

[Muho to Victoria:]

Dear Sir:

I had an exchange with Dan about Sawaki Kodo's support for Japanese nationalism, and I e-mailed him an article by Matsuoka Yukako which I think he forwarded to you. I received the answer that you wrote to him.

I know that I shouldn't be demanding any of your time by asking questions about a book which I haven't read myself so far. I only know about quotes which appear on the internet, especially in discussion forums, from time to time.

From my understanding, it seems that you helped to open the eyes of many Westerners to the fact that Buddhist clerics, just as many of their Christian and Islamic colleagues, were not always the solemn pacifists that we would like them to have been, especially in times of war. Most of them supported their country during war times, either actively fighting on the battlefield themselves, or verbally, justifying the cause of the war. I think that it is highly praiseworthy if your book helped to wake people up from their illusions about Buddhists and Buddhism.

Personally, I am not so surprised to find the Japanese Buddhist establishment involved in war time propaganda. Some of the quotes that I find on the Internet were also featured in Endo Makoto's "Ima no otera ni bukkyo ha nai", which I read and think is important.

There are some points of disagreement though, which maybe have to do with a different approach I have to Buddhism and especially the precepts. It seems to me that there are roughly three different approaches to the precepts:

1) The orthodox or common-sense approach to the precept as forbidding certain actions. You can either "keep" or "break" the precepts. In some traditions you can stay "clean" by excusing yourself from the precept (by disrobing etc) for the time you want to practice the action that is forbidden, i.e. have sex, kill people during war time etc.

2) The precepts as stating a "universal law". This seems to be the Mahayana interpretation that many Japanese Buddhist were and are still using. When Sawaki talks about the precept throwing a bomb, he is using this interpretation. Here you can not "break" the precept at all, because it is universal. You cannot kill universal life. Thus the precept becomes a tautology.

3) The precept as contradiction or koan, as Hisamatsu Shinichi's basic koan: What will you do when there is nothing at all you can do (and doing nothing at all is not an option either)? So it is not possible to "keep" the precept in the first place, but the function of the precept is to keep you aware of the contradiction of your life, and humble. It prevents the illusion "I am right, because I don't do wrong".

I tend to interpret the precepts in the third way, although I am aware that both the second and third interpretation make one vulnerable to the temptation of not taking responsibility for one's actions. I have taken the Buddhist monk's precepts myself that I understand to be forbidding (among other things) having sex, but I later married and

have two children (without disrobing). It is not that I have no problems with this, but I understand working with these problems and contradictions as part of what the precepts are about. I find it much harder to understand how people can seriously think that they can avoid breaking the precepts by disrobing for the time of their war service. Or the story of the Theravada monk who disrobed, fathered six children with several women and then "left home" again to keep to the precepts...

Anyway, I agree that we should give meaning to the precepts in our lives, regardless if we keep them literally or not. That also goes for the precept of not-killing during war time. But I am less interested in quotes from Japanese Buddhists in the past than in the question what we can do now, in whatever situation we might find ourselves.

The reason why your presentation of Sawaki Kodo concerns me (and that is why I write this e-mail), is simply that I am translating his books and practicing in his lineage. So if it should be true that he was a war monger or a zen fascist, as he is called by some, and that this is somehow expressed in his teaching, it would be a great problem for me.

But I think that this is not the case, although I completely agree that he wasn't a pacifist either, nor was he super human or anything. His attitude during the war is open to criticism. But I am disturbed by the fact that - judging from the quotes that I find on the Internet and that are supposed to come from your book - he indeed sounds like the war monger and Zen fascist that some people - after reading your book - seem to think he is. And thus they lose the chance to learn a lot of precious things from Sawaki Kodo, by viewing him through the glasses: "Another quote from the infamous Zen fascist!"

The most important example comes from Matsuoka's text
<http://members.id.infoseek.co.jp/chinohito/essays/sawaki1.htm>:

According to her, you are quoting Sawaki as saying: "My comrades and I gorged ourselves on killing people. Especially at the battlefield of Baolisi, I chased our enemies into a hole where I was able to pick them off very efficiently."

This quote seems to be from Sakai Tokugen's biography of Sawaki Kodo, which - as you know for sure - was not written or dictated by Sawaki himself, but by Sakai using the first person, thus creating the impression of an auto-biography. Only the first printing was published under Sawaki's name, all later editions mention Sakai as the author. Sakai mentions and apologizes for this in his forward in later editions. What I find interesting about this forward and the one by Tanaka Yoneki is, that while Tanaka claims that Sakai used notes by Uchiyama Kosho, Sakai makes the point that he didn't use those notes because they were full of mistakes. He also admits that his own version of Sawaki's life was contradicted by some after the publication of the book, but says that this was only about "nuances". This means, to say the least, that Sakai's version of Sawaki's life is not the only one, it is not generally accepted by everyone, nor is it directly out of Sawaki's mouth. Thus, the quote above is not by Sawaki, but by Sakai writing in a way that HE THINKS Sawaki would have talked.

