewart noted that her husband accompanied her to Yoshimura's classes in Tokyo.[143] When a *New Yorker* reporter attended one of Okamura's lectures, they reported that the audience was composed of thirty women and half a dozen men.[144]Scholtz remembers the number of male participants as being even

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[141] Zeko Nakamura, "Minature Bonsai," *Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees,* 46.

[142] Yashiroda, "The Amateur Bonsai Fancier," 82; I was also assured by Prof. Masumi Izumi's upper level cultural studies class at Doshisha University in Dec 2008 that most recently it has become a hobby associated with older retired men.

[143] Stewart, 39.

[144] "Tiny Trees," 23.

higher; her recollection is that the gender ratio for most BBG classes was about fifty-fifty.[145]

It also soon became apparent that not all bonsai enthusiasts necessarily appreciated it for the "right" shibui reasons, or adhered strictly to the traditional rules of cultivation. One army colonel reported told his instructor in Tokyo that he took up bonsai "simply to waste time."[146] Many others appeared to be impressed by bonsai specimens for their exotic qualities rather than their subtle beauty. Many BBG visitors found a specimen's age to be its most impressive characteristic, amazed that trees so old could still be so small. [147] Some Americans also thought it might be cute or charming to add tiny houses and people to their bonsai and create miniature oriental scenes, a practice that most Japanese people, including Yoshimura, found "repugnant."[148] He further complained that many students wanted to treat bonsai like houseplants and keep them indoors as conversation pieces. In order to keep them healthy, he insisted that bonsai must be grown outside; otherwise they would suffer due to a lack of sunlight and air.[149] However, at the insistence of many apartment-dwelling New Yorkers, who had little

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[145] Scholtz interview.

[146] Yashiroda, "The Amateur Bonsai Fancier," 82-83.

[147] Thach, X45, Hull 14-16, "We Tell The 'Secret of Bonsai,'"*Popular Gardening*, Jan 1963, 28.

[148] Yoshimura & Halford, 19, 172.

[149] Yoshimura & Halford, 14; also Joanna May Thach, "Japanese Bonsai," *The New York Times*, Mar 29, 1959, X45.

access to outdoor space, the BBG developed techniques and offered classes for creating "indoor bonsai"[150]

It seems that the biggest misunderstanding Americans held toward bonsai involved the level of dedication and difficulty involved in its creation and maintenance. Early guides like Kobayashi's called bonsai "an art that demands not only scientific observation but also care born of motherly affection." He emphasized that bonsai plants required diligent attention, as "The price of neglecting to water your bonsai in midsummer even for a day will have to be paid with a withered plant. You might as well plough the field and forget the seed as commit such negligence."[151] In his guidebook, Yashiroda criticized some of the elitist Japanese he had encountered who frowned upon American amateurs' attempts to raise bonsai, but nonetheless cautioned that those who tried to cultivate bonsai without proper instruction "will be bothered and will find himself incessantly busy, trying to maintain them in perfect condition."[152] Okamura agreed with his colleagues, yet he assured his pupils: "people think these things require patience [but] when you are creating art, there is no question of time."[153]

However, it appears that some American magazine editors may have misinterpreted his advice. A number of their publications featured tips for homemakers and amateur gardeners who might wish to take up bonsai, but did not have as much time

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[150] Scholtz interview and "Tiny Trees,"23.

[151] Kobayashi, 72-75.

[152] Yashiroda,"The Amateur Bonsai Fancier," 83-84, 90.

[153] "Study is Planned in A Japanese Art," 21.

to care for their plants as they would an extra child, offering pointers and techniques for creating faster, easier bonsai. In one article entitled "We Tell The 'Secret' of Bonsai," *Popular Gardening* magazine declared, "No special Oriental patience is required, and no more gardening skill than that possessed by many home gardeners. "[154]*Sunset* magazine, based on the west coast where bonsai was popular, was the first major publication to start offering its readers tips on quicker and simpler bonsai. In 1954, it advised, "For the gardener who delights in dwarfed plants, but wishes they could be developed without the usual process of binding and twisting, "adapted bonsai" offer a happy substitute."[155] The technique involved pruning roots in a way that naturally stunted the tree's development. Several years later, it suggested that its readers comb their local nurseries for naturally twisted young trees that would more easily lend themselves to bonsai training.[156] It also presented another easy form of "adapted" bonsai: taking a shrub already growing in the front yard, and artistically pruning it.[157]In 1963, since "many Westerners who appreciate the subtle beauty of bonsai lack the patience to grow them by traditional methods," it further suggested "air layering," a process of growing new trees off of the roots of older ones that proved much faster than cultivating a plant from a seed.[158]

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[154] "We Tell The 'Secret' of Bonsai," 42.

[155] "A Simpler Way to Grow Dwarfs, "*Sunset,* Apr 1954, 276.

[156] "Shopping With An Eye For Plant Structure, "*Sunset,* Oct 1957, 66-67.

[157] "It's An 'Adapted' Bonsai, " *Sunset*, March 1957, 233.

[158] "Quick Bonsai – By Air Layering," *Sunset,* Jan 1963, 146-147.

In the early 1960s, once bonsai had established its reputation as a fashionable hobby, other magazines offered similar advice to impatient and harried middle-class Americans. A number of these articles seemed to be in competition to offer the fastest, easiest bonsai growing technique. In 1959, *Flower Grower* told its readers they could "Grow Miniature Trees in Just One Year," by shopping for already stunted specimens.[159] In 1963, George Hull provided *New York Times* readers with "Practical Shortcuts to Decorative Bonsai," that promised plants in "a season or two."[160] But later that year, *American Home* magazine claimed "You can…make an enchanting facsimile of a bonsai in a day."[161] As if that still wasn't fast enough, *Flower Grower* countered by declaring that 'good specimens can be grown in a few hours."[162] But the quickest time of all appeared in a November 1963 *House & Garden* article that told readers: "You can make a true and lovely bonsai from a nursery-grown plant in half an hour."[163]

While some of these articles' claims may have appeared too good to be true, they often did advocate legitimate shortcuts, occasionally utilizing recently developed horticultural techniques. The same cannot be said for an advertisement that appeared in *The New York Times*' Sunday Section 2 in February 1958. A company called Miniature

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[159] Tatsuo Ishimoto, "Grow Miniature Trees in Less Than One Year," *Flower Grower*, Nov. 1959, 26-27.

[160] George F. Hull, "Practical Shortcuts to Decorative Bonsai," *The New York Times*, Dec 1, 1963, 217.

[161] Mary Alice Roche, "Do-It-Yourself Bonsai," *American Home*, May 1963, 94.

[162] Robert E. Atkinson, "Bonsai in One Day," *Flower Grower*, Oct 1963, 50.

[163] "Bonsai Briefs: How To Collect, Care For, Create Your Own," *House & Garden*, Nov 1963, 306.

Forests Inc. offered a mail-order bonsai growing kit that retailed for $3.98 (about $28.00 today) and promised customers “automatic results…You Work Only 5 Minutes! You Don’t Even Dirty Your Hands! And You See Your First Baby Trees -- In Just 4 Short Weeks…Or Your Full Money Back!” The advertisement tried to sell its product by playing up the novelty of bonsai’s miniature size:

> Yes! Imagine your friends walking into your home, and seeing on your living room table – in breathtaking miniature -- an actual forest tree! One of the largest and most beautiful living creatures in the world – transformed – as if by magic – *into an exquisite living miniature no higher than an ordinary book!* [italics in original] Imagine the look of astonishment on your friend’s face as he bends down and begins to examine this living miracle.

Its greatest attribute appeared to be, not its subdued elegance or embodiment of natural harmony, but rather its power to amaze guests with its unusual appearance that seemed to defy nature. The rather dubious process for growing these miracle bonsai relied on an unspecified “new scientific invention,” and involved growing seeds in pots made from “an amazing new natural material” that combined just the right amount of plant food, fungicide and moisture, allowing purchasers to avoid “long, tortuous hours of careful work.”[164] The kit succeeded in essentially making the cultivation of bonsai as quick and easy as other convenience-based products of the time, like the TV dinner.

Yashiroda had predicted, “I get the impression that American bonsai growers or instructors are intending to have mass production of bonsai, disregarding the wise words of Henry Hicks: ‘Plants are… not standardized merchandise that anybody can buy and

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[164] [Display ad 156] (Miniature Forests Inc.), *The New York Times*, Feb 9, 1958, X45.

sell.'"[165]Had he known about Miniature Forests Inc., he surely would have found them the worst offender in this regard. The company had overlooked the trees' subtle grace and the patience involved in their care. Instead of letting bonsai's spiritual aspects provide respite from the machine age world, it subsumed the plants within it, by turning them into another mass-produced consumer commodity. But at the same time, the ad probably held a different meaning to its intended audience. The type of middle income Americans who would have bought instant bonsai or followed magazine's advice had recently grown to rely on the electric appliances and convenience foods meant to make their lives easier. For those who had little time to tend to their plants, shortcut versions of bonsai cultivation allowed them the opportunity to create intriguing specimens that fit in to their busy schedule, but would also mimic the refined taste of wealthier people able to enjoy more leisure.

Conclusion

The practices of bonsai and ikebana had both arrived in the U.S. in similar ways. Americans involved with the military stationed in Japan took an interest, and upon returning to the states, shared their new pastimes with their friends, neighbors and families. Both arts also had Japanese experts, like Houn Ohara or Yuji Yoshimura, who were eager to help Westerners learn and appreciate them, and traveled to the U.S. to offer lessons and lectures. Along with Americans who had also become masters, they

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[165] Kan Yashiroda, "For Bonsai Beginners" *Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees*, 1953 edition, 173. This passage criticizing some aspects of American enthusiasm for bonsai was removed from later editions.

promoted these pursuits as part of the shibui aesthetic; Sparnon explicitly used the word to describe ikebana in his book.[166] However, it appears that significant differences emerged between ikebana and bonsai as to how thoroughly this message was ultimately received.

The specific types of people who initially engaged in these arts affected the ways in which each were disseminated in the U.S. The first American ikebana enthusiasts were the wives of military officers, affluent women who consistently referred to themselves in print as "ladies." Most were educated, often in art appreciation, as it was considered an appropriately feminine field. In their social circles, ikebana was a sophisticated art, and they consistently treated it as such. The connection between the free style schools and modernist art was hard for anyone to miss, but they also found traditional arrangements contained the same clean lines and spare beauty seen in minimalist abstract design. While a few homemakers of lesser means might have tried their hand at ikebana arranging after reading how-to instructions in *Better Homes and Gardens* or *Flower Grower*, for the most part, the practice remained largely restricted those women who had the time and money to devote to a serious hobby. I.I. members and teachers largely retained control over its dissemination and interpretation in the U.S., allowing room for the creative leeway promoted by avant-gardist Japanese experts, but nonetheless tending to promote adherence to authentic traditional methods among their own ranks.

In contrast, bonsai initially attracted a larger variety of military personnel. Less restricted by the confines of prescribed gender roles, it attracted officers as well as their

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[166] Sparnon, 33.

wives. Requiring fewer materials and being more durable, it was also less expensive, and accessible to enlisted men as well. As a result of such variety, bonsai was more predisposed to stray from the parameters set for it by its expert promoters. For many, it was a hobby that allowed them to create a work of subtle beauty, and whose meticulous demands forced them to take time out from their hectic schedule and appreciate nature. But others were as likely attracted by bonsai's curious appearance and "how'd they do that?" qualities, as any high art principles. For homeowners who read magazines offering advice not only on how to create bonsai, but how to do it in ways that were faster and easier, it became a convenient but attractive patio decoration, or an intriguing conversation piece. Unlike ikebana enthusiasts who acknowledged that their art had indeed changed over time, those who advocated quicker bonsai opposed a seemingly timeless Japanese tradition to American ingenuity in discovering new gardening techniques, arguing that the former had much to gain from the latter.

Bonsai masters in the U.S. often complained about the habits of these latter two groups, as they did indeed rub against the grain of the shibui spirit. The shortcuts advocated in magazines made bonsai resemble exactly the kind of cheap convenience products that it was meant to oppose. It also led those who enjoyed bonsai's exotic qualities to harken back to a different set of well-worn stereotypes about the Japanese. Instead of their assumed attunement with nature and sense of serenity, they held in awe their supposed appreciation of the miniature, as well as their alleged talent at deceiving the eye.

However, neither one of these factors meant that these variations on bonsai appreciation were wholly antithetical to the spirit of the Shibui Movement. In playing up

bonsai's unusual qualities, enthusiasts nonetheless latched on to assumptions about Japan that were relatively benign, and well-suited to an atmosphere of friendly relations and exchange with the U.S. While methods of creating bonsai may have varied greatly, the end product was almost always the same: a handmade item exhibiting simple, subtle natural beauty that signified sophisticated and fashionable taste. The suburban homemaker who aspired to appear urbane might not have had the resources to take up ikebana seriously, but she was much more likely to have a free Sunday afternoon to create a half-hour bonsai. New techniques specifically geared toward American living allowed it to spread more successfully outside its initial military circles by making it more accessible to a larger audience. As processes of adaptation made bonsai more suited to more people, it furthered the impact that the shibui aesthetic had on everyday life in the U.S.

CHAPTER II: SAMURAI AT THE SURE SEATERS:

1950S "HIGHBROW" JAPANESE MOVIES IN THE U.S.

At the same time that many Americans were learning about Japanese culture from their friends in the military, another avenue was emerging through which they could encounter Japan more directly: the cinema. Japanese movies had been playing in the specialty houses of immigrant neighborhoods on the West Coast throughout the twentieth century, and prints with English language intertitles were distributed occasionally, but few succeeded in making a significant impact on American audiences. During the war years, they disappeared altogether in the general tide of anti-Japanese sentiment. Once the war ended, however, a number of factors in the international film industry sparked not only a revival, but an unprecedented appreciation for Japanese film in the United States.

The first movie to arrive was Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* in 1951.[167] It was followed three years later by two other prestigious films: Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* and Teinosuke Kinagusa's *Gate of Hell.* Slightly pre-dating the peak of widespread interest in arts like ikebana and bonsai, they provided many Americans' first postwar glimpse at Japan's culture. Reviews from the critics still carried some touches of exoticism, condescension or even derision left over from the war years, but with the growing appreciation for Japanese tradition, their assessments began to reflect admiration, especially for the movies' artful images and measured pacing. Shown mostly in exclusive

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[167] A. H. Weiler, "Random Observations on Pictures and People," *The New York Times*, Dec 16, 1951, 113.

art house theater settings, these first three films proved successful at the box office as they were hailed by upper middle class urbanites as refined and sophisticated, and became some of the earliest examples of popular shibui art in the U.S.

Japanese Movies Arrive at the American Art House

Japanese films began appearing on American screens in the early 1950s, in part because of thawing relations between the two nations, as well as widespread interest in Japan sparked by the occupation. However, they were also part of a growing trend of increasing numbers of foreign films shown in the U.S. Immediately following World War II, international civilian trade had been so disrupted by the conflict that no foreign movies were shown in the U.S. In 1954, foreign films made up about 5% of the American market, but six years later, that figure had jumped to 25%.[168] Domestically, several factors contributed to this change. One was the *Paramount* Supreme Court decision of 1948, which declared the Hollywood studio system in violation of federal anti-trust laws, and consequently threw the industry into turmoil. After suffering financial losses once they could no longer control vertically integrated theater chains, studios decided to cut back production schedules and focus on quality over quantity. The result was that all eliminated, or drastically reduced, their output of "grade B" features, leaving small independent "neighborhood" theaters with fewer films they could afford to exhibit. Since

[168] Figures taken from a chart provided to the author by Lary May at the 2008 American Historical Assoc. Annual Conference.

imported movies were often far less expensive to rent than first run American films, many of these theater owners used them to fill the gap.[169]

They were encouraged in this strategy by another sea change simultaneously taking place in the film industry, the slow death of the Hays censorship code. In the 1952 case of *Burstyn v. Wilson,* the Supreme Court declared that the motion picture in question, an Italian film called *The Miracle*, was not a commercial product but a work of art, and as such, to censor it would be a violation of free speech. Although the Motion Picture Distributor's Association of America (MPDAA) continued to adhere to the code until the early 1960s, it was now illegal to ban the showing of any film for the purpose of censorship. Since most movies produced outside the U.S. did not follow its strict censorship guidelines, the decision effectively removed a long-standing obstacle to the exhibition of foreign films.[170] At the same time, increasing protectionism among the various European film industries forced American companies to agree to import films from Europe if they wanted their own product to be shown abroad. [171] The stage was set for American filmgoers to come in contact with more foreign fare.

One common venue for these films in the 1950s was the art house, a type of small upscale movie theater that proliferated throughout the country following World War II. Most were small, with a seating capacity of 300-750, and advertised that they specialized

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[169] See Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 65-69; Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers & Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950's* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 18-24.

[170] See Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 101-105.

[171] Wilinsky, 69-70.

in intelligent films for the more mature movie viewer. By 1952 over 400 had sprung up in major metropolitan centers and college towns, [172] and by 1958, that number had doubled, including one chain that catered to rural areas of the Rocky Mountains.[173] Originally known as "sure seaters" in industry slang because so few people attended that patrons were sure to find a seat, by the early 1950s, the term's meaning was reversed to refer to the fact that art houses were sure to attract a steady clientele. While urbanites and students made up the majority of attendees, at least one Philadelphia suburb dweller complained to the *New York Times* that she wished there was an art house closer to her home, since many of her neighbors were interested in quality cinema as well.[174]

Many art house owners courted a "lost audience" of sophisticated adults who felt that Hollywood films had become too banal, and the experience of viewing them in a regular theater too noisy and distracting. Louis Sher, the owner of a midwestern chain of art houses explained "Lately, we've got a very definite impression that commercial theaters have deteriorated to the point where they no longer served my purpose – which was to relax… Double features and kids thundering up and down the aisles, popcorn stands going full blast, all these things tend to discourage adults from attending the commercial theater."[175] Most theaters sought to create a haven for these tasteful adults in

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[172] "Film Chain Finds Cure for Box-Office Blues," *Business Week*, March 22, 1958, 72

[173] Doherty, 32; A.H. Weiler, "Noted on The Local Screen Scene," *New York Times*, July 15, 1956, 69.For a complete list of art house theaters in the U.S. by location as of 1965, see Michael F. Mayer, *Foreign Films on American Screens* (NY: Arco, 1965), appendix xiv.

[174] Mrs. Catharine H. Brown, "Bad Booking," *New York Times*, Feb 9, 1958, X5.

[175] "Film Chain Finds Cure for Box-Office Blues," *Business Week*, March 22, 1958.

their design and amenities, offering coffee instead of popcorn, displaying fine art exhibits instead of movie posters in their lobbies, and barring children from attending.[176] As such, art houses tended to take on what *Nation's Business* magazine referred to as "a subtle snob appeal." [177] Attending one, most middle class Americans felt, could make them appear intelligent and sophisticated, and bolster their social standing. In turn, the films shown in these venues, of which about 80% were foreign,[178] became a form of social capital as well.

In choosing which particular foreign films to show at their art houses, owners were aided by yet another trend in film exhibition, the expanding European film festival circuit. The first major recurring film festival was held in Venice in 1932, and soon fell under the influence of Mussolini's fascist regime. In response, Great Britain, France, and the U.S. collaborated to open a counter festival in Cannes in the south of France, but its inaugural was postponed by wartime conditions until 1946. From that point onward, other festival events appeared throughout Europe. Many, including those in Locarno, Edinburgh, Brussels, and Oberhausen, were established in an attempt to promote the national cinemas of their host countries in the face of increased competition from Hollywood. Others, like Karlovy Vary, West Berlin, and Moscow, were founded with additional Cold War motivations in mind. Whatever their initial intent, by 1960, these festivals had become a fixture in the global cinema industry, forming an established

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[176] Wilinsky, ch 5.

[177] Stanley Frank, "Sure-Seaters Discover an Audience," *Nation's Business*, January 1952, 37, see also Wilinsky ch4 and Baumann ch5.

[178] "Film Chain Finds Cure for Box-Office Blues, " 75.

network through which films could gain international recognition by winning awards. Most festivals, especially the older ones like Venice and Cannes, also gained a respected reputation among filmmakers and critics, and lent a great deal of prestige to the films they endorsed.[179]

As a consequence, regular American art house patrons were sure to flock to the theater to see the latest prizewinner. In 1954, a film critic for the highbrow magazine *The Saturday Review* grumbled "scarcely a foreign film reaches these shores without having won some kind of award *somewhere*," but added approvingly, "as a direct result of the European festivals our American movie diet has become richer and more varied."[180] But with so many cities hosting festivals, other critics and film reporters began to wonder if enough was enough. A. H. Weiler of *The New York Times* asked

> have the festivals and medals become so numerous, the publicity mongering and the wheeling and dealing become so flamboyant as to leave the general moviegoing public confused, or at best, apathetic?...The rising numbers of film fairs and their burgeoning awards appear to be robbing the fetes and their prizes of much of their basic meaning and impact, much the same as the use of 'masterpiece' when applied to several works by the same author.[181]

Or as John McCarten of *The New Yorker* quipped more bluntly, "nobody who owns so much as a Brownie [camera] can get away from one of those international film festivals

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[179] Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 47-53, ch 3.

[180] "A Domestic Film Festival," *The Saturday Review*, September 11, 1954, 44.

[181] A. H. Weiler, "Focus on Movie Fetes," *New York Times*, July 30, 1961, X1.

without some sort of Oscar."[182] Eventually, with this glut of prizes, winning an award from a festival surely increased a film's chances of being shown in the United States to critical acclaim, but it was hardly a guarantee. Other factors, usually related to distributor's predictions about how much money a film could earn, were always at play. To take a relevant example, *Ugetsu* won a silver lion at Venice, but while Mizoguchi's next film *Sansho The Bailiff* received the same award a year later, it was never distributed in the U.S., due to fears that it was too dark and violent for American audiences.

It was nonetheless through one of these festivals that American audiences gained their first postwar exposure to Japanese cinema. Despite the fact that it was one of the world's largest film industries, Westerners knew little about Japanese movies. In 1950, the organizers of the Venice film festival decided it was time they learned more, and sent an invitation to Japan to submit an entry. At the time, Japanese filmmakers had taken little interest in European festivals, and studio heads had a hard time agreeing on a suitable candidate on short notice. *Rashomon* was not even among the finalists they considered; the producers at the Daiei film company had found the film utterly confusing, and most Japanese critics had panned it. However, Guilliana Stramigioli, head of Italiafilm in Japan, decided to recommend it to Venice over their heads. When the movie eventually won first prize, the news probably came as a bigger shock to the filmmakers in its home country than anywhere else.[183] Once they recovered, Japanese industry heads

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[182] John McCarten, "The Current Cinema," *The New Yorker,* September 18, 1954, 62.

[183] Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965, 1998), 79-80.

quickly realized that they had succeeded in breaking into a vast and potentially profitable foreign market.[184]

Part of the reason that Japanese producers were initially reluctant to let *Rashomon* represent their national cinema is that its storytelling format was highly innovative and unusual for its time, in either Japanese or Western culture (although it has been employed by numerous television writers since).[185] Its plot revolves around a crime committed in a dense forest glen with four witnesses each offering their own version of what took place, all with contradictory outcomes.

The film opens on a very rainy day in twelfth century Kyoto, where a woodcutter, a Buddhist priest, and a commoner have taken shelter under the dilapidated Rashomon gate. The woodcutter and the priest have just served as witnesses at the trial of a samurai's murder, and mull over the evidence presented to them. First, the bandit Tajomaru revealed that he had met the victim traveling through the forest with his wife, lured him into a thicket, tied him up, then seduced his wife as he looked on helplessly. After the incident, the wife begged the two men to duel as only one could "know her shame," and promised to leave with the winner. Tajomaru accepted her proposal, and slew her husband in a fierce sword fight. However, none of the other accounts agreed with this ending. In the wife's version, the bandit fled after raping her, and in shame she asked her husband to kill her with her dagger, but then fell into a faint, and woke up to find the knife lodged in his chest. The dead samurai himself is also questioned via a

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[184] Ray Falk, "Japan's 'Rasho-Mon' Rings The Bell," *New York Times*, Oct 21, 1951, 100.

[185] Stuart Galbraith IV, *The Emperor and The Wolf: The Lives And Films of Akira Kurosawa And Toshiro Mifune* (NY: Faber & Faber, 2001), 129 .

medium. According to his story, his unfaithful wife attempted to run off with Tajomaru, and he then killed himself rather than bear such betrayal.

In each account the principal narrator has acted according to the tenets of their own code of honor, for outlaws, noble women, and samurai respectively. But then the commoner gets the woodcutter to admit that he had indeed witnessed the entire incident, and in his version no one appears courageous, demure, or morally upstanding. After the rape, Tajomaru begged the woman to become his wife. She agreed on the condition that he duel her husband to the death, and then loudly and derisively goaded them into battle. The two engaged in combat, but their duel was a pitiful farce. The bandit eventually managed to slay the husband, but the wife had run away, too cowardly to uphold the bargain. While this flawed portrayal of each character's actions appears to be closest to the truth, after the woodcutter finishes offering the account, the commoner gets him to admit that he had stolen the wife's pearl-handled dagger from the crime scene, thus throwing his reliability into doubt as well. [186] The full truth remains hidden, and it appears that no one can be trusted because human beings inherently lie to everyone, including themselves. But Kurosawa offers an uplifting ending (that was later maligned by critics). The three men in the gate discover an abandoned baby, which the woodcutter promises to provide with a home. The priest then tells the woodcutter has restored his faith in humanity at the end of a very trying and disheartening day.

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[186] At the 1980 San Francisco Film Festival, Kurosawa did reveal to audience members, "Probably the person closest to the truth was the woodcutter, but he's lying too." Judy Stone, "Akira Kurosawa, 1991, reprinted in *Akira Kurosawa Interviews*, ed. by Bert Cardullo (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008), 162.

After the film proved a surprising success in Venice, the American studio RKO chose to distribute it in the United States. Like most foreign films at the time, it was first shown in New York,[187] at the Little Carnegie art house on December 26, 1951. Since the film's premiere marked not only the first Japanese movie in the U.S. in over fourteen years, but also the re-opening of the theater following a four thousand dollar renovation project, it attracted a small degree of fanfare, including coverage of the event on both local radio and Voice of America Japan.[188] *Rashomon* next opened in Washington D.C. on February 25, 1952, and in a number of other U.S. cities soon thereafter. It did well at the box office for an art house film, [189] and favorably impressed a number of American awards committees, garnering the National Board of Review's award for best foreign film, an Oscar for best foreign film, and a Screen Director's Guild Award, as well as a nomination for a Film Critics' Award.[190]

Like many foreign films of the early 1950s, *Rashomon* met with disapproval from some censors, especially for its frank portrayal of rape and murder. However, as a sign of the times that attitudes about art films were slowly changing, a censorship board in Pasadena overturned their ban of the film as local protestors convinced them to re-

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[187] Wilinsky, 105-106.

[188] Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in The United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 187; "Of Local Origin," *New York Times* Dec 24, 1951, 9.

[189] A.H. Weiler, "By Way of Report," *New York Times*, Feb 3, 1952, X5. The film was also re-released in Japan where became a runaway hit thanks to its newfound international prestige.

[190] "National Board of Review Names 'Place in The Sun' Year's Best Movie," *New York Times,* Dec 18, 1951, 41; "Humphrey Bogart Wins Movie 'Oscar,'" *New York Times*, March 21, 1952, 25; Thomas M. Pryor, "Warners To Make 27 Films in Color," *New York Times,* May 19, 1952, 12; "'Streetcar' Wins Film Critics' Nod," *New York Times*, Dec 28, 1951, 18.

examine it on its artistic merits.[191] An even stronger about-face occurred in the Catholic community, the sector of the U.S. population that had historically led the charge for movie censorship. In a 1959 book on the current state of the industry, Father William F. Lynch claimed *Rashomon* was in fact morally superior to most American films for depicting violence and crime in an honest and thoughtful manner, instead of fantasizing and glorifying them.[192] The movie was also included in a film festival sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago in the same year.[193]

Other film festivals continued to screen the movie after it had disappeared from first-run theaters, as did art museums and public lecture series.[194] It also proved popular as a 16mm print, a format that enabled organizations like churches, schools and clubs to show films on non-commercial projectors.[195] Its initial success was further revived by the rise of the repertory film movement during the late 1950s, wherein theaters primarily screened older movies that they considered part of cinema's classical canon.[196] In

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[191] Thomas M. Pryor, "Hollywood Survey," *New York Times*, Aug 24, 1952, X5.

[192] William F. Lynch S.J., *The Image Industries* (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1959), 31-34.

[193] "Move Forum Group Offers Three Films," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct 18, 1959, SW13.

[194] Eleanor Jewett, "Fascinating Oriental Art Is Exhibited," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept 20, 1953, E4; "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Aug 20, 1955, 20; "Tyler Speaks on Film Tonight," *New York Times*, Apr 27, 1956, 24.

[195] "From The Theater Screens to 16MM," *New York Times*, May 10, 1959, X7.

[196] Gomery, 194; for a contemporary profile of one such repertory theater see "Bleeker Cinema Plans Revivals," *New York Times*, Jun 8, 1963, 15; Listings of *Rashomon* screenings at such theaters include: "Midtown Houses List New Movies," *New York Times*, Oct 28, 1959, 40; [Display Ad 52] *New York Times*, Dec 2, 1959, 55; [Display Ad 35] *New York Times*, Dec 4, 1959, 36; Eugene Archer, "Maria Schell Set for Role Abroad," *New York Times*, July 16, 1960, 9; Howard Thompson, "British Director Plans 2 Pictures," *New York Times*, Nov 25, 1961, 26.

addition, the movie inspired a number of spin-offs in different media, which helped ensure its continued place in the public eye. A translation of the Japanese short story collection from which Kurosawa had borrowed the film's plot was released in American bookstores in 1952, also to critical acclaim.[197] Broadway producers Fay and Michael Kanin bought the rights to the story and adapted it as a play that premiered in 1959, to mixed reviews and moderate success.[198] The play was in turn adapted into a Hollywood movie entitled *The Outrage*, which moved the story to the Old West, and starred Paul Newman as the now Mexican bandit.[199] An unrelated, more offbeat tribute, came from the Swank company's 1959 line of "Oriental Dynasty" men's cufflinks, which included a Japan-inspired model called "Rashomon."

The film had succeeded in becoming, in one critic's words, "the most famous Japanese movie ever made," [200] but others would soon establish their own distinguished reputations. The next to arrive in the U.S. was *Ugetsu*. Similarly set in Japan's "Warring States Period" (mid-fifteenth through early seventeenth centuries), it sought to illustrate the effects these ongoing battles had on ordinary people. Genjuro the potter goes to town to sell his goods, leaving his wife, Miyagi, and son behind. He is accompanied by his

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[197] Ryunosuke Akutogawa, *Rashomon and Other Stories*, trans. by Takashi Kojina (NY: Liveright, 1952). See also James Kelly, "No Jade, No Peonies," *New York Times,* Nov 30, 1952, BR47; "And Bear in Mind," *New York Times*, Dec 28, 1952, BR8; [Display Ad 289], *New York Times*, May 3, 1953, BR28.

[198] Seymour Peck, "'Rashomon' From The Screen to The Stage," *New York Times*, Jan 18, 1959, X1; Claudia Cassidy, "On The Aisle," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 29, 1959, C1.

[199] Larry Glenn, "Hollywood New Look," *New York Times*, Jan 19, 1964, X9; A. H. Weiler, "Paul Newman Starred in 'The Outrage,'" *New York Times*, Oct 8, 1964, 48.

[200] Joseph I. Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1959), 212.

samurai-obsessed neighbor Tobei and his wife Ohama. At the market, Genjuro makes a sale to a mysterious and beautiful noblewoman, and Tobei and Ohama are separated after Tobei runs off in pursuit of a passing samurai.

When Genjuro goes to deliver his pottery, he is seduced by the Lady Wakasa, and decides to remain at her manor. Meanwhile, Tobei has concocted a scheme to become a great and powerful samurai. In his new guise, he stops at a brothel one night to find Ohama working there, after having been raped and disgraced by wandering soldiers. A Buddhist priest next informs Genjuro that the Lady Wakasa is actually a ghost, and he flees the manor, which disappears without a trace. He returns home to find his son asleep and his wife cooking dinner, but is informed by the village headman the next morning that soldiers had killed Miyagi while he was away, and that the woman he had seen was in fact another ghost. Tobei and Ohama soon arrive home as well; the three fire up the kiln and begin their simple lives again, somewhat the worse and much wiser for their adventures.

After the film received the silver lion at the 1953 Venice Film Festival, the owners of Plaza Theater in New York decided to bring it to the U.S. with the help of an independent distribution company. Its premiere took place on September 7, 1954, as part of a gala event sponsored by The Japan Society that was attended by several Japanese dignitaries. Ambassador Sadao Iguchi introduced the screening with a speech commending American audiences for welcoming Japanese cinema.[201] Within the next

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[201] "Iguchi at Premier," *New York Times*, Sept 8, 1954, 40.

week, the film brought in near- record box office returns for the theater.[202] It also soon appeared, along with *Gate of Hell*, on critical yearly "Ten Best" lists for both *The Saturday Review* and *Time* magazine. [203] Amidst such acclaim, it spread to other art houses throughout the country during the following year.[204] As the decade progressed, like *Rashomon*, it found new audiences at film festivals and repertory theaters.[205] Its name also became the title of a Japan-themed bebop album recorded by Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers in 1963.[206]

While *Ugetsu* gained an excellent reputation among elite filmgoers, *Gate of Hell*, the next Japanese film to arrive in America, proved much better able to transfer critical prestige into box office earnings. Part of its more widespread appeal lay in the fact that it was the first color film ever produced in Japan, and as such, offered a much more vivid visual spectacle. The movie's plot, in contrast, was quite thin, and featured rather one-dimensional characters. The short-tempered samurai Moritoh is asked to protect the Lady Kesa during a battle while she masquerades as the empress to distract a rebellious army.

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[202] "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Sept 15, 1954, 39.

[203] "Take Ten!" *The Saturday Review*, January 1, 1955, 63; "Choice for 1954," *Time*, Jan 3, 1955.

[204] "Playhouse Owner Marks 40 Years of Movie Trade," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec 5, 1954, F3.

[205] "Series at Fordham," *New York Times,* Jan 28, 1960, 26; Eugene Archer, "Movie 'Failures' Will Be Revived," *New York Times*, May 31, 1961, 26; "Camera Club Notes," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 1, 1962, N8; "Modern Museum Sets Film Series," *New York Times* May 1, 1962, 34;"I.I.T. Series Will Begin With 1928 Russian Movie," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept 15, 1963, S1; [Display Ad 54] *Chicago Tribune*, Nov 4, 1960, B18; "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Aug 25, 1961, 17; Howard Thompson, "Six Imports Scheduled," *New York Times*, May 19, 1962, 18; [Display Ad 396], *New York Times*, Sept 15, 1963, 135.

[206] See "Ugetsu" on amazon.com, http://www.amazon.com/Ugetsu-Art-Blakey-Jazz-Messengers/dp/B000000Y5F/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1238602391&sr=8-1, accessed April 25, 2009.

When the war is over, the emperor wishes to reward Moritoh for his loyalty and bravery; he asks only to marry Kesa, with whom he has fallen in love. The only problem is that Kesa is already married to an upstanding samurai named Wataru. Moritoh then spends most of the film trying to force his affections on the devoted Kesa, by confronting her personally and by defeating her husband in a horse race. Eventually, he threatens to kill her beloved aunt if she does not relent. She finally agrees to a plot to help him kill her husband in his sleep, but then convinces Wataru to spend the night in another room. Instead of slaying Wataru, Moritoh ends up killing Kesa, and upon discovering what he has done, resolves to spend the rest of his life in a monastery.

After winning the Grand Prize at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival, *Gate of Hell* also received a New York gala premier sponsored by The Japan Society, this time at the Guild Theater.[207] It soon went on to win a plethora of best foreign film awards, including: a National Board of Review Award, the MPDAA's Joseph Burstyn Award, a Critic's Choice Award, a New York Film Critics' Award, and a Photographic Society of America award. It also won an Academy Award for best foreign film, but some critics felt it was cheated in being denied a nomination in the category of Best Color Photography.[208]

Over the course of the next year, it also proved highly successful financially. It was typical practice for many art houses to continue playing the same film until it was no

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[207] "Japan Society Film Premier," *New York Times*, Dec 12, 1954, 134.

[208] "Film Board Votes for 'Waterfront,'" *New York Times,* Dec 21, 1954, 31; "'Gate of Hell' Gets Burstyn Film Prize," *New York Times*, Dec 28, 1954, 20; A.H. Weiler, "Critics' 'Best' Goes to 'Waterfront,'" *New York Times*, Dec 29, 1954, 18; "Film Critics Here Present Awards," *New York Times*, Jan 23, 1955, 86; "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, March 19, 1955, 12; Thomas M. Pryor, "'Waterfront,' Brando, Grace Kelly Win 'Oscars,'" *New York Times*, March 31, 1955, 23 and "Hollywood TV Tiff," *New York Times*, Feb 20, 1955, X5.

longer profitable, no matter how long the run.[209] Adhering to this principle, the Guild continued screening *Gate of Hell* for over ten months, while it set new box office records for the theater.[210] Once a film was retired from first run theaters, industry standards required that second run houses wait 35 days before screening the film themselves.[211] True to form, about a month after *Gate of Hell* closed at the Guild, it reopened at in smaller venues across New York.[212] A similar phenomenon took place in Chicago; after opening for an extended run at the Loop Theater in February, *Gate of Hell* was later snatched up by second run theaters throughout the region in July.[213] It appears this pattern was repeated throughout major U.S. cities, as the movie ranked number ten in nationwide box office receipts for May 1955, a feat rarely attained by a foreign film.[214]

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[209] Wilinsky, 110-111.

