

Zazen in D. T. Suzuki's religious thought

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Introduction

D. T. Suzuki's stay in America played a very important role in spreading Buddhism, particularly Zen, to the Western world. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, he resided in America, his first time, for more than 10 years. During this period, his *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* and English translation of *Açvaghosha's Discourse on Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, which had a great impact on the understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the Western world, were published. However, it was during his post-war stay in America that he more directly focused on introducing Buddhism. From 1949 to 1958, he stayed in the United States while making several trips back to Japan, and gave many lectures on Zen and Buddhism at universities there. Through these lectures and his writings, he contributed greatly to introducing Buddhism, mainly Zen, to the country.

Such activities resulted in a unique social phenomenon in the U.S. In the 1950s, Beatniks adopted Zen, which Suzuki introduced, as a spiritual driving force for the construction of a new ideal society. In addition, in the 1960s, hippies sought Zen as a base for a free and carefree way of life that left behind politics.

However, although Suzuki was at the forefront of propagating Zen, he primarily gave lectures and wrote, doing little to encourage people to practice the Zen that he preached. Ishii Seijun states, "As D.T. Suzuki was not a Buddhist monk, his main activity was to preach and spread Zen as a philosophy of thought, and he was not involved in practice-related endeavors, such as actual ascetic training and the establishment of *dōjōs* to practice it."¹ It was the Rinzai sect members, such as Senzaki Nyogen and Sasaki Shigetsu, who taught Zen practice on the ground at an early stage, and then, in the late 1960s, priests of the Soto sect, including Suzuki Shunryū, actively opened meditation halls and partook in

missionary work. Furthermore, Japan's Sanbozen Society, as well as Southeast Asian and Tibetan Buddhist *sangha*, also conduct work to propagate meditation in America. Meditation is one of the characteristics of modern American Buddhism.²

Trevor Leggett holds that D.T. Suzuki's activities played the role of "rooting" or "seeding" Buddhism in the Western world,³ especially the United States. This is highly relevant for this paper. The fact that people influenced by D.T. Suzuki, who continued to explain Zen philosophically, actually then experienced Zen through *zazen* and meditation means that the seeds he planted took root in the soil and eventually produced flowers. But Suzuki did not teach that Zen is mere *zazen*. On the contrary, it can be seen that he was against preaching *zazen*.⁴ There is no doubt that his preaching of Zen grew out of his passionate *zazen* experience during his youth as part of traditional Rinzai Zen training at Engakuji temple in Kamakura. When Suzuki was a university student, he participated in intensive *zazen* training, called *sesshin*, at Engakuji temple for a week. As a result, he experienced *kenshō*, which means awareness of one's nature. This experience later became the basis of his Zen thought. Needless to say, *zazen* is an essential part of the traditional practice of Rinzai Zen. Before Hakuin Ekaku systematized Zen practice in the 18th century, *zazen* (Ch. *zuochan*; Skt. *dhyāna*) was an important point of practice in both Chinese Buddhism and Indian Buddhism. Nevertheless, in his writings, D.T. Suzuki did not always discuss *zazen* in positive terms.

In this paper, I will summarize how he discusses *zazen* therein, and try to identify the position of *zazen* in his Zen thought. This will be both a critical assessment from the perspective of Suzuki's thought of Zen Buddhism's traditional practice system, as well as serve to clarify *zazen*'s special significance in modern civilization, which went beyond the scope of specific sects.

1. The psychological benefits of *zazen*

D.T. Suzuki focuses on *zazen* in only a limited number of his writings. The largest of them is *Seiza no susume*. This book seems to be

co-written with Shaku Sōen, but according to Furuta Shōkin, one of the editors of D.T. Suzuki's complete works, Suzuki wrote most of that book. *Zazen* is taken up as a subject in *Zen no daiichigi* (1914, Volume I, Part VIII, “*Zazen no sahō*”) and his article “*Zazenron*” (1910). In many other works, he briefly touches on *zazen*. When we survey passages in Suzuki's writings that mention *zazen*, it becomes clear that he has several fixed images about *zazen*, which can be broadly summarized as follow: (1) *Zazen* as therapy for the minds of youth and modern people; (2) *Zazen* as a complementary practice for *kanna-zen*; and (3) *Zazen* as the working of enlightenment itself.

While the first aspect stays consistent throughout Suzuki's life, the second aspect changed with the transition of Suzuki's thought, resulting in the third. In addition, as the context in which Suzuki is discussing *zazen* changes, he explains the concrete content of *zazen* in different ways. His book *Seiza no susume* states that only people with a rich religious spirit can practice the true form of Zen, that is, knowing the true meaning of one's life through *zazen* and expressing one's peace of mind (DTS 18:397).⁵

It is desirable for everyone to cultivate dignity and to maintain the dignity of human nature; therefore, I want to generally recommend to ordinary people Zen meditation as a practical way to cultivate their virtue. (DTS 18:397)

Here, Suzuki puts aside the religious aspect of Buddhist practice and discusses the moral side of “cultivating virtue.” Since the subject of this book is the edification of youth, his descriptions of *zazen* only cover its physical posture⁶ and how “to control the mind in one place” (DTS 18:398).