Matsuoka says that the original quote by Sawaki that comes closest to Sakai's quote is the following:

「私などは日露戦争に行って腹いっぱい人殺しをして来たが、これが平常だったら

大変な話だ。此の頃新聞に、どこそこの敵を殲滅したとか、機銃の掃射をしたとかよく出ている。まるで掃除でもしているような気がする。残敵掃射などといって機関銃でシュウッとやるのである。これを銀座の真ん中で遊んでいる奴を、動物掃射などと云うようなことをやつたら大変なことになる。昔の戦争は、今からかんがえるとよほど風流なもので、一発一発パンパンと弾を射ったものだ。如 露で水を撒くように機関銃でバラバラやつたり、大きいヤツをドカンドカンと落としたり、毒瓦斯で一ぺんにやつたり、そんなに荒っぽくはなかった。私も得利寺で敵を落とし穴に追い込んで殺したことがあったが、それでも罰を食わなかつた。その上に恩給を貰つてしまつた。それだから人を殺したらいつでも罰になるとはきまつていない。罰にするとかしないとかは其の規定によるのだ。この規定は人間がこしらえるのである」

(オリジナル版『証道歌を語る』 414 頁、 1940 年)

I would translate that into broken English as something like:

"i went to the russo-japanese war and killed people until i had my fill/enough of it/my stomach was full [hara-ippai, "gorged" - in the German version of "Zen at war", they have an expression that means "we just couldn't get enough of", which is quite wrong, as "hara-ippai" means the point where one has enough], but if you think about it soberly/normally/in peace [heijo], this is a serious matter [taihen]. today the newspaper writes about the extermination of the enemy or how we clean [sosha] them away with machine gun fire. that almost sounds like everyday household cleaning [soji]. they fire their machine gun and call it "cleaning away the remains of the enemy". imagine that would happen in the midst of the ginza: people getting "cleaned" as if you were shooting animals! it would be a serious affair. compared with today the former war was old fashioned [furyu]. We shot only one bullet at a time. That was not so gross like shooting your machine gun as if you were spreading water with a watering can, or throwing big bombs, or poison gas. i also once killed enemies at the battlefield of Baolisi, chasing them into a hole, and i was never punished for it. i even received monthly payments as a veteran [onkyu] after i came back from the war. that means that you do not always get punished for killing a person. it depends on the regulations of the time if you get punished or not. but these regulations are made by men."

[from the 1st edition of sawakis comments on the shodoka, 1940]

Now I do not know what you make out of this, but at least I do not hear a Zen fascist boast about his deeds here, but rather a quite courageous criticism of unhuman ways to fight a war. In this context, the quote above hardly serves as proof for any support that Sawaki showed for the war. Also, there are many sources that say that Sawaki Roshi thought about the "onkyu" he received after the Russo-Japanese war as "dirty money" and wouldn't use it for his personal life, but rather to print Buddhist texts or support students of Buddhism, which is surprising, as even today many think that this war was an honourable war that saved Japan's independence against the threat of Western imperialism.

I think that the same is true for the text about the precept and the bomb.

「この不殺生ということは、どうしても仏教のいう無我というものが徹底しなければ、徹底するものではない。我というものを前提に置いたら、必ず、相手を嫌うことになり、これを殺さんならんことになる。それ故ここは、『法華経』の諸法実相ということが徹底すれば、前にあるものが仏さんであると思うて、これが殺せぬことになる。だからここに徹底するなら生死透脱ということもいわれる。 そういう人が戦さをすれば、敵を愛すること味方の如く、自利が利他にあっていい。別にむやみに敵兵を殺すとか、そんなことはありやせん。また掠奪するということなどもあるものじゃない。これが戦さをするとその土地の身になってやる。その土地の住民ができるだけ保護してやる。また戦術の方からいっても、その土地の人民を保護してやれば、その戦さは必ず勝つべきものである。また捕虜を大切にするということは、戦術の上からいっても、その方が得なのである。最後の勝利はそのものの上にある。己の命を捨てることは、鴻毛の如く、人の命を哀れむことは、己の如く。ここに人と己との境目の尽きたところが初めて不殺生戒なのである。だから法華経の『三界は皆これ我が有なり、その中の衆生は皆是れ吾が子なり』。ここから出発すれば一切のものは、敵も味方も吾が子、上官も我が有、部下も我が有、日本も我が有、世界も我が有の中で秩序を乱すものを征伐するのが、即ち正義の戦さである、ここに殺しても殺さんでも不殺生戒、この不殺生戒は剣を揮う。この不殺生戒は爆弾を投げる。だからこの不殺生戒を参究しなければならん。この不殺生戒と云うものを翻訳して、達磨はこれを自性靈妙と云った。」

Read as a whole, Sawaki is not saying that throwing bombs is in itself a perfectly good way of keeping to the Buddhist precepts, so Zen monks should go ahead without hesitating and kill as many as possible, but rather quite oppositely: When people have to go to war and kill people, they should still try to keep the precepts in mind when they throw bombs etc. They shouldn't let themselves allow to be carried away by excitement, as he did when he was in the war. They should stay aware of the contradiction (killing an enemy that you are supposed to identify with) and try to make the best of it, i.e. not killing enemies thoughtlessly ("killing one's fill", as Sawaki has done himself during the Russo-Japanese war), looting, other violence (rape?). When he adds that "even from a military point of view" this makes sense, he does not say that soldiours should keep to the rules only to "ensure victory", as you claim in your e-mail to Dan. In my opinion, he first tells the soldiours to care for the people, and only after that, to back up his claim against criticism, he says that this makes sense "even from a military point of view". This is supported by the following quote that Matsuoka makes (Sawaki saying in 1943):