[210] The movie first broke the Guild's attendance record in Feb 1955, with 125,000 ("Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Feb 23, 1955, 24). It next broke the record for the longest running film a the Guild in April ("Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Apr 12, 1955, 25). It finally closed on Nov 6, 1955 after premiering on Dec 13, 1954 ("Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Nov 5, 1955, 22).

[211] Kerry Seagrave, *Drive-in Theaters: A History from Their Inception in 1933* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1992), 36.

[212] [Display Ad 16], *New York Times*, Dec 26, 1955, 22; [Display Ad 31], *New York Times,* Dec 27, 1955, 30.

[213] "Japanese Film," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 27, 1955, J19; "Japanese Film," *Chicago Tribune*, March 27, 1955, K3; [Display Ad 35] *Chicago Tribune,* July 24, 1955, E10.

[214] "Newsreel," *Time*, Jun 13, 1955. The film also found continued success in repertory theaters, see [Display Ad 39] *Chicago Tribune,* March 23, 1962, B16; "Film Openings Listed, " *New York Times*, Oct 27, 1962, 14; [Display Ad 283] *New York Times*, Aug 25, 1963, X8; [Display Ad 164] *New York Times*, Dec 26, 1963, 37.

Critical Response to The Newly Discovered Japanese Cinema

Following the success of *Gate of Hell*, these three films came to comprise the gold standard for Japanese filmmaking among U.S. critics. Over the next ten years, most coverage of any Japanese movie in the American press invariably referred back to the "excellent" films *Rashomon, Ugetsu* and *Gate of Hell*. That the films became grouped together in this way makes sense. Not only were they the first movies to arrive from Japan, they were also all set in feudal times and involved adult themes of lust and betrayal, coincidentally centered around the actress Machiko Kyo playing a noblewoman (the wife in *Rashomon*, Lady Wakasa in *Ugetsu*, and Lady Kesa in *Gate of Hell*). *Rashomon* and *Ugetsu* shared the same cinematographer, Kazuo Miyagawa, and the same musical composer, Fumio Hayasaka.

But fundamental differences simultaneously existed in the films' styles. While Akira Kurosawa often voiced his admiration for Kenji Mizoguchi,[215] the two directors remained very different kinds of filmmakers. In Japan, Mizoguchi had a reputation for portraying the tragic lives of long suffering women, of which Miyagi and Ohama provide excellent examples. In contrast, despite the complex multi-dimensional character offered by the wife in *Rashomon*, Kurosawa was best known his depictions of strong and independent male heroes.[216] Mizoguchi also established a "one scene, one shot" method

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[215] Donald Richie, "A Personal Record," *Film Quarterly,* vol 14, no 1 (Autumn 1960), 20-21.

[216] Tadao Sato, *Kenji Mizoguchi and The Art of Japanese Cinema*, trans. By Brij Tankha (NY: Berg, 2008), 56; Gilles Deleuze, "Figures, or The Transformation of Forms," reprinted in *Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa*, ed. by James Goodwin (NY: Macmillan, 1994), 250.

of filming in which he relied on camera movements instead of cutting, a technique that he employed in *Ugetsu*.[217] Kurosawa, on the other hand, relied heavily on the quick cut, and *Rashomon* in fact contains the highest average number of shots per minute of any of his films.[218]

Since their initial production, *Rashomon* and *Ugetsu* have come to be hailed by film studies scholars in both Japan and the West as masterpieces of Japanese cinema. However, *Gate of Hell*, the most successful of the three in its own time, has now largely been forgotten. In 2001, Donald Richie, an American film critic who lived in postwar Japan and has since established himself as the United States' pre-eminent expert on Japanese cinema, referred to the movie as a "weak… period play made into limp film with flaccid performances…If anyone paid attention to this film it was because of [cinematographer] Sugiyama Kohei's superlative color photography."[219] *Gate of Hell*, it appears, may have had different priorities than the other two films, seeking primarily to exhibit beautiful visual techniques over any deeper intellectual or emotional contemplation.

However, none of these differences were taken into consideration by American critics of the time. Few had even heard of Kurosawa, let alone Mizoguchi and Kinagusa, and instead of viewing each movie as the vision of an individual director, as they might today, they had a tendency to consider all three of them together, as examples of Japanese

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[217] For more on camera techniques used in *Ugetsu* see Keiko McDonald, *Mizoguchi* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 116-124.

[218] Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 78.

[219] Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* (NY: Kodansha International, 2001), 272.

Filmmaking. Criticism of foreign films in general during the postwar era centered on uncovering the essence of various national cinemas. As part of an effort to understand the "One World" they now lived in, critics would first lay out what made a film from a particular country unique (e.g. its Japanese-ness), then find those elements that contained a more universal appeal.[220] At the time, it was the accepted wisdom that Italian films were starkly realist, French films treated sex lightly, and British films dealt frankly with the problems of the urban poor. Yet all had elements that spoke to a shared humanity and made them accessible to enlightened audiences everywhere.[221] Another circumstance for foreign films was that critical opinion mattered more than it might have to a Hollywood movie. Since most art houses lacked a large advertising budget, they relied more heavily on word of mouth and positive press to promote their films, and most patrons were more likely to learn about the latest import from a newspaper article than an ad on radio or TV.[222]

Encountering Japanese culture for the first time in two decades, most reviewers of the early 1950s Japanese films began with a comment on their foreign origin. *Time* referred to *Rashomon's* "peculiarly Oriental flavor," and described *Ugetsu* as "wholly Oriental in its lidded introspection" and "a descent into the grey and moaning hell of an

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[220] For more on this practice, see *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* ed by Alastair Philips and Julian Stringer (NY: Routledge, 2007), 10-11 and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa Film Studies And Japanese Cinema* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2000), 9-19. In the case of Japanese films in particular, this tendency was also aided by the fact that the great auteur Akira Kurosawa was as yet unknown to American critics and as such, they often interpreted *Rashomon* as the product of a national culture instead of an individual vision, as they might today.

[221] See Mayer, ch's 5-7.

[222] Wilinsky, 117-122.

Oriental soul."[223] *The Nation's* Robert Hatch elaborated on this characterization, positing that a Japanese film

> presents an exciting problem to the Western observer. Not only must he try to grasp the impulse behind the deeds of people with whose reactions and habits of logic he is unacquainted, not only must he respond to excerpts from a culture that is almost entirely closed to him; he must try to gauge how much of what seems to him savage, archaic or exotic would seem so also to an Oriental spectator."[224]

While Hatch's statement appears to be a rather evenhanded assessment based in notions of integration and cultural relativism, others were not as generous. Bosley Crowther, the eminent *New York Times* critic, wrote that both *Rashomon* and *Ugetsu* were "so different in their concepts and structures from the general characteristics from American films that the average patron of pictures is as sure to find them as baffling as their speech."[225] By far the worst offender in this respect was John McCarten of *The New Yorker*, a critic who Donald Richie categorized as one of those "who dislike because disliking is easy and because their publications encourage it."[226] In his review of *Rashomon*, he revived several well-worn Asian stereotypes, claiming that the film was "a lot more simple-minded than any product of the mysterious East has any right to be" and that it "subjected [audiences] to a series of inscrutable variations on a Japanese theme."

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[223] "Rashomon," *Time,* Jan 7, 1952, 82;"New Picture," *Time*, Sept 20, 1954; "The Year in Films," *Time,* Jan 3, 1955.

[224] Robert Hatch, "Films," *The Nation,* Dec 11, 1954, 516.

[225] Bosley Crowther, "This Week: Ugetsu," *New York Times*, Sept 12, 1954, X1.

[226] Richie, "A Personal Record," 28.

He also described the commoner as a character “right out of ‘Fu-Manchu,’” referring to Sax Rohmer’s infamous Chinese villain from the turn of the century.[227]

While McCarten certainly took the most derisive tone of any film critic, he was not alone in his mockery of some of the films’ more exotic elements. Objectively speaking, there are a number of aspects of Japanese movies that American viewers would find unfamiliar, and many journalists must have found themselves in the same position that Hatch described. For instance, the way in which women’s kimonos fit them tightly at the knees would make the movements of many Japanese actresses appear unnatural to Western audiences.[228] Concepts of beauty could also be different, as demonstrated by a *New York Times* reader who wrote in to ask about Machiko Kyo’s painted eyebrows in *Ugetsu*, which she referred to as “forehead smudges.”[229] McCarten and Crowther in particular were also put off by the supernatural elements in *Rashomon* and *Ugetsu*, which they felt were too fantastic for American viewers to swallow. However, as Robert Bingham of *The Reporter* later pointed out, the theme of falling in love with ghosts is not unheard of in Western literature.[230]

The most common criticism along such lines was that the acting was exaggerated and overemotional. McCarten described the style in *Rashomon* as “wheezing, grunting,

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[227] John McCarten, “The Current Cinema: What Happened in Those Woods,” *The New Yorker*, Dec 29, 1951, 60-61.

[228] Example borrowed from Mark LeFanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 149.

[229] “Miss Kyo’s Smudges,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1955, SM7.

[230] Robert Bingham, “Movies: Ghosts and Flesh,” *The Reporter*, Sept 24, 1954, 41.

gurgling, and falling down," and in *Ugetsu* as "more writhing and tumbling than has been seen since the Keystone Cops turned in their badges."[231] *The New Republic* similarly warned its readers that the actors in *Rashomon* "howl and spit, they leap in the air, beat the shrubbery, rend their garments, roll on the ground, foam at the mouth and scratch their fleas."[232] Bingham also wrote of *Gate of Hell* ,"it's hard not to laugh at the passionate lovers who grunt and groan and fall on their faces."[233] The acting in these movies is, in fact, often more emotionally expressive than the "method acting" techniques popular in Hollywood at the time, but the descriptions of these critics might lead readers to believe that the characters are in the constant grips of epileptic fits. In fact, Japanese critics had a similar response to *Rashomon*, as they also found it overly emotional, particularly actor Toshiro Mifune's exuberant performance as the bandit. Ironically, Kurosawa had taken inspiration for the film's peculiar style from the silent movies of the West.[234] While it may have been true that overacting occurred in these films, in all fairness, it could not be directly blamed on their Japanese origin.

Another frequent criticism related to the pacing of these films, especially in the earlier reviews of *Rashomon*. *Time* felt that "its slow pace is deliberate and consistent enough to be accepted as a matter of style, presumably designed for the Japanese taste,

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[231] McCarten, "The Current Cinema: What Happened in Those Woods?" 60 and "The Current Cinema: The Potter's Saturday Night," *The New Yorker*, Sept 18, 1954, 62.

[232] *New Republic*, Jan 14, 1952, 22.

[233] Robert Bingham, "Movies: 3 Loves Gone Wrong," *The Reporter*, August 11, 1955, 54.

[234] Richie, "The Films of Akira Kurosawa," 79; Galbraith, 130-132.

yet U.S. moviegoers are likely to find much of it draggy."[235] *The New Republic* added, "the creators of *Rashomon*… gave not a damn about narrative pace,"[236] and Edward Barry of *The Chicago Tribune* said it "seems longer than its actual time in minutes."[237] However a marked shift occurred as the film gained widespread critical acceptance, and by the time *Ugetsu* and *Gate of Hell* were released, instead of "draggy," the movies were "formalized and ritualistic" or "subtle and understated."[238] *Time* waxed poetic about the measured pace of *Gate of Hell.* Its review remarked, "as the actors move in their flowered robes among the peaceable abstractions of the Japanese architecture, they seem like deities wafted through the realm of pure idea."[239] What had once been simply slow was now studied and serene, as an early liability for Japanese movies transformed into an asset.

Other reviews more explicitly credited the films' foreign origins with making them artistically superior, claiming they were strongly influenced by Japanese tradition. *Newsweek* claimed that *Rashomon's* sets "recall the historic glories of Japanese art," and that *Ugetsu* contained scenes "which reach back to Japanese painting for their effect."[240] *Time* was again eloquent in its comparison of the film to traditional visual art, promising

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[235] "Rashomon," *Time*, 83.

[236] "Film," *The New Republic*, Jan 14, 1952, 22.

[237] Edward Barry, "Japanese Film Beautiful, Tho Story is Slight," *Chicago Tribune*, March 5, 1952, B7.

[238] Athur Knight," Japan's Film Revolution," *Saturday Review*, Dec 1, 1954, 26; "Ugetsu," *Newsweek*, Sept. 20, 1954, 98.

[239] "The New Pictures," *Time*, Dec 13, 1954.

[240] "Rashomon," *Newsweek*, Jan 7, 1952,59 and "Ugetsu," *Newsweek*, 100.

"the moviegoer has the sense of living in a classic Japanese watercolor or of walking in a world that is really a giant pearl."[241] Arthur Knight of *The Saturday Review* also compared *Gate of Hell* to a Japanese painting, adding "its delicacy, its subtlety provide an almost startling contrast to our Hollywood- conditioned concepts of color in films." The article then speculated that this difference might have been attributable to Japan's "centuries of accumulated wisdom in the psychology and philosophy of color." He further claimed that the traditional Kabuki theater had influenced the film's acting style.[242] Hatch made the same comparison, writing that actor Kazuo Hasegawa, who played Moritoh, "grimaces like a devil mask and moves with the abrupt square grace of a Kabuki dancer, which he once was."[243] *Newsweek* further pointed out that *Gate of Hell's* director, Teinosuke Kinugasa, was also an actor in the Kabuki theater himself earlier in his career.[244]

In response to such comparisons, Donald Richie and his colleague Joseph Anderson felt compelled to publish an essay in *Film Quarterly* in 1959, entitled "Traditional Theater and The Film in Japan: The Influence of Kabuki, Noh, and other forms on Film Content and Style." Their first sentence flatly stated, "there isn't any. All of the parallels…are forced; all the pigeonholes are wrongly labeled; all the conclusions, so carefully jumped at, are as false as the assumptions on which they are based." They

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[241] "New Picture," *Time*.

[242] Knight, 26-27.

[243] Hatch, "Films," 517.

[244] "Universal Samurai," *Newsweek*, Dec 13, 1954, 98.

went on to argue that older Japanese dramatic forms had little to offer a wholly modern, international medium like film. Furthermore, they pointed out that around 90% of contemporary Japanese people had never attended a Kabuki performance, and thus Kabuki acting on screen would appear as strange-looking to them as it would to Westerners.[245]

But while they insisted on their Japanese-ness, American critics did find several elements in these movies that they considered universal. Many commended the first two films for their artistic skill, especially in regard to Miyagawa's photography. Bosley Crowther found the camera work in *Rashomon* "expressive beyond words,"[246] and *Newsweek* similarly claimed that "the genius of [*Ugetsu*] rests on the superb photography."[247] Even McCarten had to admit of the latter film, "the workings of the Japanese mind are odd, but I should add that the workings of the Japanese cameramen who made the film are ingenious and aesthetic. Some of the shots of the bleak, rush-grown country are undeniably fascinating."[248] *Gate of Hell* received similar praise, with added admiration for its use of color. The film was shot using the Eastman color process, and apparently when it was finished, representatives from the Eastman Company were so impressed by the result that they requested a print to serve as an example to other

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[245] Donald Richie and Joseph I. Anderson, "Traditional Theater and The Film of Japan," *Film Quarterly*, vol12, no1 (Autumn 1958), 2-9.

[246] Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review," *New York Times*, Dec 27, 1951, 37 and "Gem from Japan," *New York Times*, Jan 6, 1952, X1.

[247] "Ugetsu," *Newsweek*, 98.

[248] McCarten, "The Current Cinema: The Potter's Saturday Night," 62.

filmmakers of what could be achieved using their technique.[249] Robert Hatch called it "the best movie color we have ever seen,"[250] and Barry added, "the almost incredible beauty of the photography… will appeal as strongly to Western man as to Eastern."[251] Crowther practically gushed over the film's visual style; "No subtle pictorial compositions, no color patterns and harmonies to compare with those in this picture have ever been seen by this writer on a movie screen, and that's a statement so positive and sweeping that we tremble at its immensity."[252]

Others discovered more universal aspects to praise, including parallels between these films and the modernist art and literature of the West. *The New Republic* claimed the photography in *Rashomon* "uses perspective like a surrealist."[253] A later *New York Times Magazine* article on the Museum of Modern Art offered examples of "The Modern" in various forms, including painting, sculpture, architecture, and industrial design. Among the list was *Ugetsu*, which was "typical of modern films which are attempting to use the camera to its full artistic potential."[254] Several critics also praised *Rashomon's* innovative plot device for its intellectual contemplation of truth and morality. Crowther wrote that "although Japanese in language… and in dress, 'Rasho-

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[249] Knight, 27.

[250] Hatch, "Films," 516.

[251] Barry, "Japanese Film Proves Beauty is Universal," A4.

[252] Bosley Crowther, "Under The Wire," *New York Times*, Dec 19, 1954, X3.

[253] "Film," *New Republic*, 22.

[254] Aline B. Saarinen, "Our Cultural Pattern 1929 – And Today," *New York Times*, Oct 17, 1954, SM24.

mon' is cosmopolitan in its moral sense and philosophy."[255] *Newsweek* noted the film was "deeply based on moral ambiguities" and that its plot made "for the richest kind of psychological texture…The evocation of the many-layered possibilities of human 'reality' is little less than dazzling."[256] Soon after the movie's release, a film society called Cinema 16 published a pamphlet entitled "How to Solve the Mystery of *Rashomon*." But instead of trying to discern who actually committed the murder, author Paker Tyler argued that such an exercise would be as fruitless as trying to reconstruct one of Picasso's cubist paintings into a realistic image. "In *Rashomon*," he felt, "there is no strategic effort to conceal any more than a modern painter's purpose is to conceal instead of reveal."[257]

In these examples, the films appear to transcend boundaries of nation and culture and provide artistic insight that could be appreciated anywhere in the modern world. In fact, they also addressed many other concerns relevant to American audiences at the time, which remained unacknowledged by critics. All three movies depict the horrors of war, including images and themes that undoubtedly resonated with people emerging from World War II on both sides of the conflict. *Rashomon's* format and underlying message also spoke to contemporary currents in American intellectual life that questioned the

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[255] Crowther, "Gem From Japan," X1.

[256] "Rashomon," *Newsweek*, 59.

[257] Parker Tyler, "*Rashomon* As Modern Art," reprinted in *Rashomon*, ed. By Donald Richie (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 151.

absolute nature of truth in favor of a more uncertain, relativist outlook (see chapter 4).[258] In addition, all three films addressed debates over gender taking place in both countries at the time. To some viewers concerned about the erosion of "traditionally appropriate" roles for women, *Gate of Hell's* characterization of the Lady Kesa as steadfastly faithful and demure provided a model of proper feminine behavior.[259] In *Ugetsu*, Lady Wakasa and Miyagi may have served a similar purpose, as through death the former receives punishment for her sexual aggression, and the latter saint-like status for fulfillment of her domestic role. But at the same time, Ohama and the wife from *Rashomon* may have offered another kind of resonance for some female viewers. Both women transcend the good/ bad woman dichotomy, Ohama by surviving despite her disgrace and the wife by appearing alternately submissive or assertive, depending on who is telling the story. Women in the audience, who were finding themselves in positions as part-time breadwinners in ever increasing numbers,[260] may have seen something of themselves in these characters as they try to retain their ideals of respectable femininity, even as circumstances require them to behave otherwise.

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[258] As a contemporary example, see Carl L. Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol 8 no 3 (Sept. 1955), 327-340, for more on the modernist and postwar relativism, see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (NY: Vintage Books, 1958); Lewis Perry, *Intellectual Life in America: A History* (NY: Franklin Watts, 1984), ch 7; William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

[259] For more on the use of Japanese women as both a model and a foil to assertive American women in Hollywood film, see Shibusawa, ch 7.

[260] Nancy McLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of The American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Ch 4.

The fact that critics often failed to address these issues in the films, despite their relevance to their readership should not be surprising, considering they fell outside of the purview of what reviewers eventually came to understand a Japanese film should be. Taken as a whole, the critical response to *Rashomon*, *Ugetsu*, and *Gate of Hell* comfortably situates all three as elements of the shibui movement. To those who claimed to understand these films, they offered refined, subtle aesthetics and intellectual sophistication in keeping with American modernism. At the same time, they represented Japanese traditions that resisted the crassness of machine age life in their appreciation of visual beauty and leisurely, measured pacing. Screened mostly in art theaters, these movies also carried the same by-product of other shibui arts and practices: they invested those who appreciated them with a level of social distinction, suggesting they were tasteful and enlightened.

Japanese Film in The U.S. Following *Gate of Hell*

In breaking new ground for Japanese cinema in the U.S., according to critics, these three films had succeeded in establishing the artistic merit of their nation's cinema. Introducing *Gate of Hell*, Arthur Knight claimed that "while our Occidental films have leveled off at a plateau of technical perfection, the films from Japan are exploring psychological, physiological, and esthetic paths that are, in their implications, not merely new but revolutionary."[261] *Time's* year in review for 1954 observed, "two pictures from Japan outweighed, in many reviewer's scales, the rest of the world's product put

[261] Knight, 26.

together."[262] In 1955, *The New York Times* remarked, "lately Italy [then heralded for its neorealist "renaissance"] seems to be yielding leadership among foreign filmmakers to Japan."[263]

As a result of this newly established reputation, as the decade progressed, a steadily increasing number of Japanese films found their way to American screens, most of them playing at art houses. Japanese film festivals also became a more common sight in American cities. The first major one was held at UCLA in 1956, and was followed periodically by smaller events, usually screened at art or repertory theaters.[264] By 1960, Japan's Toho Studios decided that American interest in its product had grown strong enough that it could successfully maintain a theater showing only its films. The Toho La Brea opened in Los Angeles in August as the first Japanese movie theater in the U.S. located in a predominately white neighborhood, in this case, several blocks south of the famous "Miracle Mile."[265] The theater proved to be profitable enough that the company opened a second franchise in New York three years later.[266]

Heads of other Japanese studios also became heavily invested in marketing their films abroad. The first and most famous of these was Masaichi Nagata of Daiei Studios, a

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[262] "The Year in Films," *Time*, Jan 3, 1955.

[263] "Foreign Film Fare," *New York Times*, March 6, 1955, SM26.

[264] Thomas M. Pryor, "Hollywood Annual," *New York Times*, March 18, 1956, 131; A.H. Weiler, "By Way of Report," *New York Times*, Dec 6, 1959, X9; [Display Ad 179], *New York Times*, Oct 24, 1962, 44; "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, Nov 14, 1962, 43; [Display Ad 28], *New York Times*, Apr 7, 1964, 28.

[265] Galbraith, 296-298.

[266] Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Film From Japan," *New York Times*, Jan 23, 1963, 5.

man whom American film experts dubbed the "Daryl Zanuck of Japan," comparing him to one of their own blockbuster producers.[267] This comparison stemmed largely from the fact that he had in fact produced *Rashomon*, *Ugetsu* and *Gate of Hell*. He quickly became a star in his own right, winning a special achievement award from the Foreign Press Association of Hollywood (a precursor to the Golden Globes) even before *Ugetsu's* American premiere. In 1955, he toured the U.S. accompanied by Machiko Kyo, with the American press covering their trip.[268] Apparently unaware that Nagata had initially hated *Rashomon*, American journalists hailed him as genius promoter who first introduced Japanese cinema to the U.S. As a result, he gained a favorable reputation as a savvy businessman with an eye for the American market and a mission to ensure that his nation's movies were appreciated across the globe.

After his successes of 1954, other producers began to follow his lead, and courted American distributors for their movies. However, studios remained selective about which films they exported, as one bad picture could ruin the reputation of the whole nation's industry. Richie and Anderson estimated that of the entire film output for Japan in 1959, only about 5% were considered "high quality," and of those, only a fraction were ever shown abroad.[269] Studios were also careful to export only those films they felt conformed to Western sensibilities. Almost as soon as *Rashomon* won the Golden Lion, Japanese critics began claiming that its success lay in its inherent "Western-ness," a

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[267] "A Domestic Film Festival," 44.

[268] "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, July 27, 1955, 15; A. H. Weiler, "By Way of Report," *New York Times*, Sept 25, 1955, X5.

[269] Richie & Anderson, *The Japanese Film*, 337.

charge that Kurosawa denies, but continues to haunt discussion of his work.[270] In the later 1950s, studio chiefs employed the strategy of exporting mostly samurai movies, according to the logic that they had already been successful, and that they tended to resemble American Westerns.[271] In 1959, Akira Kurosawa complained that these movies were "all the West has seen and continues to see of Japanese cinema, " and wished film audiences could view more movies set in modern Japan.[272] There also appeared to be a consensus across the industry that foreigners couldn't understand any movie that was "overly Japanese." For example, they refused to export the films of Yasujiro Ozu, who is often considered one of their nation's greatest directors. At the time, Richie described his films as marked by "restraint, simplicity [and] near-Buddhist serenity." Since Japanese producers assumed that Americans craved action in their movies, it was these characteristics that rendered them unfit to be appreciated abroad.[273]

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[270] Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 80; Ray Falk, "Introducing Japan's Top Director" and "Akira Kurosawa: Japan's Poet Laureate of Film," *Show Business Illustrated*, both reprinted in *Akira Kurosawa Interviews*, 3-5, 20-23; for examples of critics who seek Western themes in Kurosawa's work see Andre Bazin, "*Rashomon*" in *Perspectives on Kurosawa*, 113-114; James Goodwin, *Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994);for an example of a scholar who reacts to these by arguing instead for Kurosawa's Japaneseness, see Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and "Zen and Selfhood: Patterns of Eastern Thought in Kurosawa's Films, " in *Perspectives on Kurosawa*, 225-235. For a critical discussion of the persistence of the debate over Kurosawa's Westerness versus his Easterness, see Yoshimoto, Part 1.

[271] Richie & Anderson, *The Japanese Film*, 229-233; Richie, "A Personal Record," 27. For more on the postwar *chanbara* genre and its comparison to westerns, see Yoshimoto, 227-234.

[272] Akira Kurosawa, Foreword to Richie & Anderson, *The Japanese Film*, 13.

[273] Donald Richie, "The Later Films of Yasujiro Ozu," *Film Quarterly,* vol 13, no 1 (Autumn 1959), 18; Another, more technical, possibility why Ozu was too Japanese lies in the fact that he refused to employ filmic techniques (for example eye line matching) in the same way as most Western directors, see Noel Burch, "Akira Kurosawa," in *Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa*, 241.

In addition to selecting appropriate films for export, producers also created films specifically for the foreign market. *Gate of Hell* was in fact the first example of such a movie.[274] Before production began, Daiei Studios sent color technicians to Warner Brothers as well as several European studios to learn how to create visual effects that would appeal to Western taste.[275] They also hired an art director whose brother had emigrated to the U.S., and later designed the famous costumes for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).[276] The film itself prominently displays the antique temples, gardens and picturesque natural landscapes of Japan, as well as traditional dances, koto playing, and samurai competitions. At times, it almost resembles a travelogue designed to entice viewers by showing a foreign country's attractive and exotic scenery and customs. Judging from the critical response to the film it appears this overall strategy toward Western appeal succeeded. Crowley found that *Gate of Hell* was "not as fantastic as 'Ugetsu'… or as strange and complex as…'Rashomon'"[277] Even John McCarten softened his tone in his review, admitting that it was a quality film, without resorting to the knowing winks and rib pokes he employed in describing earlier Japanese movies.[278]

Following the film's astonishing success at the box office, several producers decided to duplicate this technique on a larger scale, by creating movies along the lines of

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[274] Richie & Anderson, *The Japanese Film*, 228.

[275] Knight, 26.

[276] "Yuji Ito, Designer for The Theater," *New York Times*, Nov 4, 1963, 35.

[277] Crowther, "Under The Wire," X3.

[278] John McCarten, "The Current Cinema: Japanese Passion, English Satire," *The New Yorker*, Jan 8, 1955, 70.

American "spectaculars," like Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956). In 1959, Toho began production on the epic *The Three Treasures*, which portrayed the nation's mythical beginnings.[279] Nagata also tried his hand with *Buddha*, a retelling of the life of the prophet featuring a massive budget and a cast of thousands.[280] Neither one made much of an impression in the U.S. Nagata and others also attempted collaborations with American or European studios, but these often proved unprofitable, at times failing even before shooting was completed.[281]

In the end, few of the Japanese studios' efforts to make and export more "Western" movies paid off, possibly because they did not really understand American taste as much as they thought they did. Judging from the reviews of *Rashomon*, *Ugetsu*, and *Gate of Hell*, it was not primarily the plot of these films that critics enjoyed, but their distinctive photography, pacing, and composition. Few were impressed by Japanese attempts to appear more familiar to American audiences. In 1955, *Time* gave a negative review to the film *The Impostor* (Tatsuo Osone) that declared, partly mistakenly:

> Three Japanese films shown in the U.S. since the war – Rashomon, Ugetsu, Gate of Hell – were made, and made superbly, to win world prestige for the Japanese product. The Impostor was made for the folks back home who have a yen for the movies. The difference is startling. The other three often had the exquisiteness of Hokusai prints brought to life. The Impostor… has the look of a

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[279] Ray Falk, "Designed in Japan for The U.S.A.," *New York Times*, March 6, 1960, X9; Galbraith 271-274.

[280] A.M. Rosenthal, "'Buddha' Faces Camera," *New York Times,* Aug 13, 1961, X7; "The Zen Commandments," *Time*, Aug 11, 1961.

[281] Richie & Anderson, *The Japanese Film*, 245-250; Ray Falk, "On A Japanese 'Flight,'" *New York Times*, Oct 14, 1962, 131.

> grade A Hollywood costume adventure that was shot with an almond-eyed camera.[282]

Bosley Crowther had a similar opinion of the movie, as well as *The Samurai* (Hiroshi Inagaki, 1956), about which he remarked, "its drama is largely a conglomeration of contemporary Japanese romantic clichés, very much on the order of the conventional situations that occur in Hollywood western films."[283] He also made similar comments about several of Kurosawa's films as they arrived in New York, including *The Hidden Fortress* (1962)*, Yojimbo* (1962), and *Seven Samurai* (1956).[284] While he liked the latter, he also observed, "Mr. Kurosawa is telling a story that has been told a hundred times (or maybe more) in a setting of sagebrush and with sheriffs instead of samurai."[285]

It appears that Japanese studio heads were shortsighted in favoring epic "Western style" samurai films over Ozu's more quiet and restrained domestic dramas. Perhaps not realizing that imported movies were viewed primarily in exclusive art house circles in the U.S., they instead aimed for the middle as far as taste was concerned, missing their intended mark. American critics, considering themselves highbrow arbiters of quality,

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[282] "The New Pictures," *Time*, Apr 25, 1955.

[283] Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Nasty Politics in Old Nippon," *New York Times* , March 23, 1955, 27 and "Just An Ol' Samurai," *New York Times*, Jan 22, 1956, 93.

[284] Bosley Crowther, "Screen: 'Hidden Fortress' From Japan," *New York Times*, Jan 24, 1962, 24; "Screen: Oriental Western," *New York Times,* Oct 16, 1962, 34; "Screen: Japanese Import," *New York Times*, Nov 20, 1956, 45 and "Eastern Western," *New York Times*, Nov 25, 1956, 145; dates given here are for the films' U.S. release, many had been screened earlier in Japan.

[285] Crowther, "Eastern Western," 145; Today *Seven Samurai* arguably the most popular film Kurosawa ever made, at the time of its U.S. release it remained largely unappreciated. Columbia only had one print of the film to circulate, meaning the film only ran one week in New York, and received no press attention during its brief stay in Chicago. Unlike *Rashomon* and *Gate of Hell*, it was not nominated for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film (Galbraith, 194). Most Americans did not become familiar with the film until 1960, when director John Sturges, seemingly at the prompting of so many critics, remade the film as the actual western *The Magnificent Seven*.

wanted these films, like those from Europe, to meet their expectations of an artistic Japan and offer them something different and better than the usual Hollywood product; they wanted them to be shibui.

Conclusion

Several feudal era melodramas did prove successful, both at the box office and on the awards circuit, including *The Samurai* and *The Rickshaw Man* (also directed by Inagaki, 1960),[286] but few other Japanese art house movies would do much to distinguish themselves in the U.S. Beginning as early as 1955, American film journalists were reporting that Japan's showing at international festivals was declining.[287] If *The New York Times* truly was the bellwether for newspaper critics across the country,[288] most found the Japanese films screened in the U.S. later in the decade to be decidedly disappointing. To take one example, in 1959, Crowther scathingly referred to *The Human Condition* (Masaki Kobayashi) as "turgid and tedious as drama…there is nothing in its substance, its theme or the prison camp melodramatics that you might not see in a cheap American film."[289] Even subsequent films by Kurosawa and Mizoguchi failed impress him, as he also derided *The Men Who Tread on The Tiger's Tail* (Kurosawa, 1960), as

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[286] Galbraith, 203-206, 249.

[287] Robert F. Hawkins, "Politics Plagues Venice Showing – Edinburgh Expands Its Lists," *New York Times*, Sept 18, 1955, X7 and "Cannes Close-Up," *New York Times*, May 20, 1956, 119.

[288] See Richie "Personal Record," 28.

[289] Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Japanese Cycle," *New York Times*, Dec 16, 1959, 56.

well as *Throne of Blood* (Kurosawa, 1962);[290] he found *Yang Kwei-Fei* (Mizoguchi, 1956) tedious and *Street of Shame* (Mizoguchi, 1959) mediocre.[291] It appears that the prestige of Japanese cinema in the United States had experienced an early peak.

This happened in part because by the early 1960s, the Japanese film industry was facing a deep financial crisis. As it encountered increasing competition from television, the quality and quantity of both foreign and domestic product began to dwindle.[292] But perhaps a bigger factor was that later Japanese movies were not meeting the expectations of American critics, whose opinions mattered greatly to art house audiences. At first they were wary of movies from a country whose film industry was not nearly as internationally established as the United States', as *Rashomon's* exotic and unfamiliar qualities raised their eyebrows. Yet as the appreciation for Japanese tradition grew among American "upper middlebrows," they began to find a new role for its cinema, discovering that it indeed fit the same shibui mode as other art forms. Serving as a complement to extravagant American movies, its measured pacing and attention to visual composition were evocative of tradition, but at the same time, its understatedness and intellectually provocative themes reflected modernist sensibilities. By mid-decade, when samurai films began to appear in greater numbers, the problem was no longer that they were too foreign, but too American. The critics had formed a definite impression as to what

[290] Howard Thompson, "Japanese Film Has Debut at Victoria," *New York Times*, Jan 11, 1960, 35; Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Change in Scene," *New York Times*, Nov 23, 1961, 50.

[291] Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Chinese Legend," *New York Times*, Sept 11, 1956, 41 and "The Screen: From Japan," *NEW YORK TIMES*, June 5, 1959, 17.

[292] Philips and Stringer, 9.

Japanese culture was, and what it had to offer them: quiet, subtle elegance that should counteract the garishness of Hollywood, instead of trying to imitate it.

CHAPTER III: HOW TO BE AMERICAN WITH *SHIBUI* THINGS:

JAPANESE AESTHETICS IN THE AMERICAN HOME

In 1959 and 1960 both *Better Homes & Gardens* and *House Beautiful* magazines featured photo spreads of the Hillsborough California home of Mr. Frank D. Stout. Stout was not a famous person, only a homeowner with unusual design tastes, whose house became a minor celebrity itself. As they approached its entrance, a pebble paved court led visitors under exposed roof beams to hand-carved wooden front doors. Once inside the living room, they found *tatami* mats on the floor, exposed wood ceilings, sliding *shoji* screens, brush paintings on the walls, kabuki lamps sitting on lacquer end tables, and in the center of the room, a large *fusuma* cabinet. The rest of the house was similarly decorated with Japanese touches, including hanging scrolls, paper lanterns, and bathroom towels embroidered with imperial crests.

Better Homes & Gardens claimed that its theme "soften[ed] the rather severe lines of this modern California House."[293] *House Beautiful* concurred, observing that the use of Japanese aesthetics gave the house "an over-all simplicity and coherence" and a "kind of meditative calm and repose." But while his home may have offered respite from the modern world, both articles show that Stout still enjoyed many of the conveniences of

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[293] "The Warmth of Oriental for a Modern House," *Better Homes & Gardens* Feb. 1959, 39.

U.S. postwar prosperity. Tatami were made of machine woven fabrics instead traditional straw, kabuki lanterns were wired with electric bulbs, and the fusuma opened to reveal a wet bar and a hi-fidelity stereo system.

Stout's house and the terms journalists used to present it epitomize both the extent and the limits of the shibui aesthetic in the American home during the 1950s. Few homeowners went as far as he did to try and mimic Japanese living in every aspect of their houses, but some did incorporate Japanese elements into their design. Or they decided to make over a living room or replant a garden along the lines of Japanese decorating principles. A larger number purchased pieces of Japan-inspired furniture to adorn their otherwise American-style living rooms. Some appreciated the elegance of shibui and longed for the calm it promoted. Others liked the functionality of Japanese design, especially when it was adapted to fit suburban homes. For still others, it was its reputation as an upper class aesthetic that held the most attraction. This chapter will explore the varied reactions to this trend that made its popularity so widespread, as well as its meanings for those who followed it, in particular the melding of "traditional" Japanese decor with mid-twentieth century American design movements and styles of living.

The Japanese Influence on Architecture and Landscaping

American interest in Japanese home design at mid-century was in fact a revival of an older movement as opposed to a new trend. Architecture and interior decoration served as pillars of the turn of the century wave of Japonisme, as artists, designers and wealthy homeowners studied and tried to duplicate Japanese aesthetic concepts. In 1876,

the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia brought Japanese design to the attention of the larger public when it featured a Japanese "dwelling," tea house, garden and "bazaar." The 1893 Columbia Exposition in Chicago similarly included a large Japanese pavilion composed of a series of three structures known collectively as the *hoo-do* or Phoenix Villa. Other examples appeared at various exhibitions around the country in cities including San Francisco, Buffalo, and St. Louis.[294] The first American book to enumerate the principles behind the Japanese house appeared in 1886 and was written by East Asian specialist Edward Morse. His ideas influenced the young architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who took a lifelong interest in Japanese art, and went on to create buildings that echoed the horizontal layout and lack of external ornament typically found in Japanese houses. [295] Some of his contemporaries followed suit, including Charles Sumner and Henry Mather Greene, the latter constructing a number of distinctive Japanese-inspired homes throughout Southern California in the early twentieth century.