He adopts a similar approach for “modern” people. Below, as in the above quote, he refers to the psychological effect of practicing *zazen* as a “virtue” for healthy living in society.

Zazen does not mean giving rise to an attitude of forgetfulness or self-hypnosis. It means to put the mind in a calm and balanced state

of mind, and to concentrate one's mind on anywhere it desires. In today's turbulent era of commercialism and industrialism, most people are so absorbed in excitement, impulse, and emotional things that they exhaust their nerves in time, and, in the end, lose their balance. Zen aims to recover this uselessly lost energy and to constantly replenish the mental reserves. (DTS 12:33-34)

This is a 1906 text that was included *Zen no kenkyū* (1957). When this article was written, Suzuki was in the middle of his first stay in America, which followed his Zen training at Engakuji. His sight was set on Western society from a viewpoint that went beyond that of Zen Buddhism. A similar claim to the above was made in *Zuihitsu Zen* (1927).

The purpose of Zen training is *kenshō* or *godō*, which mean enlightenment, but in terms of the illness of modern thought, Zen training's merit is that it deepens one's heart and heals the ill of excessively trying to receive recognition. It has the effect of strongly reproaching modern people who tend to live in a superficial mind. (DTS 19:508)

Here, too, Suzuki describes the significance of Zen training in terms other than enlightenment. Then, what is the "illness of modern thought"? The following passage of *Tōyō no kokoro* (1963) expresses it in a straightforward manner.

The full lotus position is an Indian style of sitting that helps to calm one's mind. In the beginning, the legs ache a little, especially as we have recently become accustomed to living in a chair. But you will soon get used to it. Then they will surely feel comfortable and happy. Full lotus is more stable than the normal Japanese way of sitting, because putting your hips on the floor, in the end, is directly on the earth. It is sometimes said that the floor and the ground are different, but sitting on the earth is difficult in modern life. You can see that the floor is the earth. The earth is a symbol of immovable

things. Because of this, “full lotus position” means immovable. In modern life, a sense of steadiness must be seen as the most important thing. This is evident from the fact that modern people are very active. (DTS 20: 196)

As mentioned here, the immovable full lotus posture of *zazen* helps calm the modern people, who are swayed by all external stimuli. It is stated here that *zazen* plays a role in reducing the mental anxiety brought about by an overly active life.

Behind this insight into the situation of modern society is a theory rooted in the Zen tradition.

It has been said since the old days that practicing *zazen* makes you feel better, calm down, or not be afraid. Zen itself is not a state of mind, but from the point of view of the physical aspect or medical physiology, there is certainly such a psycho-social aspect. (DTS 20: 197)

One of the characteristics of Suzuki’s theory of *zazen* is that the psychological effects brought by the practice of *zazen* help maintain the spiritual balance of adolescents and modern people. The above-mentioned discourse that *zazen* gives us courage has long been found both inside and outside of Zen Buddhist temples. It may be related to the history of *zazen* having been used for a long time in Japan to cultivate the bravery needed for warriors to enter the battlefield. Suzuki recounted the traditional psychological effects of *zazen* for young people and modern people. However, discussing the “immovable” nature of *zazen* is also found in Suzuki’s training theory.

Mokushō-zen [*zazen*-only zen practice] specializes in *dhyāna*. *Dhyāna* is the only thing that saves *kanna-zen* [*zazen* and *kōan* zen practice] from excessive excitement. *Dhyāna* as means is very good. However, it cannot be said that the essence of Zen lies in *dhyāna*. *Dhyāna* does not lead a person to enlightenment. It actually has the danger of falling into the so-called black and dark demon cave. The

mind is either depressed or fidgeting—these may be two diseases that attach to the human heart. It takes a lot of real effort to go between these two. (DTS 16:240)

While Suzuki had said that *zazen* heals the illness of the modern society, here he discusses its harmful effect of sinking the mind of the practitioner. Of the five obstacles that hinder Buddhist practice, Suzuki lists depression and fidgetiness, and states that it is necessary to devise a way to set the mind between floating and sinking. Here again, Suzuki is discussing the effects of *zazen*, but *zazen*'s position clearly differs for a person in society who has not practiced *zazen* at all and a person who practices *zazen* daily as part of Zen training.

However, psychological effects such as “gaining courage” or “sinking a floating mind” are secondary in his theory of *zazen*. Suzuki would later try to identify the significance of *zazen* in the context of *kenshō*, that is, in the theory of enlightenment. That is the second aspect of *zazen* that we saw earlier. Next, I would like to consider this point.

