

Toshihiko Izutsu on Intercultural Dialogue and Zen Dialogue in *Consciousness and Essence*. Toward a Dialogical Religious Education in the Era of Irreligion

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Abstract

[Objective] This paper examines Toshihiko Izutsu's theory of dialogue in *Consciousness and Essence*, focusing on intercultural dialogue and Zen dialogue, and clarifies its significance for religious education in the era of irreligion.

[Contents] The paper first clarifies the dialogical character of the educational relation and the role of religiosity in it. It then analyzes the relationship between culture and language in Izutsu's thought and shows how the impossibility of dialogue emerges from cultural and linguistic articulation. Against this background, it examines Zen as the negation of essence, the movement from articulation through non-articulation to articulation (II), and the structure of Zen dialogue as vertical dialogue grounded in non-articulation.

[Conclusions] Zen dialogue should not be understood as the introduction of Zen as religious content, but as one concrete form of educational dialogue rooted in religiosity. The paper argues that such dialogue opens a possible direction for religious education in the era of irreligion by unsettling fixed relations between self, other, and world.

[Keywords] Toshihiko Izutsu; *Consciousness and Essence*; Intercultural Dialogue; Zen Dialogue; Religious Education; Religiosity

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『의식과 본질』에 나타난 이즈쓰 도시히코의 문화 간 대화와 선적 대화: 비종교 시대의 대화적 종교교육을 향하여

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요 약

[연구 목적] 본 논문은 이즈쓰 도시히코의 『의식과 본질』에 나타난 대화론을 문화 간 대화와 선적 대화에 초점을 맞추어 고찰하고, 비종교의 시대에 종교교육에 대해 갖는 의의를 밝히는 데 목적이 있다.

[연구 내용] 본 논문은 먼저 교육적 관계의 대화적 성격과 그 안에서 종교성이 갖는 역할을 밝힌다. 이어서 이즈쓰 사상에서 문화와 언어의 관계를 분석하고, 문화적·언어적 분절 속에서 대화의 불가능성이 어떻게 발생하는지를 해명한다. 이러한 논의를 배경으로, 본 논문은 본질의 부정으로서의 선, 분절에서 비분절을 거쳐 분절(II)로 나아가는 운동, 그리고 비분절에 근거한 수직적 대화로서 선적 대화의 구조를 고찰한다.

[결론] 선적 대화는 선을 종교적 내용으로 교육에 도입하는 것으로 이해되어서는 안 되며, 종교성에 근거한 교육적 대화의 하나의 구체적 형태로 이해되어야 한다. 본 논문은 이러한 대화가 자아, 타자, 세계 사이의 고정된 관계를 동요시킴으로써 비종교의 시대에 종교교육이 나아갈 수 있는 하나의 가능성을 열어 준다고 주장한다.

[주제어] 이즈쓰 도시히코; 의식과 본질; 문화 간 대화; 선적 대화; 종교교육; 종교성

I . Introduction

In the contemporary world, where globalization and secularization are advancing simultaneously, religious education needs to be reconsidered as a practice that explores the possibility of dialogue with others from different cultural and religious backgrounds, a task that also bears on education more broadly, including moral education. In particular, in an age when religious affiliation can no longer be taken for granted, the question must be asked in what sense religious education can still be “religious,” and how this religiosity relates to dialogue in education.

To address this problem, this paper focuses on *Consciousness and Essence*, widely regarded as one of Toshihiko Izutsu’s major works. This paper seeks not only to contribute to developing a theory of religious education in the era of irreligion, but also to offer a distinctive interpretive perspective on Izutsu’s thought. It is therefore necessary first to clarify where this paper stands within Izutsu studies.

Published by Iwanami Shoten in 1983, *Consciousness and Essence* comprises four essays: the title essay, “Consciousness and Essence,” which occupies the greater part of the book; “Essence-Intuition: Fragments of Islamic Philosophy,” which offers a detailed discussion of the theory of essence in Islamic philosophy that serves as one point of departure for the argument of the title essay; and two shorter essays, “The Problem of Linguistic Meaning in Zen” and “Dialogue and Non-Dialogue: A Study of Zen Dialogue.” Ono states that “no one would object to regarding *Consciousness and Essence* as the summit and culmination of Izutsu’s philosophical enterprise” (Ono, 2023: 133), while Nagai describes it as “the pinnacle of his academic career” (Nagai, Stone trans., 2019: 224).