Unlike ikebana enthusiasts who recognized that their art was in a continuous process of modernizing in Japan, American designers latched on one particular historical style, which they treated as a timeless template for "The Japanese House."[296] The *sho-in*

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[294] Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (NY: Walton H. Rawls, 1963), 47-48, 78-83, 97-103, 139; Neil Harris, "All The World A Melting Pot? Japan at American Fairs, 1876-1904," in *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America*, ed. by Neil Harris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 29-55.

[295] See Kevin H. Nute, "Frank Lloyd Wright and *Japanese Homes*: The Japanese House Dissected," *Japan Forum*, 6:1 (April 1994), 75, also Lancaster, 84-89; and Julia Meech-Pekarik, *Frank Lloyd Wright and The Art of Japan: The Architect's Other Passion*, (NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

[296] For a more detailed discussion of this tendency, see Peter McNeil, "Myths of Modernism: Japanese Architecture, Interior Design and the West c. 1920-1940," *Journal of Design History*, vol 5, no 4 (1992), 281-294.

style (pronounced "show een") was developed in the fourteenth century, and persisted as a popular model for residential design through the nineteenth. In the twentieth century, its popularity was in fact declining, as it was somewhat ironically being replaced by Western-style homes.[297] Its hallmarks included the use of exposed support beams, sliding interior walls and floor-to-ceiling windows, *tatami* floor mats, a *tokonoma* display alcove, and a general lack of furniture or ornament.

American observers noted several key characteristics of this style they felt they and their colleagues could learn from. The first and most fundamental was efficiency and a lack of ornament. Morse declared, "the Japanese dwelling is in every bone and fibre of its structure honest and our dwellings are not honest."[298] Wright, who generally advocated Japanese simplicity over cluttered late Victorian interiors, similarly praised the Japanese house for its "elimination of the insignificant."[299] Another component was openness and flexibility. Sliding or removable walls could be pushed aside to either expand a room or open the house to the outside, and allow spaces to be used for multiple purposes. A third element was modularity, exemplified by the use of standardized and interchangeable tatami. Every mat in every sho-in house in Japan had the same measurements of approximately three feet by six feet. Homeowners arranged them in

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[297] See Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space and Bourgeois Culture 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Ann Waswo, *Housing in Postwar Japan: A Social History* (NY: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

[298] Quoted in Nute, 75.

[299] quoted in Lancaster, 88, See also Meech-Pekarik, 263-270.

various patterns to create rooms of differing sizes to suit the requirements of day-to-day living, and the number of mats per room became a standard measure of interior space.[300]

Figure 11: A typical sho-in style interior with walls removed. Tenryu-ji temple in Kyoto, 2008. Source: author's collection

Interest in Japanese architecture waned within the architectural community between the World Wars, but revived in the aftermath of World War II. In their discussions of Japanese design, postwar American experts often followed the example of their predecessors, referring to sho-in simply as "Japanese architecture" and admiring its simplicity, openness and modularity. All three elements also proved to fit in well with shibui ideals. A 1956 article in *Holiday* magazine, written by industrial designer George

[300] see Nute; and Lancaster , ch's 9 & 11.

Nelson succinctly lays out the mid-century re-interpretation of sho-in design. He first dismissed “Gilbert and Sullivan” stereotypes to declare, “the Japanese house no longer looks like a toy, but seems a more remarkably provocative solution to many problems architects are trying to work out today.”[301] He next echoed earlier designers by contrasting the cramped cluttered feeling of many American homes, particularly in urban areas, with the openness of design found in traditional Japanese houses, with their post and beam construction that allowed free passage from one room into the next. He then added the shibui claim that the Japanese better appreciated nature, evident in the ways in which sho-in style appeared to value the simple beauty of the house’s natural building materials, like its polished wood framing structure.[302] In its entirety, the Japanese house provided modern efficiency and styling, while remaining true to older notions of an almost spiritual respect for the natural world.

One significant difference between American observers’ prewar and postwar appreciation for Japanese architecture was that 1950s design experts discovered similarities between its principles and those of modernist designs that had emerged since the turn of the century. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the rise of the “International School,” a style of building that eschewed unnecessary ornament and emphasized functionality. Characterized by the work of French architect Le Corbusier and German architect Mies van der Rohe, it often featured exteriors composed of efficient grid-patterned window walls with modularly apportioned space on the inside. American

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[301] George Nelson, “The Japanese House” in *Problems of Design* (NY: Whitney Library of Design, 1974), 127-128.

[302] *ibid.*, 128-131.

architects took note of the fact that, despite their centuries-old influences, traditional Japanese houses shared these characteristics with the newer European styles. In 1963, architectural historian Clay Lancaster observed the most common example of modern building, the skyscraper, finding that its features “are related to Far Eastern architecture rather than traditional Western architecture.” He drew attention to most skyscrapers’ lack of weight-bearing walls and the presence of flexible interior partitions, also found in sho-in houses.[303]

In the early 1950s, John D. Rockefeller III, then president of New York’s Japan Society, wanted to convey all of these ideas to a wider audience, as well as promote cross-cultural understanding between the U.S. and Japan. He took a cue from earlier World’s Fairs, and decided to create a public exhibit of a Japanese house. Knowing that the Museum of Modern Art had already sponsored two displays of model homes in its garden, he took his idea to curator Arthur Drexler (not coincidentally a friend of George Nelson), who readily agreed that the next house in the series should be Japanese. The two traveled to Japan, where they received financial support from numerous corporate donors, their biggest sponsor being Chikao Honda, president of the widely circulated Mainichi Newspaper. During the process of fundraising, they formed the Special Rockefeller Architectural Committee. Its members concurred with earlier designers that sho-in would be the best style to favorably represent Japanese culture, but specifically noted its historical context as the style preferred by samurai. They then selected Junzo Yoshimura

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[303] Lancaster, 172.

of the Tokyo Art College as chief architect.[304] The house was constructed in Nagoya, and later disassembled into 736 meticulously labeled crates for shipment to New York in the spring of 1954.

The exhibit opened on June 20 to over 1200 visitors. Each paid an extra 60 cents admission, then removed their shoes and toured the house in complimentary slippers, so as not to damage the rice straw tatami.[305] In the pamphlet they received upon entering, Drexler described the resemblance between modern architecture and Japanese design, praising both for their ingenious efficiency and functionality. He drew attention to the retractable walls that provided flexible interior space and integration with the garden, and pointed out that the house had an uncluttered look because both decorative elements and furniture were integrated into its structure.[306] If guests wished to learn more, they could purchase a copy of Drexler's *The Architecture of Japan* at the museum gift shop, which elaborated these concepts, and featured photographs that Drexler had taken while visiting Japan with Rockefeller, showing details of famous buildings.[307]

Reviews of the exhibit tended to reiterate the ideas Drexler presented in his pamphlet and book about the similarities between Japanese and modernist design. One

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[304] For a brief history of the planning and sponsorship of the MoMA Japanese house, see *Bulletin of The America-Japan Society*, July-Aug 1954, Museum of Modern Art Public Information Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frames 628-631.

[305] Paul V. Beckly, "Japanese House Here in Crates" *New York Herald Tribune*, Mar 16, 1954, MoMA Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5074, frame523; Margaret Parton "Japanese Home Seen at Museum" *New York Herald Tribune*, Jun 21, 1954, MoMA Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 530.

[306] The text of this pamphlet was reprinted in *Bulletin of The America-Japan Society*, July-Aug 1954, MoMA Public Info, Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frames 626-628.

[307] Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan* (NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955).

journalist remarked that the house "gave [her] the feeling [she] might be looking at an American home of the future."[308] In a *New Yorker* essay, cultural critic Lewis Mumford discussed the similarities between the house and the designs of Wright and Mies. He noted the modernist modularity of tatami, and laid out several lessons that he felt Americans should learn from Japanese architecture. The first was its "associa[tion of] purification and cleanliness with beauty." Subtle decorative elements could be derived from "changes in the color and texture of the surfaces" of the wood used in constructing the house, instead of from added ornament.[309] The second lesson was "how much beauty can be achieved merely by quiet repose, by selection and elimination, by stripping every human requirement down to its essentials, " as Japanese houses rejected any unnecessary elements that would complicate the lives of their inhabitants. [310] The last was that "no building is aesthetically finished until" the visitor can look from "the interior outward and back again," as open construction allowed for the observation of nature without having to leave the house.[311]

However, in the postwar atmosphere of material abundance, not every visitor agreed on the house's shibui merits of simplicity and functionality. Some local newspaper columnists who visited the exhibit passed on portions of the museum's official message to their readers -- especially the resemblance to modernism and the lack of

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[308] Nancy Grace, "Japanese House," *The Courier-Journal Louisville*, July 21, 1954, MoMA Srapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 543.

[309] Lewis Mumford "Windows and Gardens" *The New Yorker* Oct 2, 1954, 122.

[310] *ibid.*,123.

[311] *ibid.*, 129.

clutter -- but many seemed to take a far greater interest in the fact that visitors had to remove their shoes before entering. One columnist from Hartford, Connecticut directly contradicted the museum's pamphlet, declaring, "it seemed to me that the spirit of this Japanese house was as different from contemporary, Western domestic architecture as chalk from cheese, " and pointed out that modernist architecture has German roots.[312] Other visitors doubted the relevance of Japanese architecture to their own lives, some seeming to forget the pamphlet's explanation that the house was meant to reflect seventeenth century life. One complained that there was no place to put a TV.[313] A Washington D.C. columnist remarked he could never live without modern plumbing and kitchen appliances.[314] Another visitor seemed to prefer cluttered spaces to clean and empty ones, reportedly asking a museum employee "'Where is the television set, the radio, record player and records? The shelves of books? The piles of magazines and newspapers that flood in on every mail? Where is the desk, the piano, children's toys, hobby junk, tropical fish, model planes, butterfly collection, oil paints, dolls' clothes, tennis rackets, fishing poles, and golf clubs?'"[315] Few were willing to give up the convenience of appliances or comforts of consumer goods in favor what they perceived as a more austere form of living.

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[312] T.H. Parker, "West 54th Meet East," *Hartford Courant*, Jul 4, 1954, MoMA Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 541.

[313] *ibid.*

[314] Tom Donnelly, "Pardon Me While I Push This Wall Away," *Washington D.C. News*, July 6, 1954, MoMA Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 541.

[315] Betty Pepis, "Japanese House Gets Praise Here," *The New York Times*, Aug 9,1954 MoMA Scrapbook, reel 5073, frame 535.

Nonetheless, tourists' curiosity to see the house made it so popular that the museum reopened the exhibit the next summer. At the end of its second season, MoMA agreed to dismantle and ship the house to Philadelphia to be reassembled in Fairmount Park, where it remains today.[316] By the time it left New York, it had attracted over 50,000 visitors and garnered nationwide press coverage. [317] Clay Lancaster compared its impact to the turn-of-the-century exhibitions, but claimed that in this case the house's influence was greatly increased by advances in transportation and communication. [318] As a result, it became the most successful display to promote Japanese architecture to the American public.

At the time that the exhibit opened, some homeowners had already begun to integrate Japanese features into the design of their houses. *Life* magazine observed in 1951 "elements of Japanese home design… are having their impact on the West's modern architecture." The article mentioned features of the American home like all-purpose rooms, indoor-outdoor living rooms, and exposed wood surfaces that were "like the functional simplicity of their whole design, old ideas in Japan, newly fashionable in the U.S."[319]But this is hardly to say that homebuilders were directly copying the sho-in style. Architectural historian Myungkee Min offers three useful categories to describe

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[316] see MoMA Scrapbook, reel 5073, frames 661 & 693; also The Japanese House and Garden website at http://www.shofuso.com.

[317] figure quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct 15, 1954, MoMA Public Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 547.

[318] Lancaster, 171.

[319] "A Style of Home Adapted by West," *Life,* Dec. 31, 1951, 61.

how Americans have adapted Japanese design over the years: by exact imitation, by incorporating individual elements, and by borrowing underlying principles.[320] While some Victorians had favored the former strategy, in the postwar era, the latter two were far more common. In 1960, a *New York Times* reporter commented that the current Japanese influence on American homes was "subtle" and pointed to such features as "airy, graceful building contours, the occasional use of stilts" and "exotic rooflines."[321] A contributor to *House Beautiful* magazine also noted "our preoccupation with the exotic aspects of Japanese architecture is beginning to fade and … some more general appreciation of the lessons of Japanese architecture, as they may apply to our way of living, is replacing it."[322]In other words, many Americans wished to borrow from Japan the principles of simplicity, efficiency and openness, while still leaving room for the television set.

The first houses to follow this plan appeared on the West Coast, where, in some respects, the trend seemed almost inevitable. The climates of central Japan and the Pacific Northwest are similar in average temperature and rainfall, making the same building styles appropriate to both regions. At the same time, Japanese immigrants had maintained a presence on the West Coast for decades, exerting a greater cultural influence there than they had anywhere else in the country. By 1960, homes adhering to

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[320] Myungkee Min, "Japanese/American Architecture: A Century of Cultural Exchange," Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1999, 274.

[321] "Jersey Home's Octagonal Rooms Lend Atmosphere of The Exotic," *The New York Times,* May 8, 1960, R1.

[322] Curtis Besinger, "Lessons We Are Learning From Japan," *House Beautiful*, Sept. 1960, 121.

the principles of Japanese design had become a common sight in Washington, Oregon and California. When the American Institute of Architects announced the winners of their biennial Western Home Awards in 1959, they pointed out the latest local trends in design, some of which were also features of the MoMA house. These included the elimination of "unneeded posts and walls" to provide more openness, and closer integration with the surrounding gardens.[323] In fact, flipping through the pages of *Sunset* Magazine (the competition's co-sponsor) for that year reveals a number of West Coast homes that follow Japanese design patterns. Most lacked attic or basement, relied on heavy post and beam construction, and featured windows integrated into the house as walls.[324]

Although it was not as widespread, sho-in design influence could also be found in houses in the Midwest and Northeast. Some homebuilders were motivated by practical concerns, and employed Japanese building techniques because of their efficiency and cost effectiveness. For instance, in the first summer of the MoMA exhibit, the Frazel family of Wayne, Illinois moved into their new house. They chose to build Japanese-style natural wood interiors in order to avoid continuous polishing, repainting or repapering, claiming that "by use of natural textures, upkeep and maintenance are practically eliminated."[325]In 1958, Norman F. Carver of Kalamazoo, Michigan was inspired in the design of his house after visiting Japan on a Fulbright Fellowship. He found that the Japanese traditions of

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[323] "Announcing The Award Winners of The Second Biennial round of the American Institute of Architects- Sunset Magazine Western Home Awards," *Sunset*, Sept. 1959, 65.

[324] For a particular example of the latter see the AIA award winning house featured on page 75 of the same issue.

[325] Elizabeth Rannells, "The Japanese Touch in A Rural Home," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1954, C24.

using open post and beam construction and incorporating furniture into the structure of the room helped him save money on both labor and materials.[326] A Chicago area architect, Robert Tyler Lee, designed a summer house with sliding screens just inside the windows, because they "provi[ded] wonderful light control and guarantee[ed] complete privacy when it is desired." Shutting the panels in the off-season also hid the contents of the house, which could discourage potential thieves.[327]

For those who prized efficiency even more than the Frazels, Japanese design also came in pre-packaged form. Various tract housing development companies created suburban communities that offered Japanese features in some of their models.[328] In 1960, New York imports retailer Charles E. Gracie and Son offered a pre-fabricated teahouse. Designed by a Japanese artist, and constructed mostly out of cedar, the structure cost $8,000, and buyers were asked to wait six months for delivery.[329] Yet despite, or perhaps because of, their machine-age mass-produced nature, promoters of these houses insisted that their traditional Japanese aesthetics offered the inhabitants a feeling of timeless tranquility. After visiting the store display model of the prefab teahouse, a *New York Times* reporter commented that it "today symbolizes for many

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[326] Cynthia Kellogg, "Translated from The Japanese," *The New York Times*, Feb 23, 1958, SM48.

[327] Pauline Graves, "Try This For A Unique Vacation House," *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 1963, SW18.

[328] see for examples "Long Island Home Blends Oriental Styling with Contemporary Open Plan" *New York Times*, Jun 22, 1958, R1 and "Shows Ranch Home in Japan Motif," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept 15, 1962.

[329] "Samurai's Meeting Place Imported For Sale Here," *The New York Times,* Oct 7, 1960, 39; According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Inflation Caluclator, http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl, the house would have cost $58,564.05 in 2010. Unfortunately, figures on how many pre-fab teahouses actually sold are unavailable.

Americans utter serenity in a shelter."[330] The developer for Cherry Hill, an upscale Chicago area suburban tract-housing community, claimed his "shibui" model "gives you a feeling of serene tranquil calmness, with its lovely Japanese settings," because "in the fast-paced world in which we now live, it is hard for a person to relax."[331] Like Stout's home, these houses offer examples of how Americans decided to use Japanese design to incorporate postwar modern convenience with a simultaneous escape from the often-stressful conditions that made it possible.

Running parallel to the professional interest in residential architectural design was the revival of Japanese gardens. In this instance as well, Americans could view displays at museums and exhibitions. The MoMA Japanese house exhibit included a garden, designed by landscape architect David Engel that did not receive as much press attention as the house.[332] A number of large cities also resurrected their Japanese gardens that had been constructed before World War II. San Francisco had maintained its Japanese tea garden in Golden Gate Park since the Midwinter Exposition of 1894. The city briefly renamed it the "Oriental" tea garden during the War; in the 1950s it reverted to its original appellation and was once again a popular destination for family outings.[333] The

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[330] *ibid.*

[331] "4 Model Homes in Settings That Fit Imported Names," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 30, 1962, N10.

[332] Engel admired his finished product so much that he even took the stones from the garden back to his New Jersey residence following the exhibit. "Precious Stones from Japan Will Adorn Princeton Pond." *Trenton N.J. Times*, Aug 8, 1958 and "Japanese Stones to Adorn Garden Near Princeton," *Princeton Packet*, Aug 8, 1958, Museum of Modern Art Public Information Scrapbooks microfilm, reel 5073, frame 723.

[333] "In Golden Gate Park, Cherry Trees Are Ready to Blossom," *Sunset*, March 1959, 3.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) featured a Japanese style garden that was originally constructed 1914. In 1960, it reopened its wooden Shinto shrine that had burned down in 1938, possibly a victim of an anti-Japanese arsonist. [334] In Seattle, in 1957, the University of Washington Arboretum began plans for a three-acre public Japanese garden. Originally proposed in 1937, it had been put on hold once war was declared.[335]

Completely new gardens also opened, and the most notorious was the BBG's replica of the Ryoanji temple rock garden in the summer of 1963. The exhibit consisted of fifteen granite rocks arranged in an asymmetrical clustered pattern, within a tennis court-sized courtyard, surrounded by white gravel. (In one of the more amusing twists of the exhibit, the most authentically "Japanese looking" gravel that the Garden could find was poultry grit from North Carolina.[336]) The gravel was then raked on a daily basis – by an African-American groundskeeper designated as a "monk" -- to resemble the wave patterns of a river flowing around the rocks in a technique known as *karesansui*. Visitors were asked to pay twenty-five cents admission and don paper slippers before stepping out on an elaborately constructed viewing platform, where they could ask questions of female interpreters from Japan, typically art students studying in Manhattan, who dressed in

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[334] "The New Harvest Shrine" in Brooklyn Botanic Garden report "The First 50 Years," for more information on the original fire see1938 Annual Report of the BBG, 24-25, both from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Library Collection, Brooklyn, New York.

[335] "Seattle's Japanese Garden," *Ikebana International Magazine*, Fall 1960, 52, National Arboretum Library Collection, Washington D.C.

[336] "Garden?" *The New Yorker*, Sept 7, 1963, 28.

kimono to help create an air of tradition.[337] In the summer it opened, 24, 236 guests visited the garden. The following year it proved only slightly less popular, receiving 20,066 visitors.[338]

Figure 12: The original Ryoanji garden in Kyoto, 2008. Source: author's collection

The idea for the exhibit began when George S. Avery, the BBG's director, visited the original Ryoanji temple with his wife in 1960.[339] With motives similar to those of Rockefeller and Drexler, he decided to recreate the garden in New York to help expand

[337] interview with Elizabeth Scholtz, July 15, 2008, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn, NY. According to Ms. Scholtz, most of these interpreters were visiting the United States as art students at the Brooklyn museum, and had varying degrees of English proficiency.

[338] "Ryoanji Stone Garden," in Brooklyn Botanic Garden Report 1961-1964, 37, BBG library collection.

[339] *ibid.*

Americans' cultural horizons and improve their understanding of Japanese culture. He hired Takuma P. Tono, a Japanese landscape architect who had taught at Columbia, as a consultant on the project to oversee plans and construction.[340] Avery and Tono also convinced their mutual friend Alden Dow, of Dow Chemical, to help sponsor the project. Dow had recently toured Japan himself, and was excited at the prospect of helping to further the promotion of Japanese arts in the U.S.[341] Further assistance came from the members of the BBG, who were asked to scour their neighborhoods for the perfect stones fitting the color description and dimensions of the rocks in the original Ryoanji.[342]

Once their efforts came to fruition and the exhibit was completed, Avery told the *New York Times* that he hoped it would inspire visitors to create their own gardens, on the grounds that "Japanese garden concepts, which started independently from ours, bring a fresh viewpoint to American gardening."[343]But while it exhibited fifteenth century techniques, like the MoMA house, the garden was meant to exemplify the values of modern design. The brochure for the exhibit compared it to an abstract painting or modernist symphony, claiming, "because simplicity is the key to the design, this type of

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[340] "A Quiet Place: Japanese Stone Garden at the Port of New York," *Via the Port of New York*, circa 1963, date unkown, BBG library collection.

[341] interview with Elizabeth Scholtz, July 15, 2008.

[342] George Avery to "Dear Member," July 1961, BBG library collection.

[343] Susan E. Sargoy, "Stone Garden to Be Dedicated in Brooklyn," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1963, 119.

garden makes a strong appeal to contemporary taste," adding "[though the garden was] created by unknown artists and nearly 500 years old, it is as modern as tomorrow."[344]

Public reaction, however, did not always seem as enthusiastic about the garden. Some guests did appreciate the simple and subtle beauty of precisely arranged stones; one female visitor described it as a Japanese Mona Lisa.[345] *Newsweek* extended the comparison, noting that those who attended the formal opening ceremony "debated the mysteries of the garden like art students puzzling over the Gioconda smile." However, few subsequent visitors seemed eager to embrace the extreme foreignness of the Japanese rock garden. A Brooklyn housewife reportedly wondered, "if it's a garden, where are all the flowers?… and what are all those stones doing here?"[346] Elizabeth Scholtz, the BBG's Director of Adult Education at the time, remembered that while some guests would sit and mediate for long periods of time, more would remark: "it's just a lot of sand," or "why did I have to pay extra to see this stupid thing?" She added that often, by the end of the day, carelessly discarded paper slippers littered the exhibit.[347]

While many Americans failed to appreciate the unfamiliar, abstract nature of Ryoanji, landscape designers of the time frequently borrowed more typically American-looking elements from Japan. They admired Japanese gardens primarily for the ways in which they utilized, but respected, the natural world. David Engel, probably the strongest

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[344] Ryoanji Temple Stone Garden brochure, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1963, BBG library collection.

[345] "Zen Grows in Brooklyn," *Newsweek*, June 10, 1963, 69.

[346] *ibid.*

[347] interview with Elizabeth Scholtz, July 15, 2008.

American proponent of Japanese gardens in the postwar era, published a thoroughly illustrated guide to Japanese garden techniques that praised their "naturalness, strength, simplicity, humor, and human warmth. [The Japanese garden's] elements are arranged to convey the feeling of the partnership of nature and art. In effect, the symbolism is that of man and nature in a pact of friendship, sealing it, as it were, with a hearty handshake."[348] The Japanese garden succeeded in directing and cultivating nature without necessarily taming or subduing it. In contrast, Western gardens, he argued, often forced nature into an overly contrived arrangement. Osamu Mori, head of the architecture department at the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute in Japan, agreed. In his first book written for an American audience, he explained that the fundamental philosophy behind Japanese gardens "comes from the inherent view of nature of the Japanese people themselves – to see nature at its roots and take only the most intrinsic out of it. In thus abstracting nature, there have been a set of tacit rules and agreements,"[349] to ensure that it was not overly confined or restricted.

However, both authors also offered a word of caution to their readers before they began to plan their Japanese gardens. They criticized the practice of direct imitation, encouraging gardeners to instead apply underlying principles, and be personally creative with plant materials native to their local climate. Mori complained about the haphazard use he had witnessed of "glaring red bridges, grotesque dwarfed pine-trees, out of place

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[348] David H. Engel, *Japanese Gardens for Today* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle & Co., 1959), 6.

[349] Osamu Mori, *Typical Japanese Gardens* (Tokyo: Shibata Publishing Co., 1962), 6.

stone lanterns and *torii* gates."[350] He concluded his book with the admonition: "The fact should always be remembered that any 'imitation-for-imitation's sake will never do in the creation of true Japanese gardens in Western countries. Simply discard all that cannot be copied in foreign countries and try to grasp the 'spirit' rather than the 'physical

Figure 13: Garden at Kyoto Imperial Palace, 2008. Source: author's collection

appearance' of Japanese gardens. This way and only in this way, Japanese gardens will be a true success in Western countries."[351] Like houses that accommodated modern convenience, gardens could exhibit Japanese inspiration, but should maintain the parameters of American climates and property lines.

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[350] *ibid.,* 8.

[351] *ibid.*, 155.

Again, California proved fertile ground for Japanese influences. In 1959, *Sunset* ran a six-page photo essay of professionally designed American gardens that resembled gardens in Japan, with pictures placed side by side for comparison. In some cases, the magazine admitted, the similarities might have been coincidental, as designers did not consciously intend to borrow from Japan. Nonetheless, the resemblance is striking, as American landscapers employed such typical Japanese elements as bamboo groves, miniature waterfalls, stepping stones, entry gates and gravel surfaces.[352] In another issue, the magazine featured the garden of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Belshore of Carmel, California, who had asked designers to create a Japanese garden around an old pine tree in their yard.[353] A third article showed a spacious garden in Sausalito with winding stone paths, and another in San Francisco that exhibited nature in a "handkerchief size" plot.[354] These types of designs soon spread beyond the West Coast. In 1959, *Flower Grower* Magazine observed, "the Japanese influence in American gardens" was "gradually moving eastward."[355] Indeed, in the late 1950s and early 1960s flower shows in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia featured model Japanese gardens.[356] In 1961, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Mary Merryfield commented on the large number of artists and

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[352] "How Western and Japanese Landscape Designers See Eye to Eye," *Sunset,* May 1959, 106-111.

[353] "Intimate Garden… in the Japanese Manner," *Sunset*, Jan 1955, 100.

[354] "Gardens in The Japanese Manner," *Sunset*, May 1962, 118-123.

[355] "The Japanese Influence in American Gardens," *Flower Grower*, Nov 1959, 29.

[356] "New York Flower Show Preview," *The New York Times,* Feb 23, 1958, X41; "World Gardens Imported for Chicago Flower Show," *Chicago Daily Tribune* Jan 8, 1961, SB and "Flower Shows Start This Week," *The New York Times*, Mar 4, 1962, 127.

professionals in the Lincoln Park neighborhood who had planted Japanese gardens outside their homes.[357]

By this point, the trend had firmly taken hold as across the country, as American design professionals took inspiration from Japanese principles in the gardens and houses they created. They praised traditional models like the MoMA house or Ryoanji for their shibui attributes, finding that several characteristics of Japanese design fit well with modernist values of efficiency and economy, including flexibility of space and lack of unnecessary ornament. At the same time, Japanese design features could also transform the home into a refuge from the bustling modern world by providing a greater sense of harmony with nature. However, not every American homeowner wanted to escape the machine age entirely. In some cases, like tract housing, Japanese design itself was mass-produced. Even more common however, was the desire to keep appliances and a comfortable level of clutter, instead of embracing the sparseness of the museum model sho-in style home. In many cases, this preference led homeowners to dismiss Japanese design outright. But others, especially those who possessed both the resources to hire professionals and the desire to follow the latest design theories, chose to draw up plans according to underlying Japanese principles, or incorporate select borrowed elements into their houses and gardens. The result was a new fashion in residential design that simultaneously evoked traditional Japanese and contemporary American aesthetics, modernity and tradition, as it spread up and down the West Coast, and then to affluent suburbs throughout the nation.

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[357] Mary Merryfield, "City Gardens Import Illusion," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 21, 1961, F7.

Japanese Aesthetics and The American Homemaker

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the thoughts and actions of design professionals, but the appreciation for Japanese aesthetics was not limited to their circles. In many instances homemakers who could not afford to hire an architect or gardener, but wanted to look like they could, decided to add Japanese touches to their houses. Unable to exert any influence over the structural design of the house they had purchased, they could nevertheless use Japanese motifs either in planting their gardens or furnishing and decorating interior rooms. Some undoubtedly took experts' shibui pronouncements to heart, and used Japanese design in an effort to combine the modernist and the spiritual. But for others, it was the side effect of shibui that held greater importance: its role as a marker of a specific fashionable and refined taste.

Like the practice of architectural design, there was also historical precedent for the display of Japanese objects in the American home. As part of the same movement, wealthy Americans hung lanterns from their parlor ceilings, decorated their walls with brush painting, fans, and oriental print wallpaper, and entertained their friends with china sets imported from East Asia. Advice magazines of the time praised "The Japanese Taste," claiming that it reflected important universal values. Paintings depicting supposedly typical Japanese subjects like flowers and birds were meant to enhance their owners' appreciation of nature. Similarly, the attention to balance, harmony and simplicity found in most Japanese objects d'art was assumed to convey a lack of ostentation and a level of honestly. For turn of the century Americans, the display of

these items in the home came to signify not only worldliness and refinement, but also good moral character.[358]

A number of similarities existed between this earlier trends and the one that took place following World War II. One was that many homemakers learned about it by reading women's magazines. This particular publishing genre reached its peak in U.S. circulation in the 1950s. Since prevailing gender roles of the era declared that an American woman's place was the home, these large glossy periodicals offered them advice and instruction on almost every aspect of their everyday lives including cooking, relationships, childcare, fashion and of course, housekeeping.[359] In their discussions of home decorating, magazines tended to combine explanations of design principles with practical tips, to enable homemakers create their own professional looking interiors without having to hire an expert. For example, *Sunset's* articles on Japanese gardening often expounded such aesthetic values as asymmetry, orderly spacing, and uniformity of plant types. But they also included direct advice, such as where to place a stone bridge or

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[358] See Lancaster, Ch 6; Jane Converse Brown, "The 'Japanese Taste': Its Role in The Mission of The American Home And In the Family's Presentation of Itself to The Public as Expressed in Published Sources – 1876-1916," PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin Madison, 1987; Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing The East: White Women and American Orientalism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch 1; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

[359] For more on the content and readership of postwar women's magazines see Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mother's World: American Women's Magazines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) and *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and The Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 1998).

which species of pine trees was the most attractive. One article gave readers step-by-step illustrated instructions on how they could build their own bamboo water basin.[360]

House Beautiful '*s* coverage of Japan-inspired gardens followed this same pattern.[361] Two of its articles – one written by David Engel, offering a summary of his book's ideas -- discussed pragmatic techniques that Japanese gardeners used, which American readers could copy with relative ease. For example, they introduced a practice called *sawari* as a way to plan a garden that visually integrated neighbors' trees, creating the optical illusion of a far larger space.[362] But both articles also made a more philosophical point, presenting Japanese gardens as a place to escape the overly mechanized and standardized aspects of industrialized American life. They re-iterated that Japanese gardens were attuned to nature, especially compared to those that followed more European traditions, or contemporary American practices. Landscaper June Meehan claimed that in the West "man is supreme (and busy) and nature has to revolve around him" while "the traditional gardens of Japan are dedicated to nature."[363] Engel added "While we tend to mow lawns, edge garden plots, and remove rocks, aiming at an artificial, man-made-looking smoothness and order… the Japanese garden …is unmown,

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[360] "Gardens in The Japanese Manner,"123, see also "How The Japanese Combine Stone, Water and Planting," *Sunset,* May 1954, 68-9 and "Japan's Family Gardens," *Sunset*, March 1958, 80-95.

[361] June Meehan, "In Japan You Will Find The Most Meaningful Gardens in The World," *House Beautiful*, Jan 1962, 82-83, 120-121 and David Engel, "Translating the Japanese Garden into American Terms" *House Beautiful*, September 1960, 161-163, 191-196.

[362] Meehan, 120; Engel, "Translating the Japanese Garden,"163.

[363] Meehan, 83.

unedged and carefully disordered."[364] Both argued that the American garden had become too neat, too planned, and too divorced from the natural world, while Japanese gardens created a kind of controlled chaos of nature.

Engel's article appeared as part of back-to-back *House Beautiful* issues devoted to the subject of Japanese design, published in the late summer of 1960. The August issue discussed Japanese aesthetics in their original context, echoing many architects' praise for their functionality. Its lead article claimed that the "the Japanese have not distinguished between the beautiful and practical." Even mundane elements of Japanese houses and household objects, it claimed, may have appeared simple at first glance, but actually contained subtle and complex beauty. The Japanese home was meant to reflect "an attitude to beauty which had made of it something to consume and experience every hour of every day."[365] As in modern design, form followed function, but remained pleasing to the eye. Another article re-iterated this theme of subtle elegance, and introduced the concept of "shibui" as "the hidden treasure waiting for discovery, the giant's unused power, the modesty that lets the thing speak for itself, and the creation of wealth by discarding the unnecessary and the trivial."[366]It added, "If we could learn something of the balance between freedom and discipline that gives Japanese art and

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[364] Engel, "Translating the Japanese Garden ,"161.

[365] "What Japan Can Contribute to Your Way of Life," *House Beautiful*, August 1960, 54-56, 119.

[366] Anthony West, "What Japan Has That We May Profitably Borrow," *House Beautiful*, Aug 1960, 118.

design its serenity, the quality of *shibui*, we might find a clue to lead us toward a recapture of the tranquility and harmony that our machines have stolen."[367]

The September issue revisited and expanded upon these concepts as it focused on American uses of Japanese design and defined a new style of home decoration, which it dubbed "the *shibui* syndrome."(In this case, the term "syndrome" referred not to a neurosis, but a unifying principle.) In articles entitled "How to Be *Shibui* with American Things" and "New Home Furnishings with The Shibui Concept of Beauty" the magazine suggested ways to create this overall design effect by using American objects, but following underlying Japanese ideals of taste. The editors explained "we feel the current interest [in the Japanese look] is prompted … by a search for meaning and richness, after the arid sterility of the Modern movement."[368] Shibui took the best aspects of modernism, and endowed it with a degree of human warmth. As in abstract art, its modest, subtle quality meant that there was always more to shibui objects than met the eye. "One of the characteristics of a thing that is *shibui* is that at first glance it looks plain and simple but on subsequent examinations it reveals more and still more."[369] At the same time, it "connotes rather a lack of artifice, a spontaneity,"[370] Instead of the machine produced, precision made chrome of some modern furniture, shibui items were fashioned

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[367] *ibid.*

[368] "How To Be *Shibui* with American Things," *House Beautiful*, Sept 1960, 149.

[369] *ibid.*, 151.

[370] Elizabeth Gordon "New Home Furnishings With The Shibui Concept of Beauty," *House Beautiful*, Sept 1960, 159.

from natural fabrics and wood, reflecting the individual character of the craftsman who made them.

There were other characteristics of shibui design that the magazine did not lay out as explicitly — in particular, its association with affluent taste. For many Americans, home decoration had long been, and continues to be one of the prime markers of social class distinction. In her book on the cultural and political significance of home furnishing, historian Leora Auslander offers an illustrative example of this process at work. Her maternal grandmother wished to identify with the working-class Jewish community in which she had grown up. Even after she and her husband began to earn more money, in her home she employed "aesthetic norms that would probably be described by a sociologist as working class, " which included Formica tables, Lay-Z Boy chairs, and wood veneer bookshelves. Her other grandmother, a more secular Jewish woman, wanted to distance herself from her working-class past. She chose to furnish her home with pieces that conformed to middle-class values of taste, including "simplicity, elegance, quality, purity of line." Her living room included a glass and metal coffee table, Danish modern furniture, and modular shelving units.[371]

The 1959 bestseller, *The Status Seekers,* written by social critic Vance Packard, suggests that Auslander's paternal grandmother had chosen her furniture wisely. In outlining the recognized markers of class standing in postwar America, he included the assertion that working class women liked to decorate with bright colors and a lot of frills, while wealthier women preferred more austere, less-ornamented furnishings, or in *his*

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[371] Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 11-12.

terms "the primly severe" over "the frankly garish."[372] Indeed, *House Beautiful* instructed its readers, "*Shibui* must never be attention-demanding. It must have depths of interest that are so unobtrusive you will almost miss them."[373] It must always be subtle and understated, never flashy, busy, or gaudy; if the use of loud patterns denoted a lower class home, shibui decidedly signified affluence.

The magazine's editors were clear about the fact that they did not want Japanese design to become a fad that just anyone could copy.[374] As a publication directed toward upper middle class women, the suggestions it gave reflected an exclusive taste that connoted an exceptional level of elegance and refinement. However, contemporary observers also noticed that women of lower income levels often did not strictly adhere to the dictates of class "appropriate" taste, as many aspired to appear as if they too possessed money and sophistication. To help create this impression, they read magazines like *House Beautiful* and took their advice, when it was within their budget. In 1950, cultural critic Mary McCarthy noted in *The Reporter* that women of all backgrounds were avidly reading the up-market magazine *Vogue*. "Southern women, Western women with moderate incomes pored over it to pick up 'hints,' carried it with them to the family dressmaker, copied, approximated, with a sense, almost, of pilferage… (What would

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[372] Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers*, ch 5; *American Social Classes in The 1950s: Selections from Vance Packard's* The Status Seekers, ed. by Daniel Horowitz, (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1995), 61-62.