2. *Kanna and Zazen*

In the context of his religious thought, D.T. Suzuki mainly discusses *zazen* as *dhyāna*:

Zen, as I said before, means *dhyāna*. In the process of its development in China, however, it was assimilated into *prajñā* more than *dhyāna*. *Prajñā* is also an intuition as well as intuited wisdom. Although the power of intuition arises from *dhyāna*, *dhyāna* itself does not constitute *prajñā*, and the purpose of Zen is the realization of *prajñā*, not *dhyāna* itself. (DTS 17:332)

In Suzuki's Zen thought, attaining *prajñā* is the most essential. He often warns readers against mistakenly seeing *dhyāna* as the end instead of the means. It is just one of many ways to experience intuition. However, as many practitioners throughout history have used *dhyāna* to gain intuition,

it came to be regarded as an indispensable practice, and, as a result, this practice, which was originally a process for attaining a goal, was misunderstood as the goal itself (DTS 2:274). Therefore, Zen, which is supposed to be wisdom, came to be identified with the practice of *dhyāna*, or *zazen*.

It is good to distinguish Zen from *zazen*. The *zazen* recently trending in Japan is actually a mimicry of *zazen*. The imitation of *zazen* is not bad at all—as it is said, people imitating filial piety were praised by the lord—but it would be a disaster if you think that Zen is itself. (DTS 15:221)

Suzuki considers *dhyāna* to be a step for attaining *prajñā*. He expresses this with the phrase “awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*.” This idea has been passed down in Buddhist tradition for a long time and is not unique to Suzuki. The three disciplines of *śīla*, *dhyāna*, and *prajñā* are basic concepts of Buddhism. The *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* states, “To moderate our mind is *śīla*, and we generate *dhyāna* by *śīla*. We generate *prajñā* by *dhyāna*. These are called three practices apart from desire.”⁷

In China, Zen developed while being heavily influenced by the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra*. In fact, some of the Zen Buddhist masters made the same claim. For example, Lanxi Daolong (Jp. Rankei Dōryū), who brought to Japan the first full-fledged *soshi zen*, said in his *Zazenron* that the ancient sage experiences *dhyāna* by keeping *śīla*, and when he has *dhyāna*, he generates *prajñā*.⁸

Suzuki’s understanding of *dhyāna* is also basically in accordance with this traditional interpretation. If the goal of Zen is to manifest *prajñā*, *dhyāna* is a process for that purpose, and it will remain in a secondary position. Of course, *zazen* is not the only essential practice for Zen. As I quoted above, *kanna* is positioned as a more direct way to *prajñā*. *Zazen* is needed to supplement *kanna*. Today Rinzai Zen training uses these two at the same time. *Zazen* is used to suppress the mind floating around on the outside, and *kanna* is used to prevent the mind from sinking into a quiet state. While in this context it is difficult to unambiguously define the specific content of *zazen*, we can say that Suzuki’s understanding of

zazen is basically the same as traditional teachings.

As for the style of *zazen*, Suzuki directly quotes *Zen'en shingi's* "Zazengi" (DTS 18:303-304). Based on that, he also explains part of Hakuin Ekaku's enhancement of the *kikai-tanden* (the lower abdomen, which is thought to be filled with energy in Eastern medicine). However, Suzuki repeatedly states that *dhyāna* is different from meditation and concentration.

What is commonly referred to as *dhyāna* in India is just to calm the mind. There is no intellectual development there. There is no turning point in which one feels, "I understand!" There is no experience. The *zen* of Zen Buddhism does not refer to such content. *Dhyāna* is good as it is, but there must be something that comes out of it. (DTS 14:75)

It has become clear to those who have read so far that what is called *zazen* practiced in connection with *kōan* practice is not the same as mental training generally understood in the West. In other words, doing *zazen* is not the same as meditating. (DTS 17: 432)

So, if there is meditation proposed by Zen, it means to take things as they are, to see where snow is white and crows are black. When we talk about meditation, we usually think of its abstract character. That is to say, meditation is to focus the mind on some highly generalized proposition. And by its very nature, such a proposition does not necessarily have a close connection with actual life. Zen perceives or feels and does not abstract or meditate. Zen is all about the working (*hataraki*) itself, in which there is no longer anything to see and to be seen. In contrast, meditation is clearly dualistic, and therefore superficial. (DTS 14:216-215)

As clearly stated here, Suzuki tried to distinguish *zazen* in Zen from mental training, such as other forms of meditation and concentration, because *zazen* is practiced as part of *kanna* meditation in Zen training.

In Suzuki's theory of religious thought, not only *dhyāna* but also

kanna is treated as an effective means for attaining *prajñā*. There is no doubt that *zazen*, which “controls the mind in one place,” exists as a background to the practice of *kanna*. However, *kanna* is different from other forms of meditation because it contains an element of “questioning.”

There must be a doubt in mind, not only *dhyāna*. This doubt does not have to be *kōan*, as long as it is some kind of doubt. When a person applies themselves to this doubt itself, they can acquire *dhyāna*, and then this *dhyāna* bursts at the same time as the doubt is resolved. If there is no explosion, there is no enlightenment; if there is no enlightenment, there is no Zen. (DTS 16:240)

In addition, in *Zen to nenbutsu no shinrigaku teki kiso* (1937) Suzuki states the following.