Despite such evaluations, many previous studies that refer to the 1983 volume have taken mainly the title essay “Consciousness and Essence” as their object of analysis. Ono, for example, presents the work as “Consciousness and Essence (1983)” or as the “book *Consciousness and Essence: In Search of the Spiritual Orient*,” thereby referring to *Consciousness and Essence* as a book; in practice, however, what he examines is the title essay “Consciousness and Essence.” Nagai likewise treats *Consciousness and Essence* as a book, but his analysis is limited to the title essay and the postscript that frames it. Wakamatsu, by contrast, clearly distinguishes *Consciousness and Essence* as the title of the book from “Consciousness and Essence” as the serialized title essay (Wakamatsu, Hoff trans., 2014: 260); nevertheless, his discussion is no different in that it centers on the title essay.

Ono points out that “precisely because its scope and content are so grand and complex, no unified interpretation or evaluation of this book has yet been achieved” (Ono, 2023: 133). This difficulty, however, becomes even more conspicuous when one considers *Consciousness and Essence* as a whole.

This paper argues that, by focusing on the two essays included in *Consciousness and Essence*—“The Problem of Linguistic Meaning in Zen” and “Dialogue and Non-Dialogue: A Study of Zen Dialogue”—we can discern that the problem of “dialogue” is already present as an undercurrent in the title essay itself. It is therefore necessary to examine how these two essays—especially “Dialogue and Non-Dialogue,” which originated in Izutsu’s 1977 lecture “Beyond Dialogue: A Zen Point of View”—are positioned within the volume as a whole. “Essence-Intuition” can be read as supplementing the theory of essence developed in the title essay. “The Problem of Linguistic Meaning in Zen,” in turn, can be read as elucidating through Zen dialogue the Zen language discussed in the title essay. Seen in this way, “Dialogue and Non-Dialogue,” which begins as a discussion of dialogue in general, might be interpreted not as having been written with a direct connection to the title essay in mind, but rather as having developed out of “The Problem of Linguistic Meaning in Zen.” This paper, however, argues that the problem of dialogue is already latent in “Consciousness and Essence” itself.¹⁾

On the basis of these concerns, this paper aims to reconstruct the problem of intercultural dialogue in Izutsu’s thought, with reference to *Consciousness and Essence* and with particular attention to Zen dialogue, and to connect this reconstruction to the question of religious education in the era of irreligion. Specifically, first, it clarifies the relationship between dialogue and religiosity in education; second, it examines the relationship between culture and language in Izutsu’s thought, with particular attention to cultural and linguistic articulation; third, it

1) This point is also important for understanding the position of Zen in *Consciousness and Essence*. Izutsu had been familiar with Zen since childhood (Izutsu, 2019c: 9-12). Although this Zen experience formed part of the background of his thought, his reflection on Zen may also be regarded as one of the outcomes of his Erano lectures. This is because Izutsu was invited to the conference as D. T. Suzuki’s successor, and the expectation that he, too, would address Zen thought became one point of departure for his studies of Zen (Izutsu, 2019b: 373-374). For the influence of Suzuki’s thought on Izutsu, see Sawai (2024: 27-31) and Kojima (2024). Yet the place of Zen within *Consciousness and Essence* is not necessarily self-evident. Saito argues that Izutsu leaves undecided the priority of “essence” over non-“essence” (Saito, 2018: 176). By contrast, Yorizumi identifies Izutsu’s most primordial standpoint as “the negation of essence based on absolute non-articulation” (Yorizumi, 2017: 156). This paper reinforces this reading from the perspective of the theory of dialogue.

elucidates how the impossibility of dialogue emerges within this relationship; fourth, it locates the possibility of dialogue in the Zen process of de-essentialization and rearticulation. Finally, it clarifies Zen dialogue as one possible practice of dialogical education rooted in religiosity for the era of irreligion.