[373] Gordon, 159.

[374] "How To Be *Shibui* with American Things," 149.

Vogue say if it knew?)"[375] The same was almost certainly true for *House Beautiful* as women beyond its stated audience purchased the magazine, discovered the styles it featured, and tried to mimic the tastes of the wealthier homeowners.

It is doubtful, however, that many *House Beautiful* readers of any income level followed its prescriptions to the letter, as such a feat would have proved impossible for the audience of any women's magazine.[376] Its editors had advised readers to concentrate on the underlying ideals of shibui instead of direct imitation, but for many homemakers it was easier and more affordable simply to buy a shibui item like a piece of Japanese art or furniture, rather than to completely redo a whole room according to a "syndrome." In the early 1950s, examples of items often used for this purpose included paper lanterns, painted screens, ceramic tea sets, and lacquer trays.[377] The trend quickly spread to include a variety of furniture types, and in 1958, *The New York Times* declared that "the functional simplicity of Japan[ese furniture] is having a boom here."[378] Its popularity proved so widespread that the crockery and glass industries, according to their trade journal, began to fear that the turn to the "uncluttered" Japanese look would lead Americans to purchase fewer of their products.[379] On the other side of the coin, Japanese

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[375] Mary McCarthy "Up The Ladder from *Charm* to *Vogue,*" *Reporter,* July 18, 1950, reprinted in *Women's Magazines 1940-1960*, 248.

[376] See Walker, *Shaping Our Mother's World*, ch. 5.

[377] Betty Pepis, "From The Far East, " *The New York Times*, Dec 14, 1952, SM 46.

[378] "Japanese Furniture, Fabrics are Shown at Trade Show," *The New York Times*, Jan 15, 1958, 33.

[379] Walter Brower, "The 'Uncluttered Look' And You," *Crockery & Glass Journal,* Aug 1954, MoMA Scrapbook, reel 5023, frame 572.

import stores experienced new levels of success. In 1958, Charles E. Gracie and Sons, who had been operating in Manhattan for over 35 years, moved from a two-storey showroom to a nine-storey shop after business started booming. While their products ranged from inexpensive bamboo chopsticks to luxurious silk wall coverings, their most popular items were mid-priced, and included grass wallpaper and shoji-style room dividers.[380] Other successful New York shops included "Jasmine" and "Shibui," the latter opening soon after the MoMA house exhibit, and gaining customers in the wake of its popularity.[381]

The biggest and most significant Japanese retailer to find a large and eager customer base was New York's Takashimaya. The store was the brainchild of Michio Kushi, a Japanese entrepreneur who had moved to the city ten years earlier to study political science at Columbia University. Having already established several small specialty shops, he and a friend felt the Japanese trend in American home decoration was strong enough to warrant an entire department store filled with Japanese art and furniture. The two men approached the owners of the Japanese chain Takashimaya to open a branch in the United States, and by 1958, construction had begun. The store was meant to be entirely Japanese, in appearance as well as merchandise. Kushi hired Junzo Yoshimura, the designer of the MoMA house, as chief architect to design its two-storey façade. He also employed a staff of twenty young Japanese women in traditional dress to wait on

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[380] Cynthia Kellogg, "Oriental Fad in The House Due to Last," *The New York Times,* Apr 14, 1958, 14.

[381] Gloria Emerson, "Japanese Works on Sale in Profusion Here," *The New York Times*, Oct 24, 1960, 23.

customers. The merchandise itself consisted mostly of home furnishings and art objects – Kushi was adamant that his store did not sell cheap souvenirs – that varied largely in price to accommodate a wide customer base. [382] They ranged from bamboo coasters and chopsticks to *zabuton* pillows and paper bedside lamps to expensive tables and decorated screens.[383] The store also carried miscellaneous items like pearls, kimono, dolls, stationery, garden tools, and Japanese made watches and transistor radios.[384] Kushi's aim was that his store mimic the experience of shopping on Tokyo's Ginza, "offer[ing] some consolation for frustrated citizens who can't make the trip."[385] Later, the store employed the advertising banner: "how to reach Japan by subway."[386]

Jasmine and Shibui similarly offered virtual "trips to Japan,"[387]but not everyone would attest to their authenticity. The *Times'* interior design expert Betty Pepis had already complained that much of the new trend in American furniture did not accurately reflect Japanese design. The most obvious reason why it could not, she pointed out, was that traditional Japanese homes did not include most Western forms of furniture, apart from the cooking table.[388] Most Japanese-American furniture was therefore, by

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[382] Gloria Emerson, "Japanese Specialty Store to Open on Fifth Avenue" *The New York Times*, June 27, 1958, 22.

[383] [Display ad no 6] (Takashimaya Furniture Sale), *The New York Times*, Mar 10, 1960, 8.

[384] [Display ad no 5] (Takashimaya ad), *The New York Times*, Aug 12, 1961, 7.

[385] Emerson, "Japanese Store to Open on Fifth Ave." 22.

[386] [Display ad no 5], *New York Times*, Aug 12, 1961.

[387] Emerson, "Japanese Works on Sale in Profusion Here," 23.

[388] Betty Pepis, "'Tradition' Theme of New Furniture" *The New York Times*, Jan 8, 1954, 24.

necessity, American-style pieces with Japanese motifs grafted on to them. For example, a 1959 advertisement in *Sunset* shows a dining set called “Kyoto,” which featured only the vaguely Japanese touches of a teak patterned plastic tabletop and brass accents on the chairs that resemble bamboo.[389]

Japanese trade representatives, however, seemed eager to encourage rather than correct this trend, especially if it meant American consumers would buy more of their products. In 1954, such efforts were recognized when the National Home Fashion League, Inc. awarded the nation of Japan for “outstanding promotion of home furnishings in this country by a foreign power.”[390] In 1958, the Japan Trade Center, the public relations branch of the Japanese government’s postwar External Trade Recovery Organization, offered an exhibit of new styles of Japan-inspired furniture. The goods on display consisted mostly of American- style items containing elements suggestive of Japan, for instance the “curved arms and back of a chair” were “reminiscent of a pagoda roof.”[391] Additionally, the exhibitors suggested ways in which Americans could adapt actual traditional Japanese items to suit their own needs, such as: “a hibachi (charcoal cooking urn) makes an unusual outdoor grille or can be converted into a planter or umbrella stand. Japanese rice bowls make original finger bowls or soup bowls. And rice containers can be used as catchalls for almost anything.” They might even have spoken to

[389] Virtue Brother Manufacturing Ad, *Sunset*, May 1959, 253.

[390] “Washington HFL Foreign Promotion Award to Japan,” *Retailing Daily*, May 4, 1954, MoMA Scrapbook microfilm, reel 5073, frame 529. Accepting the award on behalf of Japan was Junzo Yoshimura, architect of the MoMA house.

[391] “Japanese Furniture, Fabrics Are Shown at Trade Center,” 33.

Frank Stout, as they also suggested using a large living room cupboard to "house a hi-fi set."[392] A year later, Miya, another New York Japanese specialty store, offered a series of lectures in a similar vein, giving customers tips on how to use Japanese-style screens to hide design flaws in their apartments.[393] In none of these cases was the main concern of either furniture sellers or buyers to use authentic Japanese furniture in an authentically Japanese way, or even to duplicate a "shibui" philosophy. While the Japanese elements were superficial, for many Americans, they provided a relatively easy and practical way to lend their home an air of cosmopolitan taste.

One type of furniture that provides an illustrative case study for this type of American adaptive use is the shoji screen. In the Japanese home, "shoji" refers to the sliding partitions that separate either interior rooms, or the interior from the exterior of the house. They are usually made of wood and rice paper and decorated in a grid pattern with a particular five blocks high to three wide ratio. In America, the term "shoji" often referred to stand-alone folding screens, which may or may not have featured the distinctive grid pattern, typically imitating the appearance, but only occasionally the original purpose, of Japanese shoji.

The shoji screen was one of the first Japan-influenced items to become a common sight in American homes, and its popularity continued to grow throughout the 1950s. In 1960, *The New York Times*' Sunday magazine offered a comical retrospective of interior

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[392] *ibid.* The practice of using Japanese items for purposes other than their original intent had long been common among American women living in Japan. See Sanae Yamazaki, *We Loved Every Minute, or Life in "Western" Japan* (Tokyo: Pacific Stars and Stripes, 1958) section entitled "This Will Make A Nice…" University of Iowa Special Collections, Iowa City, IA.

[393] "Architect to Suggest Touches of the Orient," *The New York Times*, Nov 18, 1959, 44.

design throughout the decade. The article identified 1953 as the year shoji “invad[ed] from the East,” and featured a cartoon of perplexed visitors getting lost in an apartment overrun with folding screens.[394] A 1956 ad for *Esquire* magazine listed the many cutting

Figure 14: Shoji in Japan. Tenryu-ji temple, Kyoto, 2008. Source: author’s collection

edge trends it had suggested to its readers, including the use of shoji screens as room dividers.[395] The next year, a New York shutter store noticed a decline in its sales of Western style window treatments in favor of shoji.[396] By 1959, the term may have even become overused, as Chicago department store Carson Pirie Scott mislabeled a set of

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[394] Cynthia Kellogg, “Home Furnishings Report: Background Story,” Sept 25, 1960, SMA9.

[395] [Display ad 236] (“You Saw It First in Esquire”) *The New York Times*, Sept 26, 1956, 43.

[396] “Shoji Screen’s Popularity,” *The New York Times*, Oct 29, 1957, 26.

wood and fiber screens with no grid pattern as “shoji,” assuming the word applied to any Japanese-inspired screen.[397] In 1960, an Atlanta newspaper declared that shoji “screens… although mentally linked with the land of the cherry blossoms, are standard equipment in the U.S.”[398]By that point, most major department stores, including Bloomingdale’s, Gimbel’s, and Macy’s, carried shoji-style screens, most retailing at a price between thirty and forty dollars for a three panel screen.[399] This would equal a price range of about $220-290 in 2010,[400] making shoji a significant investment, but one that most financially comfortable middle class customers could afford.

The trend took off in large part because homemaking experts suggested shoji screens as the solution to a number of design problems specific to American living spaces, often those found in urban apartments. Despite her distaste for inauthentic Japanese furniture, Betty Pepis suggested her readers use shoji to conceal awkwardly placed windows in their apartments.[401] *The Chicago Tribune* also mentioned some possible uses in the American home, including: separating a living room from a dining room, or baby’s sleeping area from its parents’, serving as “unusual window treatments,”

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[397] [Display ad 33] (Carson Pririe Scott), *The Chicago Daily Tribune* Oct 19, 1959, A7.

[398] Quoted in Earl and Kayle Costenoble, “Other Chapters in Action,” *Ikebana International Magazine*, Spring 1960, 49.

[399] See [Display ad 62] (Bloomingdale’s), *The New York Times*, Sept 21, 1958, 63; [Display ad 19] (Gimbel’s), *The New York Times,* Jul 13 ,1958, 20; and [Display ad 39] (Macy’s) *The New York Times*, Apr 12, 1959, 40.

[400] Figure taken from the Inflation Calculator at http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm, accessed March 16, 2010.

[401] Betty Pepis, “Solving Built-in Problems,” *The New York Times*, Sept 2, 1956, SM26.

and hiding "bad architectural features" or a mess in the corner of the room.[402] According to both articles, shoji screens not only looked attractive and elegant, but proved highly functional as well.

Since they were put to such practical uses, American shoji were often manufactured out of more durable materials than the traditional wood and rice paper. Gracie & Sons specially treated their models to withstand the steam heat used in many New York apartments.[403] The *Tribune* also mentioned that many shoji were made with plastic instead of paper. In some cases these designs discarded shibui restraint in lieu of more colorful American taste, pressing plants and butterflies within the plastic.[404] Other models were made to be more cost efficient. In 1959, Mandel Brothers of Chicago offered one with a wrought iron frame for only $9.99, about one third the price of most screens.[405] A year later, the *New York Times*' Sunday section two featured instructions for do-it-yourself shoji, claiming it could be "built by any handyman." The article suggested using pre-treated wood that would not warp or shrink and translucent white fiberglass, because traditional rice paper " would not be practical on a portable screen since the paper could be very easily torn or punctured."[406] By the end of the decade,

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[402] "Easy Way to Divide: Use Screen," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* May 7, 1959, N_A15.

[403] Kellogg, "Oriental Fad in The House Due To Last," 14.

[404] "Easy Way to Divide: Use Screen," N_A15.

[405] [Display ad no 29] (Mandel Bro's) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 1, 1959, 26.

[406] Bernard Gladstone, "Shoji Screen," *The New York Times*, Aug 28, 1960, X36.

there were in fact few sho-in elements left to American shoji, save its distinctive grid pattern.

To some homemakers, it seems that the grid was what mattered most. Commercial furniture makers incorporated the shoji pattern onto the fronts of chests and wardrobes, the backs of chairs, and as “a veneer pattern on table tops.”[407] One Chicago homemaker decided to place painted strips of wood across her living room windows to create the illusion of shoji.[408] Mrs. H. Licht, also of Chicago, applied black tape to the white doors of her bedroom closet to imitate a shoji pattern.[409] Professional architects had initially praised shoji for its function: providing well-lighted and flexible interior space. High-end tastemakers later praised their form for its understated attractiveness. In these cases, the latter won out in the end. While experts and the well-to-do might be able to enjoy the real thing, others of lesser means could at least suggest their sense of style, by copying its superficial elements.

Another example that was smaller in scale, but nonetheless illustrates the Japanese influence on American furnishings was the *hibachi* grill. In Japan, the hibachi is a charcoal brazier used inside the home for cooking and keeping warm in the winter. Traditionally, they were small and compact, often by necessity as homes made of wood and paper and filled with grass mats could be highly flammable. In the 1950s, Americans

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[407] “Style Trends in Furniture Are on View,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 1958, 27; see also [Display ad 125] (B. Altman & Co.), *The New York Times*, Nov 27, 1960, 125.

[408] Pauline Graves “Make Your Own Outlook,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mar 29, 1959, G32.

[409] “Readers Help Put More Comfort, Charm into Home” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept 10, 1960, N_A3.

decided to adopt this device in their homes, and hibachi -centered cocktail parties became a fashionable trend. The concept was first introduced in 1953 by the high-end magazines *House Beautiful* and *Vogue*. Both publications touted the hibachi party because the novelty of cooking in the living room (hibachi predated the American fondue craze) made for good conversation and would keep parties lively. *Vogue* claimed it worked "better than drink or a dancing poodle, partly because of audience participation." No guest could sit around bored or at a loss for words as they participated in the experience of grilling their own hors d'oeuvres.[410] *House Beautiful* also pointed out how hibachi made food preparation easier, and called hibachi-grilled appetizers "delightfully 'irresponsible,'" as the hostess simply set out ingredients and let the guests do most of the work themselves.[411]

Like other Japanese household items, the hibachi table, as a piece of furniture, was adapted to suit American needs. *House Beautiful* included a photograph showing how, after the party was over, the grill could be removed, and the hole in the center of the table used as an attractive planter.[412] *Vogue* also pointed out "some people have removed the old braziers and put in electric grills, which is *not* on a par with putting a clock in the stomach of the Venus de Milo, but simply means that those not raised in the charcoal tradition can be sure of temperatures and results."[413] Not to mention the fact that it

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[410] "Japanese Hibachi Cooking: New in American Living Rooms," *Vogue*, May1, 1954, 154.

[411] Poppy Cannon, "The Pace Setter House Introduces The Hibachi," *House Beautiful*, Nov 1953, 322.

[412] *ibid.*

[413] "Japanese Hibachi Cooking," 154.

would be far less smoky in an American house with no sliding shoji to open the room to the outdoors. With the new electric models, homemakers could capture the rustic and exotic quality of grilling in the living room without giving up modern convenience.

However, this fad did not last long among America's more upscale urbanites. After 1955, the *Times* hardly mentioned hibachi, suggesting that well-to-do New Yorkers had lost interest. Yet the trend continued to gain traction with *Chicago Tribune* readers, eventually catching on in the Midwest more strongly than it had in the Northeast. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the paper reported on celebrities and other personalities who enjoyed hibachi cooking, and featured a number of recipes.[414] In 1960, cooking columnist Mary Meade suggested that her readers use their hibachi to grill food like shrimp with mushrooms, lean beef or lamb, and fish balls.[415] After the article appeared, friends criticized her for omitting the fact that cocktail franks, a food more commonly associated with lower incomes, were "perfect for hibachi cookery." Meade responded: "I didn't mention cocktail franks… simply because they are what everyone cooks on hibachi," and proceeded to lay out her recipe for "Cocktail Franks Oriental."[416] By this point, hibachi parties were hardly an exclusive elite affair, as it is highly doubtful the editors of *Vogue* would ever have made such a suggestion.

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[414] Patricia Rile, "Her Hobby: Cooking And Serving Foreign Food," *The Chicago Daily Tribune,* Mar 21, 1958, B3; Frieda Zylstra, "Harriet Lee Finds Cooking Exciting, Satisfying Hobby," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 19, 1960, B9; Frieda Zylstra, "His Guests Do The Cooking, " *The Chicago Daily Tribune,* Aug 17, 1962, B9; Mary Meade "Foods To Fix on Hibachi" *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb 3, 1960, B3 and "Fix Franks on The Hibachi" Feb 10, 1960, B3.

[415] Meade, "Foods to Fix on Hibachi," B3.

[416] Meade, "Fix Franks on The Hibachi,"B3.

The case of the hibachi follows the overall patterns of the use of Japanese aesthetics and objects in the postwar American home. Trained experts and tastemakers who contributed to high-end magazines encouraged a revival of japonisme in the shibui style. However, this new “Japanese taste” did not remain exclusive to members of the upper middle class who had the time and money to hire professionals or decorate their homes according to an underlying artistic philosophy. Those on a tighter budget may have had more mundane concerns than finding spiritual harmony, and put practical matters first. They may have discovered that the simple designs of Japanese furnishings proved more cost effective than more ornamented styles, or they appreciated the way a shoji screen provided a relatively inexpensive means to separate the living and dining rooms. In many cases, when Japanese objects failed to suit their needs exactly, they adapted them in ways that did, removing them farther from its origins and often making them more affordable in the process. Other homemakers’ primary desire was to appear more sophisticated, and found they could create such an effect by following Japanese garden tips from a magazine, or purchasing a piece of Japanese-influenced furniture as both suggested refined upper-middle class taste, regardless of how much they cost. For these consumers, their shoji or hibachi’s association with its Japan and the praise design experts gave it mattered less than its association with midtown Manhattan and its fashionable residents.

Conclusion

Throughout this exploration of the Japanese influence on the American home, one theme has remained constant regardless of income level or professional status. Few

Americans tried to copy Japanese design or furnishings exactly, instead searching out an underlying essence that could be applied in new contexts or by altering the original form in a significant way. The popularization of Japan-inspired home decoration seems to demonstrate this practice most clearly. As in the case of bonsai, home furnishings appeared in adapted, more durable, or more comfortable forms that nonetheless remained indicative of shibui taste. In this sense, shoji patterned tables and hibachi stand planters provide an example of how everyday American consumption of foreign culture can reflect Americans' attitudes about nation's position in the postwar world. Although the connection often remained implicit, shibui taste not only signified wealth and fashionability, but encouraged consumers to embrace the culture of a new foreign ally. At the same time, unwillingness to give up clutter, electricity, or legs on chairs suggests a persistent preference for typical American middle class lifestyles, as well as a notion that American ingenuity could improve on foreign traditions. Those who purchased plastic shoji might have thought that maybe Japanese mothers could put up with repairing rice paper screens, but American housewives did not have the time, and why should they have to bother, when more durable materials were so readily available? For many of the non-expert consumers who chose to employ shibui taste, Japanese tradition had its merits, but American ways were still the best.

Architects, landscapers, and other design experts arguably held Japanese design in deeper respect, wishing to follow its underlying ideals as authentically as possible as they borrowed techniques and principles and opposed to outward form. Some professionals, like Drexler and Engle, visited Japan to study its buildings and gardens, and expressed a desire to improve understanding between the two countries. However, in creating their

image of "traditional Japanese design" they tended single out particular schools and techniques, like sho-in, karesansui and sawari, to represent Japan's culture as a whole. Few of their writings acknowledged the presence of newer building forms in Japan, and if they did, it was often to condemn them as products of a lamentable encroaching Westernization. In contrast, the styles they advocated appeared to be timeless traditional forms that either mirrored modernist sensibilities in their efficiency, understatedness and practicality, or fit the post World War II image of a sedate, non-aggressive Japan. This process of selection as to what constituted true Japanese design in the first place raises questions about what these designers were staying authentic to: was is something purely foreign, or did it bear the imprint of American ideals from the beginning? These questions would also prove relevant to American understanding of our next Japanese import: Zen Buddhism.

CHAPTER IV: SATORI IN AMERICA:

THE "ZEN BOOM" OF 1957-1960

On Saturday, April 18, 1959, Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York held a one-day intercollegiate conference entitled "Zen Buddhism in American Culture."[417] Speakers from the fields of academia, art, music, literature and psychiatry had all arrived to offer their thoughts on the subject in student moderated panels. Representatives from The First Zen Institute in New York were on hand to answer questions and demonstrate meditation techniques, and Manhattan department store Takashimaya contributed a display of furnishings to the event to enhance its Japanese atmosphere.[418] All of the elements appeared to be in place for a well-organized intellectual discussion of a relevant contemporary issue.

However, the morning's keynote address – an introduction and overview of the Zen religion by University of Delaware philosophy professor Bernard Phillips – ran long, postponing lunch by over an hour. After lunch, participants attended panels based on the themes of religion, the arts, and psychology, the three fields in which Zen appeared to be

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[417] Records from the college's archives do not reveal the reasons why they decided to host such an event, but it appears that the school gave ongoing support to those interested in Zen outside of the conference. Beginning in 1936, Zen inspired psychologist Erich Fromm conducted research there, and in 1949 hosted a guest lecture by Zen influenced author J.D. Salinger.

[418] "Professor Phillips To Keynote Conference on Zen Buddhism," *The Campus* (student newspaper), April 17, 1959, Sarah Lawrence College Archives, Bronxville, NY.

exerting its greatest influence in the U.S. Modernist composer John Cage, “Beat” poet Gregory Corso, head of the Pace College art department, Peter Fingesten, and psychotherapist Vera Brensen formed the arts panel. Several minor disagreements arose between Brensen and the artists over issues of art and communication, and were only exacerbated when Phillips, who was in the audience, stood up and declared that Corso “needed [psychological] help.” Once this disagreement was resolved, a new, more heated one ensued, with Fingesten on one side and Cage and Corso on the other, over the issue of how well one needed to understand Western culture before exploring Eastern ideas. A student reporter covering the conference for the school newspaper described the scene. “Mrs. Brensen is just trying to find out what’s going on. The audience has stopped trying. It’s just enjoying itself.”[419] Meanwhile, at the religion panel, a “three-cornered tug-of-war” emerged over whether or not Zen should be “all-embracing,” to which the reporter responded “all-embracing what?” She eventually concluded “Seeing Zen discussed by so many experts, one realizes there is no one thing called Zen.”[420]

Both the organization of the conference and the way the panel discussions played out illustrate the space Zen Buddhism came to occupy in American culture in the1950s. It was held in the spring of 1959, at the height of a phenomenon that contemporaries called “The Zen Boom.” Two years earlier, *Time* magazine had proclaimed, “Today a ‘Buddhist boomlet’ is under way in the U.S.” adding, “Increasing numbers of intellectuals – both faddists and serious students – are becoming interested in a form of Japanese Buddhism

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[419] Anita Silvers, “Zen Conference Notes Found At Site Of Unearthed College,” *The Campus*, April 24, 1959,Sarah Lawrence College Archives.

[420] *ibid.*

called Zen."[421] Other mass circulation magazines like *Vogue, Mademoiselle,* and *Harper's Weekly* similarly took note of the trend. While the practice of Zen had been known in U.S. for over half a century, and continues today, at no point before or since did the religion inspire as much interest in the United States as it did over a roughly four-year span in the post World War II era.

The multiple perspectives on Zen offered at Sarah Lawrence provide another dimension to the Americanization of Japanese ideas and culture to create new forms. In a well-known *Chicago Review* article: "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen,"Alan Watts, one of the prominent exponents of the Zen movement, attempted to categorize the various strains of American Zen into three broader types. (It was later summarized in *Time* magazine and reprinted both as a pamphlet and in a collection of Watts' essays.) He described "Beat Zen" as the countercultural, often rebellious form of Zen practiced mostly by young poets and artists (see chapter 5). "Square Zen," by contrast, placed a premium on following rules, required study under a master or *roshi*, and appeared a much closer fit to the shibui ideal. He criticized both versions for making too much "fuss" about rebellion on the one hand, or structure and formal appearance on the other. Real Zen, he argued, was a third way based in spirit, not practice, which could and should be applied in adapted form to postwar American life. [422]

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[421] "Zen," *Time,* Feb 4, 1957, 65.

[422] Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen & Zen," *Chicago Review*, 12:2, summer 1958, 3-11; "Zen: Beat & Square," *Time*, July 21, 1958, 49; *Beat Zen, Square Zen & Zen* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1959); *This is IT and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1958), 77-110.

In exploring the shibui side of the Zen Boom, this chapter will focus on the latter two of Watt's categories. It discusses the followers of "Square Zen," those Americans who took Zen seriously as a religion, studied the sutras, and regularly practiced meditation. It also examines the artists and intellectuals, as well as typical affluent city dwellers and suburbanites, who tried to integrate Watts' "real Zen" less intrusively into their daily lives. Both groups shared an appreciation for Zen's shibui qualities. One of its most prominent characteristics was the fact that it placed spiritual improvement ahead of material gain, a trait that appealed to anti-modernist sensibilities. At the same time, there were other aspects of the centuries-old religion that had much in common with modernist intellectual currents, like scientific and moral relativism or systems theory. This skeptical humanism and its acquired social cachet allowed Zen to tap into major currents in American consciousness in the late 1950s throughout the middle class, and came to occupy a prominent place in the popular imagination of the time.

The Origins of the Zen Community in the U.S.

The first wave of interest in Buddhism in the United States occurred in the final decade of the nineteenth century. It was sparked, in large part, by the World Parliament of Religions, held in conjunction with 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Arranged by a number of scholars from the then-emerging field of comparative religions, it brought together representatives of many faiths, including a Zen delegation.[423] It was led by

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[423] Rick Fields, *How The Swans Came to The Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1981), ch. 7.

noted Zen scholar Shaku Soyen, a member of a group of Zen followers in Japan whose aim was to raise their religion's prestige. In the aftermath of the Meiji restoration, Buddhism was subjected to short lived but intense repression as a "foreign" religion due to its Indian and Chinese origins. One way to revive their faith, these Zen adherents felt, was to demonstrate its appeal to the West at a time when Japan was trying to catch up with the United States and Europe economically and technologically. They decided to present Zen overseas in a particular package, emphasizing characteristics of the sect that made it appear modern or universalist.[424] The image they created would become the basis for the shibui understanding of Zen.

Modernist thought developed in Europe and Anglo-America in the late nineteenth century, when prominent intellectuals questioned key tenets of positivism – the idea that the natural world and human behavior function according to a set of discernable and constant laws -- and turned their gaze toward the uncertain and the irrational.[425] At the turn of the century, some social scientists were also beginning to lean toward "cultural relativism," the idea that the practices of all cultures were valid, and deserved to be understood on equal terms. [426] Capitalizing on these trends, Soyen and his compatriots played up the fact that like most forms of Buddhism, and unlike Christianity and other monotheistic religions, Zen did not subscribe to a notion of a personified God. On the

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[424] Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions,* 33:1 (1993), 1-43.

[425] For a thorough, and now canonical account of this movement, see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (NY: Vintage Books, 1958).

[426] For a concise summary of cultural relativism see Lewis Perry, *Intellectual Life in America* (NY: Franklin Watts, 1984), 319-324.

contrary, in Zen cosmology, no single being existed to exercise control over the universe, or even provide humans with a set of moral laws to follow to avoid eternal damnation. Instead, according to its Zen conception, the world was subject to inexplicable occurrences that were neither good nor bad. Births, deaths, war, peace, disease and good fortune all happened because that was simply the way of things, and Zen thought eschewed the duality that characterized events as either good or evil. This worldview, which denied underlying structure, also tended to reject intellectual theorization and logical thought as imposing a false sense of order. Instead, Zen favored more simple, direct, and spontaneous ways of thinking, focusing on the here and now, which adherents referred to as a clear or “mirror” mind.[427]

However, this is not to imply that Zen envisioned the world as amoral, hopeless chaos. To promote its universalist aspects, Soyen and his colleagues emphasized that Zen further held that every living being and the actions they performed were connected to all others, not only in the sense that actions have consequences, but as part of a deeper unity, which they often referred to as “Buddha” (meaning not the religion’s founder, but a sense of pervading spirit). Adherents could achieve peace by realizing their position in this unity or “one-ness,” through letting go of their individual sense of self and becoming more aware of the universe as a whole and their place within it. In most Buddhist denominations, this involved renouncing attachment to material possessions – which created “illusions” and misdirection from the universe’s true nature -- and becoming

[427] This general overview of Zen belief is constructed from the numerous books on the subject footnoted throughout the chapter. All were written for either European or American audiences, published in English (if not initially then at least in translation), and produced by those who followed Soyen’s school of thought.

more attentive to the natural world and other living things. The Zen sect's preferred technique for achieving this state of mind was meditation, which involved sitting still and quiet for long periods of time, trying to clear the head of ego-centered thoughts and become attuned to unified existence, both external and internal to oneself.

A number of American scholars embraced this version of Zen that appeared so well suited to their own country's intellectual currents. In 1897, journalist Lafcadio Hearn published *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*, which chronicled his experiences with Japanese religion. By the turn of the century, he had established himself one of the most influential chroniclers of Japanese life and culture for Americans, having lived in Japan for seven years, married a Japanese woman, and taken a new Japanese name.[428] In the book, he expressed his admiration for Zen belief, finding it more "capable of being reconciled with the widest expansions of nineteenth century thought" than traditional Christianity. Specifically, he found the concept of ego-created illusions to be highly compatible with recent theories on human sense perception, and felt the absence of any specific moral code in Zen was more amenable to the promotion of tolerance among peoples than Christian doctrine.[429] Around the same time, Paul Carus, a German-American religious scholar and editor of the academic journal *The Monist,* released a series of books on Asian religion through his Open Court Publishing Company, including *The Gospel of Buddha* in 1904. His publications in general sought to uncover what he termed "the

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[428] See Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan's Religions: Shinto and Buddhism*, ed. by Kazumitsu Kato (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1966), introduction.

[429] Lafcadio Hearn, *Gleanings in Buddha Fields: Studies of Hand and Soul in The Far East* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1897), 240, 223-229.

religion of science," a modernist rationalism underlying the various religions of the world, and he found Soyen's Zen to be an ideal fit for his model.[430]

The specific Zen sect to which Soyen subscribed was *Rinzai*, primarily distinguished from the other major Japanese Zen denomination, *soto*, by its use of *koans*. A koan can be a riddle, such as the now famous question "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" Or it can be an anecdote involving the words or actions of a past Zen master that the novice is asked to explain. An example of this second type that was often quoted in 1950s Zen literature involves a story in which a monk asks his master "What is Zen?" to which the master responds "three measures of flax." For many students, discovering a satisfactory answer to a koan can take years of rigorous meditation practice, or *zazen*. Some eventually experience *satori*, the point at which the illogical nature of Zen suddenly makes intuitive sense. In the meantime, they are expected to meet with their roshi on a regular basis and discuss their koan in meetings known as *sanzen*.[431] Traditionally, roshi very rarely had kind words for their pupils during these sessions, and Rinzai students in Japan had a reputation for receiving verbal and physical reprimands.

After Soyen's return to Japan, his student Yeita Sasaki, known to fellow Zen adherents as Sokei-an, stayed behind to continue the mission of spreading Zen's popularity in the U.S., and founded the Buddhist Society of America in New York in

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[430] Sharf, 14-18; See also Martin J. Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha: Paul Carus and the Transformation of Asian Thought" in *The Faces of Buddhism in America,* ed. by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1998), 207-227.

[431] For an excellent synopsis of the koan training process, see "Zen Training" in *Cat's Yawn* (NY: The First Zen Institute of America, 1947), 31-32.

1931.[432] However, it was Soyen's translator, Daisetsu Teitaro (or D.T.) Suzuki, who would have the biggest impact in the United States. Initially inspired to study Zen at a young age by a mathematics teacher in grade school, Suzuki also learned and taught English in his early adulthood.[433] His first opportunity to visit America came when he accompanied Soyen to the World Parliament of Religions. Afterward, Carus hired him to help with translations for Open Court.[434] Over time, Suzuki proved to be an enthusiastic and prolific writer in his own right, eventually publishing over thirty books in English.[435] His early works were mostly translations and explications of traditional Zen writings, but through interactions with American Zen enthusiasts, he eventually developed his own social science-based approach to explaining his religion. [436] The result was an expository style that incorporated sayings and anecdotes from older Japanese texts, but often read more like Western philosophy.[437] He achieved widespread recognition after delivering several series of public seminars at Columbia University throughout the 1950s, which proved to be well attended, [438] especially after they were

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[432] For more on Sokei-an's life see *Holding The Lotus to The Rock: The Autobiography of Sokei-an, America's First Zen Master*, ed. by Michael Hotz (NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002).

[433] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, "Early Memories," manuscript, First Zen Institute of America Archives, New York, NY.

[434] *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed by Masao Abe, (NY: Weatherhill, 1986), 219-220.

[435] *Ibid*., xv.

[436] See the preface to D.T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen,* ed. by Christmas Humphries (London: Rider & Co., 1982).

[437] For more on foreign influences on Suzuki's writing style, see Sharf.

[438] Fields, 196.

mentioned in the "People Are Talking About" section of *Vogue* in January 1957.[439] His popularity continued to increase after The *New Yorker* ran a feature-length profile on his life and works in August, and was given a further boost in 1959 when he appeared in a half-hour long interview on the NBC television network.[440]

Suzuki's growing fame was partly due to his charismatic personality. Almost everyone who discussed their interactions with him spoke of his kindness, humility, and unfailing charm. Alan Watts described him as a "humorous offbeat scholar, and about the most gentle and enlightened person I have ever known."[441] Psychologist Erich Fromm also characterized Suzuki as a vibrant but humble, somewhat non-conformist figure. He claimed, "His love for life, his freedom from selfish desires, his inner joy, his strength… tended to make one stronger, more alive, more concentrated. Yet without ever evoking that kind of awe which the great personality so often does."[442] Some praised Suzuki for making Zen more accessible to an American audience. In *The New Yorker*, Winthrop Sargeant claimed that he wrote in "a language whose clarity might be the envy of many metaphysicians."[443] Catholic monk, religious scholar and author Thomas Merton added "I can venture to say that in Dr. Suzuki, Buddhism finally became for me

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[439] "People Are Talking About," *Vogue*, Jan 15, 1957, 98.

[440] [Display Ad no. 60] *The New York Times*, Apr 1, 1959, 74.

[441] Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography 1915-1965* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1972), 78.

[442] Erich Fromm, "Memories of Dr. D.T. Suzuki," in *A Zen Life*, 128.

[443] Winthrop Sargeant, "Profiles: Great Simplicity," *The New Yorker*, Aug 31, 1957, 36.

completely comprehensible, whereas before it had been a very mysterious and confusing jumble of words, images, doctrines… and so forth."[444]

Yet, at the same time, Suzuki had detractors who held reservations about the message he was delivering, arguing that it was a bad idea to popularize Zen, some on the grounds that it only served to create half-hearted converts.[445] One of his colleagues in Japan complained that Suzuki was telling people "the use of meditation" was "out of date" and "unsuited to the West," and worried that his support for replacing sanzen with more casual conversations would corrupt Rinzai traditions.[446] His biggest critic in this latter regard was Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Suzuki's personal friend of and the wife of Sokei-an, [447] who took over the Buddhist Society of America -- now renamed the First Zen Institute -- after his death in 1945. Throughout her career, she would insist that a student must engage in the rigorous and exacting practice of Zen meditation in order to understand it fully. Born into a wealthy Chicago family, she married attorney Edward Warren Everett in 1917, and first took an interest in Buddhism three years later, as a harried new mother in search of peace in her personal life. In 1932, she left the U.S. to begin traditional style Zen training under Nanshinken roshi in Japan (with the help of a translator), and would continue to divide her time between the two countries for the rest

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[444] Thomas Merton, "D.T. Suzuki: The Man And His Work," in *Zen And The Birds of Appetite,* ed. by the author (NY: New Directions, 1968), 61.

[445] see Sargeant 36; also Alan Watts "The Mind-less" Scholar" in *A Zen Life*, 192.

[446] Ruth Fuller Sasaki to "Everyone," July 5, 1951, First Zen Institute of America Archives, New York.