Enni-Bennen, the founder of Tōfukuji temple, admonished people, “As if I have fallen to the bottom of the well of a thousand feet, the only thing in my mind that I want is to leave this well, from morning to night, and from night to morning, by a thousand and ten thousand ideas and judgments. And I will not think any other else” (*Shōichi-kokushi hōgo*).

When the consciousness is fully occupied by only one idea such this, a kind of awakening suddenly occurs from the depth of “unconsciousness,” miraculously. This is called *tongo*. (DTS 4:244)

Generally, concentration and meditation are for eliminating discriminatory thinking, and to do so it is necessary to focus consciousness on one object, such as breathing, avoiding the intervention of discriminatory thinking as much as possible. However, according to Suzuki, in *kanna* practice, the whole metaphysical quest of the mind, including its intellectual element, builds a singular concentrating subject. *Kōan* training leads to “Zen experience” through a process of exploration, ingenuity, maturity, and bursting.

This process is generally more like a *vipaśyanā* rather than *dhyāna*, and the process is done in the form of meditation with few intellectual elements. It is a common practice for those who study *zazen* to sit in the Indian style as shown in “Zazengi.” (DTS 4:234)

Intellectual inquiry does not always mature through discriminatory thinking. Here, Suzuki describes meditation in which there is no conflict between the thinking subject and thought. Suzuki distinguishes between the general practice of meditation/concentration and Zen meditation by highlighting that the former removes discriminatory thinking while the latter includes this discriminatory thinking and unifies the mind. It is also important to note that here he is touching on the concept of *vipaśyanā* to express the intellectual elements contained therein.⁹

3. From “awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*” to “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*”

However, whatever the content of *dhyāna* was, for Suzuki it and other devices were still means to achieve enlightenment. He separates those means, or psychological processes, for attaining Zen experience from the enlightenment itself.

In preaching Zen, there is one thing you must know in advance. It is that the Zen experience is fundamentally different from other psychological experiences. Once, I also wanted to write something like Zen psychological research. However, this is only possible if one describes from a technical point of view the psychological and mechanical endeavors when traditionally studying *kōan*. When we look at the Zen experience itself, the psychological work leading up to it will be irrelevant. It may be said, therefore, that experience itself has nothing to do with the psychology of the process. (DTS 13: 296)

This is a passage from *Zen e no michi* (1941). For Suzuki, who described

Zen thought in terms of *soku-hi* logic, the most important task was to give words to the Zen experience. Therefore, he clearly brushes aside the process to reach it as irrelevant.

In order to clarify how D. T. Suzuki's religious thought changed, I would like to focus on the concept of "substance and working" (*tai-yū*). In *Bankei no fushō zen* (1940), Suzuki describes the distinction between substance and working as follows:

The merit of *kanna-zen* is that it treats enlightenment as something alive. It can be said that *taza-zen* [the attitude of just practicing *zazen*] acquires the substance of enlightenment, and *kanna-zen* acquires the working of enlightenment. (DTS 1:474)

Here, Suzuki uses the concept of "substance and working," which would come to serve as the basis of his thought. Through his textual studies of the Dunhuang manuscripts of the 1930s, he was able to create a framework of "substance and working" in his own thought. *Soku-hi* logic, which is the central structure of his Zen thought, is established based on these "substance and working." Suzuki's thought developed, changing from "separating substance and working" to "the union of substance and working." These two clearly treat the relationship between the "substance," which is enlightenment itself, and "working," which is the action of the "substance," differently. In the former, where the substance and working are treated as separate, working is distinguished from enlightenment itself. In contrast, in the latter, the substance of enlightenment does not exist apart from the working. Until the 1920s, Suzuki used the framework of "separating" when explaining "substance and working," but he came to adopt the framework of their "union" after encountering the analects of Huineng (Jp. Rokuso Enō) and his disciple, Heze Shenhui (Jp. Katakū Jinne) because they adopt this approach.¹⁰

As I have quoted above, Suzuki assumes that "substance" is acquired by *dhyāna* (*taza zen*), and "working" is acquired by *prajñā* (*kanna-zen*). "Awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*" means "separating substance and working" because there is a distinction *prajñā* as working and *dhyāna* which is its source. In fact, Suzuki had been discussing Zen in this

framework until around 1940.

Zen's profound truth does not exist in this kind of physical discipline, but as long as you enjoy this corpse and live or die in the real world, it is most important to be careful about this. It is the so-called "awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*." *Prajñā* is the eyes, and *dhyāna* is the legs. Those who train them should make great efforts. (DTS 14:305 *Zen no daiichigi*, 1914)

The nature of Zen itself has a tendency to give rise to two schools [*mokushō-zen* and *kanna-zen*] like this. Even when we read *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (Jp. *Rokuso-Dankyō*) we could find phrases such as "Zen is not *zazen*." In fact, I believe that it is important not to be biased toward either side. In other words, the light of *prajñā* must come out at the same time as attaining *dhyāna*. As said from old times, we should generate *prajñā* by *dhyāna*. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* emphasizes that *dhyāna* and *prajñā* are originally united. As for the relationship between them, there is no doubt that *dhyāna* is the substance of *prajñā*, and *prajñā* is the working of *dhyāna*. (DTS 17:248 *Hyakushū sensetsu*, 1925)

As one can see from these sentences, Suzuki discusses Zen training using the framework of "awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*" However, it was when Suzuki clearly constructed his *soku-hi* logic around 1940 when he made "the union of substance and working," which was derived from Huineng and Shenhui, his own religious thought. The following is a passage from *Zen shisōshi kenkyū dai ichi* (1943).