1. Educational Dialogue and Religiosity

Education necessarily involves some form of transmission of meaning. Yet the existence of such transmission does not immediately mean that dialogue is taking place. A one-sided transmission from the educator to the educand cannot be called dialogue so long as it lacks mutuality. As Kawamura characterizes it, such a relation is “an imperative relation that deprives the subject of freedom” (Kawamura, 2024: 167). If education is reduced to the educator’s setting of aims and the educand’s obedience to them, the relation intrinsic to education is lost. What is required between educator and educand is not mere transmission, but mutual responsiveness. In this sense, education is intrinsically dialogical. As Buber states, “the relation in education is one of pure dialogue” (Buber, Smith trans., 2002: 116). Education, therefore, does not merely include dialogue as one method among others; rather, it is constituted, at its foundation, as a dialogical relation. Cohen further develops this point by interpreting Buber’s educational philosophy as pointing toward an “education no longer dedicated only to the transmission of information and the development of intellectual faculties but intent on fostering true dialogue” (Cohen, 1983: 13). In other words, education is not only dialogical in its very structure; it is also required to foster, or bring into actuality, such dialogue.

However, the dialogue at issue here is not so easily grasped. The realization of mutuality does not by itself rule out the possibility that the aims imposed upon the educand have already been unilaterally determined in advance.

Education that truly secures “the freedom of the subject” must arise from the singular relation between educator and educand in a concrete situation. How, then, can such a dialogical relation be realized? Buber states: “The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being” (Buber, Smith trans., 1953: 11). The question of dialogical relation may be said to concern being itself. Ueda writes that “this direct face-to-face relation of ‘one-to-one’ is a unique field that cannot be reduced either to the mere individual or to the whole” (Ueda, 1993: 177).

When we consider the locus in which dialogue emerges, we encounter the problem of religiosity. Here, religiosity is first understood as something located at the ground of human

existence, in the sense suggested by Smith's statement that "living religiously is an attribute of person" (Smith, 1964: 195). Although Izutsu does not explicitly define key concepts such as "religiosity" in *Consciousness and Essence* (Wakamatsu, Hoff trans., 2014: 260), Sawai notes Izutsu's resonance with Smith's view that all human beings are "religious" and essentially concerned with "transcendence" (Sawai, 2024: 20). This paper begins from this understanding of religiosity and examines it through Izutsu's theory of Zen dialogue.

If this is so, then the dialogical relation must also be rooted in such religiosity. Buber states that "education is a whole only when it is religious as a whole" (Buber, 2005: 129). It may therefore be said that education grounded in this kind of religiosity is education in its fullest sense. From Buber's perspective, the field opened by this relation is not a mere sum of the religiosity of the two interlocutors; rather, it emerges as a unique field in its own right.

However, it is also true that within religious education there are views that do not ground dialogical education in such "wholeness." Jackson, for example, characterizes religious education as "a conversational process" in which students "continuously interpret and reinterpret their own views" (Jackson, 2004: 18). Here, rather, the emphasis falls on each individual's existential self-understanding.

Although the question remains as to what kind of field is opened by dialogue, there is nevertheless agreement that dialogue is fundamental to religious education. If this is so, how can religious education be realized in the era of irreligion? Since dialogue is ordinarily mediated by language, this question necessarily leads to another: does language facilitate such dialogue, or does it obstruct it?

To address these questions—the ground of being that makes dialogue possible and the relation of language to that ground—this paper focuses on Toshihiko Izutsu's theory of intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue must be examined because the problems of language, culture, religiosity, and dialogue appear there in their most acute form. For this reason, *Consciousness and Essence* becomes central to the present inquiry.

2. The Relationship between Culture and Language

For Izutsu, whose intellectual inquiry took Islamic philosophy as its point of departure, the question of culture stood at the center of his intellectual concerns. To be sure, one of the principal themes of his reflections on culture was the encounter between the Orient and the Occident. In order to reconstruct Izutsu's theory of intercultural dialogue, however, it is first

necessary to clarify a more basic issue that underlies it: the relationship between culture and language. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, this section therefore examines how culture and language are related in Izutsu's thought.