[447] Some authors speculate that they married to keep Sokei-an from internment, others, like Alan Watts, insist they were actually in love.

of her life. After her husband's death in 1940, she devoted her full efforts to the study and promotion of Zen, and in 1956, she established a Kyoto branch of the First Zen Institute at the Ryosen-an subtemple of the Daitoku-ji complex, providing a venue for Westerners to study Zen in Japan. For administrative purposes, she was ordained as a Zen "priest," in order to serve officially as "abbot" of the temple. As she was the first white person to

Figure 15: Ryosen-an, 2008. Source: author's collection

receive such an honor, the event gained her brief media attention, including a short profile in *Time*. [448]

A friend later reported that her Japanese colleagues at Daitoku-ji complained about the inclusion of a foreign woman in their midst, but later warmed to her once they saw how many new adherents she was attracting to the temple.[449] American observers, in contrast, made little mention of her gender. In fact, despite its association with virile masculine discipline in Japan, in the U.S., Zen attracted fairly equal numbers of male and female adherents, and so it did not seem that strange for a women like Fuller Sasaki to earn the position she did. Minutes of First Zen Institute meetings also reveal that men and women were present in near equal numbers, and the appearance of an article on Zen in *Mademoiselle* magazine suggests that it was a subject of interest for well-to-do young women in the late 1950s. Reasons for its apparent gender neutrality may lie in the fact that a calm veneer and strong spiritual convictions were at the time considered admirable values for both men and women, or it may also stem from women's longstanding active participation in many American religious sects. Other women took leading roles in the promotion of Zen, including Mary Farkas, who ran the New York branch of the Institute when Fuller Sasaki was in Kyoto, and novelist Nancy Wilson Ross. Having first encountered the subject prior to World War II, Wilson Ross devoted much of her energies in the 1950s toward educating others about it. Her most substantial work was the

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[448] Isabel Stirling, *Zen Pioneer: The Life & Works of Ruth Fuller Sasaki* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006) and "The Zen Priest," *Time*, May 26, 1958, 65.

[449] Ruth Stephan, "The Zen Priests and Their Six Persimmons," *Harper's Magazine*, June 1962, 47.

anthology *The World of Zen*, published by Random House in 1960, which featured pieces from authors like Suzuki, Watts and Fuller Sasaki, as well as excerpts from older translated Zen texts, and discussed the influence of Zen belief on Japanese arts.[450]

But unlike Wilson Ross, or her own late husband, Fuller Sasaki did not advocate spreading Zen to the masses. She herself never produced any writing that attempted to explicate Zen to a Western audience; instead she preferred to translate the historical works of masters into English and let them speak for themselves. Later, commenting in his memoirs as her son-in-law, Watts depicted her as the epitome of Square Zen. He felt the texts she created were mainly intended for an elite establishment of scholars to whom he derisively referred as "the in-group of academic Orientalists who, as librarians, philological nit-pickers, and scholarly drudges dissolve all creative interest into acidulated pedantry."[451] When Fuller Sasaki did write for a larger audience, her pamphlets took the form of practical guides to serious study, or critiques of the reception of Zen in the U.S. For example, her "Rinzai Zen Study for Foreigners in Japan," published in 1960, essentially discouraged the faint of heart from engaging in Zen studies by outlining its demanding practices and self-denying lifestyle.[452] She also complained to *Time* that many people who visited her Institute – in either New York or Kyoto -- in the late 1950s were "faddists, or just curious, and Zen is not for them… Zen is not a cult. The problem with Western people is that they want to believe in something and at the

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[450] *The World of Zen: An East- West Anthology,* ed. by Nancy Wilson Ross, (NY: Random House, 1960). See also Donald Keene, "Views from The East," *The New York Times*, Dec 18, 1960, BR6.

[451] Watts, *In My Own Way*, 143.

[452] See reprint in Stirling, 179-246.

same time they want something easy. Zen is a lifetime work of self-discipline and study."[453]

Despite such warnings and admonitions, her centers for the study of Zen did indeed attract a diverse array of visitors. While Fuller Sasaki spent most of the Boom in Japan, the New York branch maintained a healthy core of loyal adherents under Farkas' direction. They ranged in age and background from young single Anglo-Saxon Protestants to middle aged Jews and Germans, and included a Russian immigrant woman in her late sixties.[454] Stephen Tichachek, a carpenter by trade, provides an interesting case of an Institute member. He had worked as a set designer with Farkas' husband, who first brought him to a meditation service. As a longtime sufferer of Parkinson's disease, he was losing his ability to perform his job, and was in search of new meaning in his life. He was so grateful to the Institute for helping him spiritually that one of his last acts before his disease finally took his life in 1961 was to re-paint and plaster the Institute's meditation hall, or *zendo*.[455] However, the majority of Institute visitors were not nearly so dedicated, and it became a common sight to see first time attendees sitting outside in the hall during meditation services so as not to distract others.[456] Others were not so polite. One member reported witnessing "people walking out during the chanting just

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[453] " The Zen Priest," 65.

[454] Tea and Queries Notes, Nov 25, 1962, First Zen Institute Archives, New York.

[455] Zazenkai Meeting Notes, Aug 27, 1961, First Zen Institute Archives, New York.

[456] Zazenkai Meeting Notes, Nov 26, 1962.

doubled up with laughter."[457] While the Institute may have attracted large numbers of curious visitors, its strict traditional practices proved too demanding or foreign for some.

Figure 16: The altar in the zendo at Ryosen-an, 2008. Note the photograph of Ruth Fuller Sasaki to the left. Source: author's collection.

Meanwhile, the Kyoto branch was growing under Fuller Sasaki's direct oversight. In 1957 and 1958, the center expanded physically, adding a new library and zendo.[458] The number of students increased as well, as Ryosen-an grew from hosting several of Fuller Sasaki's personal acquaintances to offering daily meditation services for 15-20 visitors. In 1960, the Institute constructed a temporary dormitory facility called Zuiun-

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[457] Annual Meeting, Nov 25, 1962, First Zen Institute Archives, New York.

[458] Ruth Fuller Sasaki "Letter From Kyoto," *Zen Notes*, March 4, 1957, First Zen Institute, New York.

ken to accommodate the growing number of students.[459] The majority were university professors from both the U.S. and Japan, perhaps attracted to Zen because of

Figure 17: Ryosen-an library, 2008. Source: author's collection.

the emphasis Rinzai places on rigorous individual study, much like academia. In addition, it played host to other students of varied backgrounds, including pianist Walter Nowick, artist Donatienne Lebovich, Dutch novelist Janwillem van de Wetering[460], and a banker

459 Stirling, 113.

460 *ibid*., ch. 5.

couple from Egypt.[461] Its most famous guest was the poet Gary Snyder, who at the time he first arrived was a graduate student in Asian languages at the University of California at Berkeley.[462] After returning to the U.S. in the 1960s, he went on to found the Ring of Bone Zendo in Northern California and work as an environmental activist, but was most well known as the inspiration for Jack Kerouac's fictional character, Japhy Ryder in the novel *The Dharma Bums* (see chapter 5). As in New York, Kyoto members were subject to the Institute's strict traditional style of Zen study, though it did offer some concessions to non-Japanese guests, such as sanzen in English, electricity, indoor plumbing, and Western cuisine. [463] Perhaps as a result of these familiar comforts, Ryosen-an also saw its share of fair-weather adherents. Philip Yampolsky, who worked as the temple's librarian, claimed he met a number of "Zen students of varying sincerity of purpose," and that, "no one lasted very long as a student of Zen."[464] According to Fuller Sasaki, many gave up when faced with the mental and physical strain of culture shock, not to mention

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[461] Ruth Fuller Sasaki, "Letter From Kyoto," *Zen Notes*, Aug 3, 1957. Unfortunately, neither husband nor wife's name are provided.

[462] Stirling, 67.

[463] Gary Snyder, Foreward to Stirling, xii, and Stirling 101.

[464] Philip Yamplonsky "Kyoto, Zen, Snyder" in *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of A Life* ed by Jon Halper (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), 67.

long periods of zazen.[465] Others, she claimed, were lured by the sights of Kyoto and simply wandered off when they got bored with Zen study.[466]

While, according to Snyder, Fuller Sasaki "labored as though her vision held the only possible path that could take genuine Zen to the West,"[467] her son-in-law was developing a very different approach. Born in Kent, England, Alan Watts moved to the United States in 1938 after marrying Ruth's daughter Eleanor.[468] As an ordained Anglican priest, he was attracted to Zen because of his impatience with certain aspects of Christianity. Primarily he felt it was too doctrinaire, and claimed that the commandment, "love the Lord thy God," was in fact impossible, since no human being could forcibly will themselves to feel any emotion, especially love. Zen, in contrast, did not ask anyone to strive for salvation; instead, it rejected the idea of directed effort in a world where things happen as they will, as well as the notion that an isolated individual ego exists to be saved in the first place.[469] As he learned more about Zen, he became more enamored of its concepts of universal unity and non-duality, both of which he felt would inspire human beings to exercise compassion more effectively than Christianity's antiquated commandments, by endowing them with a sense of sympathy and discouraging them

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[465] for an example of one such case, see the conclusion of van de Wetering's *The Empty Mirror: Experiences in A Japanese Zen Monastery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973). In this fictionalized memoir, the author gives up Zen study after he is confounded by his koan, exhausted by monastery routine, and discouraged by the lack of progress he feels he is making.

[466] See Ruth Fuller Sasaki, "Rinzai Zen Study for Foreigners in Japan," 1960, reprinted in Stirling.

[467] Snyder, xiii.

[468] Watts, *In My Own Way*, 136, 336.

[469] Watts, "Zen and Control," in *This is IT*, 61-75.

from passing judgment. By the time the Boom began, Watts had rejected Christianity and its emphasis on a distant otherworldly afterlife outright. Zen, he believed, offered a means to salvation in this world, consisting of a life based on personal serenity, understanding, and well-being.[470]

While some (including biographer Monica Furlong) have speculated that Watts may have married Eleanor Fuller in order to spend more time with her mother discussing Zen, a strong rift developed between them over the issue of formal training and practice. Watts had in fact studied with Sokei-an for about eight months, but found that the experience of koan meditation left him "bored and angry," as well as resentful of the teacher/pupil roles.[471] As he explained in his autobiography:

> so far as I was concerned, the formal study of Zen was "busy behavior." to sit hour after hour and day after day with aching legs, to unravel Hakuin's tricky system of dealing with *koan*, to subsist on tea, pickles and brown rice… was – although good in its own way as learning to sail – not what I needed to know. What I saw in Zen was an intuitive way of understanding the sense of life by getting rid of silly quests and questions.[472]

In other words, the First Zen Institute style of Buddhism was to Watts nothing more than a lot of "fuss." Eventually he would write, "I do not even style myself a Zen Buddhist. For the aspect of Zen in which I am personally interested is nothing that can be

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[470] See Alan Keightley, *Into Every Life A Little Zen Must Fall: A Christian Philosopher Looks to Alan Watts And The East* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986); David K. Clark, *The Pantheism of Alan Watts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978).

[471] Monica Furlong, *Zen Effects: The Life of Alan Watts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986), 76-77.

[472] Watts, *In My Own Way*, 262-263.

organized, taught, transmitted, certified, or wrapped up in any kind of system."[473] His approach to Zen, which most Americans adherents copied, was as a philosophy of life with an emphasis on intuitive understanding and means to connect to true inner emotions. In denying that belief did not require years of difficult training, his version of Zen resembled contemporary self-improvement literature, as it tended to promise a form of do-it-yourself peace of mind. Eventually this stance would lead him to become a longhaired and bearded "New Age" guru of the 1960s and 70s counterculture. But in the 1950s, Watts was still a close-cropped, respectable looking public intellectual, publishing prolifically and lecturing throughout the country on the subject of Zen and its applications to American life.

In 1951, he helped open the short lived American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco, where he and like-minded colleagues taught graduate courses on divers subjects including: Hinduism, Islam, Sanskrit, yoga, and sumi-e brush painting. (It was while he was enrolled in one of Watt's classes that Synder first met Fuller Sasaki).[474] Although he had published his first book on Zen, *The Spirit of Zen* in 1935, when he was only twenty years old, and would later call it "unscholarly" and "misleading", [475] he re-issued it twice with new prefaces in 1954 and 1958.[476] In addition, he released a far lengthier and more scholarly work in 1957 entitled *The Way of Zen*, intended for the more

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[473] Watts, *This is IT*, 79.

[474] Furlong, *Zen Effects,* 136-141.

[475] Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1957), xi.

[476] Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work and Art in The Far East, Third Edition* (NY: Grove Press, 1958).

"advanced student, "[477]as well a collection of more accessible essays, *This is IT,* in 1960. Throughout the decade, he maintained a radio series on KPFA in Berkeley,[478] achieved increasing popularity as a seminar speaker[479] and appeared in his own television mini-series in 1959-60 called "Eastern Wisdom and Modern Life."[480] Like Suzuki and Fuller Sasaki, he too received attention from magazines such as *Time* and *Life.* Over the course of his rise to fame, he insisted, in the style of a great but humble Zen master, that all of his appearances were nothing more than a great "put-on" and referred to himself as a "genuine fake."[481] Nonetheless, his offer of a relatively attainable path to enlightenment, coupled with his articulate speaking and writing skills and personal charisma, gained him a reputation as one of the most knowledgeable and widely read advocates of Zen in the U.S.[482]

By 1960, the mainstream press had essentially ordained Watts, Suzuki and Fuller Sasaki as the American triumvirate of Zen, with journalists calling on each of them for quotations whenever they wanted to write a story relating to the Boom. However, if these three were the main pillars of Zen in the U.S., they provided uneven support. Suzuki promoted a highly intellectual form of Zen, relying strongly on ancient sutras, but

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[477] Watts, *Way of Zen*, xi.

[478] Alan Watts, *Zen and The Beat Way*, adapted and edited by David Cellars and Mark Watts (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1997), vii.

[479] Furlong, *Zen Effects*, 151.

[480] See The Alan Watts Library and Gallery, http://www.alanwatts.com/aw_story.html.

[481] Watts, *In My Own Way*, ch 9.

[482] Furlong, *Zen Effects*, ch 8.

offering explanations in relatively plain English, and encouraging study without necessarily advocating practice. Watts took a step further toward creating a less-tradition bound Zen, claiming study and meditation were about as useful as "legs on a snake."[483] In response, Suzuki criticized him in a Japanese scholarly journal, calling him a "fake," speculating, "he is still young, so if he trained for ten years he would get better… Still, it's probably useless from the start to hope for him to do that."[484] Fuller Sasaki disagreed vehemently with both men on a number of points; her copies of their books in the Ryosen-an library are filled with argumentative marginalia, including a declarative "nonsense!" which appears twice in Watts' *This is IT*.[485] She primarily objected to their belief that anyone could understand Zen only by reading books or talking with experts, without practicing regular koan contemplation. Yet underneath their differences, all three fundamentally agreed that Zen Buddhism offered a forward-looking path to spirituality for postwar Americans, by providing personal insight and serenity.

[483] Alan Watts, *This is IT*, 51.

[484] "Zadankai: Zen no kokusai-sei ni tsuite," *Zen Bunka* 1963, quoted in Shoji Yamada, *Shots in The Dark: Japan, Zen, and The West*, translated by Earl Hartman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 222.

[485] Ruth Fuller Sasaki's annotated personal copies of *This is IT* (Pantheon, 1960) and Suzuki's *The Essence of Buddhism* (Kyoto: Hozoken, 1948) and *Zen & Japanese Culture* (NY: Pantheon, 1959) can still be found in the library at Ryosen-an, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, Japan.

Expanding the Circle: Zen's Appeal to Artists and Intellectuals

While Suzuki's lectures at Columbia were often credited as the immediate catalyst for the Boom, several other factors were at play, spreading Zen's popularity beyond its initial circles. One of these was the United States' postwar relationship with Japan. This situation in part appears ironic, considering that Zen's popularity was in fact on the wane in Japan, due to its association with wartime militarism.[486] Nonetheless, it was through Japan that Americans learned about Zen, as its popularity crested with the same wave of shibui fashion that brought ikebana, bonsai, and shoji screens. In his introduction to *The Way of Zen*, Watts posited that its appeal was "connected, no doubt, with the prevalent enthusiasm for Japanese culture which is one the constructive results of the late war."[487] In writing a book for Zen beginners in the late 1950s, Chinese master Chang Chen-Chi felt obliged to use Japanese terms and names, because Americans were already using them. [488] Even today, while most Americans have at least heard the word "zen," very few would know or use the term *ch'an,* its Chinese equivalent.

At the same time, a number of "pull factors" were at work, in the form of elements in U.S. culture that would make middle class white Americans particularly receptive to Zen beliefs. In some respects, Zen appears unsuited to twentieth century

[486] Peter Berg, "Beating The Drum with Gary," in *Gary Snyder*, 383; "Zensation," *Time*, Feb 23, 1959, 52; "The Real Spirit of Zen?" *Newsweek*, Sept 21, 1959, 121-122.

[487] Watts, *The Way of Zen*, ix.

[488] Chen-Chi Chang, *The Practice of Zen* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1959), xi.

American life, due to its esoteric form of knowledge and demanding practice. In his 1957 *New Yorker* article, Winthrop Sargeant warned readers that Zen "may appear puzzling in the light of Western thinking – or indeed in light of any systematic thinking whatever."[489] Writing about Suzuki's books, Daniel Bronstien of the *Saturday Review* felt it necessary to "warn the reader that unless he is a patient man he may find himself developing an inferiority complex as he reads Dr. Suzuki's exposition of Zen," due to its many "ciphers."[490] Or, as the intellectually curious Israeli premier David ben Gurion more colloquially phrased it to *The New York Times*, "'I don't know… The more I read about [Zen], I can't understand what they want."[491] In fact, most books on Zen began with the disclaimer that the author was about to explain in writing concepts that could not effectively be expressed in words. But they all felt that despite such obstacles, Zen had much to offer mid-twentieth century America, and in keeping with Soyen's precedent, they continued to emphasize those particular characteristics that might resonate with a U.S. audience. In an introduction to a collection of Suzuki's essays on Zen, religious scholar William Barrett argued that its approach to the world was suited to the complex environment of the "modern age," writing that "the very premises of Buddhist thinking… look much closer to what we moderns have to swallow" than traditional Western Christian ideas. [492]

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[489] Sargeant, 42.

[490] Daniel J. Bronstein, "Search for Inner Truth," *The Saturday Review* Nov 16, 1957, 23.

[491] "The Afternoon of A Book Lover," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1960, 19.

[492] William Barrett, Introduction in *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*, ed. by Barrett (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), x.

Without intending to broach the subject of Zen, cultural historian William Graebner's general study of the postwar intellectual climate, *The Age of Doubt,* coincidentally lays out a number of currents in American thought that might have supported a Zen belief system. He argues that many were grappling with a sense of uncertainty in morals, science, arts and philosophy. Even in the realm of the natural sciences, which might have been the last bastion of solid fact, Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle placed limits on humans' abilities to know and quantify the physical world. This "culture of contingency," as Graebner calls it, largely stemmed from the shock and horrors of the recent war, including the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, which seemed to call into doubt everything Americans had known about human nature and reason prior to the war. Watts' *Way of Zen* describes this intellectual atmosphere from a contemporary standpoint when he writes that since the war:

> We find ourselves adrift without landmarks in a universe which more and more resembles the Buddhist principle of the "Great Void." The various wisdoms of the West, religious, philosophical, and scientific, do not offer much guidance in the art of living in such a universe, and we find the prospects of making our way in so trackless an ocean of relativity rather frightening. For we are used to absolutes, to firm principles and laws to which we can cling for spiritual and psychological security.[493]

He went on to argue that since Zen had been grappling for centuries with the question of how to lead an enlightened life in a random universe, it seemed to follow that it held important answers in the postwar intellectual and emotional climate. The Zen idea that

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[493] Watts, *Way of Zen*, x.

the universe is fundamentally unstructured seemed to make more sense in this environment than the concept of a God who was fully in control yet allowed such tragedies to occur. The trauma of war similarly encouraged most intellectuals to abandon the idea that humanity was constantly progressing toward a more perfect state, a notion that Zen, with its acceptance of the universe on its own terms, had long ago rejected. Additionally, Americans felt a desire to leave behind anything that sounded like a dogmatic ideology, fearing it could lead to the kind of extremism that had fueled the conflict, giving Zen's non-doctrinaire approach another advantage over the appeal of traditional Christianity. [494]

At the same time, there were several more positive ideas in circulation that drew educated Americans toward Zen, some of which appeared sympathetic to its principle of underlying unity. One Worldism insisted that human beings from all nations could be united by fundamental commonalities in order to promote world peace. Many postwar thinkers and artists were also attracted to the idea of "systems theory," the concept that both physical scientific processes and the functions of society behave according to the machine-like movements of integrated elements.[495] In addition, according to other scholars as well as Graebner, many postwar Americans found themselves looking inward and turning away from societal improvement.[496] At first, this stance may seem

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[494] William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought And Culture in The 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), ch's 2-3, 6.

[495] Graebner, ch. 4.

[496] *ibid*., ch 5, also T.J. Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in The Age of Cold War* ed. by Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 38-57.

antithetical to the value that Zen places on egoless-ness. However, to many American Zen enthusiasts, the techniques of Rinzai in particular, with their emphasis on individual study and one-on-one consultation with a master, seemed to offer a well-directed path toward personal improvement.

One group who seemed attracted to Zen was modern artists. Composer Jackson MacLow attested that his fellow artists and musicians could always be found in large numbers at Suzuki's lectures.[497] One circle, known as the Northwest school and centered in Seattle, gained a reputation in the late 1950s for the influence of Zen on their work. In fact, the U.S. Information Agency selected their paintings for a goodwill exhibition tour in 1957, on the grounds that they would especially appeal to Asian audiences.[498]

Painter Mark Tobey was considered the founder and elder statesman of the group. Born in 1890 in Wisconsin, he moved to New York as a young man searching for excitement, and soon found himself able to gain commercial work as a portrait painter.[499] But even at this early stage there was something different about his portraits, as he employed overly bright colors and greatly exaggerated features.[500] As he matured he would develop his own style, forming human figures into increasingly abstract shapes until they disappeared altogether in fields of color and crisscrossing lines. Observers

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[497] Jackson MacLow interview with Peter Dickinson, in *Cage Talk: Dialogues with and about John Cage* ed. by Dickinson (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 95.

[498] "Art: Contemporaries Abroad," *Time*, July 22, 1957.

[499] See Arthur L. Dahl, "Mark Tobey, 1890-1976" in *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief* ed .by Dahl (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984), 1-4.

[500] See Eleanor Jewett, "Mark Tobey's Art Makes You Laugh with It or at It," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec 25, 1928, 38 and "Paintings by Tobey Arouse Interest," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* Dec 30, 1928, E4.

labeled this new style "white writing," and pointed out that it derived its origins from Chinese characters. Inspired by the strong influence of Asian culture on life in Seattle,[501] he had traveled to China and Japan in 1934 to study calligraphy. Finding the free flowing Japanese Zen scripts more appealing than the standard Chinese, he tried to duplicate this effect in his painting. The result was series of white squiggles filling his canvases, the invented characters of someone who knew no actual Chinese,[502] or as a *Time* reporter phrased it, "slippery tangles" that look like "a dish of spaghetti."[503]

On his trip to Asia, he spent four months in a Kyoto monastery learning more about Zen. Since he was an artist, the abbot gave him a *sumi* ink painting of a large circle on which to meditate, which he did seemingly to no avail. "Day after day I would look at it," he would later write, "Perhaps I didn't see its aesthetic and missed the fine points of the brush which to a trained Oriental eye would reveal much." However, when he finally left the monastery, he found he saw Japanese art in a new light, realizing for example, that the dragon ceiling painting at Myoshin-ji had "the same rhythmical power of Michelangelo." From this experience he took the lesson that Zen paintings reflected "Simplicity, Directness, and Profundity" through their ability to express complex

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[501] For more on this influence see "Seattle, Where Far East and Northwest Meet," *The New York Times*, May 15, 1960, XX31.

[502] For more on the Asian influence on white writing see, Min-Chih Yao, *The Influence of Chinese and Japanese Calligraphy on Mark Tobey (1890-1976)* (Republic of China: Chinese Materials Center, 1983).

[503] "Art: Seattle Tangler," *Time,* Apr 9, 1951.

emotions and concepts with the use of only a few well-placed lines.[504] Examples of his work that come the closest to incorporating this concept include his "Hollyhocks" series (1953), which are comprised of dots of paint allowed to run down the canvas.

Others include his own sumi ink paintings (most completed in 1957), in which he applied the paint in abstract blotches, zig-zags and splatters. With the appearance of these works, art critics were quick to point to the influence of Zen on his oeuvre, but in 1962 he told an interviewer "in spite of the comments regarding my interest in Zen, it has never been as deep as my interest in the Baha'i Faith."[505] Originating in Persia, Baha'i emerged in the first half of the twentieth century as a "World Religion," one that held universalist beliefs meant to appeal to people of any geographical and spiritual background. Its main principles are unity, humanity, and "progressive revelation," the idea that God is continuously revealing Himself to humankind through the faiths of various religions over time and across the globe. It was these beliefs that had inspired Tobey to become an abstract painter in the first place, as he sought forms of expression that could be comprehended by anyone regardless of language or culture. [506] However, there remains a significant overlap between the Zen and Baha'i worldviews, especially in regard to Baha'i's first two principles, and indeed, many of Tobey's paintings reflected such complementary themes. For instance, his *E Pluribus Unum* (1942) depicts a

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[504] Mark Tobey, "Japanese Traditions in American Art," *College Art Journal,* 1958, reprinted in *Sounds of The Inner Eye: John Cage, Mark Tobey, Morris Graves,* ed. by Wulf Herzogenrath and Andreas Kreul (Bremen: Kunsthalle Bremen, 2002), 157.

[505] Dahl, "The Fragrance of Spirituality: An Appreciation," in *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief*, 34.

[506] William C. Seitz, "Tobey's World View" in *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief*, 13-20.

multitude of human figures combined to form an abstract pattern, illustrating the concept of the many in the one. He depicts anti-materialism in *The Void Devouring The Gadget Era* (1942) – the term "void" itself is often used by authors describing Zen -- which features a mess of chaotic shapes disappearing into a quieter field of color. In interviews, Tobey would insist that his work reflected a sense of humanism that distinguished him from other modernists, including Jackson Pollock, whose paintings he saw as impersonal and sterile.[507] Watts – who occasionally practiced sumi-e himself[508] -- also made this separation, claiming Tobey's work was more than a "haphazard drooling of paint or uncontrolled wandering of brush," that instead revealed a truly graceful sense of Zen spontaneity.[509]

While living in Seattle in the 1930s, Tobey taught art classes at the Cornish School, where he met a younger painting instructor named Morris Graves, who became his close friend and apprentice. He even copied Tobey's white writing technique in many of his own works,[510] feeling that it had the ability to "expand consciousness" in the viewer.[511] The camaraderie between the two partly stemmed from the fact that Graves shared Tobey's ideal of creating a universalist art,[512] but Graves was particularly drawn

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[507] See Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (NY: The Devin-Adair Co., 1957), 2-8 and Katherine Kuh, "The Painter Meets The Critic," *The Saturday Review*, July 2, 1960, 31-32.

[508] See Watts, *Zen and The Beat Way*, xviii-xix.

[509] Watts, *This is IT*, 97.

[510] See Ray Kass, "The Art of Morris Graves: Meditation on Nature," in *Sounds of The Inner Eye*, 38-53.

[511] Rodman, 11.

[512] Ray Kass, *Morris Graves: Vision of The Inner Eye* (NY: George Braziller, Inc, 1983), 20.

to the arts of Japan, even more directly than Tobey had been. He made his first visit to Japan at age seventeen, not as an artist, but through his job as an ordinary seaman. Even then, he felt an attraction to the country: "I was interested… in the gardens of Japan. You could get out into the countryside from Tokyo – it was only half an hour by train. In Japan I at once had the feeling that this was the right way to do everything. It was the acceptance of nature – not the resistance to it. I had no sense that I was to be a painter, but I breathed a different air."[513]

This interest in Japan would continue throughout his life. During World War II, Graves was sentenced to detention in a military stockade when a dispute over a technicality caused him to lose his conscientious objector status. On the day he reported to the authorities, he wished a warm goodbye to a Japanese-American friend who was on his way to an internment camp, an act that subjected both men to interrogation.[514] Following the war and his release, he and another Nisei friend practiced rock gardening together as a hobby.[515] He also made an attempt to visit occupied Japan, claiming that an artists exchange would help promote democratic ideals, but found his request for permission to enter the country was denied. He then applied for and received a Guggenheim fellowship to make his visit appear more legitimate, but was again turned down. In 1947, he traveled to Hawaii anyway, on the hopes of finally being granted entry

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513 Frederick S. Wight, *Morris Graves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 7.

514 Kass, *Morris Graves*, 35.

515 "Art: Obscure Meadows," *Time*, March 15, 1948.

to Japan, but was rejected a third time, and settled for taking a Japanese language course at the University of Hawaii instead.[516]

His interest in Zen, more specifically, had begun when Graves was twenty-five. Following the sudden death of his father, he started to frequent a local Buddhist temple in search of solace, finding his family's church "barren of beauty."[517] It was there that he met Dorothy Schumacher who would teach him about the Zen sect.[518] Over time, he found that Zen's greatest appeal for him lay in its emphasis on intuition over intellect, claiming "I think it is possible for one section of your mind, the rational, to intrude upon yourself and hamper deeper insight."[519]He displays this sense of spontaneity in works such as *Restless Ink* (1943), which features swirls of sumi ink, or *Machine Age Noise* (1957) in which he doused a broom in sumi and strategically splattered it against the canvas.[520] Other Zen related motifs that occur in his paintings include the depiction of nature – the majority of his works feature birds or small animals– and anti-materialism.[521] Both of these themes are represented in works like *Bird with Possessions* (1943), which depicts a malevolent looking crow furtively guarding several small seeds,

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[516] Kass, *Morris Graves*, 48-51.

[517] Wight, 19.

[518] Kass, *Morris Graves*, 24.

[519] Wight, 19.

[520] *The Drawings of Morris Graves with Comments by The Artist* (NY: New York Graphic Society, 1974), 128.

[521] See Ray Kass in *Sounds of The Inner Eye,* also R.M. Coates, "Art Galleries: Peace and Quiet," *The New Yorker*, Dec 12, 1959, 151-152.

or *Spring with Machine Age Noise #3* (1957), with dissonant lines of red and black paint splotches representing industrial sound polluting an otherwise peaceful marsh scene.

In addition to his art, Graves took inspiration from Zen in his life, in particular when he engaged in anti-logical Dadaist acts in and around the Cornish School.[522]For one occasion, he decided to make a scene at a modernist music concert sponsored by the school, exhibiting the work of a young, unknown composer. He and several friends rolled out a red carpet to the entrance, which they proceeded to walk up dressed in shabby clothing. Once inside they began loudly eating peanuts and dropping shells on the floor. Graves had also brought along a lorgnette with paper eyeballs attached that he used to conspicuously stare at the stage. After shouting out the Zen-sounding phrase "Jesus in the everywhere!" during a moment of silence during the performance, he was finally escorted from the theater.[523]

Luckily for him, the musician whose works were featured in the concert was John Cage, a like-minded modernist artist who appreciated the spontaneity of Graves' acts, and would become one of his lifelong friends as a result of the incident. Cage praised Grave's paintings, calling them "transcendent,"[524] and concurred with his belief that art should be universal, proclaiming once on BBC radio: "We need a view of society that is not

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[522] One of these stunts included wheeling a baby carriage around town filled with rocks and old toothbrushes dangling behind. For another, he rolled a red carpet up to the entrance of a local restaurant, walked in, ordered a lettuce sandwich, and proceeded to eat it without any further fanfare. See Kass, *Morris Graves*, 27 and Wulf Herzogenrath, "John Cage: An Artist Who Accepts Life," in *Sounds of The Inner Eye*, 8.

[523] Bonnie Bird interview with Rebecca Boyle in *Cage Talk*, 76-77.

[524] John Cage, "Morris Graves," reprinted in *John Cage: An Anthology* ed. by Richard Kostelanetz (NY: Da Capo, 1968, 1991), 124.

divided by political entities but that sees the world and the people living in it as a whole."[525] His earliest efforts in this direction consisted of a series of percussion-based pieces he wrote in the 1930s, to be played on a variety of instruments with origins from all over the world, and which avoided following the traditional harmonic structures of any one culture.[526] A decade later, his instrument of choice was the "prepared piano," an ordinary piano where various objects had been placed underneath the strings, which could include, but were not limited to nuts, bolts, nails, screws, rubber erasers, gears, plastic spoons, clothespins, aspirin tins, and in at least one performance, the right arm of a rubber doll. Critics compared the sound produced to that of a harpsichord or a gamelan, an Indonesian stringed instrument.[527] As he grew older, Cage's works drifted farther away from any kind of recognizable harmonies, or even any sounds resembling conventional music. By the late 1950s, he was no longer making distinctions between "music" and "noise," writing compositions to be performed on objects like auto horns, ratchets, toy whistles, water pitchers, electric mixers, and radios tuned to random stations.[528]

Like Tobey and Graves, Cage also acquired a reputation as a Zen-inspired artist. It is unclear how he first got involved in the religion; he tended to prove frustratingly elusive when discussing his past with interviewers, often purposely providing

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[525] John Cage interview with Frank Kermode in *Cage Talk*, 200.

[526] See David Nicholls, *John Cage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 18-27.

[527] Nicholls, 37-41,"Ajemian Presents John Cage Works," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1950, 33 and ""Prepared Pianos' Loaded for Concert," *The New York Times*, Dec 16, 1954, 50.

[528] Nicholls, 48-60, and "'Prepared Pianos.'"

misinformation. According to several accounts, he first became interested around 1950 when he was going through a particularly difficult period in his life, prompted by his divorce from his wife Xenia.[529] If this is true, he might have been directed towards Zen through his close friendship at the time with Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi.[530] However, others place his attraction earlier, to when Graves convinced him to attend a lecture on Zen given by Nancy Wilson Ross at the Cornish School in 1939.[531] Regardless of the details, by the time he reached the height of his popularity, Cage was committed to Zen beliefs, and once told an interviewer "rather than taking the path that is prescribed in the formal practice of Zen Buddhism itself, namely, sitting cross-legged and breathing and such things, I decided that my proper discipline was that one to which I was already committed, namely, the making of music. And that I would do it with a means that was as strict as sitting cross-legged."[532]In short, composing was his path to enlightenment.

Zen-based philosophy influenced Cage's work in several ways.[533] First, he exhibited egolessness by rejecting the role of the artist as an individual attempting to convey a message, and denied repeatedly that there was anything personal to be found in

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[529] Nicholls, 31-36, Earle Brown interview with Peter Dickinson in *Cage Talk*, 138.

[530] Yamada, 236.

[531] Wesley Wehr, "Mark Tobey: A Dialogue Between Painting and Music," in *Sounds of The Inner Eye*, 34.

[532] quoted in Christopher Shultis, *Silencing The Sounded Self: John Cage and The American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 93.

[533] For a more complete discussion of all the characteristics of Cage's music listed below and how they relate to Zen see Pauline Oliveros interview with Peter Dickinson in *Cage Talk*, 172-173.

his music.[534]Secondly, he expressed non-duality in refusing to distinguish between noise and music, or sound and silence, letting the latter pervade his works far more than most other musicians of his time.[535]From his belief that people should be made more aware of the random and spontaneous nature of the universe, he composed much of his music through a process known as "chance operations," in which he tossed a coin or threw the *I Ching* to decide the next note, sequence, or action a piece would take.[536] He summed up these ideas in a phrase often repeated by friends and critics alike: "I have nothing to say and I am saying it."

Probably the best example of such a philosophy put into action, and no doubt Cage's most infamous piece, was *4'33,"* a piano composition that consisted of nothing more than four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence. It was arranged in three "movements" -- which the performer signified by raising a lowering the keyboard cover – of random duration determined using the *I Ching*. It made no direct statement, nor did it distinguish between silence and music, and forced its audience, like Zen students, to sit quietly and become more aware of the subtle noises in world around them. The debut performance was staged on August 29, 1952 at Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, New York with pianist David Tudor at the keyboard. During the first movement, the only sound to be heard in the hall was the wind blowing outside. At some point in the second,

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[534] For examples, see various interviews in *Cage Talk* and Roger Maren, "The Musical Numbers Game," *The Reporter*, March 6, 1958, 39, for an analysis, see Shultis, ch. 4.

[535] See, for example, Edward Downes, "4 Pianists Play Tense Silences," *The New York Times*, May 1, 1957, 42.

[536] See Nicholls, 42-48, also Maren and Harold C. Schonberg, "The Far-Out Pianist," *Harper's Magazine*, June 1960, 49-54.

it began to rain, producing a somewhat musical pattering on the roof overhead. In the course of the third movement, the sounds increased as audience members began talking amongst each other and walking out.[537] Despite the response, Tudor himself found it to be a spiritual experience, later telling *Harper's Magazine*, "[Its] one of the most intense listening experiences you can ever have… You're hearing everything there is… It is cathartic – four minutes and thirty-three seconds of meditation, in effect."[538]

Watts, somewhat surprisingly, did not agree with this assessment, referring to Cage's piece as "therapy… not yet art," and accusing him of using Zen as an excuse to incorporate shock value into his work.[539]He was not alone in taking an unfavorable stance towards Cage's compositions. Other critics called his music "sound effects" and "notable for dullness;" one used what might have sounded like a Zen compliment to dismiss one of his typically unconventional works: "Mr. Cage? Oh, yes, let's not forget Mr. Cage. His 'Theater Piece' was just…[sic] well, anyway, it was."[540]But others seemed to appreciate Cage's intent more fully. One characterized his prepared piano pieces as "wistful" and "lonely," claiming they sounded like "rain dripping from an eve," a description Cage might have appreciated for its emphasis on quietude and nature. Another young *New York Times* reader wrote to the newspaper to defend modernist

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[537] Nicholls, 59.

[538] Schonberg, 49.

[539] Watts, *This is IT*, 94-95.

[540] "Living Theater Gives Concert of Moderns," *The New York Times*, May 6, 1952, 34; Benjamin Boretz, "Music," *The Nation*, Feb 3, 1962, 107; Eric Salzman, "By Cowell and Cage," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1960, 38.

music against harsh critical reviews, claiming that most of his fellow college students enjoyed listening to works like Cage's.[541]

He also received honors from more established quarters toward the end of the decade as did Tobey and Graves. In 1956, the Whitney Museum staged a retrospective of Graves' work, and two years later, Tobey won the top award for painting at Venice Biennale, as well as an American Art Award.[542] One month earlier, New York's Town Hall had staged a retrospective of Cage's work that included percussion and prepared piano compositions as well as more recent avant-garde pieces.[543] In January 1960, he appeared on the popular TV game show "I've Got A Secret," where he skipped the usual game and instead performed "Water Walk," mostly on kitchen implements, and had the host refer to him as "probably the most controversial figure in the musical world today."[544] While the Northwest School may have discovered Zen decades before, as increasing numbers of Americans were drawn into the Boom, they began discovering them.