The group of Huineng and Shenhui insist on "the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*," and this state of union is enlightenment or *kenshō*. They insist that *dhyāna* is *prajñā* and *prajñā* is *dhyāna*, but that one gain *prajñā* by practicing *dhyāna* in a step-by-step manner. *Prajñā* is the working of *dhyāna*, and *dhyāna* is the substance of *prajñā*. Substance and working are two sides of the originally same thing

seen by the intellect. *Prajñā* follows *dhyāna*, and *dhyāna* follows *prajñā*. (DTS 1:86)

In *Hyakushū sensetsu* (1925), Suzuki had clearly argued that the expression “awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*” in *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* means “the union of substance and working.” However, in *Zen shisōshi kenkyū dai ichi* he clearly denies this.

Suzuki did so because it became clear to him by studying the literature of early Zen Buddhism that “awakening *prajñā* from *dhyāna*” is a concept of the Northern school of Zen. The Northern school was opposed to Southern school, which is directly linked to modern Zen. In the Southern school, *dhyāna* and *prajñā* considered to be one and not dual. In other words, *dhyāna* is substance of *prajñā*, and *prajñā* is working of *dhyāna*. These two don’t exist separately. We see one thing as having two sides due to discrimination.

However, this means that the relationship of “*zazen* and wisdom,” which was originally one of “means and end,” has changed. The fact that *dhyāna* and *prajñā* are unified means that there is no *dhyāna* apart from *prajñā* and that *dhyāna* will always appear in *prajñā*. In other words, *dhyāna*, which was a means, has been incorporated into *prajñā*, which is the aim. And for Suzuki, “the appearance of *prajñā*” was nothing other than “enlightenment.” In other words, at this point, in Suzuki’s thought the relationship between the two terms *dhyāna* and *prajñā* has changed into one of “substance and working” rather than “means” (training) and “aim” (enlightenment).

In the first place, *dhyāna* is an activity to stop discriminatory thinking and *prajñā* is based on discrimination.¹¹ It can be said that *dhyāna* and *prajñā* are contradictory to each other from the viewpoint of discriminatory thinking. These two contradictory elements are united within the framework of “the union of substance and working.” This leads to the “discrimination of no-discrimination” or *soku-hi* logic, which is the main concept of D.T. Suzuki’s religious thought.¹²

It is certain that Suzuki’s thought was broadened and deepened by his adoption of “the union of substance and working.” However, this also brought with it new practical problems. Due to *dhyāna* and *prajñā*, which

had been understood in the two terms of “means” and “aim,” being unified into the concept of “enlightenment,” the means to reach “enlightenment” was lost. Mahayana Buddhists generally seek to reach enlightenment by following three steps in order: *śīla*, *dhyāna*, and *prajñā*. In contrast, Suzuki tends to subsume everything under *prajñā*, so his practical methodology is lacking. In fact, Heze Shenhui, on which Suzuki based his argument, had a similar problem.¹³ Suzuki was also aware of this and stated as follows.

Huineng doesn't give any suggestions about the techniques of *zazen* or the methods of *kenshō*, but he said that *zazen* is not immobile, and *kenshō* is not artificial. So the question of “how to awaken” is only resolved by inner efforts of Zen practitioners themselves. He didn't say “keep concentrating on one” or “watch one”, and on another occasion, he said even that “Zen is not *zazen*.” Originally, “enlightenment” is something that leaves behind technology. Therefore, Huineng thought that the same goes for becoming enlightened. (DTS 1:134)

Huineng and Shenhui argued about the nature of enlightenment and did not pay much attention to the monastic problem of how to become enlightened. While the above meant that the practice of working towards a result was moved out of the center of Suzuki's Zen thought, he did not regard the process itself as unnecessary. Suzuki made that point very clear:

Zen meditation must be practiced. The full lotus posture is a traditional method of India. Regardless if they are Zen trainees or *nenbutsu* practitioners, Buddhists all practice this *dhyāna*. But if this *dhyāna* is “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*”, how should we practice it? How is it possible to attain Buddhahood? The answer must be more than just an ideological suggestion. You cannot experience *kenshō* or “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*” unless you actually practice to some extent the view that our nature is pure. (DTS 1:137)

No result can be obtained without a process. Suzuki did not deny it. However, Suzuki, like Huineng who he quotes, does not give a clear statement about how to achieve that result. Since “experience itself has nothing to do with the psychology of the process leading up to it,” the relationship between them depends on the accidental things. So he concluded that “the question of ‘how to awaken’ is only resolved by inner efforts of Zen practitioners themselves.”