物には重点がなければならぬ。人間にも重点がある。これが無上菩提である。戦さまでして人間を殺して最後の無上のものを求めぬならば、フウケモノ(実のない奴、愚か者)ばい。勝ちさえすればよい、負かしさえすればよいというが、それか

ら先に何があるか。私はそれから先が大切じゃという。これが正法眼蔵である。

(1943年7月提唱『返照』256号)

My English:

"things have a gravitational center. human beings also need to have a gravitational center. if you go to war and kill people but don't seek for something final, something that goes beyond, you are an empty person. people think it is all about winning, about not losing, but the question is: what comes after that? i think only that what comes afterwards is important. and that is the shobogenzo."

Again, I don't hear a war crazy fascist talking here. I'm surprised such statements went into print in Japan in 1943. I think that he is not telling people to forget about the precepts or Buddhism, but rather to try to make the best out of it.

I realize that my concern about Sawaki Roshi's mis-interpretation must seem secondary or even trivial to you. At the same time though I think that if it is true that you purposely put quotes out of context only to proof your point (the same claim is made [here](#) for your treatment of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who was even less of an supporter of the Japanese regime), you do damage to your own cause. Which would be a shame, as I generally sympathize with your criticism of Japanese established Buddhism, and I even think that it can be applied to Sawaki as well. I only think you went too far, and thus distorted the picture of Sawaki and probably many others completely, to the delight of such reviewers as the one at [Amazon](#), who claims that he now finally knows why his grandmother would shout: "If I saw a Jap, I'd shoot him!"

I realize that you must be very busy and maybe will not have the time to respond.

Yours sincerely,

Muho Noelke

[Victoria to Muho:]

July 3, 2007

Dear Muho-osho,

Thank you for your message. I apologize for not responding earlier, but I was working on a major article that had to be submitted by July 1st.

As for your comments, let me quote the following passage from "Zen at War": "The lives and accomplishments of [militarist-supporting priests] cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of their positions regarding the relationship of Zen to the state and warfare."

For me, this means that priests like Sawaki Kodo may indeed have many positive and laudable aspects to their lives and teachings even though, as I assert, they were, sadly, fervent supporters of Japanese militarism. In evaluating any human being it is always important to see the whole person, including both his positive and negative traits and accomplishments. The trouble of course in most religions, Zen included, is that those closest to their particular religious leader/master only want the positive

things to be known. This is as one sided as those who say that someone was completely negative or evil. As always, we need to take the "middle path."

As for Sawaki, there can be no question that in words and deeds he was a fervent supporter of Japanese militarism. I note that you try so hard to make excuses/explain away/reinterpret every militarist passage of his that you are aware of. However, as the additional material attached to this e-mail attests, those people around him during the war years never thought that ANYTHING he wrote or said was opposed to Japanese military actions IN THE SLIGHTEST! That explains why he was taken in by the head of the Tokyo police when Sawaki's house was destroyed by U.S. bombing raids; why he was a leader of a martial arts association during the war (whose goal was to prepare youth to become soldiers); why he was honored with a silver cup by the government; why he was sent to Manchuria to strengthen the morale of the troops and Japanese colonists there, etc., etc.

While none of us can know what he really thought inside, his words and actions over and over and over again during the war were recognized by ALL OF THOSE AROUND HIM as being TOTALLY IN SUPPORT OF THE WAR EFFORT! These facts will not change no matter how much you attempt, Muho-oshō, to make excuses/explain away/reinterpret what he wrote.

Also, if you are really interested in the truth about Makiguchi please read the following article I wrote in which I go into a detailed listing of his support for Japanese imperialism in Korea, etc. and his fanatical belief that only the Lotus Sutra as interpreted by Nichiren can bring victory to Japan. None of the Soka Gakkai apologists have even attempted to deny what I wrote in this later article:

"The Putative Pacifism of Sōka Gakkai Founder Makiguchi Tsunesaburō," published in the refereed journal Japanese Studies, Vol. 21/3, December 2001, pp. 279-296.

As for your comment: "even today many think that this war was an honorable war that saved Japan's independence against the threat of Western imperialism." Whoever thinks that way should go to South or North Korea, or China, or Singapore, etc. and ask how many of the millions of people in these countries agree with this idea! The Chinese in particular lost between 10-20 million human beings to the Japanese invaders and even today Japan's lack of true remorse strains relations between the two countries. It can certainly be argued that Western imperialism throughout the world should have been opposed, but the truth is that Japan's pre-WW II brutal colonial control of Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria shows Japan to have been as much an imperialist power as the Western powers were. When Sawaki was killing Russians in Manchuria he was in fact helping to "save" Korea and Manchuria from the Imperial Russia in order that Japan could take over these same areas for itself. Imperialists all!