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[541] Francis G. Schoff, "From The Mail Pouch: Tribute to A Violinist," *The New York Times*, Dec 21, 1952, X9.

[542] Howard Devree, "News About Art and Artists," *The New York Times*, Feb 29, 1956, 27, "Symbol and Image," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1956, X14, and "Award at Venice," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1958, X15; "American Art Award Winner Named," *The New York Times*, Dec 3, 1958, 12.

[543] Ross Parmenter, "Music: Experimenter," *The New York Times*, May 16, 1958, 20; According to Schonberg, disagreement was still prevalent over Cage's work as a number of audience whistled and catcalled from the balcony.

[544] To view the broadcast, visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U. A notable characteristic of this broadcast is that the studio audience begins to laugh about halfway through the piece, encouraged to do so by the host, as well as Cage himself on the grounds that he prefers laughter to tears.

The situation was similar for fiction author J.D. Salinger, who first began reading about Zen as *Time* phrased it, "years before it was peddled in the supermarket," in Greenwich Village circles after he returned from World War II as a depressed veteran.[545] Like Tobey and Cage, he was attracted to a range of Eastern religions, including Hinduism and Vedanta.[546] Yet his devotion to Zen was strong enough that he adhered to a "Zen diet" from the 1950s onward, and according to his neighbor, the renowned Judge Learned Hand, it led to a more general affinity for Japanese culture. "In fact," Hand told *Newsweek*, "whenever Japan is mentioned, his face seems to light up. He seems to adore everything about Japan."[547]

While reviewers of Salinger's work did not point to its Zen influences nearly as much as critics had in the case of Tobey and Graves, it remains readily apparent throughout much of his published work. He even chose a koan as an epigraph for his *Nine Stories* (1953): "We know the sound of two hands clapping. But what is the sound of one hand clapping?" The book concludes with the short story "Teddy," about a young prodigy who meditates, loves Japanese poetry and believes in reincarnation.[548] His last two books both center on the Glasses, an upper-middle class New York family with seven children, all of whom had starred on a radio quiz show in their youth. The eldest

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[545] "Sonny: An Introduction," *Time*, Sept 15, 1961 and Paul Alexander, *Salinger: A Biography* (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999), 114.

[546] See Alexander and Som P. Ranchan, *An Adventure in Vedanta: J.D. Salinger's The Glass Family* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1989).

[547] "The Mysterious J.D. Salinger…His Woodsy, Secluded Life," *Newsweek*, May 30, 1960, 93.

[548] J.D. Salinger, *Nine Stories* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1953, 1981).

two sons, Seymour and Buddy, also share Salinger's penchant for East Asian religion and poetry. In "Zooey," originally published as a short story in the *New Yorker* in 1957, Buddy explains their approach in helping raise their two youngest siblings: "Seymour had already begun to believe… that education by any name would smell as sweet, and maybe much sweeter, if it didn't begin with a quest for knowledge at all but with a quest, as Zen would put it, for no-knowledge. Dr. Suzuki says somewhere that to be in a state of pure consciousness – satori – is to be with God before he said, Let there be light."[549] "Seymour, An Introduction" (first published 1959), a tribute composed by Buddy to his older brother, is similarly peppered with musings on haiku poetry and Buddhist belief.[550] Beyond these direct references, Salinger's characters and themes reveal an undercurrent of Zen ideals. The protagonist in "Franny" (first published 1955) is a college student experiencing an existential crisis, who seeks relief by constantly repeating a short prayer like a Buddhist mantra. Most of Salinger's stories also carry a pervasive tone of anti-materialism, and a distrust of what his most famous character Holden Caufield (*Catcher in The Rye*, 1951) would call "phonies," the kind of people too concerned with their social appearance to seek to understand their own true nature.[551]

Few American authors would incorporate Zen so completely in their writing, but others, like novelist Ray Bradbury, would admit they found some use in its philosophy towards improving their craft. Bradbury titled a 1958 article in *The Writer* magazine,

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[549] J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (NY: Bantam Books, 1964), 65.

[550] J.D. Salinger, *Raise High The Roof Beam Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction* (NY: Little, Brown & Co., 1963, 1987).

[551] J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in The Rye* (NY: Little, Brown & Co., 1951, 2001).

"Zen and the Art of Writing," as a play on the popular book *Zen in The Art of Archery*.[552] Written by German Zen scholar Eugen Herrigel in 1948, and translated into English in 1953, it described its author's attempts to improve his archery technique by giving up strenuous effort and learning how to release the arrow without over-intellectualizing his action.[553] In his essay, Bradbury claimed that he had recently been surprised to discover that the advice he had always given for good writing – work hard, relax, and don't think too much – in fact followed the same general pattern as the archery techniques Herrigel described. Bradbury further argued that "every wood-turner, every sculptor worth his marble, every ballerina, practices what Zen preaches without having heard the word in all their lives."[554] Despite the fact that he was skeptical of the Zen Boom overall, and mockingly distinguished himself from "yogi[s] [who] feed on kumquats, grapenuts and almonds beneath the banyan tree," he had to admit that Zen's fundamental teachings could have some practical uses, and provides an excellent example of how an artist could borrow from them without devoting himself to a new religion.

Nonetheless, the Zen Boom created apprehension among some Christians, as they worried that this newly imported belief system might make inroads into their congregations. In an article in *The Christian Century* magazine, Peter Fingesten, who

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[552] Bradbury later reused this title for a collection of essays published in the 1980s, Ray Bradbury, *Zen in The Art of Writing* (Santa Barbara: Joshua Odell Editions, 1989).

[553] Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in The Art of Archery* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1953). Few archers in Japan actually subscribe to such a Zen technique, it was instead the creation of Herrigel's particular instructor Kenzo Awa. As a consequence, German, American, and Japanese readers alike continue to subscribe to the misguided notion that Japanese-style archery is inherently Zen. For more, see Yamada.

[554] Ray Bradbury, "Zen and the Art of Writing," *The Writer*, October 1958, 10.

several months later would fight with Cage at Sarah Lawrence, initially drew similarities between the two religions. "Zen Buddhists make a tremendous effort to understand life from the point of view of eternity and at the same time to preserve their childlike directness in relation to it. This attitude too is a cornerstone of Christianity." However, he did not aim to show compatibility between the two religions, but rather to convince Christians who might be tempted to leave the church that their own religion already offered many of the spiritual benefits for which they might be searching. He also cautioned his readers that Zen employed "shock treatment" and "the irrational and unproved premise that life, nature and God are 'void,'" implying that it promoted nihilism and a dangerous disengagement from the real world.[555]

At the same time, other members of the clergy sought to reconcile this newly introduced spirituality with their own. The general trend of many American churches in the postwar era was toward ecumenism, which in most cases meant creating and instilling unity across different Christian denominations. Such was the goal of the National Council of Churches when it was founded in 1950 to serve as the U.S. branch of the larger World Council of Churches; both organizations brought leaders of separate Protestant and Orthodox sects together to promote communication and find common ground.[556] But while most of these discussions held fast to fundamental Christian beliefs, they

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[555] Peter Fingesten, "Beat and Buddhist," *The Christian Century*, Feb 25, 1959, 227.

[556] For information on the NCC, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 81-82; for more on the WCC, see Thomas E. Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), ch 6. The Catholic Church did not become involved in the ecumenical movement until the 1960s, and was thus not part of the original NCC.

nonetheless demonstrated a willingness on the part of the participants to soften doctrinal differences and become more open to other faiths.[557] The Catholic Church was even more explicit about its willingness to find value in all religions at the convention of the Second Vatican Council, now commonly referred to as "Vatican II," held in 1962.[558] The group issued a declaration urging Catholics to "acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture."[559]

While this statement was not written until the early 1960s, during the Zen Boom, such sentiments were already widely in play. One prominent example of a Catholic willing to learn from others faiths was Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk who lived in solitude in the Gethsemani monastery in Kentucky, and filled his days by writing prolifically on his personal beliefs and spiritual quest. Several of his books, most notably the autobiography *Seven Storey Mountain*, became bestsellers, earning him a celebrated reputation in educated Catholic circles. Having grown up in France, Great Britain and the United States with a half-hearted Protestantism, he had discovered Catholicism by way of a long and winding spiritual quest. Likely as a result of these experiences, by the mid 1950s, he had taken up a personal mantle of One-Worldist ecumenism several years

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[557] For examples see *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* ed. by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), especially Bossey Ecumenical Institute Conference, "Non-Theological Factors that May Hinder or Accelerate the Church's Unity," (1951), 212-216, Oliver Tomkins, "Address to the Third World Conference on Faith and Order," (1952), 135-136, Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, "Report of Section II: Scripture, Tradition and Traditions," (1963), 139-144.

[558] Wuthnow, 94; Fitzgerald, ch. 7.

[559] Second Vatican Council, "Declaration on The Relation of The Church to Non-Christian Religions," in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology*, 399.

before his adopted church.[560] Looking back in 1964, he wrote "Latin America, Asia, Zen, Islam etc., all these things come together in my life. It would be madness for me to attempt to create a monastic life for myself by excluding all these. I would be less a monk. Others may have their way of doing it but I have mine."[561] In the early 1960s he supported Abraham Heschel's efforts as a Jewish adviser to Vatican II to introduce a statement denouncing anti-Semitism into Church doctrine. In addition, he maintained correspondence with prominent figures from other religions including Quaker civil rights activist June Yungblut, Muslim scholar Abdul Aziz, and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.[562] While he did not produce his most substantial work on Zen until the late 1960s,[563] it was in 1959 that he first corresponded with D.T. Suzuki about a book he was writing on "The Desert Fathers," a group of early church mystics who lived in Egypt and practiced seclusion. Merton felt there was an affinity between these monks' adherence to a lifestyle based on simplicity and clear mindedness and the practices of Zen monks.[564] Though they argued over terminology, and Suzuki occasionally felt compelled to dampen Merton's enthusiastic search for exact correspondence between the two faiths, the two

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[560] For more on the life of Thomas Merton, see Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (London: SPCK, 1995), Elena Maltis, *The Solitary Explorer: Thomas Merton's Transforming Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) and Merton's own *The Seven Story Mountain* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1948).

[561] Thomas Merton, Unpublished Diary, July 10, 1964, printed in Robert E. Daggy, *Encounter: Thomas Merton & D.T. Suzuki* (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1988), 89-90.

[562] William Apel, *Signs of Peace: The Interfaith Letters of Thomas Merton* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

[563] Thomas Merton, *Zen And The Birds of Appetite.*

[564] Maltis, 104-113.

concluded that the Zen concept of attaining spiritual fullness by emptying one's ego could also be found in the more mystical branches of Catholicism.[565]

Similar ideas are expressed in Dom Aelred Graham's *Zen Catholicism,* published several years later, shortly after the Zen wave had crested. His underlying argument was that the "permanent value of Zen is, I submit, not Japanese but… of such universal validity that one does not have to leave home to find its application,"[566] or as a reviewer from the Catholic magazine *America* phrased it, "we can filter a little Zen in to our lives without losing our souls or becoming beatniks"[567] Graham believed that the tenets of Catholicism could prove as useful to life on earth as they could toward the afterlife, much in the same way that Zen could. Like Merton, he posited that both religions advocated an abandonment of the concept of the self in order to attain a sense of oneness with a higher power. Graham even described the epiphany of the fourteenth century figure St. Catherine of Siena as "satori."[568] He became such an enthusiast of Zen that he built a rock garden at his Portsmouth, Rhode Island priory, which attracted many Catholic tourists in the early 1960s.[569]

Another profession whose members were drawn to Zen was psychology. Psychoanalysis was at is peak in the U.S. during the postwar era, bolstered by the

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[565] See Daggy; and Thomas Merton, "Wisdom in Emptiness" in *Zen And The Birds of Appetite*, 99-138.

[566] Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 155.

[567] "Zen: Sense and Sensibility," *America*, May 25, 1963, 752.

[568] Graham, 134.

[569] "Zen: Sense and Sensibility," 752.

immigration of prominent European Jewish psychologists to the U.S. fleeing the Nazis, as well as the success that psychoanalytic techniques appeared to be having on shell-shocked veterans. Partly to aid the health of soldiers recovering from trauma, in 1946 President Truman signed the National Mental Health Act, which significantly expanded federal funding for psychiatric education and research. The belief among many psychologists at this point was that most serious mental illnesses could be successfully combated if they were caught early, while the patient was still leading a relatively "normal" life. Community clinics, established with NMHA funding, were meant to help average Americans cope with everyday stress and neuroses before they developed into a more serious condition. This increase in availability was accompanied by a boost in visibility, as weekly newsmagazines ran articles profiling prominent psychoanalysts and highlighting successfully treated cases. They also reported on movie stars and other celebrities in therapy, and helped spread the image of a typical patient as a young, urbane, and intelligent person. It soon became common, even fashionable, for those who could afford the expense to visit a therapist on a regular basis. In affluent urban circles, it was considered a status symbol to be analyzed by a prominent psychologist, as wealthy Americans suffering the strain of everyday life headed to the couch in unprecedented numbers.[570]

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[570] See Nathan G. Hale, Jr, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and The Americans 1917-1985* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch 16, also Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From The Era of The Asylum to The Age of Prozac*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), ch 5 and Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of The Care of America's Mentally Ill* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), ch. 9.

Suzuki and Watts had both felt for a long time that Zen had much to offer the field of psychology, and vice versa. Suzuki was a friend of several psychologists, and allegedly once told a colleague that "psychoanalysis could in part take the place of Zen," since many therapy patients experienced personal breakthroughs not unlike satori.[571] Watts often employed terms borrowed from psychology like "self-consciousness" and "double bind" in his writing, and some of his essays at times sound like they might belong in self-help books.[572] Meanwhile, Fuller Sasaki characteristically objected to such adulteration of the Zen religion. In one pamphlet she wrote, "a lively interest taken in Zen by psychiatry has given rise in some quarters to the view that Zen is a kind of psychotherapy. Here again a warning is necessary…do not expect [your roshi] to have insight into your private neurosis or be able to cure it for you through koan study."[573] Nonetheless, the library at the First Zen Institute in Kyoto maintained a collection of books on psychology, acknowledging that the two fields did indeed share some common goals and assumptions.[574]

Psychologists developed a reciprocal interest in Zen. The 1960 edition of The *American Handbook of Psychiatry* devoted a full article to Zen as a "related field."[575] At the Sarah Lawrence College conference, a panel on psychology sought to answer

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[571] Fuller Sasaki to "Dear Everyone," July 5, 1951.

[572] See in particular Watts, "Zen and Control" in *This is IT.*

[573] Fuller Sasaki, "Rinzai Zen Study for Foreigners in Japan," 188.

[574] The psychology shelf still exists at the Ryosen-an library. It is largely dominated by the works of Carl Jung, but also contains several books by Erich Fromm.

[575] Alan Watts, "The Ways of The Mind," *New York Times*, Oct 16, 1960, BR35.

questions like: "Does [Zen] provide answers for questions created by our current situation?" and "How does Zen relate to Freud's or Jung's conception of the unconscious?"[576] It was widely known in the field that Carl Jung was interested in Eastern religion, and many of his colleagues noted similarities between his concept of a collective unconscious and the Buddhist concept of a unifying nature pervading all sentient beings. In the postwar era, Karen Horney decided to follow in his footsteps. After researching the subject in the 1940s, she traveled to Japan with Suzuki in 1952, where she became determined to create a Zen-based form of therapy. She died several months later, [577] leaving other practitioners to continue her work. One was her colleague, Japanese psychologist Akihisa Kondo, who did indeed develop an approach that combined Freud's and Zen's mutual appreciation for "a state of wholeness."[578] In the same issue of the *Chicago Review* that featured Watts' "Beat Zen Square Zen" article, Kondo discussed the enormous benefits of the Zen practice of "sitting" for his patients. At first, he reported, many did not enjoy it as it forced them to be alone and quiet, mulling over their problems. But in time they worked through their anxiety, and experienced a sense of personal wholeness, which led them to become "charged with more psychic energy and vitality,"[579] as well as mentally refreshed.

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[576] Zen Buddhism in American Culture conference schedule, Sarah Lawrence Archives.

[577] Larry A. Fader, "D.T. Suzuki's Contribution to the West" in *A Zen Life*, 102-104.

[578] See Akihisa Kondoo, "The Stone Bridge of Joshu" in *A Zen Life*.

[579] Akihisa Kondoo, "Zen in Psychotherapy: The Virtue of Sitting," *The Chicago Review*, Summer 1958, 62-63.

However, it was expatriate German psychologist Erich Fromm who proved to be most influential in allying Zen with psychology. As the nephew, grandson and great-grandson of Hasidic rabbis, he claimed to develop a propensity toward mysticism, and away from materialism in early childhood.[580] After moving to the United States following the Nazis' rise to power, he eventually gained a reputation in the American psychiatric community as a politically engaged analyst who popularized his ideas to laymen outside of the profession.[581] His theories often developed from his interest in how people become socialized to one another, as well as his belief that all human beings possess an inherent need to receive compassion from others, which attracted him to the Zen concepts of unity and "oneness."[582] More concretely, he had worked closely with Karen Horney (the two possibly had a sexual affair),[583] and had also attended Suzuki's lectures at Columbia.[584] In 1957, he organized a conference in his adopted home of Cuernavaca, Mexico for American psychologists interested in Zen, with Suzuki as its keynote speaker.

Following the event, Fromm published three lectures from the conference as a book called *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. The first, by Suzuki, echoed most of his

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[580] Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: His Life and Ideas: An Illustrated Biography* (NY: Continuum, 2000), ch. 1.

[581] See Daniel Burston, *The Legacy of Erich Fromm* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), ch. 1.

[582] See Burston, ch 4; Funk, 132-134.

[583] Funk 104-105, 116-117.

[584] Fader, 102.

earlier writings on the theme that Zen is applicable to American life, with an added emphasis on what he characterized as the overly logical Western mind. An essay by psychologist Richard De Martino contained more professional jargon, and explained in psychoanalytic terms the process by which koan study and satori effectively healed a divided ego. In Fromm's own essay, he argued that Zen proved particularly effective for those suffering the ills of life in the modern industrial era. He observed a "'mal du siècle'" in his patients, which entailed "the deadening of life, the automatization of man, his alienation from himself, from his fellow man and from nature… Where the roots of Western culture [once] considered the aim of life the *perfection of man*, modern man is concerned with the *perfection of things*," leaving him "in a state of schizoid inability to experience affect, hence he is anxious, depressed and desperate."[585] In an age that prized rationality, Fromm argued like Suzuki that Americans had become divorced from their basic inner feelings in favor of their intellect. Furthermore, a societal emphasis on conspicuous consumption had led them to place too much value on material acquisition. Practicing Zen meditation, Fromm felt, could put them back in touch with their emotions, help them transcend materialist desires, and in effect make them well again.

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[585] Erich Fromm, D.T. Suzuki, and Richard DeMartino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (NY: Harper & Row, 1960), 79.

The Zen Boom: Zen Enthusiasts Get Caught Up in the Fad

But these ideas did not remain within the confines of psychiatric discourse; coverage in the popular press helped spread the notion that Zen offered hope for Americans made anxious by the demands of their society. In her 1958 *Mademoiselle* article, Nancy Wilson Ross explained, "in modern psychological terms Zen is a way of connecting with the deep Unconscious so that one becomes what one is." She further argued that Zen was the solution to a problem that many psychologists had identified in modern life: that Americans blocked the deeper levels of their consciousness by focusing too much on the superficial world without taking the time to look within themselves. She added that Zen appealed to "people tired of the increasing clutter and gadgetry of life," and concluded by claiming: "Something has gotten badly out of balance: the 'flow of life' has been stopped. The emphasis on fulfilling the appetite for 'things' is at an all time high. Zen invites one to another range of experience."[586] Essentially, Ross repackaged and re-presented Fromm's ideas to a wider audience.

During the Boom, she was hardly the only one to do so, as other media sources similarly offered interpretations of Zen-influenced art and literature to their audience. In many ways, press coverage helped further the phenomenon by repeatedly proclaiming its existence; the more people heard that "everyone" was studying Zen and how valuable and interesting it was, the more popular it became. It also helped that Suzuki and Watts were masters of self-promotion, and eagerly offered their opinions to almost anyone who

[586] Nancy Wilson Ross, "What is Zen?," *Mademoiselle*, January 1958, 116 -117.

would report them. Despite her alleged elitism, Fuller Sasaki never seemed reluctant to talk to reporters either, and one of her guests at Ryosen-an, writer Ruth Stephan, recounted her experience for *Harper's Weekly*. In the article, Stephan described the simple living quarters and daily routine for guests staying at Zuiun-ken, as well as acquainting her readers with several international Zen students, and providing details of a tea ceremony at which she viewed the renowned Zen painting *Six Persimmons* (owned by Daitoku-ji). While the purpose of her visit was to complete a novel, not study Buddhism, Stephan nonetheless recounted that the experience left her with a "metaphysical" calm, and a deeply felt understanding of Zen's simplicity and directness.[587] Additionally, Columbia University classics professor Gilbert Highet featured a segment praising *Zen in The Art of Archery* on his radio show. While he felt the Zen lifestyle would be impossible for Westerners to follow strictly, he also called it "fascinating," claiming that it contained "some values which we must all respect," and encouraged his listeners to delve further into the subject. [588]

Zen's fashionability was further aided by a recent surge in another, relatively new media form: the paperback reprint. First attempted in 1939, the idea of offering inexpensive versions of widely selling books had grown dramatically in popularity and profitability over the following 20 years, with a spike in publication corresponding almost exactly with the Zen Boom. In 1958, sales of paperbacks registered a 25 percent

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[587] Stephan, 47-53.

[588] Gilbert Highet, "The Mystery of Zen," in *Talents and Geniuses: The Pleasures of Appreciation* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1957), 315-321.

gain over the previous year, when over 300 million copies had been sold.[589] Zen appeared to be a staple subject for paperbacks. Books like *Zen & The Art of Archery* and *Spirit of Zen*, as well as Suzuki's numerous works and collections of translated poetry and sutras became popular titles.[590] By 1959, these books were in such high demand that a drug store in New York's Greenwich Village, a popular locale for Beat Zenists, demolished its soda fountain to make more room for paperbacks. "Any book with the word Zen on it sells fast here," the proprietor reported, rattling off titles, "We've sold 'The Way of Zen,' 'Zen Buddhism,' Buddhism Zen, 'The Way of Zen,'[sic] 'Zen and Japanese Culture,' 'Zen Flesh Zen Bones."[591]

Those who purchased such books found they were able to learn about Zen relatively easily and inexpensively, without fully devoting themselves to its practice. Religious scholar Thomas Tweed has taken an interest in this particular type of enthusiasm, in an attempt to break down the dichotomy between "adherents" and "non-adherents." He refers to those who merely dabble in Zen as "nightstand Buddhists." The name arose from the fact that many fair-weather Buddhism enthusiasts in the U.S. are known to "place a how-to book on Buddhist meditation on the nightstand… read it before they fall to sleep, and then rise up the next morning to practice, however imperfectly or

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[589] David Robbins, "Something for Everyone," *The New York Times*, Jun 14, 1959, BR37.

[590] In running a search for the term Zen in the 1950s in *The New York Times*, the majority of my hits turned out to be ads from discount book dealers, from which I obtained a sense of which titles were being sold at the time.

[591] Gay Talese, "Zen Selling Better Than Sodas, 'Village' Store Scraps Fountain," *The New York Times*, Sept 12, 1959, 11.

ambivalently, what they have learned the night before."[592] Such Americans "have some sympathy for a religion but do not embrace it exclusively or fully. When asked, they would *not* identify themselves as Buddhists. They would say they are Methodist, or Jewish, or unaffiliated. If we could talk to them long enough – or better yet visit their homes and observe their daily routine – we would notice signs of interest in Buddhism."[593] Chang Chen-Chi observed a similar phenomenon in 1959. "Most Westerners, after reading a few books on the subject, treat it as a pastime or topic of conversation… A few even practice meditation with high hopes of Enlightenment, or at least having some interesting experiences."[594] Similarly, in his introduction to a collection of Suzuki's essays, William Barrett predicted, "For the readers of this book, the question will hardly arise of becoming a Buddhist, but that does not lessen the importance of Zen for them."[595]

While it would be impossible to estimate the exact number of urban and suburbanites who fit this description, contemporary sources repeatedly suggested that it was indeed large. In 1958, *Time* declared: "Zen Buddhism is growing more chic by the minute."[596] Wilson Ross' article opened by mentioning a girl who attended a fashionable

[592] Thomas A. Tweed, "Nightstand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion" in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. by Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999), 75.

[593] *Ibid*., 74.

[594] Chang, 115.

[595] Barrett, xx.

[596] "Zen:Beat & Square."

New York cocktail party where everyone was talking about Zen.[597] Ruth Fuller Sasaki also noted that Zen was not only gaining popularity among artists, but had become "the magic password at smart cocktail parties … Radio and television comedians consider it natural for spoofing. Zen jokes appear in the daily papers, and a recent magazine contains an excellent satire on it."[598] In 1961, poet Felicia Lamport published a humorous collection called *Scrap Irony*, which contained a section entitled, "The Fifties Recollected in Tranquility," where she poked fun of such decade defining trends and events as McCarthyism, the sheath dress, and the "Twenty-One" quiz show scandal. She included the following verse on the Boom:

Buddhism Now and Zen

Conceptual dichotomy
Had primed me for lobotomy
Until I met a Buddhist fan
And man!
He really got to me

Shoot the dharma
To me mharma![599]

[597] Wilson Ross, "What is Zen?" 64.

[598] Fuller Sasaki, "Rinzai Zen Study for Foreigners in Japan," 182.

[599] Felicia Lamport, *Scrap Irony* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 73.

Not only had "conceptual dichotomy" and "dharma" become common parlance, the term "Zen" itself became so familiar as to appear in some unexpected places. One example was a *New York Times* article about the return of rambunctious children from summer camp that advised parents to "'live loose' for a week or so… and to float, as followers of Zen Buddhism are said to do, 'like ping-pong balls on the stream of life.'"[600] Another appeared when actor Burgess Meredith (who would later achieve fame as The Penguin on TV's *Batman* and crusty trainer Mickey Goldmill in the movie *Rocky*) reportedly went on a "Zen-macrobiotic diet kick." He dined frequently at the upscale Musubi Restaurant in Manhattan, specializing in "yin-yang cuisine."[601] Those who were interested in this new regimen could also attend the Zen Macrobiotic camp sponsored by the diet's founder, George Ohsawa.[602]

Perhaps the most amusing commentary on the growing popularity of Nightstand Zen-ism was a short fiction article that appeared in *The New Yorker* in August 1959 entitled, "Zen in The Art of Tennis." Its author, Calvin Tomkins, caricatures the worst examples of middle class pretensions regarding Zen. He writes of "cocktail-party guests" who "ask each other Zen *koans*," and complains that it is now impossible to "spend a whole evening talking to an old friend without having to hear about his *satori*, or having

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[600] Dorothy Barclay, "Summer Vacations for Many Parents End 2 Weeks Sooner Than for Young," *The New York Times*, Aug 22, 1958, 24.

[601] "Macrobiotics," *The New Yorker*, Aug 25, 1962, 22.

[602] Tea and Queries notes, July 30, 1961 and Sept. 30, 1962 First Zen Institute Archives; according to Mary Farkas, Mr. Ohsawa had never studied Zen, nor was he a member of any Zen organization. It seemed to be the consensus among Institute members that the diet was mainly a scam to make money, without any real association with the Zen religion.

to argue the relative merits of beatnik Zen, square Zen, and ladies' Zen."[603] When the story's unnamed narrator finds that his tennis game is slipping, he decides to turn to Zen for help, on the advice of a fellow country club member who has his own personal roshi. While searching the yellow pages under tennis instructors, the protagonist finds a listing under the Japanese name Ashikawa. Despite the fact that it is actually a misplaced ad for a pet shop, he sets off in search of his new teacher. Of course, when he arrives at the store with his tennis racket asking for a lesson, a befuddled and disgruntled Ashikawa slams the door in his face. Instead of feeling daunted by such a greeting, our hero instead interprets his reaction as the typical rebuff of a Zen master requiring his student to prove his devotion before entering the monastery. So he persists, and Ashikawa eventually agrees to take him on as a pupil, teaching him the duties of running a pet shop, which the narrator assumes is all part of the training. When he brings a tennis racket one day, Ashikawa asks him, "what have you got there?" a question which he decides must be his koan. The story goes on, with every one of the pet store owner's perplexed reactions interpreted as the behavior of an enigmatic sage. Ashikawa eventually puts an end to the foolishness by calling a policeman to stop this strange man from harassing him. By this point, the narrator seems no more enlightened for his troubles, and in fact his tennis game has gotten worse.

While the story is presented as a farce, its humor only worked because readers recognized a ring of truth to it. Its appearance in the pages of *The New Yorker* demonstrates that by the height of the Boom, the presumptuous Zen dilettante had

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[603] Calvin Tomkins, "Zen in The Art of Tennis," *The New Yorker* Aug 8, 1959, 24.

become a common and recognizable figure among an upper middle class audience. While the narrator's claim to have read fifteen or sixteen books by D.T. Suzuki might be absurd, in real life many New Yorkers had picked up at least one or two. The Zen practicing salesman who played tennis at the club could also easily have been a real person, and although they probably would not have gone to such extremes as this protagonist, many Americans did indeed fancy themselves experts on Zen, whether or not they actually were. Fuller Sasaki delivered a speech at MIT in 1958 in which she described a particular type of visitor to her Institute who, "without having read a single primary Buddhist or Zen text, think they know all about it. How many hours have I not spent in my Kyoto temple listening to people, usually Americans recently come to Japan, tell me what Zen is!"[604]

Other Zen-inspired authors also felt compelled to complain and worry about the faddish turn the Boom eventually took. In "Seymour," Salinger wrote, "Zen is rapidly becoming a rather smutty, cultish word to the discriminating ear… Pure Zen…will be here even after the snobs have departed."[605] Dom Graham similarly felt compelled to issue a warning to "Western dilettantes who take up the cult of…Zen on the grounds that it is rather 'chic.' To dabble in the world's oldest metaphysical and religious tradition… opens up endless possibilities of trouble."[606] The kind of people he was addressing were likely attracted to Zen, not primarily to attain spiritual enlightenment or personal

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[604] Ruth Fuller Sasaki, "Zen: A Method for Religious Awakening" in *Zen Pioneer*, 163.

[605] Salinger, *Seymour*, 242.

[606] Graham, 77.

understanding, but, as with other shibui pursuits, for its association with the sophisticated urban elite. They noted how it was lauded by cutting-edge artists, advocated by fashionable psychiatrists, incorporated into trendy diets and promoted by *Vogue* magazine, and interpreted Zen as the latest fad to sweep the nation's respectable classes, where everyone who wanted to be anyone was getting involved. Suzuki, Watts, and other paperback authors may have wanted to make Zen accessible to more Americans, but their efforts led to the unintended consequence that some adherents were half-heartedly studying so they could sound more knowledgeable at cocktail parties. These were the kind of people that Watts criticized most harshly as Square Zenists, those who would use their familiarity with Zen to "get ahead," using their knowledge and supposed mastery of the subject to gain the approval of their peers. In their circles, the pursuit of anti-materialist Zen enlightenment ironically proved to be another form of status seeking, and eventually a passing trend that faded away only several years after it had begun.

Conclusion

While journalists of the late 1950s spoke of the Zen Boom as if it were a single phenomenon, the differences between various Zen enthusiasts, as well as its promoters, undermine the impression that it was indeed a unified movement. Members of the First Zen Institute branches in both New York and Kyoto practiced a strict form, adhering closely to the practices and precepts of Japanese tradition. Artists and writers borrowed from these techniques to express more skillfully (or refuse to express, in Cage's case) their visions and beliefs. Those who could be spotted giggling outside the Institute's zendo, along with others who did not have the time or commitment to devote to regular

meditation, similarly required a different form of Zen, more adapted to their mindset and lifestyle. Most proponents of Zen in the U.S. proved willing to alter it in some way to make it more palatable to these potential audiences. Suzuki added scientific rationalism. Watts did away with regulated religious practices. Fromm integrated it with psychoanalysis.

Yet despite the various styles that emerged, most of these versions of Nightstand Buddhism, as well as Fuller Sasaki's, were consistent in that they qualified as shibui. They were appreciated by all the "right people," intellectuals, artists, and educated urbanites in general. But while some Zen enthusiasts simply wanted to climb aboard a fashionable bandwagon, others were sincere in their quest for an alternative form of modernism. Zen philosophy, according to its advocates, was undeniably contemporary. Watts suggested that Zen provided an appropriate outlook for the post-Hiroshima world that was grappling to come to terms with a new set of morals, and pointed out the similarities between Zen ideology and such recent Western currents of thought at "non-conceptual, experiential philosophy" and "scientific relativism."[607] For many artists and intellectuals, like Graves and Graham, this may have been its primary appeal, making it relevant to current developments in fields like painting and religious philosophy. Zen also met the second qualification for shibui-ness, providing respite from the industrialized world. Fuller Sasaki described the typical Zen seeker of her time as someone "said to…find in scientific materialism poor nourishment for their spirits, to feel that modern life, with its multitude of machines, is an exhausting and unrewarding way of life for

[607] Watts, *Spirit of Zen*, ix-x and "Beat Zen, Square Zen," *Chicago Review*, 5.

them as human beings."[608] Fromm found its use effective among his patients, as its promotion of quiet introspection helped provide a psychic antidote to the pressures of modern life.

Throughout the Boom, books by Suzuki, Watts, and others assured their readers that such a sense of well-being would indeed be theirs if they mastered Zen. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, a popular 1957 paperback featuring ancient writings compiled and translated by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki claimed, "It has been said if you have Zen in your life, you have no fear, no doubt, no unnecessary craving, no extreme emotion… Serene, you enjoy life in blissful tranquility."[609] It appears, however, that when these books failed to deliver quickly on such lofty promises, many American Nightstand Buddhists grew disillusioned and decided to move on. With its sarcastic tone, "Zen in The Art of Tennis" signaled that in the summer of 1959, the trend was starting to become passé, and by the early 1960s, most fair-weather Zennists had abandoned this particular spiritual quest. Nonetheless, the more devoted adherents at the First Zen Institute stayed faithful long after their religion's popularity had waned, and both branches of the organization remain in operation today.[610] Others who had been involved, including Watts, became part of a revival of interest in Eastern mysticism in the late 1960s, but this later movement

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[608] Fuller Sasaki, "Zen: A Method For Religious Awakening," 176.

[609] *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, ed. by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1957, 1985), 18.

[610] For information on the New York branch, see its website, http://www.firstzen.org. The Kyoto also branch remains in operation at Daitoku-ji, offering daily meditation services in English, although its size has shrunk considerably. When I visited in December 2008, the only permanent inhabitants were the roshi and one Zen student from London.

diverged greatly from the Boom's Square Zen. Associated with the loud and vibrant counterculture, it drew its inspiration from more colorful Tibetan sects instead of relatively staid and restrained Rinzai practices.[611] Never again since the late 1950s have Americans embraced Buddhism in an austere shibui form on such a large scale. Yet as early as 1957, shades of what was to follow could be seen in the other side of the Boom, the version of Zen that chose to emphasize very different aspects of the religion, practiced by Jack Kerouac and the rest of the Beat Movement.

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[611] See Fields, ch. 12.

CHAPTER V: JAPAN FOR THE REST OF US: ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF JAPANESE IMPORTS IN THE POSTWAR ERA

Throughout the two decades following World War II, among circles of intellectuals, established artists, well-traveled experts, and cosmopolitan urbanites in general, shibui was the dominant mode of interpreting Japanese culture. According to its tenets, Japan was a land of rich traditions that promoted reflection, serenity, and a form of simplicity that was well attuned to modernist aesthetics. Japanese art, design, and philosophy were sophisticated, refined and subtly tasteful, as were, it was assumed, those who appreciated them. But as Donald Keene pointed out, there were other aspects of Japanese culture that did not quite fit confines of shibui restraint: the heavily ornamented temple at Nikko, the colorful glazes of some traditional pottery, the crowded drawings of the *Tale of Genji* scrolls.[612] Even American interpretations of shibui culture occasionally deviated from their own rules, with products like instant bonsai, the pre-fab teahouse, or Alan Watts' rejection of koan study.

Beyond these variations, Japan entered American life in other ways that were in fact directly opposed to shibui. The most common avenue was the inexpensively priced consumer goods that appeared on the shelves of five and dime stores across the nation. Typically they were cheaply made, through the methods of mass production that shibui objects were meant to counteract. Several other noteworthy adaptations and uses of

[612] Donald Keene, *Chronicles of My Life: An American in The Heart of Japan* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2008) 156-157.

Japanese culture appeared in the U.S. One was Beat Zen, the alternative to Watts' "Square Zen" that favored spontaneity over serenity. Another was the most notorious Japanese import ever to reach U.S. shores: Godzilla, the fifty meter tall prehistoric monster who destroyed Tokyo on movie screens throughout the country. The former lay at the heart of a movement of youthful artists who rebelled directly against the society that upheld shibui. The latter provided uncomplicated entertainment to drive-in audiences across America. Both could be violent, excessive, and exuberant, and marked those Americans who enjoyed them as lacking the taste and values that elitist highbrows and upper-middlebrows held dear.