After all, by throwing away the framework of “awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*” and adopting that of “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*,” he has hollowed out the process of acquiring *prajñā*.

4. Developed concepts of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*

As described above, due to the development of Suzuki’s thought, (2) *zazen* to supplement *kanna*, or *zazen* in the framework of “awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*,” lost its position around 1940. Instead, he came to discuss (3) *zazen* as the working of enlightenment, that is, *dhyāna* incorporated into “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*.”

From the standpoint of “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*” which positions practice from the perspective of enlightenment, the understanding of the practice changes after attaining enlightenment. For example, Suzuki discusses *samādhi* as follows.

When the mind becomes one with the substance of existence and is conscious of only this state of unity, we call it *samādhi*. In this case, *dhyāna* is the means or process that leads us to this last *samādhi*.
(DTS 12:35)

Suzuki wrote the above in 1906, quoting Shaku Sōen’s opinion. The understanding that *samādhi* is acquired by *dhyāna* is a traditional understanding that also applies to the Indian text *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*.¹⁴ However, Suzuki overturns such an understanding in his *Zen shisōshi kenkyū dai ichi* (1943).

Samādhi seems to be something that can only be obtained by doing *zazen* and reaching the limit of meditation, but that is not the case. *Samādhi* is lifting an eyebrow and winking an eye (*yōbi shunmoku*). The *pāramitās* are not necessarily the six practices. It may be thought that something is not an offering unless it is an act of mercy, but that is a mistake. When I wake up in the morning and look at someone and say *ohayō* (good morning), there are the six *pāramitās*, and when we hear the cicadas crying, there are the six *pāramitās*. (DTS 1:324)

Here, a new context is emerging. *Samādhi* is no longer brought about by physical meditation, but now *samādhi* works at the site of wisdom. Next, let us go over *dhyāna* itself. In *Zen shisōshi kenkyū dai san* (around 1945¹⁵) he discusses *Hokushū gohōben* as follows.

Immobility is the means of generating *prajñā* from *dhyāna*. Immobility and *dhyāna* are separated into two here. The word “immovable” is not the principle of *dhyāna* itself, but rather a means of making *dhyāna* rise to *prajñā*. *Dhyāna* is a matter outside of immobility. *Dhyāna* alone does not produce *prajñā*. In addition, *dhyāna* itself cannot become true *dhyāna*. If *dhyāna* became true *dhyāna*, or if *dhyāna* was true *dhyāna*, then *prajñā* would be derived from it. This requires means (*hōben*) and means is immobility. (DTS 3:23)

In other words, there are two different types of *dhyāna*: one that makes *prajñā* and one that does not make *prajñā*. Suzuki states that “*dhyāna* which does not make *prajñā*” means an “immobile emotional state that comes from the spiritual training methods inherited from the Indian tradition” (DTS 2:282). He said that Indian Buddhists did not clearly explain the relationship between the practice of *dhyāna* and the working of *prajñā*, and he distinguished this *dhyāna* from the twofold *dhyāna* that he discussed. Suzuki tried to present “*dhyāna* that makes *prajñā*,” and he saw this new kind of *dhyāna* as the “true *dhyāna*.”

Thus, just as Suzuki re-presented *dhyāna* as a new concept, he also gave *prajñā* a new interpretation that rewrites the traditional definition.

Prajñā is understood in many ways, but its fundamental structure is the total understanding of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, or *dhyāna* and *prajñā*. It is to experience in mind that all beings are one and at the same time to discriminate thoroughly. (DTS 12:435)

This is the description in *Zen ni yoru seikatsu* (1949; translation of the English *Living by Zen*). Suzuki came to understand *prajñā*, which originally was a separate concept from *dhyāna*, in his “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*” framework, so it was combined with *dhyāna* in the same way as *dhyāna* is combined with *prajñā*. He also discussed the subject of this paper, *zazen*, in new terms.

Therefore, although *zazen* is *jōryō* [*dhyāna*, i.e., suppressing discrimination], we can’t suppress discrimination. Discrimination doesn’t calm down. *Dhyāna* is to catch the substance of discrimination where discrimination is working. This is *zazen*. (DTS 7:111)

As described above, Suzuki removed the basic meanings from these practice-related concepts within the framework of “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*” from 1940 onwards and then presented the new concept which developed them. Here we find *zazen* (3) inseparably linked to “enlightenment.” In other words, Suzuki defined *zazen* as the enlightenment itself.

I would like to recall that when discussing *zazen* (2), Suzuki used the concept of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. However, in (3), this is abandoned.

When Huineng came on the scene, he immediately said that *prajñā* is the most fundamental thing in the study of Buddhism. And he saw that, as long as one is proceeding with the practice of *dhyāna* at the expense of the wisdom of *prajñā*, one would never see anything real. Furthermore, what is known as *dhyāna* has been mixed with

śamatha and *vipaśyanā*. The Tiantai [Tendai] school was greatly interested in these two concepts. I don't think that Huineng was historically aware of such fact, he just tried to declare his intuition. (DTS 12:192)

When Suzuki adopted the position of Huineng, he abandoned the concept of *śamatha-vipaśyanā*. It is true that earlier Suzuki said that *prajñā* is the synthesis of the concept of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. However, for Suzuki, *śamatha-vipaśyanā* is a “means” in *zazen* (2). In *zazen* (3), in which *zazen* is regarded as the aim itself, it is no longer necessary to associate *zazen* with *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, so Suzuki wrote the above passage.