At any rate, please read the additional information below I prepared for the French edition of "Zen at War." If Sawaki speaks like a militarist, and ACTS like a militarist for many, many years, then an honest observer can only conclude that he was indeed a militarist. I can only hope that your OWN EGO, Muho-oshō, is not so fully invested in defending Sawaki and your Dharma lineage that you will remain blind to this fact. It was, after all, Buddha Shakyamuni who is recorded as having said at his death: "Take refuge in the Dharma, take refuge in yourself, and seek no other refuge." That is the Buddhism I believe in. And yourself?

With gassho,

Daizen

Attachment follows:

Revised and Enlarged Description of Sawaki Kôdô for French edition of "Zen at War":

* Note: This latest revision was completed on 1 January 2000. All changes/additions have been placed in brackets so that they are easily identifiable. These brackets should, of course, be removed in the final text.

8. p. 35, line eight, insert the following material concerning Sawaki Kôdô following the sentence that ends with the words: ". . . at Antaiji located in Kyoto."

French readers may be more familiar with Kôdô as the Zen teacher of Deshimaru Taisen (1914-1982), founder of the Paris-based 'Zen Association Internationale.'

Sawaki Kôdô Kôdo first entered the Sôtô Zen priesthood at age sixteen. Three years later, while still undergoing monastic training, he was drafted into the imperial army where he served for [nearly six years during the period 1900-06. He rose through the ranks to become] a non-commissioned officer and squad leader. With the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, Kôdô was sent [to fight Russian soldiers stationed in northern China]. In a book entitled Recollections of Sawaki Kôdô (Sawaki Kôdô Kikigaki) Kôdô related what happened next:

My comrades and I gorged ourselves on killing people. Especially at the battle of Baolisi temple, I chased our enemies into a hole where I was able to pick them off very efficiently. Because of this, my company commander requested that I be given a letter of commendation, but it wasn't issued.⁵⁶

Kôdô also recorded the following conversation among his comrades, describing what they thought about his accomplishment:

"Who the hell is that guy?" "He's only a Zen priest." "I see. Just what you'd expect from a Zen priest. A man with guts."⁵⁷

In this simple conversation we find what is perhaps the first modern reference to the effectiveness of Zen training on the battlefield. Kôdô himself described what he learned from his battlefield experience as follows:

Following the end of the fighting I had the opportunity to quietly reflect on my own conduct. I realized then that while as a daredevil I had been second to none, this was nothing more than the greatness of Mori no Ishimatsu, Kunisada Chûji , and other outlaws and champions of the underdog. However, as a disciple of Zen Master Dôgen, I still didn't measure up. . . . I had been like those who in the act of laying down their lives sought something in return. . . . That is to say, I had been like those who so wanted to become famous, or be awarded a posthumous military decoration, that they were ready to lay down their very life to get it. Such an attitude has nothing to do with [Buddhist] liberation from life and death. Such fellows have simply replaced

one thing with another, exchanged one burden for another. They sought honor and fame for themselves through laying down their lives. This is nothing but the substitution of one thing for another. Even had they succeeded in acquiring these things, one wonders whether they would have been satisfied. In any event, this is what we identify in Buddhism as being endlessly entrapped in the world of desire. What can be said is that liberation from birth and death does not consist of discarding one's physical life, but rather, of discarding desire. There are various kinds of desire, including the desire for fame as well as the desire for wealth. Discarding desire, however, means giving up all forms of desire. Religion exists in the renunciation of all forms of desire. This is where the way is to be found. This is where enlightenment is encountered. . . . Expressed in terms of our Japanese military, it expresses a realm in which where the flag of our military goes there is no ordeal too great to endure, nor enemy numbers too numerous [to overcome]. I call this invoking the power of the military flag. Discarding one's body beneath the military flag is true selflessness.⁵⁸

While at the beginning of the above quote Kôdô appears to be criticizing his participation in the Russo-Japanese war, a closer reading reveals that this is not the case. That is to say, Kôdô shows not the least regret for having killed large numbers of the enemy, but, instead, criticizes himself for having sought "honor and fame" in the process, proof that he remained trapped in the world of desire, i.e. in an unenlightened state. Thus, it was not the killing of his fellow human beings that bothered him, but his failure to kill the enemy (and die himself if need be) with a totally selfless spirit.

Furthermore, when Kôdô talked of "invoking the power of the military flag" it is important to realize that he was employing terminology normally associated with the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara. In the well-known Kannon-gyô (Avalokiteshvara Sutra) the idea is advanced over and over again that one can be rescued from a multitude of disasters and calamities if one but "invokes the power of Avalokiteshvara" (J. nenpi Kannon-riki). What Kôdô did in the last paragraph of the preceding quote was to replace Avalokiteshvara with a unit's military flag, a sacrosanct object considered to have been bestowed on the unit by the emperor himself. Thus, to invoke the power of the military flag was tantamount to invoking the power of the emperor to ensure victory. This particular phraseology is unique to Kôdô and reveals just how thoroughly he conflated Zen with the emperor and imperial military. Although Kôdô himself never fought again, his support for the unity of Zen and war continued unabated. This is attested to[by any number of his wartime words and deeds. For example, in early 1937 Kôdô was a professor of Buddhist Studies at Sôtô Zen sect-affiliated Komazawa University in Tokyo. Although Japan would not begin its full-scale invasion of China until July of that year, students were becoming worried about their futures as they sensed war approaching. At this juncture Kôdô addressed an assembly of Komazawa students preparing for the Sôtô Zen priesthood as follows:

"There is at present no need for you students to be perplexed by questions concerning the relationship of religion to the state. Instead you should continue to practice zazen and devote yourself wholeheartedly to the Buddha Dharma. Should you fail to do this, and, instead, start to waver in your practice, then when it comes time to defend your country in the future you are unlikely to be able to do so zealously." ⁵⁹

As this quotation makes clear, Kôdô saw no conflict between devotion to the Buddha Dharma and defense of one's country, even when, as in this case, that "defense"

meant the invasion of a neighboring country. In fact, it appears that Kôdô regarded dedication to Zen training as the basis for a similar dedication to military service. In any event, following the outbreak of war with China, the Japanese government issued a call for a "Movement for the Total Spiritual Mobilization of the People," the chief goal of which was "the enhancement of the Japanese spirit." Underlying this call was the government's realization that the successful prosecution of the war would require a totalitarian mindset free from the liberal and democratic ideals of the West. Zen was seen as one method of instilling this mindset in that it had long promoted a hierarchical social structure coupled with an attitude of unthinking and unquestioning loyalty to one's superiors. Kôdô, together with his disciples, responded to the Japanese government's call by creating a lay-oriented Zen training center attached to the Sôtô Zen temple of Daichûji located in Tochigi prefecture. Just how closely associated this effort was with the government is demonstrated by the fact that one of the major financial contributors to the center's establishment was Prince Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945), the prime minister who had authorized the invasion of China. Konoe made a contribution of 1,000 yen, a substantial amount of money in prewar days. The training center commenced operation in October 1940 when Kôdô was sixty-one years of age. As one of his closest disciples, Sakai Tokugen (1912-96) has noted, Kôdô frequently injected the government's wartime slogans into the Dharma talks he gave at Daichûji:

In Kôdô's lectures on Zen Master Dôgen's writings, you will find such phrases as "the eight corners of the world under one roof" and "the way of the [Shinto] gods" scattered throughout. At that time we all truly believed in such things as "one hundred million [citizens] of one mind" and "self-annihilation for the sake of one's country." We were consumed with the thought of repaying the debt of gratitude we owed the state, and we incessantly feared for the destiny our nation. 60

With regard to his Shinto-related comment, it should be noted that Kôdô also said: "As far as the national polity of our country is concerned, the 'way of the gods' is the same as 'original enlightenment' [in Buddhism]." 61

The training center at Daichûji continued in operation until the fall of 1944 when it closed in order to accommodate children being evacuated from the cities due to Allied bombing. In spite of the danger, Kôdô returned to live in Tokyo at a Komazawa university-affiliated student dormitory. Due to the worsening war situation, however, this dormitory was closed in March 1945. Kôdô then accepted an invitation to live at the home of the former Superintendent-General of the Metropolitan Police, Maruyama Tsurukichi. Maruyama extended this invitation because of Kôdô's longtime cooperation with Japanese police officials, part of whose wartime job was to apprehend and imprison anyone suspected of being opposed to the government and its war effort. From 1938 onwards Kôdô found time to give talks to those "thought offenders" (J. shisô-han) who had been freed from prison following disavowal of their previous anti-war views but who were still under police supervision. He also went into prisons holding such offenders in order to convince them to cooperate with the government. Kôdô was viewed as being particularly good at this kind of work not least of all because a poverty-stricken childhood had contributed to his down-to-earth attitude and an ability to identify with the offenders. For example, he typically began his talks with a description of his own one month imprisonment at age eighteen when he had been mistakenly arrested as a pickpocket. Furthermore, in describing his own military service Kôdô downplayed his heroism by saying: "Although I was decorated with the 'Order of the Golden Kite' for my meritorious deeds during the Russo-

Japanese War, it was just a question of being in the right place at the right time - a time when a lot of killing was going on. I was lucky - that's all." 62

Kôdô's contribution to the war effort did not stop with the above. From December 23, 1939 onwards he served on a government commission charged with promoting the martial arts among Japanese school children as part of their preparation for military service. It was only natural for Kôdô to serve on this commission, for he had long believed that "the unity of body and mind as taught in Zen was identical with the ultimate stage of the martial arts."63

Kôdô had come to this conclusion during his late teens when he practiced both kendô (swordsmanship) and jûdô while in training at Shûshinji in Kumamoto prefecture. Further, on November 22, 1941 Kôdô was appointed to serve on a government commission devoted to enhancing the physical strength of all citizens. This and related contributions led the Japanese government's Bureau of Decorations to award a silver cup to Kôdô for "promoting the public interest" on November 3, 1943. Significantly, Kôdô's war support was not limited to Japan alone. On three separate occasions in 1941 and 1942 he travelled to the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo (Manchuria) in northern China to assist in sustaining the morale of Japanese military and civilian personnel stationed there. Kôdô's dedication even led him, in May 1942, to board a truck bound for a remote rural area of Manchukuo to deliver a lecture to some three thousand armed Japanese colonists undergoing their annual military training.