This relationship can be clarified from two perspectives: "Dialogue and Non-Dialogue" approaches the issue from the perspective of culture as seen through language, whereas "Consciousness and Essence" approaches it from the perspective of language as seen through culture.

Let us first consider the former perspective, namely, culture as seen through language. What is at issue here is the impossibility of communication. Izutsu states that "it is hardly an exaggeration to say that this problematic character of communication is the problem of modern human existence itself" (Izutsu, 1991: 378). If communication is an act rooted in existence, then the difficulty of communication also signifies a crisis of existence. At the same time, this impossibility of communication is also a linguistic problem.

Izutsu first frames the problem of linguistic communication as a tension between two extremes: "thoroughgoing linguistic solipsism," which denies the possibility of transmitting the contents of consciousness through language, and a "naïve affirmation of communication," according to which everything is linguistically communicable (Izutsu, 1991: 379). He then states that "today almost all theorists of language are in broad agreement on the point that it is impossible to convey to another person in words, exactly as it is in its living uniqueness, the content of a purely personal or existential experience" (Izutsu, 1991: 380), thus giving greater weight to the former position.

This opposition becomes even more acute in the case of intercultural dialogue. Izutsu states that the problem of linguistic communication arises with particular sharpness as "the problem of dialogue between different cultures," that is, as communication between interlocutors belonging to different cultural traditions (Izutsu, 1991: 378). On the skeptical side, he cites the Sapir - Whorf hypothesis, which he characterizes, on the premise that language is primarily "a system of cognitive articulation of 'reality,'" as the position according to which "there do not exist in the world any two languages that coincide in their structuration of 'reality'" (Izutsu, 1991: 383 - 384). On the rationalist side stands the notion of "linguistic universals," grounded in the conviction that the human mind is fundamentally the same everywhere (Izutsu, 1991: 385). Izutsu points out, however, that the communication envisioned by this position may, in the end, amount to no more than "vague semantic approximations" (Izutsu, 1991: 388). Accordingly, intercultural dialogue may be identified as the primary case in which the impossibility of

dialogue appears.

Let us now turn to the second perspective: language as seen through culture. In “Culture, Language, and Alaya-Consciousness,” Izutsu states that “human beings cannot live in the primordial chaos of Being” (Izutsu, 2019a: 64). Human existence, in other words, requires that chaos be organized into some form of order. Izutsu identifies “the mechanism of such ordering” as what is called “culture” (Izutsu, 2019a: 64). Culture, in this sense, is the paradigmatic embodiment of that cosmos.

Izutsu states that, when culture is understood “semiotically as a single text,”

... the consciousness of a human being born and brought up within its concrete context, in the dense atmosphere brought forth by the value-relations peculiar to each individual text, will break out of being human consciousness in general, become subtly particularized and colored, and that its workings, too, will also come of themselves to have a peculiar tendency. (Izutsu, 1991: 102 - 103)

Here it is clear that Izutsu sees the distinctive character of culture in the process by which consciousness becomes particularized from “human consciousness in general.” Language, in turn, can be understood as giving expression to this “cultural framework.”

However, this itself gives rise to a problem. Language arises precisely through articulation from the chaotic world. We understand the world through this articulation. And since the mode of this articulation differs according to culture, this also means that “various ‘essences’ are culturally posited and given from the beginning” (Izutsu, 1991: 129). It is precisely this problem that leads to the problem of the impossibility of intercultural dialogue.

3. The Impossibility of Dialogue in Culture

In this section, with “Consciousness and Essence” as a guide, I examine the impossibility of dialogue in culture that emerges when the relationship between culture and language discussed in the previous section is taken as a premise. In order to show how deep-rooted the impossibility of intercultural dialogue that arose in the previous section is, Izutsu divides consciousness into a vertical direction and a horizontal direction. Whereas the vertical direction “posits a two-layered structure of surface and depth in consciousness and proceeds with thought on that basis,” the horizontal direction is said to be “primarily the problem of cultural

consciousness” (Izutsu, 1991: 100, 102). Izutsu further points out that the problem of language and consciousness does not remain within the horizontal direction. He also notes that “the system of ‘essences’ learned [through that language] settles as a whole into the domain of the ‘cultural unconscious’ and regulates that person’s cognition of reality” (Izutsu, 1991: 130).²⁾