The most appropriate topic for Suzuki's discussion of this *zazen* (3) is Dōgen. As his religious training thought is called *shikan-taza* (*zazen* without a purpose in mind), he calls for people to consistently practice *zazen*. Dōgen rejected the mixing of practitioners' volitional actions into *zazen* as a practice of Buddha. He saw *zazen* as “presence of enlightenment” as it is. In addition, engaging in *zazen* with the expectation of “enlightenment” violates his position of *shikan-taza*.

It appears that Dōgen thinks that *zazen* is not a practice of meditating on something in the full lotus posture. He considers *zazen* itself to be the presence of the Great Working (*daiyū*). “The presence of the Great Working” means the existence of absolute truth itself. Dōgen preaches that what is infinitely spacious and not limited to anything, working freely, is *zazen*. (DTS 13: 84)

It seems that Suzuki regards Dōgen's *shikan-taza* as *zazen* of “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*.” In other words, *zazen* is not separated from the working of “enlightenment.” It is no longer the means of *zazen*, but the aim itself. Here, the third aspect of Suzuki's theory of *zazen* is clearly illustrated.¹⁶ However, Suzuki is trying to find a “means” and “aim” in Dōgen's teaching of *shikan-taza*. He refers to the two sides of *zazen* in Dōgen's zen as follows.

On the one hand, Dōgen tells us to do *zazen* exclusively based on the concept of *shushō-funi* (training and enlightenment are not two). But in contrast, Dōgen says *bendō* and *sankyū* (training on the Buddhist way). This is not just to be untiring, but to consider non-consideration while aiming to be untiring. The substance of training is enlightenment, but we cannot attain enlightenment without training. (DTS 1:469)

Here Suzuki describes two sides of *zazen*: *zazen* as a means and *zazen* as an aim. Suzuki classifies the *shushō-funi* as the aim and the process leading up to it as *bendō* and *sankyū*. Suzuki understood Dōgen's position of *shushō-funi* as the position of "the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*," which is the central structure of his Zen thought. On the one hand, if we were to describe the *zazen* of *shushō-funi* as "*zazen* that presents enlightenment," in contrast, *bendō-sankyū* is *zazen* that seeks to enlightenment. Suzuki once again brings intentional action into Dōgen's *zazen*, which he had tried to dismiss by the word *shikan-taza*.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to define the position of *zazen* in D.T. Suzuki's religious thought. In the Rinzai tradition, *zazen* was long emphasized as a supplement to *kanna*, which means "awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*". But when constructing his Zen thought, this *zazen* had only a secondary meaning, and, as a result, he presented *zazen* (3) as the working of enlightenment. *Zazen* (1) and *zazen* (2) were similar from the viewpoint of training in that Suzuki consistently gave such *zazen* a positive meaning as "therapy" for people who were emotionally adrift in modern life.

In this paper, I treated Suzuki's establishment of *soku-hi* logic around 1940 as the clear turning point at which Suzuki turned from *zazen* (2) "awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*" to *zazen* (3) "the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*." At that time, his understanding of *zazen* changed. In his writings prior to this, he tries to see *zazen* in relation to *kōan*, and therefore attempts to treat *zazen* as something distinct from meditation and

concentration. In terms of the concepts of *śamatha-vipaśyanā*, he understood *zazen* (1) as *śamatha*, and *zazen* (2) as something closer to *vipaśyanā*. In other words, it can be said that he tried to show the concrete content of *kōan* practice by manipulating the content of the concept of *dhyāna*.

However, after shifting to the position (3), he rather again regards *dhyāna* as same as *śamatha*, which means the suppression of discrimination since Indian Buddhism. This is because Suzuki adopted the position of “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*,” making it possible to assign the wisdom element of *zazen* to *prajñā* that has been assimilated to *dhyāna* and thereby again reinstating thus *dhyāna* as a non-wisdom concept. In other words, it is not necessary to include the intellectual element in *dhyāna* itself because *dhyāna* is defined as inseparable from *prajñā*. Of course, the meaning of wisdom is different in (2) and (3). The wisdom aspect in (2) is wisdom as “metaphysical inquiry” in *kōan* practice, while the wisdom aspect in (3) wisdom as an expression of the Zen experience itself. The relationship between these two will not be discussed in depth here.

After 1940, Suzuki rejected Northern school as “quietism” because he had adopted “the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*” framework of the Southern school. He held that the Northern school distinguished *dhyāna* from *prajñā* and that even if Northern school and *kanna-zen* after the Song dynasty in China both adopt the same position of “awakening *prajñā* by *dhyāna*,” the *zazen* of the former is different from the latter, in which it is auxiliary for *kanna-zen*. In the Tang dynasty, when the Northern school was active, *kōan* training was carried out. When Northern school referred to “awakening *prajñā* from *dhyāna*,” this showed the expectation that *prajñā* will be generated by *dhyāna* that has eliminated the intellectual element. We can also say that Suzuki changed the meaning of the concept of *dhyāna* for the purpose of clearly contrasting the Southern and Northern schools.