Made in Japan: A Label of Cheap Taste

Throughout the 1950s, Japanese goods were a common sight in American markets, as the U.S. absorbed an average of 21.7 percent of Japan's total exports every year.[613] Through the occupation and the early Cold War, U.S. foreign policymakers took it upon themselves to rehabilitate Japan economically, in an effort to bolster their new ally. They knew that Japan needed to sell goods abroad to survive, but imposed an embargo on the lucrative nearby Chinese market when it became the communist People's Republic in 1949. They were then left with little choice but to open the U.S. and Western Europe to Japanese exports, which they did by helping Japan become a signatory to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1954. However, most European

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[613] Warren S. Hunsburger, "Japanese Exports and The American Market," *Far Eastern Survey*, 26, no.9 (1957), 131.

nations, especially Britain, feared Japanese underselling and enacted quotas against Japanese goods. This situation left Japan with few places to sell its products during the postwar era other than the United States, which became its biggest customer.[614]

Prior to World War II, Japanese exports to the United States consisted mostly of low-cost, often poorly made items, and when trade between the two nations initially resumed in 1947, they continued in much the same pattern. At a party in Tokyo during the Occupation, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was heard to suggest to a Finance Ministry official that Japan rebuild its postwar economy by shipping cocktail napkins to the U. S.[615] Akio Morita, one of the founders of Sony, later admitted in his memoirs that his company was at first reluctant to sell its products in the United States because, “most people…associated Japan with paper umbrellas, kimonos, toys, and cheap trinkets.”[616] The earliest imports – which bore the label “Made in Occupied Japan” to assure consumers they were not supporting the wartime regime – were indeed mostly small discount store items. They included: ceramics (figurines, plates, tea sets, lamp bases, mugs, planters, salt & pepper shakers), toys (plastic dolls, wind-up toys), paper goods (umbrellas, fans, flowers), glassware (wine glasses, perfume bottles), metal ware (ashtrays, serving dishes, salt cellars), and Christmas tree ornaments. Most of these products were not intended to look “Japanese;” more commonly they were less expensive

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[614] For more on the U.S. decision and struggle to include Japan in GATT see Sayuri Shimizu, *Creating People of Plenty: The United States and Japan’s Economic Alternatives, 1950-1960*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001), ch. 2.

[615] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 536-537.

[616] Akio Morita, *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1986), 77.

versions of higher quality merchandise produced elsewhere. Japanese factories made European-looking ceramic figurines dressed like eighteenth century nobility, teapots with Chinese decorative motifs, and American-style plastic Kewpie dolls.[617]

This trend continued through the Korean War, during which sales of military procurements provided the windfall that allowed the Japanese economy to grow in earnest. Manufactures began to branch out into a wider variety of household goods, including kitchenware, like dinner sets, glassware, and silverware, as well as budget-priced clothing, especially dress shirts.[618] However, they continued to follow the practice of offering less expensive versions of goods already produced in the U.S. and Europe. By the end of the decade, consumers began to complain about the prevalence of lower cost Japanese products in their local stores. In 1960, an editorial letter writer to the *Chicago Tribune*, identifying herself only as "Grandma," reported that she had just received "stainless steel knives, forks, and spoons, and a stainless steel chafing dish – all made in Japan" as Christmas presents. In the same season, a "Mrs. E J K," complained to the newspaper when she discovered, much to her surprise, that nearly all the gloves and scarves she had purchased as presents bore a "Made in Japan" label. "I love Japan," she concluded, "but this is ridiculous."[619] Some Americans began to fear these goods would

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[617] For an extensive catalog of Japanese items imported to the U.S. in the years 1947-1952, see Marian Klamkin, *Made in Occupied Japan: A Collector's Guide* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1976); and Gene Florence, *Occupied Japan Collectibles: Identification and Value Guide* (Paducah, Kentucky: Collector Books, 2001).

[618] See Percy W. Bidwell, *What The Tariff Means to American Industries* (New York: Harper, 1956) and Ursula McHugh, "Made in Japan," *Industrial Design*, 6, no. 5, July 1959, 54-69.

[619] Mrs. E J K, "She Loves Japan, But…" *Chicago Daily Tribune,* Dec 25, 1960, 10.

offer unfair competition to domestic manufacturers through underselling, the most notorious example being an infamous "one dollar blouse,"[620] that prompted headlines in *Newsweek* warning of a "Deluge" of Japanese textiles and a "Flood from The East."[621]

In the face of this seeming inundation of Japanese merchandise, looking over *Chicago Tribune* articles in the late 1950s reflects the notion that most of these products were cheap in both price and quality, despite the fact that by 1960, Japanese companies had already begun to export the high-end cameras and electronics for which they are well known today. Some accounts were benign, praising small but handy kitchenware that retailed for about one dollar, like corkscrews and cheese slicers.[622] Others poked fun of Japanese imports' low reputation. In one columnist's account of a family outing at Wrigley Field, he buys his daughter a ballpark souvenir stamped "Made in Japan," only to hear her whine, "all my toys seem to be made in Japan."[623] Some made light of American-looking goods that were in fact produced in Japanese factories to save money, like "keepsakes from Brown County, Indiana, made in Japan," and even the shamrocks Mayor Daley proudly displayed in the 1960 St. Patrick's Day Parade.[624] In 1959, a letter

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[620] See Meghan Warner, "Gimcracks, Dollar Blouses, and Transistors: American Reactions to Imported Japanese Products: 1945-1964," *The Pacific Historical Review*, (May 2010), 202-230.

[621] "Made in Japan: The Deluge," Newsweek, Aug. 1, 1960, 65; "Textiles: Flood From The East," Newsweek, July 2, 1956, 66.

[622] Lois Baker, "Now You Can Cut That Pie into Six Uniform Slices," (features the corkscrew) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 7, 1959, B6, Mary Meade, "Mom's Helper: Automatic Warmer for Baby's Food," (decorative meat press) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan 8, 1960, B8 "A New Susan Serving Set," (cheese slicer) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec 9, 1960, D11.

[623] David Condon, "In The Wake of The News," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 4, 1958, C1.

[624] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, "What Can't A Conversation Piece Provoke?," May 22, 1960, G27 and "Tower Ticker," March 9, 1960, B2.

to the editor told the humorous story of an electronics salesman who discovered an ingenious new kind of TV while visiting Japan, but didn't want anyone to know where it was manufactured out of fear that his customers would assume it was poorly made. According to the anecdote, the retailer happily obliged when he shipped the set to the U.S., labeling it "Not Made in Japan."[625]

A survey of U.S. consumers, conducted in 1960 by a private non-profit group of Japanese and American businessmen known as the U.S.-Japan Trade Council, revealed that attitudes associating Japanese goods with poor quality were indeed prevalent throughout much of the country. Showing the influence of the shibui trend, it found that 78% of respondents thought Japanese people had "good taste and an appreciation of beauty." But it also discovered that most of these same people considered Japan to be an exporter of "toy goods," and seventy-eight percent thought Japanese products were of lower quality than their American equivalents. Even more expensive items, like sewing machines and radios, still received low scores in association tests. However, three out of five admitted that, "If you know how to judge quality of a product, you can often find Japanese imports which are much less expensive and just as good as American-made products." [626] Nevertheless, in the eyes of most American consumers, Japanese products remained cheaper, mass-produced imitations, which could frequently prove tacky and shoddy as well. The fact that they tried to capture middling American taste rather than employing Japanese tradition to reflect more spiritual qualities, placed them

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[625] Max, "You Must Be Joking Department," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1959, 12.

[626] "Buying Japanese," *Business Week*, Sept. 19, 1959, 150.

far outside the category of shibui. Instead, the most prevalent postwar imports from Japan in terms of numbers were exactly the kind of low quality, distasteful “knock-off” merchandise that most highbrow shibui enthusiasts claimed they would never allow in their homes.

Beat Zen: Eastern Religion Gains A Defiant Edge

In other cases it was not the Japanese import itself, but the way it reached the U.S. and who enjoyed it once it arrived that determined whether or not it qualified as shibui. One of the characteristics of shibui “Square” Zen was that most of its American proponents were affluent, urbane New Yorkers and those who aspired to be like them. Ruth Fuller Sasaki was herself born into one of Chicago’s wealthiest families, and continued to project that status even after she became a Zen priest. Gary Snyder described her as often wearing cashmere sweaters, adding that “her hair and grooming were perfect, finished with pearl earrings.”[627] Many of her friends appeared to come from a similar economic background, some stopping by The First Zen Institute in Kyoto in the course of world tours.[628] Another Institute member, Georgette Shapiro, apparently a woman of means, passed around her fine new hat at one board meeting, and joked about how her husband lived off her wealth.[629] Fuller Sasaki tried to reconcile this position

[627627] Gary Synder, preface to Isabel Stirling, *Zen Pioneer: The Life & Works of Ruth Fuller Sasaki* (Berkeley: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), xii.

[628] see reference to Vanessa Coward in Fuller Sasaki to “Dear Everyone,” Nov 5, 1956, First Zen Institute of America Archives, New York, NY.

[629] Tea Notes, Oct 28, 1962, First Zen Institute Archives, New York.

with Suzuki's claim that properly understanding Zen required experience and appreciation of poverty. She defensively countered "poverty is no different from riches. It is no-ego egolessness that is the true poverty."[630] In her mind, it was spiritual outlook that mattered more than social background, and she found no contradiction in the self-denial preached in Zen and the comfortable lifestyle she was able to enjoy.

The Beat Movement, in contrast, perceived a very large conflict between the two, as it emphasized a critical stance towards the alleged hypocrisy of middle class material comforts,[631] a sentiment that left its mark on its members' version of Zen. The Beats emerged in the early 1950s as aspiring young rebellious and mostly male artists living in the low rent districts of New York's Greenwich Village, San Francisco's North Beach and Los Angeles' Venice Beach. Often credited as the forerunners of the 1960s counterculture, they sought to flee the established American social order, which they felt had become complacent, repressed, and divorced from real experience. Their main targets included industrialism, consumerism, militarism, and above all, social convention. Modern society, they argued, was overly restrictive, forcing people to suppress their instincts, emotions, and creative impulses in order to fit into a bland middle class society. This desire to conform, they further believed, led bourgeois Americans to grow materialistic in an effort to maintain their social status by keeping up with their

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[630] Ruth Fuller Sasaki, marginalia in D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (NY: Pantheon, 1959), 253, library of the First Zen Institute of America, Ryosen-an, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto.

[631] For an excellent Beat tirade against middle class materialist striving, see Seymour Krim, "Making It!" in *The Beat Scene*, ed by Elias Wilentz (NY: Corinth Books, 1960), 75-83.

neighbors, a practice that led to mindless consumption, and supported a growing industrial base that was blighting the national landscape.

To escape such social strictures and general banality, they chose to engage in what they saw as more authentic and free ways of living. Their rejection of consumerism often led them to embrace conditions of near poverty, taking over neighborhoods that until recently had been considered ghettos, living in apartments with little furnishing or decoration. Some occasionally tried to escape urban society by retreating to the mountains or the desert with a backpack, riding the rails, or hitchhiking, all of which were romanticized in Jack Kerouac's quintessential 1957 Beat novel *On The Road*. To free their creative impulses, many Beats also wrote poetry or painted (or both),[632] and supplemented their efforts by drinking heavily or smoking marijuana. They also enjoyed jazz music, appreciating its free and impulsive improvisational style. They wore dark casual, often second hand, clothing that avoided any sense of consumerist fashion. To liberate their libidos, they eschewed monogamy and celebrated casual sex.[633]

As a result of such practices, the Beats obtained a bad reputation, and much sensational media attention. Many "Square" journalists referred to them by the derogatory term "beatniks," assuming a core of true artistic Beats, with most other participants acting as mere hangers-on. They tended to portray the latter as dirty,

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[632] For examples of the former see Wilentz.

[633] See Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (NY: Julian Messner, Inc. 1959); Francis Rigney, *The Real Bohemia: A Sociological and Psychological Study of the "Beats,"*(NY: Basic Books, 1961); Stephen Prothero, *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and The Beat Generation* (NY: Riverhead Books, 1995); Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and The Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

promiscuous, shiftless, drug addicted, self-indulgent, misguided youth. In *The Partisan Review*, literary and cultural critic Norman Podhoretz categorized them as anti-intellectual and solipsistic.[634] Other authors picked up on this theme; John Ciardi of the *Saturday Review* called them "juvenile," the *Chicago Tribune* "phony," and novelist Nelson Algren portrayed them as self-absorbed and deluded in *The Nation.*[635] On the roundtable television show "Open End," guest Truman Capote suggested that Beat writing was incomprehensible and boring, to which host David Suskind responded, "I'd like to know why they carry on the way they do… All the alcoholism, dope-addiction, sexual excess, *debauchery* – what do they mean by it?" [636]An article in *Life* magazine played up these sordid traits when it featured a photograph of a studio assembled "well-equipped pad," that included items such as: "naked light bulb…empty beer cans…bare mattress…crates which serve as tables and closets…marijuana for smoking…typewriter with half-finished poem," and "Beat baby [female guest], who has gone to sleep on floor after playing with beer cans."[637]

But even in the midst of such denigration, some of these articles – particularly those in *Life* and *The Chicago Tribune* – went on to discuss and assess the Beat Movement as a serious social and literary phenomenon. Some were thoroughly positive.

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[634] Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," reprinted in *The Beats*, ed. by Seymour Krim (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1960), 111-124.

[635] John Ciardi, "Epitaph for the Dead Beats," *Saturday Review*, Feb 6, 1960, 11; Stuart Mitchner, "Those Phony Beatniks!" *The Chicago Tribune*, Nov 8, 1959, E47; Nelson Algren, "Chicago Is a Wose," *The Nation*, Feb 28, 1959, 191; For an overview of the press coverage on the Beats, see Rigney, 151-161.

[636] "Capote, Miller and Miss Parker," *New Republic*, Feb 9, 1959, 27.

[637] Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," *Life,* Nov 30, 1959, 114-115.

For instance, *The New York Times'* review for *On The Road* was glowing, defending the movement's, "excesses" as serving "a spiritual purpose… It does not know what refuge it is seeking, but it is seeking."[638] The Catholic magazines *America* and *The Commonweal*, who might have been expected to bristle at the Beats' hedonistic lifestyle, instead offered impartial in-depth analyses of their roles as authors and as a potential political movement. Both articles also lent the movement legitimacy by situating it in a longer tradition of bohemian rebellion; *The Commonweal* even compared Beats to the Biblical figure of "the naughty psalm-singing David."[639] Psychiatrist Francis Rigney of the San Francisco Veterans Administration Hospital conducted a thorough sociological study of the Beat community in North Beach, finding that most Beats were engaged in some form of creative activity, deciding to act on the deep-seeded longing to break the bonds of social convention that actually existed in most contemporary Americans.[640]

In keeping with these press portrayals, many middle class Americans seemed to respond to the Beats with a combination of revulsion and attraction that fueled a deep curiosity about their squalid lifestyle, unusual dress, and "hip" new lingo. One observer compared the mood to a sideshow. "The freaks are fascinating, although they are hardly part of our lives."[641] Literary promoters in New York and Chicago threw lavish cocktail

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[638] Gillbert Millstein, "Books of The Times," Sept. 5, 1957, 27.

[639] Wolfgang B. Fleishmann, "Those 'Beat' Writers," *America*, Sept 26, 1959, 766-768; L.J. Hines, "Stephenson and The Beats," *The Commonweal*, Sept 9, 1960, 466.

[640] In addition to Rigney's book, see "Life of 'Beatnik' Linked to Stress," *The New York Times*, Apr 2, 1959, 37.

[641] David Dempsey, "In Search of 'Kicks,'" *The New York Times*, Sept 8, 1957, BR3.

parties in their honor, although they were never quite sure that the Beats would make an appearance. Fred McDarrah, a photographer who documented the Beats, organized a "rent a beatnik" agency, sending his friends to highbrow gatherings for a small fee; poet Ted Joans claimed to have earned enough money for a trip to Europe by working for the service.[642] Three high school aged girls in Kansas sent a letter to Beat journalist Lawrence Lipton asking him to come visit their "squaresville" town. (When he decided to accept, the surprised teenagers quickly withdrew the invitation.)[643] Other high schoolers organized a "dress like a beatnik" day and one cheerleading squad developed a beatnik routine.[644] Regular beatnik characters appeared in the radio soap opera "Helen Trent," the TV show "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis," and the comic strip "Popeye,"[645] as well as the Hollywood adaptation of Kerouac's *The Subterraneans,* the critically panned movie *Beat Generation*, [646] and several Broadway musicals with a beatnik theme.[647]

Commercial entrepreneurs inevitably tried to cash in on the trend. Coffee shops declaring themselves "authentic beatnik hangouts" opened in cities throughout the

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[642] "Movement" *The New Yorker*, Apr 16, 1960; "Manners & Morals: Fried Shoes," *Time*, Feb 9, 1959; Gilbert Millstein, "Rent A Beatnik and Swing," *The New York Times*, Apr 17, 1960, SM26.

[643] "Squaresville, U.S.A. vs. Beatsville," *Life*, Sept 21, 1959, 31.

[644] "School Bars 'Beatnik Day,'" *The New York Times*, Nov 26, 1959, 34; Nan Robertson, "1,000 Girls Cheer, Then Have A Cry," *The New York Times*, Feb 15, 1960, 29.

[645] O'Neil, 116.

[646] Howard Thompson, "Beat Generation," *The New York Times*, Oct 22, 1959, 47; A.H. Weiler, "Screen: 'Subterraneans,'" *The New York Times*, July 7, 1960, 26.

[647] Brooks Atkinson, "Theater: Beatnik Picnic," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1959, 43, describes "The Square Set;" [Photo Standalone No. 3] *The New York Times*, Aug 2, 1959, X1 depicts a scene from "The Billy Barnes Revue;" Brooks Atkinson, "Theater: Singing Beatniks" *The New York Times*, Feb 11, 1960, 39 reviews "Beg, Borrow or Steal."

country, although few real Beats would ever go near them.[648] In order to attract tourists, North Beach put up a sign declaring itself "Gateway to Beatnikland, " and sponsored a best beard contest as part of a summer festival in 1959.[649] Fashion designer Philippe Tournaye designed a fall collection for 1960 with a beatnik (mostly leather-based) theme.[650] Department stores began selling "beatnik kits" that included a beard, dark glasses and a beret, and several New York record stores put beatniks on display in their windows to attract customers, having them read poetry and meditate.[651]Abraham & Straus, a New York department store, used images of beatniks in several print ads, and had its cartoon spokesmen utter such phrases as "Man, you've been shopping Squaresville" and "A&S is the most."[652]

At the center of all this swirl of gawking, criticizing and co-optation stood the movement's most prominent authors, Kerouac and the poet Allen Ginsburg, assumed by many on both the inside and outside to embody the Beats' true nature and goals. Both became interested in Zen around 1953, several years before the Boom hit mainstream

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[648] O'Neil, 116, 126-129; Herb Lyon, "Tower Ticker," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept 21, 1959, D2.

[649] Zimpel, 16; Lawrence E. Davies, "Coast Bohemians Feeling Less Beat," *The New York Times,* June 14, 1959, 75.

[650] "American Collections: Defiant Fashions for A Beatnik Heiress," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1960, 33.

[651] Lloyd Zimpel, "Footnotes on The New Bohemia," *The New Republic*, July 18, 1960, 16, Ira Henry Freeman, "Fifth Avenue is Cool to Window Beats," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1960, 46; "Window Show Fined," *The New York Times*, Nov 10, 1960, 39.

[652] [Display ad no. 24] *The New York Times*, Aug 2, 1959, 26; [Display ad no. 48] *The New York Times*, Jan 3, 1960, 48.

America. [653] Initially, Kerouac read Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, which makes multiple references to Indian texts and appears to follow the Bhagavad-Gita's emphases on Buddhist themes of non-attachment, a notion of the infinite, and an all pervading natural spirit.[654] He was inspired to learn more about Eastern thought, purchased a translation of *The Life of Buddha*, and later discovered Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible.*[655] While neither book promoted the Zen sect in particular, they were both in the typical vein of early twentieth century modernist interpretations of Zen that emphasized the notion of unity within an otherwise disordered universe and advocated direct experience over intellectualization (see Ch 4).[656] For his part, Ginsberg was first attracted to Buddhism when he fell in love with Chinese painting, leading him to investigate its religious influences. He wrote to his friend and fellow Beat, Neal Cassady, that he was on "a very beautiful kick which I invite you to share…. [I have] begun to familiarize myself with Zen Buddhism thru [sic] a book… by one D.T. Suzuki (outstanding 89 yr. old authority now at columbia [sic] who I will I suppose to go see for interesting talk) "[657] He went on to express his enthusiasm for the idea of the koan*,* and

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[653] For more detailed information on how Kerouac and other Beat writers first encountered Zen, as well as their personal Buddhist practices see Michael Kenji Masatsugu, "Reorienting The Pure Land: Japanese Americans, the Beats, and The Making of American Buddhism"(PhD dissertation, University of CA, Irvine, 2004), ch. 3.

[654] See Paul Friedrich, *The Gita Within* Walden (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008) esp. ch. 7 which discusses both books' conceptions of "reality and being."

[655] Prothero, introduction.

[656] See Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible: History of Early Zen Buddhism, Self-Realization of Noble Wisdom, The Diamond Sutra, The Prajna Paramita Sutra, The Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (Forgotten Books, 1932, 2007).

[657] Allen Ginsberg, letter to Neal Cassady, May 14,1953, reprinted in *Big Sky Mind.*

how enamored he was of a religion that eschewed rationality and valued spontaneity, much as he did in his own poetry.

Most aspiring Beats, as well as those whom they fascinated, later learned about Zen through Kerouac's popular novel *The Dharma Bums*, published in 1958.[658] It tells the story of Ray Smith, a barely disguised version of the author, and his friendship with Japhy Ryder, himself a thinly veiled characterization of Gary Snyder. (At one point in the book, Kerouac even slipped and referred to his character as "Gary" forgetting to change his name to "Japhy"[659].) He wrote the book employing the same spontaneous style he famously used for *On The Road*, typing continuously on a roll of teletype paper, without stopping to insert paragraph breaks or punctuation.[660] As a result, its narrative is rather rambling and anecdotal, sprinkled throughout with bits and pieces of Ray/ Kerouac's Eastern-influenced personal philosophy. Ray and his friends live in San Francisco, making a meager living as poets and artists, and occasionally travel around the country in search of spiritual enlightenment. Together, they drink, recite poetry, and debate philosophy with one another. On his own, Ray reads the sutras, and spends weeks at his family home in North Carolina meditating under a tree like the Buddha. The novel ends

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[658] One unlikely fan of the book was Daniel Ellsberg. At the time he read *The Dharma Bums*, he was under the employ of the Rand Corporation on loan to the Office of Naval Research in Japan, hardly fitting the profile of a typical Beat. He later met and discussed politics with the real Snyder in Japan, and eventually went on to expose the top-secret Pentagon Papers on U.S. misconduct in Vietnam. How much influence Beat idealism may have had on this later decision is of course impossible to discern. See Dan Ellsberg, "The First Two Times We Met," in *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of A Life* ed by Jon Halper (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991).

[659] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (NY: Penguin Books, 1958, 1986),161.

[660] Al Aronowitz, "St. Jack," reprinted in *Conversations with Jack Kerouac*, ed. by Kevin J. Hayes (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005) 33-35.

after he takes a job as a fire spotter in Oregon and finally experiences something like satori, not through solving a koan, but by realizing his inherent unity with God and nature. Overall, the book portrays a discursive quest for answers by one young inspired American artist who borrows heavily from Buddhist thought and practice.

In forming this spiritual outlook, Ray has clearly read and understood a lot about the subject,[661] but like many "Nightstand Buddhists" he tends to incorporate only those elements that he finds most appealing, in this case disregarding those that he views as overly disciplinarian or repressive. As Lawrence Lipton, "The Boswell of The Beatniks,"[662] phrased it, "the Zen elements stick out in the novel like so many undigested lumps."[663] At one point in fact, Ray explicitly denies that he is a follower of Zen, instead claiming to be "an oldfashioned dreamy Hinayana coward of later Mahayanism."[664] He goes on to criticize several aspects of the sect including the strict discipline involved with koan training. He calls it "mean," and denounces "all those Zen Masters throwing young kids in the mud because they can't answer their silly word

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[661] For a discussion of the breath of Kerouac's Buddhist understanding, see Ben Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and The Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), ch. 8.

[662]HarryT. Moore, "Cool Cats Don't Dig The Squares," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1959, BR1, quoted in [display ad no 28] *The New York Times*, July 1, 1959, 29.

[663] Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, 252.

[664] Zen falls under the umbrella of Mahayanism. Such a label as Kerouac gives himself would have in fact been highly unlikely, considering Mahayana Buddhism arose as a movement to reform Hinayana. Most likely he means to imply that he is a holdover from the old school, which he believed valued enlightenment and mercy over disciplined instruction. See Takada Yoshihito & James M. Vardaman, Jr., *Talking About Buddhism Q&A* (Tokyo: Bilingual Books, 1997, 2008), 73-75 and Ted Berrigan, "The Art of Fiction: Jack Kerouac," *Paris Review*, 1968, reprinted in *Conversations with Jack Kerouac*, 67.

questions."[665] He also admires many practices that would have been frowned upon by most Zen masters, including the Tibetan practice of "yabyum," which essentially involves attaining a higher spiritual consciousness through sexual congress.[666] He and his friends also seem to find as much enlightenment in hiking and camping as they do in meditation, and improvise poetry and toss koans at one another while drunk on cheap wine. At one point, Ray even expresses a theory that Jesus Christ was a later incarnation of the Buddha, revealing his reluctance to fully renounce his Catholic upbringing.[667]

It is somewhat ironic to note, however, that the real Gary Snyder might have frowned on this amalgamating process that Kerouac employs. Writing for a leftist audience in *Liberation* magazine in 1959, he claimed that true Beat Zen should involve not only spiritual seeking and a "respect for abandon," but also "discipline" and "tradition."[668] Showing sincere dedication to his Zen study, Snyder himself learned Japanese and studied T'ang poetry in the original Chinese at the University of California, Berkeley. He went on to translate the works of poet Han Shan, and headed to Ryosen-an to practice Zen with Fuller Sasaki.[669] He once wrote to First Zen Institute director Mary Farkas, "I have an understandable fear of [Zen] being cheapened and misinterpreted by

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[665] Kerouac, 13.

[666] *Ibid.*, 28-29. In the book's description of the practice, Japhy demonstrates yabyum by sitting naked while his girlfriend Princess, also naked, straddles his lap and looks deep into his eyes.

[667] *Ibid.*, 202. For more on Kerouac's ties to Catholicism, see Giamo, part I.

[668] Gary Snyder "Note on Religious Tendencies," reprinted in *The Beats*, 147-148.

[669]Rick Fields, *How The Swans Came to The Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1981), 213-215.

westerners, in the manner that much Buddhist and Hindu thought has been stained by the appalling sloppiness of the Theosophists and other even less mentionable groups."[670] Alan Watts also referred to Snyder as more "serious" than Kerouac, and added "indeed it would be difficult to fit Snyder into any stereotype of the Bohemian underworld."[671] Snyder in fact proved more serious than Watts himself, as he once told Fuller Sasaki that he did not agree "that the 'essential meaning' of Zen can be made available to westerners in a durable form, without some of the supporting lumber of tradition, including Zendos and Masters."[672]

In his novelized form, Japhy stays true to Snyder in many respects; he later described the character as "a fair portrait" of himself at the time. [673] Mirroring real life, Japhy meets Ray at a Beat poetry reading, closely based on the actual "Six Poets at The Six Gallery" event, where Ginsberg delivered his famous performance of the poem "Howl." Like Snyder, Japhy also lives in a small cottage filled with oriental objects where he works on translating Chinese poetry, and toward the end of the story, he leaves Ray behind to study Zen in Japan. It is clear throughout the novel that he has a far deeper dedication to Zen than Ray does, and as such, often steps into the role of a more enlightened spiritual guide. But in some cases, Japhy deviates more from the strict practice of the First Zen Institute than Snyder might have in real life. During one

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[670] Gary Snyder to Mary Farkas, April 16, 1952, First Zen Institute Archives, New York.

[671] Alan Watts, *This is IT and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1958), 100.

[672] Gary Snyder to Ruth Fuller Sasaki, May 3, 1953, First Zen Institute Archives, New York.

[673] Jim Dodge, "Ten Snyder Stories," in *Gary Snyder*, 143.

conversation with Ray, he accuses his unnamed sponsor (presumably Fuller Sasaki) of being overly concerned with keeping up appearances, as well as having “little sense of America and who the people are who really dig Buddhism here.” [674] Probably more in keeping with Kerouac himself, Japhy ultimately feels that Square Zen adherents are out of touch and uptight in their insistence on disciplined practice.

Despite Kerouac and Ray’s tendency to mix various forms of Buddhism in their spiritual outlook, the Beats gained a reputation, undoubtedly with no small help from Watts’ article, as practicing Zen specifically. Rigney noted in his study that while most Beats came from a Christian or Jewish background, many professed to follow a new religion of their own invention, often heavily influenced by Zen.[675] Lipton tried to explain Zen’s appeal in his account of Beat life, *The Holy Barbarians.* He claimed they felt that by teaching the impermanence of all things in the physical world, Zen belief offered an antidote to the materialism running rampant through their society, noting that his subjects were often trying to escape “the rat race of ten thousand things.”[676] In *The Dharma Bums*, Japhy elaborates on this concept, declaring that he sees a utopian vision of:

> a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming all that crap they didn’t really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you always see a week later in the garbage anyway,

[674] Kerouac, 204-205.

[675] Rigney, 33-39.

[676] Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, 169.

> all of them imprisoned in a world of work, produce, consume,
> work produce, consume…[677]

This passage reflected an attitude common among all Zen adherents, their protest against the mass production of cheap and unattractive goods found throughout the world in which they lived.

This complaint may sound similar to that voiced by some square Zenists, especially psychologists like Erich Fromm, but the Beats frequently carried it much farther, forcefully denouncing any form of acquisition or material-based status seeking, no matter how tasteful. Viewing this kind of life as inherently repressive, they instead valued creativity and innovative thinking above all else. Lipton noted that Beats found the same type of anti-rational spontaneity in Zen philosophy that they did in jazz, poetry, and Kerouac's writing style. To the uninitiated, many koans offer seemingly nonsensical answers to simple questions, although to a master they are in fact highly calculated. Most Beats seemingly stuck with this initial impression, and came to believe that the basis of Zen lay in surrealistic free form thinking, as well as acting on impulse. While attending a Chicago cocktail party held in their honor, Ginsberg, his partner Peter Orlovsky, and fellow poet Gregory Corso, responded to a *Time* reporter's questions as if they were koans, with responses like "fried shoes," "Don't shoot the warthog" and "my mystical shears snip snip snip."[678] Kerouac had Japhy justify actions like these by describing the Beat's ideal of Zen liberation as he continues his speech:

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[677] Kerouac, 97-98.

[678] "Manners & Morals: Fried Shoes."

> I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures.[679]

In this sense, Beat Zen exemplified a set of characteristics opposed to Square Zen. Instead of promoting austerity, intellectual contemplation, and self-restraint, it primarily encouraged the freedom to think, say and do whatever one felt from one moment to the next.

Following the book's publication, this particular version of Zen interest quickly became a hallmark of the Beat Movement. In its review of *On The Road, The New York Times* had already listed the most prominent habits of the Beats as "drink, drugs, sexual promiscuity, driving at high speeds [and] absorbing Zen Buddhism."[680] But it wasn't until a year after the *The Dharma Bums* appeared that Beat hangout The Sheridan Square Chemists, which *The New York Times* described as "an avant garde drugstore," removed its soda fountain in favor of a Zen book section.[681] Soon thereafter, *Time* published a review of Kerouac's film *Pull My Daisy*, whose punning title was "Zen Hur."[682] By the end of the decade, a mere mention of the word Zen was sufficient to serve as shorthand for Beat spiritual sensibilities.

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[679] Kerouac, 97-98.

[680] Millstein, 27.

[681] Gay Talese,"Zen Selling Better Than Sodas, 'Village' Store Scraps Fountain," *The New York Times*, Sept 12, 1959, 11.

[682] "Zen Hur," *Time*, Dec 14, 1959, 66.

In keeping with its usual combination of fascination and distain, interpretation of Beat Zen from outside the movement was rarely positive. Both *New York Times* reviews of *The Dharma Bums* mocked the inconsistency of the characters, with one of them criticizing "their immersion, after brief flights into the Buddhist stratosphere, in the world of pure sensation, or – to put it more explicitly – in the world of drugs, drunkenness, and aimless wandering, spiked by frequent orgies of sex in the raw."[683] Novelist Herbert Gold characterized their mixing of spiritual influences as "promiscuity in religion," as he declared that, "Zen Buddhism has spread like the Asian flu" in Beat communities.[684] In contrast, John Ciardi of *The Saturday Review* found consistency, but only because the Beats' superficial interpretation of Zen allowed for it. "They have," he wrote, "raided from Zen whatever offered them an easy rationale for what they wanted to do in the first place."[685] In 1959, novelist Franc Smith published *Harry Vernon at Prep*, which lampooned the Beats by featuring a self-absorbed anti-hero who tried to find success as an angry young writer/ Zen scholar.[686] Dissention even arose from among their own ranks at one point as Beat elder statesman, William Burroughs wrote to Kerouac: "I have seen nothing from those California Vedantists [i.e. Beat Buddhists] but a lot of horse shit, and I denounce them without cavil as a pack of frauds. [They are] In short a bunch of

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[683] J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," *The New York Times*, Oct 26, 1958, BR2; Charles Poore, "Books of the Times," *The New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1958, 35.

[684] Herbert Gold, "The Beat Mystique," in *The Beats*, 161.

[685] Ciardi, 12.

[686] Charles Poore, "Books of The Times,: *The New York Times*, Feb 28, 1959, 17.

psychic retreaters from the dubious human journey."[687] Worse than dilettantes, he went on to express fears that they might be leading the movement in a misguided direction.

Not surprisingly, the main promoters of Square Zen were also unimpressed with this new version of their religion. Ruth Fuller Sasaki disapproved of Kerouac's "garbled and mistaken" Buddhism, characterizing the Beat movement as nothing more than the latest incarnation of pig-headed youthful rebellion. She wrote to Snyder "the present day 'Dharma bums' are just the same type of boys that appear in every generation, each time with a new name and new line, but intrinsically the same 'bums.'"[688] Thomas Merton wrote to D.T. Suzuki in 1959 " America is now full of people who think Zen is mere yielding to irrational impulses, and who do not know the difference between satori and being dead drunk."[689]

There was also no love lost between the Beats and Alan Watts. Kerouac unfavorably caricatured him as the spiritually shallow Zen huckster Arthur Whane in his novel, and Snyder declared in the *Liberator* that only squares write books about "Buddhism and Happiness for the masses."[690] Although Watts would apologize decades later in his autobiography,[691] at the time, he took issue with most followers of the Beat movement. In a 1959 radio broadcast, he admitted the existence of some "original Beats"

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[687] Quoted in Jack Kerouac letter to Allen Ginsberg, Aug 23, 1954, quoted in *Big Sky Mind*, 295.

[688] Quoted in Stirling, 101.

[689] Thomas Merton to D.T. Suzuki, Oct 24, 1959, reprinted in *Encounter: Thomas Merton & D.T. Suzuki,* ed. by Robert E. Daggy (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1988), 42.

[690] Kerouac, 195; Snyder, "Note on Religious Tendencies," 148.

[691] Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography 1915-1965* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1972), 309.

who chose to forgo a status-seeking life in favor of doing what they loved. His opposition was toward the "beatnik hangers-on," who he described as "just pretenders. They have the beards, the blue jeans, the jazz records, the marijuana. But they don't do anything. They just play at being Beats. They lie around all the time and are completely unproductive. They are weak people, parasites, exploiting a new cult."[692]

In *Beat Zen Square Zen*, he defined the kind of Zen they practiced as "hostile," writing that it "clangs with self-defense," and adding "just because Zen truly surpasses convention and its values, it has no need to say 'To hell with it,' nor to underline with violence the fact that anything goes."[693] He took issue with what he saw as a transcendent philosophy being misused as a weapon in the arsenal of social rebellion. Furthermore, he accused the Beats of employing Zen as "a pretext to license." It was true, he argued, that Zen did allow for moral relativism, as well as encourage uninhibited thought and spontaneous action, but Watts feared that in this case that the Beats were using it as "a simple rationalization," justifying their hedonistic lifestyle on the grounds that Zen permitted it. Instead, he claimed, there is a formalism to Zen, and important lessons to be learned through its irrationality before a student could claim any real understanding of its values.[694]

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[692] Watts, "The Beat Way of Life," originally delivered as a radio broadcast, Aug 11, 1959, in *Zen and The Beat Way*, adapted and edited by David Cellars and Mark Watts (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1997), 19.

[693] Watts, *Beat Zen, Square Zen & Zen* (San Francisco, City Lights Press, 1959),10.

[694] *ibid*, 15.

D.T. Suzuki also had an ambivalent relationship with Kerouac and his comrades. When Kerouac went to meet him, accompanied Ginsberg and Orlovsky, Suzuki greeted them warmly, served them green tea, and showed them his collection of Chinese paintings. However, Kerouac also felt compelled to barrage Suzuki with koans, an act that appeared to meet with his disapproval. As they were leaving, Kerouac told him, "Dr. Suzuki, I'd like to spend the rest of my life with you," to which he replied "sometime," as he hurried them out the door.[695] Later, Suzuki was unequivocally critical of the Beats in an article he wrote for the fall 1958 issue of *The Japan Quarterly* entitled "Zen in the Modern World." The main argument of his essay was that members of the movement seemed to be using Zen to justify their own immature rebellion without taking the time to fully understand it. He claimed that Beat writing contained "enough of childishness but not much of childlikeness. Spontaneity is not everything; it must be 'rooted.' These men… must grow up as human beings to become conscious of the true roots of being and walk with human dignity."[696] He went on to describe the sense of inner Self he felt these young people had to find before they could claim to be Zen followers with any measure of integrity.