Izutsu presents three types of affirmation of “essence.” The “first type” “starts from the most basic proposition of this kind of essentialism, namely, that universal ‘essence’ (māhīya) really exists,” although “even if it exists, it exists in the depth of Being” (Izutsu, 1991: 72). The “second type,” like the first, locates essence at the level of depth, but holds that “the locus proper to it is the region of consciousness in which there arises the world of primordial images characteristic of shamanism and certain forms of mysticism—the so-called *mundus imaginalis*” (Izutsu, 1991: 72–73). The “third type,” by contrast, is said to consist in “the rational cognition, at the surface level of consciousness rather than at its depth, of the universal ‘essence’ grasped through an experience of depth-consciousness” (Izutsu, 1991: 73).

Socrates and Confucius are cited as representatives of this “third type.” Izutsu characterizes them as having been “unable to escape the constraints of the system of ‘essences’ determined by their respective cultures” (Izutsu, 1991: 129). The impossibility of intercultural dialogue arising from the “third type,” then, is no more than the result of cultural difference at the surface level. The real problem lies in the cultural difference found in the “first type” and the “second type.” That is to say, even in these two types, which reach down to the depth-dimension, cultural determination proves inescapable.

Let us examine the “first type.” This type is represented by *ko-wu ch’iung-li* in Sung philosophy, understood as the “investigation of things” and the “inquiry into li.” Izutsu regards Sung philosophy as the learning of “the pursuit of ‘li,’ that is, universal ‘essence’” (Izutsu, 1991: 80). There, “the Confucianists were possessed of an unshakable conviction that everything in the world of Being necessarily has its own ‘essence’” (Izutsu, 1991: 89). Referring to the *Book of Odes*, Izutsu explains that, for the Confucians of the Sung period, “all things in this world do not exist merely in disorder and indeterminacy, but each one has a ground of existence, and each thing has that by virtue of which it is kept within the definite limits that make it what it is, that is, ‘essence’” (Izutsu, 1991: 89–90). However, when one descends to the “deepest layer” of the way of *ko-wu ch’iung-li*, “the *t’ai chi*, the one ultimate ‘essence’ of all beings, is at the same time the one point of non-‘essence’ at which the ‘essences’ of all

2) The words in brackets have been added by the present author.

things return to nothingness and disappear, the zero-point of the whole world of Being, the *wu chi*” (Izutsu, 1991: 98). Whereas the “third type” rationally grasps essence at the level of surface consciousness, the “first type” sees, in the “deepest layer” of consciousness, the origin of all essences in the dimension of *t'ai chi* = *wu chi*.

It is Mallarmé who is contrasted with this Sung philosophy. For Mallarmé, essence was “the terrifying figure of universal ‘essence’ that emerges, like ‘the pitiless glitter of a star,’ at the point where the individuality of individual things has been nullified and nullified to the utmost” (Izutsu, 1991: 75). Izutsu states that the Sung Confucian pursuit of “li” and Mallarmé’s pursuit of “essence” “belong fundamentally to the same type, and the two run in parallel lines to a considerable extent” (Izutsu, 1991: 98). Yet the experience itself is not the same. For Mallarmé, it was “to see, with the death of the empirical world as its background, the shudderingly pitiless form of the eternal ‘essences’ of those things dimly rising up” (Izutsu, 1991: 98). By contrast, for the Sung Confucians, essence was to be sought “not in the extreme realm of death and ‘forgetfulness,’ but rather in the empirical dimension of Being itself, in the life of things vibrantly surging” (Izutsu, 1991: 98). Although they belong to the same mode of grasping “essence,” the experience appears, on the one hand, as death and, on the other, as life. Izutsu does not explicitly identify the cause of this difference as a difference of language. Yet since Izutsu identifies the contradictory identity of *wu chi* and *t'ai chi* as “the Oriental character of the Sung philosophical grasping of ‘essence’” (Izutsu, 1991: 99), cultural difference may be understood as one of its causes.