In the current phenomenon called the meditation boom, *vipaśyanā* meditation is practiced in various places. Mindfulness, which has attracted attention in the business world, is also seen as a form of meditation similar to *vipaśyanā*.¹⁷ Today, the discourse on meditation is

based on the framework of ancient Indian Buddhism on which such a Theravada sect is based. There have been many attempts to recapture the traditional practices of each Buddhist tradition from this perspective. However, if we follow D. T. Suzuki's argument, it is not necessarily appropriate to apply these frameworks to Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism has an original system in *zazen* or *dhyāna*, and interpreting them from the viewpoint of the Theravada system may overlook the elements peculiar to Zen Buddhism. This is an issue that deserves deeper consideration in the future.

Notes

1. Ishii Seijun and Kakuta Tairyū, ed., *Zen to ringo: Steve Jobs toiu ikikata* (Kyoto: Miyaobi Paburishshingu, 2012) p. 191.
2. Kenneth Tanaka, *America bukkō* (Tokyo: Musashino University Press, 2010).
3. Trevor Leggett regards Suzuki's activities as winding Zen seeds into the Western world. However, he said that D. T. Suzuki's Zen theory lacked a specific explanation of *zazen*, which left many readers dissatisfied. Trevor Leggett (Okura Yuunosuke, tr.), *Shinsidō to bushidō* (Gifu: Reitaku Daigaku Shuppan, 2003) pp. 292-304.
4. According to Leggett, Suzuki intentionally omitted the description about *zazen* when he translated the Shaku Sōen's writing into English (ibid. p. 294).
5. Quotations in this paper from D. T. Suzuki's Complete Works (*Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968-71) are shown in the following form: DTS volume:page number.
6. "If possible, the best thing to do is to encourage everyone, both inside by the principle of religion and outside by the effort of meditation of *zazen*. But as mentioned above, there are countless distinctions in human talents and circumstances. Therefore, I am satisfied by recommending the physical techniques for a while" (DTS 18:401).
7. 所謂攝心爲戒因戒生定因定發慧。是則名爲三無漏學。SAT No. 945, vol. 19, p. 131c, ll.14-15. In preparing this article, SAT Text Database was used.
8. Satō Hidetaka, "Rankei Dōryū no zazengi: kanazawa bunko shozō rankei zazengi no yakuchū," *Komazawa daigaku bukkō gakubu ronshū*, 47 (2016), p. 62.
9. However, Minowa Kenryō describes Zen Buddhist *kanna* as a kind of *śamatha* in

which language is the subject of observation. Minowa Kenryō, “Daijō bukkyō no meisō gaikan,” in *Sanga Japan 1*, separate volume (Kabushiki Gaisha Sanga, 2014) p. 42.

10. I attempted to divide Suzuki’s thought into three periods in my book *Suzuki Daisetsu: sono shisō kōzō*. In the first period, Suzuki based his thought on the traditional discourses of Zen Buddhism, in the middle period (starting at the beginning of the 20th century), he used William James’s religious psychology used to positively evaluate mysticism, and in the late period (from 1940 onwards), he positively positioned the linguistic expression of Zen by distinguishing Zen experience and Zen consciousness using *soku-hi* logic. The understanding of *zazen* in (2) and (3) in this paper clearly reflects the intellectual frameworks of the middle and late periods, respectively, and the transitional times are almost the same. Hasunuma Chokuyō, *Suzuki Daisetsu: sono shisō kōzō* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2020).

11. For example, Suzuki finds the distinction in the argument of Shenhui as follows: “Shenhui here understands *prajñā* as discriminative wisdom and *dhyāna* as non-discriminative wisdom” (DTS 3:74).

12. Refer to Hasunuma *ibid.* Chapter 2.

13. On this point, Ogawa Takashi states the following: “This does not add a new meaning to the practice of *zazen*, but on the contrary, there is no doubt that this is a declaration of the total abandonment of *zazen*.” Ogawa Takashi, *Tōdai no zensō Jinne* (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2007) p. 102.

14. The eight items of the yoga system in the *Yoga Sūtras* are as follows: 1. *yama*. 2. *niyama*, 3. *āsana*, 4. *prāṇāyāma*, 5. *pratyāhāra*. 6. *dhāraṇā*, 7. *dhyāna*, and 8. *samādhi*.

15. This book is D. T. Suzuki’s posthumous manuscript, but Furuta Shōkin, an editor of D. T. Suzuki’s complete works, states that it was written around 1945.

16. Refer to Hasunuma *ibid.* Chapter 2.

17. Sugamura Genji, “Mindfulness no imi wo koete,” in Kaitani Hisanori, et al., ed., *Mindfulness* (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 2016) p. 133.