While no detailed records remain of Kôdô's talks in Manchukuo, their tone if not their content can readily be inferred from the following 1942 article appearing in the Buddhist magazine Daihôrin. Entitled "On the True Meaning of the Zen Precepts," Kôdô wrote:

The Lotus Sutra states that "the Three Worlds [of desire, form, and formlessness] are my existence and all sentient beings therein are my children." From this point of view, everything, including friend and foe, are my children. Superior officers are my existence as are my subordinates. The same can be said of both Japan and the world. Given this, it is just to punish those who disturb the public order. Whether one kills, or does not kill, the precept forbidding killing [is preserved]. It is the precept forbidding killing that wields the sword. It is this precept that throws the bomb. It is for this reason that you must seek to study and practice this precept.64

The idea that Kôdô advanced here, that killing and bomb-throwing are done independently of the individual's will, was to become a popular position advocated by Zen adherents, including D. T. Suzuki. If these violent acts are performed independently of one's will, there can of course be neither personal choice nor responsibility in the matter. It may well be said that in this instance Zen truly "transcends reason." Be that as it may, by May 1944 Sawaki Kôdô went so far as to claim that it was Zen Master Dôgen, the 13th century founder of the Sôtô Zen sect in Japan, who had first taught the proper mental attitude for the imperial military. Kôdô wrote:

Zen master Dôgen said that we should discard our Self. He taught that we should quietly engage in practice having forgotten our Self. Dôgen expressed this in the chapter entitled "Life and Death" of the Shôbôgenzô [A Treasury of the Essence of the True Dharma] as follows: "Simply discard body and mind and cast yourself into

the realm of the Buddha. The Buddha will then serve as your guide, and if you follow the guidance given, you will free yourself from life and death, and become a Buddha, without any need to exert yourself either physically or mentally." Expressed in different words, this means that the orders of one's superiors are to be obeyed, regardless of content. It is in doing this that you immediately become faithful retainers of the emperor and perfect soldiers.⁶⁵

Given that Kôdô was already sixty-five years old when he wrote these words, one must, if nothing else, admire him for his longstanding commitment to employing Zen in the creation of the selfless, "perfect soldier."

Nantembô Another shining example of Zen prowess on the battlefield in . . .

[Note 58 should now read: "58. Sawaki, "Shôji o Akirameru Kata" (The Method of Clarifying Life and Death) in the May 1944 issue of Daihôrin, pp. 5-7."]

Note 59 should now read: "59. Quoted in Tanaka, Sawaki Kôdô, v. 2, p. 462."

Note 60 should now read: "60. Ibid., p. 455."

Note 61 should now read: "61. Ibid., p. 458.

Note 62 should now read: "62. Ibid., p. 172. Unfortunately, nothing more is known about the circumstances that led to Kôdô being awarded this high military honor. Typically this decoration was awarded to a soldier upon his return to Japan from the battlefield."

Note 63 should now read: "63. Ibid., p. 341."

Note 64 should now read: "64. Sawaki, "Zenkai Hongi o Kataru" (On the True Meaning of the Zen Precepts) (Part 9) in the January 1942 issue of Daihôrin, p. 107."

Note 65 should now read: "65. Sawaki, "Shôji o Akirameru Kata" (The Method of Clarifying Life and Death) in the May 1944 issue of Daihôrin, p. 6."]

[In addition, the following material should be added to the entry under Sawaki Kôdô located on the right-hand column of p. 216: "Shôji o Akirameru Kata" in the May 1944 issue of Daihôrin, pp. 4-7." All notes after note 60 in Chapter Two (on p. 200) will have to be increased by seven. Finally, the following book entry will have to be entered in the "Works Cited" section:

Tanaka Tadao, Sawaki Kôdô - Kono Koshin no Hito. Tokyo: Daihôrin-kaku, 1990.]

[End]

STILL MORE:

I have some Kusens from Kodo Sawaki about the Shodoka dating from 1940 which were published by the International Zen Association (A.Z.I) where Kodo Sawaki highly praised the dokukodo from Minamoto Musashi.

There he says literally:

"... if one regards Budo and Zen (the so-called Samurai-zen) one comes to the conclusion that among the samurai there has always been a very clear enlightenment. If we try to understand the place of Buddhism in the lives of the samurai we feel - despite the fact that they bound their hair in a knot, wore two swords and proudly said: I am the one who - that the vital life attitude of Zen was completely embodied within the Japanese samurai."

[Second mail Muho to Victoria:]

Dear Daizen-oshō,

thank you for your answers.

I was a little surprised by the tone and apologize that my questions triggered this response.