With such disapproval coming from the Squares, it is clear that Beat Zen was a indeed world apart from the realm of shibui. As a group of rebels that adhered to a low-rent, occasionally macho aesthetic, they found little use for most shibui values. Many of the characteristics of Zen that most appealed to its bourgeois adherents – its sense of

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[695] Alfred J. Aronowitz, "The Yen for Zen" excerpted in *Big Sky Mind*, 82.

[696] D.T. Suzuki, "Zen in The Modern World," *Japan Quarterly*, Oct-Dec 1958, 454.

reflective serenity as well as its strengthening of self-discipline – the Beats would have labeled as effete or repressive.[697] Instead they chose to emphasize alternative, more aggressive or liberating elements of Zen's underlying philosophy. They read in Suzuki that "experiences are always straightforward, based on intuition or aesthetic apprehension,"[698]and decided that it condoned honesty and spontaneity. Latching on to the pronouncement in the "Four Noble Truths" that suffering is caused by longing and attachment, they found proof that materialism was corrupting their society. Turning their back on the world of their elders and looking beyond the religion of their Judeo-Christian upbringing (Kerouac once called Zen a "goofy form of heresy"[699]), they discovered in Eastern thought a seemingly timeless foundation for the lifestyle they wanted to live. In the process, they took one of the more fashionable movements of the late 1950s American upper middle class, and turned it against the social order that had made it popular in the first place.

Godzilla and Other Giant Monsters: Japan for The Drive-In Crowd

While the Beats and shibui enthusiasts battled over the most spiritually enlightened form of Zen, the Japanese cultural imports that in fact enjoyed the most widespread popularity during the postwar era fell outside of both of their aesthetic

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[697] Ironically, Kerouac himself later came to appreciate haiku poetry precisely because of its demanding and restrictive form. See Berrigan, 56-58.

[698] Suzuki, *Living by Zen* ed. by Christmas Humphries (London: Rider & Co., 1982), 32.

[699] Berrigan, 26.

sensibilities. Reflecting in the 1990s, humorist Dave Barry claimed that in his teenage years in the 1960s he learned through the movies that Japan was

> a weird foreign country that was for some reason under almost constant attack by giant mutated creatures. Godzilla was the most famous one, of course, but there were also hyperthyroid pterodactyls, spiders, etc., all of which regularly barged into Tokyo and committed acts of mass destruction. I imagine this eventually became so common-place that Japanese TV weathermen included it in their forecasts.("Partly cloudy this afternoon, with a sixty percent chance that Tokyo will be leveled by immense radioactive worms.")[700]

At drive-in theaters across the country, tens of thousands of viewers like Barry witnessed the spectacle of giant monsters attacking Japan through the films of Toho Studios' wildly popular science fiction movies.

The drive-in movie theater enjoyed its heyday in the mid-twentieth century, as Americans moved out of the cities into more spacious suburbs and purchased automobiles in larger numbers than ever before. These theaters have since earned a reputation as "passion pits," where teenagers went to escape in the privacy of their cars from the watchful eyes of their parents. However, studies at the time revealed that the majority of drive-in attendees were in fact middle to working class families with young children. Watching the movie in the car as a family did away with the need for a babysitter, and parents were often able to enjoy the film while the children slept in the back seat. Most drive-ins also offered playgrounds underneath the screen, so kids could

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[700] Dave Barry, *Dave Barry Does Japan* (NY: Random House, 1992), 7. Also the "Hyperthyroid Pterodactyls" would be a great name for a rock band.

wear themselves out before sunset, and increase the chances that they would settle down once the movie began.[701]

Few drive-ins ever screened big budget films. Most theaters were forced to show more cheaply made movies, as the major studios, which had long frowned on them as unwelcome upstarts, refused to rent their owners first run films. As a result, many evolved schedules that alternated second or third run large budget films with cheaper B-grade movies, many showing the former during the week and the latter on weekends.[702] Most audience members didn't seem to mind this low-budget selection, as they were too distracted by their children, or otherwise occupied with their date, to devote their full attention to what was showing on the screen. Theater owners didn't seem to care much either; they often doubted that their working class patrons were at all concerned with the critical reputation of the movie they were watching.[703] One concessions manager actually preferred bad movies, telling a film executive "the worse the pictures are the more stuff we sell."[704]

At the time, there was also no lack of cheap movies in circulation for these theaters to exhibit. The Supreme Court's *Paramount* decision, which broke up Hollywood's studio monopoly system, worked in favor of independent film companies in

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[701] Kerry Segrave, *Drive-in Theaters: A History from Their Inceptions in 1933* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1992), ch. 8 and ch. 15.

[702] Anthony Downs, "Where The Drive-In Fits into The Movie Industry," (1953), reprinted in *Exhibition: The Film Reader* ed. by Ina Rae Hark (NY:Routledge, 2002), 123-125.

[703] Segrave, 147.

[704] *ibid*., 73.

much the same way it had for foreign films (see chapter 2). Studios and distributors like American International Pictures (AIP) and Embassy Pictures, profited greatly as they rushed in to fill the gap left by the closing of the major studios' "B" departments.[705] Occasionally they too would import foreign movies, most frequently westerns, horror films, or "sword and sandal" epics from Italy that were thought to have a wider appeal than more "artistic" European films.[706] But the vast majority of their features were domestically produced "exploitation pictures." Film scholar Thomas Doherty explains that such movies often did their exploiting on three levels. Firstly, they exploited current events, cashing in on timely subjects to create interest. One egregious example was Roger Corman's *War of The Satellites*, which appeared in theaters only two months after the launch of Sputnik.[707] Secondly and thirdly, they exploited sensational themes, i.e. sex and violence, and the tastes of their audience, which in this case were often high school aged. The exploitation movie's exemplary form was the juvenile delinquent film. The American press of the time appeared as fascinated with scandalous teenage behavior as it was with the beatniks, and movie makers were able to borrow stories littered with accounts of knife fights and promiscuous activities. [708] In many ways the opposite of art

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[705] Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers & Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950's* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), ch 2.

[706] See Christopher Wagstaff "Italian Genre Films in The World Market," in *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity: 1945-95* ed. by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci, (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 74-84 and Karola, "Italian Cinema Goes to The Drive-in: The Intercultural Horrors of Mario Bava," in *Horror at The Drive-in: Essays in Popular Americana* ed. by Gary D. Rhodes (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003), 211-237.

[707] Doherty, 8.

[708] *ibid.*, ch.1.

house movies, these B grade films intentionally pandered to the basest emotions and employed simplistic, adolescent-oriented themes.

One genre that emerged within the exploitation category was the science fiction film, or "weirdies" as they were called in industry parlance. Typically filled with plenty of violence and destruction, they would often try to appeal to young audiences by featuring a protagonist they could relate to, leading to the creation of a legion of teenage werewolves and vampires. At other times, these movies cashed in on the anxiety over the spread of nuclear weapons that pervaded American culture at the time,[709] a theme that resonated with children already accustomed to hiding under their desks for fallout drills.[710] In these films radiation produced giant monsters that would then move destroy the nearest city, offering both a critique of nuclear proliferation, and the fear and excitement of seeing modern civilization utterly decimated.[711] One of the earliest and most distinguished of these films was *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugene Lourie, 1953), which featured a giant dinosaur awakened by an atomic blast that comes ashore to wreak havoc on New York. Another was *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954), in which the southwestern United States is invaded by radioactively mutated ants. Other similar titles included: *It Came from Beneath the Sea, Tarantula, Mole People, The Deadly Mantis,*

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[709] For more on nuclear anxiety, see Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and The Bomb" in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in The Age of Cold War* ed. by Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (NY: New York University Press, 2001).

[710] Doherty, 146-153.

[711] For more on the psychological responses to, and reasons Americans seem to love to witness, the destruction of cities see Max Page, *The City's End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York's Destruction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 4 gives special focus to the destruction of New York by nuclear attack.

Attack of The Crab Monsters, The Amazing Colossal Man, The Monster from Green Hell, The Alligator People, and *The Giant Behemoth*.[712]

Some of these movies proved so popular that they caught the attention of filmmakers worldwide. Japanese movie producer Tomoyuki Tanaka had the plot of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* in his mind one afternoon in 1954 as he traveled over the Pacific on a return flight from Indonesia. He was also contemplating the recent so-called "Lucky Dragon Incident," in which a Japanese fishing boat (the *Lucky Dragon*) was subject to radioactive fallout from nearby classified U.S. nuclear tests. While looking out the window, he began to wonder what would happen if another test were to awaken a hideous monster along the lines of the dinosaur in the movie. He was inspired to create his own film, and set his creative team on the project. Eventually they named their creature "Gojira," combining the word "gorilla" with the Japanese word for whale, "kujira." [713]

Their movie was a dark and serious commentary on nuclear proliferation, produced in the country that had felt its effects more directly and horrifically than any other in the world. The story revolves around a prehistoric beast that is awakened from its slumber at the bottom of the ocean by American nuclear tests, and then decides to vent its anger against humanity by destroying Tokyo. While one prominent scientist, Dr.

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[712] Sayuri Shimizu, "Lost in Translation and Morphed in Transit: Godzilla in Cold War America," in *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on The Global Stage* ed. by William M. Tsutsui and Michiko Ito (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 56; David Kalat, *A Critical History and Filmography of Toho's Godzilla Series* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1997), 13.

[713] August Ragone, *Eiji Tsuburaya: Master of Monsters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007), 34-35.

Yamane, wants to preserve the creature for research, the government overrules him, and calls for the monster to be destroyed. But the only thing that can possibly kill Gojira is a device known as the oxygen destroyer, a weapon that has the potential to become even more deadly than the monster himself, or even the hydrogen bomb. To prevent this from happening, its creator, Dr. Serizawa, commits suicide as he detonates the device, taking with him the knowledge of how to create another. The film concludes with a warning from Dr. Yamane that unless nations put an end to nuclear testing, more Gojira-like creatures could emerge in the future. In addition to these mature reflections on mankind's ability to annihilate itself, the movie includes shots of a burning and devastated Tokyo, as well as hospital wards filled with the injured and dying, dark scenes invoking the recent pain and destruction Japan had experienced during World War II, from urban firebombing as well as the A-bomb.[714]

To help deliver its somber messages, the film had the largest budget of any produced in Japan up to that point. Toho hired Inoshiro Honda, a colleague and occasional assistant director to Akira Kurosawa, as the director.[715] The movie featured top ranking talent, including actor Takashi Shimura, who had played the woodcutter in Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, and a musical score written by Akira Ifukube, Japan's most renowned classical composer at the time. Tanaka recruited Japan's most pre-eminent

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[714] For scholarly interpretations of Gojira's meaning in his original Japanese context, see Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture*, *1945-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 114-122 and Yomota Inuhiko, "The Menace from The South Seas: Honda Ishiro's *Godzilla*," in *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Alastair Philips and Julian Stringer (NY: Routledge, 2007), 102-111.

[715] Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like An Autobiography*, trans. By Audie E. Bock, (NY: Random House, 1983), 97, 174-176.

special effects technician, Eiji Tsuburaya, who had previously worked on films for Teinosuke Kinagusa (director of *Gate of Hell*), and during the war had produced mock battle scenes so realistic that they allegedly fooled the American military.[716] His team spared no expense when it came to the quality of their visual effects. They constructed a painstakingly detailed 1/25 scale model of Tokyo. Actor Haruo Nakajima, who played Gojira, wore a monster costume weighing 220 pounds, and allegedly lost 20 pounds during the physically demanding filming process.[717] In the end, the efforts of all involved proved worthwhile, as they produced a sophisticated spectacle, which over 6 million Japanese viewers paid to see.[718]

After the film became a hit, American distributors took notice and began to compete for the opportunity to exhibit it in their own country. According to Alex Gordon of AIP, he and his colleague Sam Arkoff first heard about the movie from a friend who suggested they attend a screening in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo neighborhood. They were so impressed by the audience reaction that they soon contacted Toho about the rights to the film, and were told by an L.A. sales representative that they could distribute it for $12,000. Meanwhile, the Tokyo offices were talking to other companies, and eventually sold the rights to Sam Levine of Embassy Pictures for $25,000, which was still a bargain

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[716] Ragone, ch's 1-2.

[717] *ibid.*, 38-44.

[718] Shimizu, "Lost in Translation," 52. For more on the Japanese reception of the original *Gojira* (critics were lukewarm, but audiences loved it), see Barak Kushner's essay "*Gojira* as Japan's First Postwar Media Event" in the same collection, 41-50.

price in the postwar movie business.[719] The film premiered in New York in April 1956, under the title *Godzilla: King of the Monsters.* (According to a romanizaton system in use at the time, the "ji" sound in Japanese became "dzi," and "ra," "la," rendering "Gojira" as "Godzilla."[720]) In May, it opened in Boston and Washington, D.C., and spread to theaters throughout the country over the summer.[721] While its initial American release took place in a reasonably upscale, first run theater,[722] in most cities, it was exhibited like other giant monster flicks, in the typical exploitation venues of matinee double features – in this case paired with the movie *Swamp Women* – and local drive-ins.[723] Nonetheless, the film made more money in the U.S. than most domestic monster movies, grossing $2.5 million.[724]

Once *Gojira* proved so successful both at home and abroad, Toho producers sensed there was more money to be made in a sequel, and began production on *Gojira's Revenge* almost immediately after the first movie left theaters. Made without the original director, and on a much smaller budget, it proved to be a lower quality film.[725] A new Gojira now confronts Angilus, another prehistoric monster sporting a spiny shell, and

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[719] Alex Gordon, "Godzilla, King of The Monsters," *Fangoria*, March 1988, 58; Shimizu, 52, 54.

[720] William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of The King of The Monsters* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 26-27.

[721] *ibid*., 52.

[722] Bosley Crowther refers to the Loew's State as "respectable" in "Screen: Horror Import, " *New York Times*, Apr 28, 1956, 11.

[723] for examples see [Display Ad 24], *Chicago Tribune*, Aug 3, 1956, A9.

[724] Shimizu, "Lost in Translation," 52.

[725] Ragone, 44-47; Kalat, 35-41.

destroys Osaka in the process. He returned yet again in 1962, this time at the request of an American producer. Willis O'Brien, creator of special effects for the film *King Kong* (1933) had long wanted to make a sequel to his initial blockbuster that pitted his giant ape against another famous monster. After he was unable to find financing in the states, Toho eventually agreed to take on the project, and pair Kong with Gojira. Tsuburaya, who was initially inspired by *King Kong* to enter the special effects business, was of course delighted to bring one of his favorite childhood characters to life. Honda also returned to the project, this time injecting a lighter tone into the film, and directing more for laughs than social commentary. The formula seemed to work, as *King Kong vs. Godzilla* became the highest grossing movie of the entire Gojira series in Japan.[726] Both movies also appeared in American drive-ins – the former under the title *Gigantis The Fire Monster* – distributed by Warner Brothers and Universal Pictures respectively.[727]

Over the next several years, other giant monsters from Toho's creative team of Tanaka, Honda, Tsuburaya and Ifukube left their mark on both sides of the Pacific. *Rodan* (1956) was a giant prehistoric bird that terrorized the southern island of Kyushu. In the movie, miners are terrified to discover that they have dug too deep and uncovered an army of giant prehistoric insects. Things only get worse when they find out the insects were serving as food for a pair of much larger rodans. After the couple destroys the town of Sasebo, the military is successful in driving them out of their volcano lair, and leaving them to perish in the ensuing lava flow. When the film reached the U.S. it grossed

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[726] Ragone 66-70; Kalat, 42-48; Ray Morton, *King Kong: The History of A Movie Icon from Fay Wray to Peter Jackson* (NY: Applause Theater & Cinema Books, 2005), 118-131.

[727] Ragone, 47, 70.

$450,000 (considerably more than highbrow box office champion *Gate of Hell*) while playing at 79 theaters throughout the New York metro area.[728]

It was followed by *Mothra* (1961), featuring Toho's first and only female giant monster. Co-sponsored by Columbia Pictures in the U.S., this film had the largest budget of any monster movie to date and took on a more international scope. Mothra herself was actually more of a goddess, on a mission from her South Pacific island home to save her one-foot-tall twin priestesses from the clutches of a greedy theater producer from Rolisica, a fictional foreign country that combined the Japanese names for Russia and America. In the process she is forced to destroy first Tokyo, where the twins are on display, and then New Kirk City, Rolisica, where the scheming villain later flees. In the end, the day is saved when an intrepid Japanese reporter, his photographer, and a enlightened scientist come up with a plan to safely return the twins to Mothra so all three can return home. The film's enhanced budget not only enabled Tsuburaya to build an impressively detailed model of New York for the New Kirk City scenes, but also allowed for more sophisticated special effects than those seen in the previous movies, as well as several elaborately staged musical numbers to accompany the Mothra theme song.[729]

In between the movies about giant monsters, or *kaiju* as they were called in Japanese, Toho also released several science fiction films that featured Tsuburaya's special effects. Two of them, *The Mysterians* (1957) and *Battle in Outer Space* (1959), featured a race of men from the planet Mysteroid who seek to conquer Earth after their

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[728] A.H. Weiler, "Passing Picture Scene," *New York Times*, March 23, 1958, X5.

[729] Ragone, 59-64.

planet has been destroyed by nuclear fallout. Additionally, the studio and its special effects team released a slate of other films starring monsters less successful than Godzilla, Rodan, or Mothra, including: *Half Human* (about an abominable snowman), *H-Man, Varan The Unbelievable, The Human Vapor, The Telegian,* and *Attack of the Mushroom People.* American distributors considered some of these films to be so ridiculous that they never even made it to the drive-in, and instead premiered as late night movies on television.[730]

In importing all of these films, bad or decent, American distributors felt the need to alter them to suit their new audience. Differences of language or culture, they reasoned, might alienate viewers in the U.S., and films had to be adapted accordingly, often in keeping with the extant giant-radioactive-monster genre already familiar to drive-in attendees. The most basic problem they encountered was the issue of dialog translation. Art house distributors frequently resolved the issue by providing subtitles, as few highbrow patrons seemed to mind making the extra effort to "read a movie," since fine art was supposed to offer a challenge.[731] But exploitation movie distributors assumed that their young and/or working class audiences would not have the ability or the patience to do the same, especially with a car's windshield potentially obscuring the bottom of the screen.[732] As a result, all *kaiju* films were dubbed.

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[730] *Ibid.*, ch's 4-5.

[731] See Wilinsky, ch. 4.

[732] On the choice between dubbing and subtitling, see Atje Ascheid, "Speaking Tongues: Voice Dubbing in The Cinema as Cultural Ventriloquism," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 40, fall 1997, 34.

Whereas subtitles draw attention to the act of translation, the process of dubbing masks it, making it less likely for viewers to remain conscious of the fact that an original dialogue track exists, which differs greatly from what they are hearing in their own language.[733] This effect would only have been enhanced by the poor quality of the sound systems at most drive-ins, for which no movie, foreign or domestic, did the voice and picture match seamlessly. Therefore it would have been relatively easy for viewers to forget that the script writing and the acting they were hearing were in fact the creation of the U.S. distributor, and not necessarily the same as those in Japanese version. This situation could often affect the way American audiences perceived the quality of a film, especially considering that the verbal dialog sounded much more fluent in some of these films than in others. In *Mothra*, for instance, the characters' spoken lines seem fairly natural and appropriate to the flow of their conversations. The same, unfortunately, cannot be said of *Gigantis The Fire Monster*, where characters occasionally make statements that seem to have little to do with what another actor has just said, and at one point the hero utters the bizarre expletive "Ah, banana oil!" There are also cases where scenes containing verbal repartee in the Japanese version are played straight in the American version, without any jokes at all.[734] Most English-speaking audiences who saw the film probably would have assumed its script writing was dull or bizarre, if not downright poor.

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[733] *ibid*., 35-38.

[734] The Toho Master Collection edition DVD of the film (here titled *Godzilla Raids Again*) includes the Japanese version of the film with English subtitles, as well as the American version, allowing viewers to make such contrasts.

Most American dubbing studios employed second-rate actors whose talents rarely matched up to their Japanese counterparts. Examples of voice actors who went on to bigger careers after working on these movies include *Star Trek's* George Takei, and cartoon actors Daws Butler and Paul Frees, best known as the voices of Yogi Bear and Boris Badenov.[735] To make matters worse, they were also frequently told to speak in Japanese accents, occasionally mimicking Asian stereotypes. As a result, the quality of acting in these films often sounded far worse than it had been in their original versions. For example, the *New York Times* said that no one in *The Mysterians* could act, despite the fact that like *Godzilla*, it featured Takashi Shimura.[736] Shimura, a lead actor in numerous Kurosawa films, could in fact act very well, but the same probably could not be said for the voice actor making him sound like an aging Charlie Chan.

Sam Levine, American producer of the original *Godzilla*, was well aware of the cheap feel of dialog dubbing, and wanted to avoid it as much as possible in his version of the film. He devised a creative solution, and hired director Terry Morse to produce a new version for English speaking viewers. He shot scenes with Raymond Burr cast as newspaper correspondent Steve Martin covering the Godzilla story from Tokyo with the help of a translator, played by Japanese-American actor Frank Iwanaga. Morse then spliced these scenes into the Japanese footage, with Burr occasionally conducting conversations with Japanese characters while their faces remained unseen. For the few

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[735] Kalat, 24-25.

[736] H.H.T., "Screen: A Double Bill," *NEW YORK TIMES*, July 2, 1959, 15.

scenes in which Burr did not appear, the actors' voices were indeed dubbed, but re-editing successfully minimized use of the technique. [737]

In the process, Morse and Levine also toned down the film's critique of nuclear testing, particularly in terms of U.S. responsibility, deleting references in the dialog to Hiroshima, Nagasaki and bomb shelters, as well as Yamane's prophetic final line: "If we keep on conducting nuclear tests, it's possible that another Godzilla might appear."[738] Most likely they feared that patriotic working class Americans would reject any direct criticism of their nation and its military activities,[739] but in keeping with themes of other giant monster movies, the presence of a more diffuse nuclear threat was allowed to stay. This softening of the original film's message was made clear in one of *The New York Times'* reviews of the movie. "One might remotely regard [Godzilla]," critic Bosley Crowther wrote, "as a symbol of Japanese hate for the destruction that came out of nowhere and descended upon Hiroshima one pleasant August morn. But we assure you that the quality of the picture and the childishness of the whole idea do not indicate such calculation. Godzilla was simply meant to scare people."[740] In coming to America, *Gojira* lost some of its critical dark side, and began to look more like light entertainment.

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[737] Kalat, 24-34.

[738] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 31, 36-37, 40.

[739] The removal of material deemed to be potentially offensive from foreign films by exploitation movie distributors, through either re-editing or dubbing, was in fact common practice. More typically, it was used to cover sexual themes. See Karola, 226. Oddly enough, the editing for *Rodan* appears to have gone in the other direction from *Godzilla*. While in the original Japanese version, the creatures are awakened by miners digging too deep, the American version adds a prologue including stock footage from nuclear tests, implying this is what brought the monsters back to life, essentially adding a anti-nuclear message that wasn't there before.

[740] Bosley Crowther, "Monsters Again," *New York Times*, May 6, 1956, 129.

Later Godzilla movies were given similar treatment. Warner Brothers handled the re-editing for *Gigantis The Fire Monster*, but they did so with much less care than Morse had taken with the original. While the re-assembled version of first movie often works in a semi-believable way, the American version of the sequel includes spliced in footage from other B-movies including *Unknown Island, One Million B.C., The Lost Continent*, and the Mexican *Adventuras en la Centro de la Teira*.[741] Universal Pictures did not do much better with *King Kong vs. Godzilla*. They tried to duplicate the technique of the original movie by creating and adding original footage of news reports broadcast in English. However, these scenes essentially feature newsmen talking directly to the camera, sitting behind a table in what appears to be a windowless studio decorated with paper maps tacked to the walls. At one point a “Godzilla expert” is reduced to holding up a children’s picture book to illustrate the dinosaurs the beast resembles. Intercut with the original footage, it was clear the American scenes had a markedly lower budget.[742] The edited versions of both movies also remove Ifukube’s music, replacing them with stock soundtracks, on the assumption that the more sophisticated original scores would sound “too Oriental” to American audiences.[743]

The overall poor quality of most imported versions of Toho sci-fi movies was also undoubtedly due to the nature of their target audience: teenagers, children, and the working-class parents that took them to see these movies. Exploitation movie producers

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[741] Ragone, 44-47; Kalat, 35-41.

[742] See Ragone 66-70; Kalat, 42-48 and Morton, 118-131.

[743] Ragone, 70.

assumed that their main concern was not a film's quality, but its level of excitement, thrills and violence, and therefore no scene of a monster attacking a city or otherwise engaging in acts of destruction was ever cut or shortened from a *kaiju* movie. Furthermore, some of these films contained subtle and serious themes, most commonly anti-nuclear proliferation, but also global co-operation (*The Mysterians*) and anti-commercialism (*Mothra*). *Mothra* also delivers a subtle critique of foreign relations, wherein a recently recovered Japan must save the world's superpowers – represented as Rolisca – from the consequences of their own greed. But such issues were completely overlooked in the movies' promotion campaigns. Instead the films were marketed using the hyperbolic rhetoric common in exploitation movie advertising, promising lots of titillating excitement, and employing plenty of exclamation points.[744] Posters advertizing *Godzilla* read "It's Alive! Raging through the World on a Rampage of Destruction!" and "See it crush… See it kill… A mighty city of 8 million wiped out by its death ray blasts! Enjoy the thrill of your life!!" [745] When *Rodan* arrived in American theaters it was double-billed at some drive-ins with *Gigantis* as "the mammoth monster show of the century!"[746] Mothra, the feminine monster, was somewhat softened: "The Mightiest Monster in All Creation! Ravishing A Universe For Love!"[747]

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[744] See J. Rocky Colavito, "Naked! Screaming! Terror! The Rhetoric of Hype and Drive-In Movie Trailers," in *Horror at the Drive-In*, 41-52.

[745] Shimizu, "Lost in Translation," 53.

[746] [Display Ad 36] *New York Times*, Jun 24, 1959, 36.

[747]Mothra Movie Poster E-bay item, http://cgi.ebay.com/Mothra-Mosura-1961-Movie-Poster-Postcard_W0QQitemZ270369997046QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH_DefaultDomain_0?hash=item2703699

These advertising campaigns also tended to downplay the fact that the movies were from Japan. Lobby cards used to promote *Godzilla* listed Raymond Burr as the star, and gave directorial credit to Morse before Honda. Those for *Rodan* similarly list distributors The King Brothers in much larger typeface than Toho Studios. Larger sized posters for *Rodan* featured a dragon-like creature that looks nothing like the actual Rodan, attacking an American looking city with white people running and screaming in terror.[748] As a result, some audience members, especially children, had no idea they were going to see a foreign film. One Godzilla fan later recalled his surprise at seeing the movie for the first time: "I was really confused. Why were all the people Japanese and why were their mouths moving so weirdly?."[749] In contrast to Japanese movies shown at art houses, where foreign origins were a selling point for cosmopolitan-minded patrons, Toho's sci-fi films were marketed to look as much as possible like other American-made B-movies.

That such domestic films were often made on-the-cheap was beside the point. Thus, a collection of movies that fit the category of middling action pictures in Japan became categorized with low-grade flicks by the time they reached U.S. Audiences and critics, accustomed to Japan's reputation for exporting shoddy merchandise, expected nothing more from these movies and treated them accordingly. In fact, few critics condescended to even review them in the first place, and those that did often took a

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97046&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14&_trkparms=72%3A1205|66%3A2|65%3A12|39%3A1|240%3A1318|301%3A1|293%3A1|294%3A50, accessed March 26 2009.

[748] Ragone, 17, 50, 52.

[749] Kalat, 28.

highly derisive tone. Crowther called the first *Godzilla* movie “an incredibly awful film,” and said the monster itself looked like “a miniature of a dinosaur made of gum shoes” smashing “about $20 worth of toy buildings and electric trains.”[750] *Newsweek* described him as “a 400-foot-high plucked chicken” who “cannot act his way out of a paper bag,” and with a remarkable lack of foresight called the movie vastly inferior to Universal’s now forgotten *The Creature Walks Among Us*.[751] When a *Chicago Tribune* reviewer, writing under the unlikely name of Mae Tinee, witnessed the death of the two rodans, she responded “good riddance to both of them.”[752] In *The Saturday Review*, Arthur Knight later speculated, “Perhaps only a glutton for punishment would go to see *King Kong vs. Godzilla* in the first place,” to which Crowther added, “viewers who attend the ridiculous melodrama… should know exactly what to expect, and they get what they deserve.”[753]

Yet, here and there, a few reviewers did take some notice of the care initially put into these movies. Philip T. Hartung of the Catholic magazine, *The Commonweal*, in particular appreciated the less-than-subtle morals they often presented. He complimented *Rodan’s* anti-nuclear message, and praised scenes in *The Mysterians* in which UN countries band together to fight the extra-terrestrial invaders and preserve world

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[750] Crowther, “Screen: Horror Import,” 11.

[751] “Fair Warning,” *Newsweek*, May 14, 1956, 126.

[752] Mae Tinee, “Horror – Poorly Done,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 29, 1958, A3.

[753] Arthur Knight, “True Confessions,” *The Saturday Review*, July 27, 1963, 34; Bosley Crowther, “Screen: Wartime Adventures of President Kennedy,” *New York Times*, Jun 27, 1963, 23.

peace.[754] A *New York Times* review for *Battle in Outer Space* nearly echoed some of the praise the newspaper had given to highbrow Japanese movies in claiming, "the most attractive thing about this Toho production is the décor – the clean, bright color, and a fetching assortment of obvious, but effective, miniature settings and backgrounds."[755] Two years later, another reviewer made a similar comment about *Mothra*. "There's that color, as pretty as can be, that now and then smites the eye with some genuinely artistic panoramas and décor designs." He went on to call the film's conclusion "as touchingly bizarre a climax as we've seen in years," adding that the plot contained "some genuinely penetrating moments" and "several of the special effects shots are brilliant."[756] While all of these compliments are qualified, they nonetheless demonstrate that at least a few U.S. critics appreciated the effects of Toho's big budgets, and Honda and Tsuburaya's efforts. It is probably also no coincidence that *Mothra's* American version was less-heavily re-edited and features much higher quality dubbing than the Godzilla sequels.

In the end, the most telling testament to the popularity of these movies among American audiences is their longevity. After their initial releases, many were revived on a periodic basis at local drive-ins, where their owners knew they were sure to attract customers. They also enjoyed new life and found new audiences on television. At its inception, the film industry had feared TV as a source of competition that encouraged

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[754] Philip T. Hartung, "The Screen," *The Commonweal,* Dec 13, 1957, 288 and May 29, 1959, 232.

[755] Howard Thompson, "Screen: Moon is Warned," *New York Times*, July 9, 1960, 10.

[756] A.H. Weiler, "Screen: Hatari! Captures The Drama of Taganyika Wildlife," *New York Times*, June 12, 1962, 19.

potential audiences to stay home instead of going out to the movies. At first, only British studios and independent distributors were willing to rent any of their product to TV stations. In the mid-1950s, the major Hollywood studios finally relented, but made only their pre-1948 catalogues available. Therefore any movie seen on television at the time was, by necessity, either English, B-grade, or outdated. At a time when the young medium was still struggling to find enough content to fill all its timeslots, successful independently distributed movies, like Toho's imports, were a boon. *Godzilla* and *Rodan,* for example, both played on local New York station WOR's "Million Dollar Movie," a prime time program that ran the same film twice a night for an entire week.[757]

Boosted by such wide exposure over the years, Godzilla has risen to become an international icon. In 1963 the *New York Times* officially declared his name to be a "household word."[758] Two decades later, a *Times*/ CBS News poll discovered he was the third most well-known Japanese "person" in America.[759] In addition to Toho's continuing movie series, Godzilla also starred in an American remake, his own comic book series, a Hanna-Barbera cartoon show, ads for Dr. Pepper, Nike and Subway, the underground cartoon short *Bambi Meets Godzilla,* and a rock song by the band Blue Oyster Cult, as well as countless figurines, action figures and collectibles. He has been spoofed on TV comedies including *Saturday Night Live*, *The Simpsons, South Park* and

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[757] Gomery, 247-248; "Television Programs," *New York Times*, Oct 12, 1958, X14; "Television," *New York Times*, Oct 10, 1960, 63.

[758] Charles Poore, "Books of The Times," *New York Times*, July 16, 1963, 29.

[759] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 6-7. In 1985, when asked to name a Japanese person, the top two responses among the sample of 1500 Americans were Hirohito and Bruce Lee, the latter of which is actually from Hong Kong.

Chapelle's Show. His name has come to connote destructive tendencies to such a degree that even the suffix "-zilla" is now sufficient to describe any thing or person as oversized or overly emotional, e.g. the Fox TV network's show *Bridezillas*.[760] In short, he has become inextricably woven into the fabric of American popular culture.

In recent years, scholars have tried to uncover the matter of why Godzilla and his ilk have enjoyed such a large following. Several suggestions were presented at the conference "In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage" held in 2004 at the University of Kansas. One theory, offered by Japanese Studies professor Susan Napier, is that he can embody fears projected onto an Oriental Other, or alternatively the menace of the nuclear age. Another, posited by anthropologist Theodore Bestor, is that he destroys symbols of modern civilization's progress, an act that is fraught with both terror and possibility. A third, put forth by English professor Joyce Boss, is that he acts as mythical trickster figure, functioning as both punisher and educator. Most agree that he is so successful because he resists any one definition of what he symbolizes.[761]All of their speculations also share the common assumption that giant monsters appeal directly to human beings' primitive or subconscious instincts. While *kaiju* movies might have contained more noble intellectual themes and artistic elements in their original forms, most of these were lost, or at least heavily downplayed, as they were shoehorned into the American exploitation market. Once dubbing killed the quality

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[760] For more examples of late 20th century Godzilla references see Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, ch. 4.

[761] See essays in *In Godzilla's Footsteps,* Susan Napier "When Godzilla Speaks," 9-20, Joyce E. Boss "Hybridity and Negotiated Identity in Japanese Popular Culture,103-110, and Theodore C. Bestor "Epilogue: He Did The Stomp, He Did The Monster Stomp," 201-204.

of acting and screenwriting, and re-editing took care of subtle humor and social commentary, the primary appeal left to American audiences was the spectacle of destruction and mayhem that their promotional campaigns had promised.

In the end, these movies became as about as far removed as they could be from the shibui movement. Eventually, it seemed the only thing *kaiju* had in common with ikebana was their country of origin. Instead of promoting serenity and self-restraint, these movies were filled with scenes of panicked crowds running in terror designed to elicit a strong emotional response. Far from minimalist, these movies can better be described as "maximalist," not only in that they feature enormous beasts towering above major cities and emitting deafening roars, but in that they up the ante in successive movies by offering more creatures for Godzilla to duel, and more locations for them all to destroy. But perhaps the biggest difference of all lay in the audience. Shibui objects were put on display in museums and the homes of the wealthy. Kaiju movies appeared mainly in drive-ins, which communications scholar Eric Mark Kramer referred to as "intimate, local, down to earth, 'Grade B,'" and added, "whoever goes there is automatically transformed into a Grade B person."[762]Appreciating a shibui film could lend someone an air of refinement and sophistication; attending a Toho monster flick would mark them as a member of the tasteless masses who enjoyed kitsch. Of course, most true fans of these movies were probably too young, or two far removed from the social circles of midtown Manhattan to care; as far as they were concerned, they were having fun witnessing the action.

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[762] Eric Mark Kramer, "Who's Afraid of The Virgin Wolf Man? Or, The Other Meaning of Auto-Eroticism," in *Horror at The Drive-In*, 21.

Conclusion

In many respects, it seems the sci-fi movies were far removed from Beat Zen as well. One aided intellectuals and artists on an earnest quest for truth, the other, seemingly cheaply produced like so many other products imported from Japan, mainly provided escapist entertainment. One aimed directly at dismantling the social order behind the oppressive bourgeois lifestyle; the other appealed to those who took little notice of what those snobs thought in the first place. But there were some notable similarities between the two as well. First, neither was very strict about staying true to their original Japanese forms. In combining Zen practice with other Buddhist teachings as it suited them, or editing and dubbing movies to fit a new audience's perceived taste, Beats and exploitation producers alike thoroughly Americanized these cultural forms, re-crafting them to fit their own concerns. Secondly, they were both aimed at an excitable young, typically male, audience, and as such tended to be loud and exuberant instead of staid and serene, with their drunken debates over koans or scenes of mass destruction. Along similar lines, both meant to express and appeal to sensation. Beat Zen encouraged spontaneity, and urged its followers to experience ecstasy by giving in to their instincts. Monster movies aimed to inspire fear in their audiences, and well as amazement at the awesome power of these giant creatures. Both succeeded in creating alternative, more vibrant modes of consuming cultural forms from Japan that didn't have to be austere, restrained, or bound by tradition.

In doing so, they also foreshadowed twenty-first century taste in Japanese pop culture much more closely than the shibui movement. As the 1960s progressed, the minimalist styles of modernism gave way to a more eclectic and colorful popular

aesthetic, and shibui slowly faded into the background. Kerouac's novels, in contrast, continue to sell to a wide audience of disaffected youth on their own spiritual journeys. The kaiju similarly lived on, not only through even more Godzilla sequels, but also TV shows, in particular Tsuburaya's series *Ultraman*, that featured a space age superhero fighting a new giant monster each week. It was followed by other Made-in-Japan series, like *Astro Boy* and *Speed Racer*, also marketed towards young viewers, which in turn paved the way for more animated series and comic books. In the 1990s some of these *anime* and *manga* became much more sexual, violent, and darker in tone. Their new fans tended to consider themselves non-conformist and subversive, along much the same lines as the Beats had once done.[763] From the current vantage point at the turn of the millennium, it appears that these youth-directed, rebellious and/or fantastical imports in Japan have now taken a place of prominence over more refined shibui practices in American culture.

[763] See Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Had Invaded The U.S.* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

APPENDIX:
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Buddhism Now and Zen

Conceptual dichotomy
Had primed me for lobotomy
Until I met a Buddhist fan
And man!
He really got to me

Shoot the dharma
To me mharma!

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