I tried to express in my previous e-mail that I do not think at all that Sawaki is beyond criticism, nor do I think that he was a pacifist (see the last part of this mail). What I think is problematic is the way you present Sawaki with two famous quotes, i.e. the one with the precept throwing the bomb and Sawaki gorging himself on killing people. Not only do you distort the picture of Sawaki, but you also do damage to your own cause, because even those who would follow your reasoning if it was more balanced and objective (or "Middle Way") will feel tempted to contradict you when they know the real context of those quotes. And, after all, isn't it about how what we can do for peace now, rather than listing what others said in support of war decades ago?

A couple of days ago, you blamed me: "you try so hard to make excuses/explain away/reinterpret every militarist passage of his that you are aware of." Why? No, I am not talking about every militarist passage I know, but about these two quotes that appear on the Internet over and over again, and I ask you to think about the fact that the first ("gorged on killing") sounds completely different when it is quoted the way it came out of Sawaki's mouth directly, while the second ("precept thorws bomb") isn't anti-war, but speaks against excesses in warfare. At the bottom of this e-mail, you will find proof that I do certainly not "make excuses/explain away/reinterpret" very passage I can find. A few sentences later, again you have: "his words and actions over and over and over again during the war were recognized by ALL OF THOSE AROUND HIM as being TOTALLY IN SUPPORT OF THE WAR EFFORT! These facts will not change no matter how much you attempt, Muho-oshō, to make excuses/explain away/reinterpret what he wrote."

But then what about the quote that Matsuoka cites?

"此の頃新聞に、どこそこの敵を殲滅したとか、機銃の掃射をしたとかよく出てい
る。まるで掃除でもしているような気がする。残敵掃射などといって機関銃でシユ
ウッとやるのである。これを銀座の真ん中で遊んでいる奴を、動物掃射などと云う
ようなことをやつたら大変なことになる。昔の戦争は、今からかんがえるとよほど
風流なもので、一発一発パンパンと弾を射つたものだ。如露で水を撒くように機関
銃でバラバラやつたり、大きいヤツをドカンドカンと落としたり、毒瓦斯で一ぺん
にやつたり、そんなに荒っぽくはなかつた。私も得利寺で敵を落とし穴に追い込んで
殺したことがあつたが、それでも罰を食わなかつた。その上に恩給を貰つてしま

まったく。それだから人を殺したらいつでも罰になるとはきまつてない。罰にするとかしないとかは其の規定によるのだ。この規定は人間がこしらえるのである" He isn't criticizing the war itself, but he is criticising the way the war is fought and the way people talk about it. Will really ALL think that this is in TOTAL SUPPORT OF THE WAR EFFORT? Is he BOASTING or HAPPILY relating how he "gorged on killing people"? At least to me he doesn't sound like the war monger and Zen fascist that he sounds like when quoted out of context.

Finally you express concern that I am blinded to the facts by my own ego. Even though I don't have done as extensive studies into the matter as you have, in "Zendo" alone I can find plenty of pro-bushido material like the quote about the "dokukodo from Minamoto Musashi" (I guess you mean Miyamoto Musashi). Some time ago I commented about Sawaki's view on the kesa as expressed in "Zendo" on our homepage (see below). For me, taking quotes out of context just to make them serve one's purpose (and one's message being put forward in an extremely aggressive and war-like way) is a sign of being blinded by own's ego. Why should paying attention to the context of a quote, the book it appears in, the times it was made etc. signify "being blinded by the ego"?

Gassho, Muho

[attachment: A text critical about Sawaki's treatment of the kesa, part of the adult practice articles, can be read [here](#).]

[Second reply Victoria to Muho:]

July 8, 2007

Dear Muho-oshō,

Thank you for your recent message. Let me begin by responding to your following comments:

"For me, taking quotes out of context just to make them serve one's purpose (and one's message being put forward in an extremely aggressive and war-like way) is a sign of being blinded by own's ego. Why should paying attention to the context of a quote, the book it appears in, the times it was made etc. signify "being blinded by the ego"?"

You are certainly correct that I am indeed 'attached' to the view that those who have taken the vows of a Buddhist priest cannot kill their fellow humans as Sawaki himself did in the Russo-Japanese War (regardless of whether he is correctly quoted as having "gorged himself" on killing or not -- at least that is what Sakai Tokugen, who was there, believed he said).

I am as attached to this view as Dogen was when he wrote the following in the Shushogi:

15.] Next we should receive the three sets of pure precepts: the precepts of restraining behavior, the precepts of doing good, and the precepts of benefiting living beings. We should then accept the ten grave prohibitions.

First, do not kill; second, do not steal; third, do not engage in improper sexual conduct; fourth, do not lie; fifth, do not deal in intoxicants; sixth, do not criticize others; seventh, do not praise self and slander others; eighth, do not be stingy with the dharma or property; ninth, do not give way to anger; and tenth, do not disparage the three treasures. The buddhas all receive and uphold these three refuges, three sets of pure precepts, and ten grave prohibitions.

If, Muho-oshō, you identify yourself with the Japanese Soto Zen tradition, then I hope you would honor the clear teachings of its founder in Japan and recognize that Sawaki, as a young priest who had already vowed to observe the ten grave prohibitions, violated his vows over and over again in killing Russians. This has absolutely nothing to do with "context" unless you think that the orders of the Emperor/State supersede these vows. But then, as a German, perhaps you actually believe that the state's orders do supersede everything? At the very least that is what Nazi subordinates claimed at Nuremberg, i.e. that they were simply "carrying out orders." I pray that you don't agree.

And where in the words of Buddha Shakyamuni do we read that he placed the state above the Dharma or the precepts? In fact, we are told that Shakyamuni actually stood aside and allowed his native city-state to be attacked and destroyed rather than use violence to defend it. That is indeed a very high standard of conduct that I honestly don't know if I could practice if the U.S. were ever genuinely invaded (instead of pre-emptively attacking others, etc.), but that is the Buddhist standard nevertheless. Sawaki utterly failed to meet this fundamental standard (or express clear and genuine remorse for having personally violated this fundamental precept).

As for the larger question of context, note that I provided you in my last message with a context that far transcended the context of 'words', i.e. the context of Sawaki's actual wartime ACTIONS. His promotion of the martial arts for youth destined to become soldiers, his state-oriented lectures to Komazawa student priests, his close relationship with the Tokyo police chief, his visits to colonists in Manchuria, his acceptance of a silver cup from the government for his services to the state, etc. tell us of a man who was fully behind Japan's wartime actions. At the very least his contemporaries thought he was and that is what counts!

And his stories about kesa-wearing samurai fit right into this pattern (except that they actually wore them as a lucky 'amulet' expecting that it would magically protect them not unlike an oral dharani is used even now in the contemporary Soto sect to prevent various 'disasters').

This said, I do commend you for rightfully criticizing the kesa-related abuse of the Buddha Dharma by the samurai (and, at least indirectly, Sawaki for relating it without critical comment).

As for Matsuoka, she is a POSTWAR disciple of Sawaki, not unlike yourself, who just can't bring herself to believe that her beloved teacher was a wartime militarist and thus, like yourself, seeks to explain away Sawaki's wartime comments by resorting to context, etc. Again, what counts are what Sawaki's contemporaries thought of his words and actions when he really could have had at least a small impact, i.e. during the war years.

Note, too, that just when Sawaki was in the midst of killing Russians, there were Zen

priests, albeit few in number, who did oppose killing in the name of Buddhism. However, they were either hung or given life imprisonment. If it were not for these handful of Buddhists there would have been no genuine Buddhists in Japan at all. They are the true Dharma heroes while the likes of Sawaki and the many, many, many Buddhist priests of that era like him (or even worse!) were abject failures.

Muho-oshō, I note that in your writing on the Internet you rightfully describe the abysmal state of contemporary Japanese Buddhism. In that regard we are in total agreement! That said, I am genuinely grateful that there was a sufficient 'shell' of Buddhism left in Japan that I was able to enter a path that allowed me to encounter the authentic Buddha Dharma despite the fraudulent priests who now claim to embody it. But the time has come to move on, calling a spade a spade. I am VERY HAPPY to see that you have begun that process with regard to Sawaki's comments on kesa-wearing samurai. I only hope you will continue on that path with regard to Japan's modern imperialism and the Zen support for it, Sawaki included.

While I certainly agree with you that what we as Buddhists do now in regard to promoting peace is critically important, I nevertheless share George Santayana's view that "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." As far as Sawaki is concerned, the French edition of Zen at War certainly goes a long way toward doing exactly that. Had I better understood of the interest in Sawaki on the part of some in the West, I would have included that material in the English edition in the first place. Unfortunately, book editors are always pushing you to 'make it shorter' when 'making it longer' allows you to be far more nuanced. I wish it had been otherwise. This, however, does nothing to change my conclusions about Sawaki let alone the others I describe.

With gassho,

Daizen

After this, I thought about asking about how Victoria himself deals with the precept of not criticizing others, which is also one of the ten precepts which he quotes from the Shushogi. The fact that he quotes from Shushogi, which again isn't exactly one of Dogen's original works (just as Sakai's biography of Sawaki isn't one of Sawaki's works), made me wonder if the reason is because it says there "Fu-ja-inkai", i.e. no "improper" sexual conduct, which is a lay not monk's precept. I couldn't find the expression "fu-ja-inkai" in the Shobogenzo though. For Dogen, a monk practicing sex is breaking the precepts just as much as one killing others, or criticizing others (Victoria is a married Zen priest with kids, just like me). And we all know that Dogen criticized others quite a lot.

Also, Dogen's "Zenki", which was addressed to his patron and his followers, all samurai, when it talks about death, isn't talking about natural death on the death-bed, it seems to me. So if the fact that Sawaki was put up by the chief of the police proofs that he was a fascist, than Dogen must have been a Zen warrior himself, because his patron was one. And the Buddha Shakyamuni himself, in the Cakkavattisīhanāda-sutta, says that it is the responsibility of a regent to have an army and protect the country.

But anyway, a friend reminded me of this quote by Huang Po:

"As soon as the mouth is opened, evils spring forth. People either neglect the root and speak of the branches, or neglect the reality of the "illusory" world and speak only

of Enlightenment. Or else they chatter of cosmic activities leading to transformations, while neglecting the Substance from which they spring - indeed, there is never any profit in discussion."

So I gave up.