Let us now turn to the “second type.” As noted above, this type locates essence in the “world of primordial images.” At this level, “the universal ‘essence’ of all beings appears as archetypes, or original forms, endowed with dense symbolism” (Izutsu, 1991: 73). Izutsu includes within this type “Gnosticism, shamanism, Tantra, mysticism, and the like,” which occupy “a conspicuous position in the domain of Oriental philosophy” (Izutsu, 1991: 180).

Central to understanding the “second type” is “linguistic alaya-consciousness,” a key concept in Izutsu’s philosophy.³⁾ Izutsu finds, beneath the language that we ordinarily use, “a deep-consciousness space of complex chains of possible meaning-relations,” and calls this

3) As its name suggests, this concept is inspired by the Yogācāra notion of ālaya-vijñāna. Makino argues that Izutsu “develops this concept of Araya-consciousness in the direction of semantics” and calls it the “Araya-consciousness of meaning” (Makino, 2000: 255-256). From “Culture and Linguistic Ālaya-Consciousness” to *The Metaphysics of Consciousness*, this concept remained one of Izutsu’s central concepts, even while undergoing substantial theoretical transformations.

“linguistic alaya-consciousness” (Izutsu, 1991: 184). At this level, from unarticulated chaos, “seeds” [*bīja*] awakened from “alayic potentiality” are “set in motion toward surface consciousness”; if they rise all the way to surface consciousness, they become words (Izutsu, 1991: 184). Images are evoked through the activation of such “seeds.” Accordingly, the “second type” is “the position that seeks to see” in such images “the symbolic manifestation of the ‘essence’ of things” (Izutsu, 1991: 181 – 182).

What must be noted here, however, is that even at this level one cannot escape cultural constraints mediated by the linguistic system itself. Izutsu points out that “what are called images, as a rule, appear in subtly different forms depending on each individual linguistic system and on the internal structure of the linguistic alaya-consciousness of each individual subject for whom it is the mother tongue” (Izutsu, 1991: 185). Even at the level of depth-consciousness images, that is, “archetypal” images, one cannot escape the constraints of language and culture. Izutsu says that this is “immediately evident” from the difference between the Shingon mandala and the “Sefirot,” or from the fact that Buddhists do not see Christ or the Madonna, nor does the reverse occur (Izutsu, 1991: 246). From this, Izutsu concludes that such “archetypal” “essence” cannot be universal “in the sense that it is common to all peoples, or to all humanity, beyond differences of time and region” (Izutsu, 1991: 246).

Finally, although Izutsu’s concern with the impossibility of dialogue was directed primarily toward intercultural dialogue, this does not mean that he regarded dialogue within the same culture as unproblematic. Izutsu points out that images “appear, even within the sphere of the same culture, as many different images” (Izutsu, 1991: 207). Even if linguistic alaya-consciousness is, to a large extent, determined by culture, “the internal structure of the linguistic alaya-consciousness of each individual subject” must differ according to the characteristics and experiences of each individual (Izutsu, 1991: 185). If this is so, then the problem discussed above also arises in dialogue within the same culture. The problem of the impossibility of dialogue appears with particular clarity between different cultures, but it cannot be avoided even within the same culture and the same language.

4. The Possibility of Dialogue in Zen

In response to the problem of the impossibility of dialogue that emerged in the preceding sections, Izutsu seeks to explore the possibility of dialogue in Zen.

To clarify this point, it is first necessary to ask how Izutsu positions Zen in relation to the

standpoints that affirm some form of “essence,” as examined above. In contrast to these standpoints, Izutsu positions Zen as a standpoint of the negation of essence. He characterizes Zen as a standpoint that “eliminates ‘essence’ from all beings and, by so doing, nullifies all objects of consciousness and turns the whole world of Being into chaos” (Izutsu, 1991: 119). At such a level, “the empirical world immediately falls into an irretrievable state of confusion and becomes chaos, while the conscious subject also completely loses its proper cognitive function” (Izutsu, 1991: 131). Yet, in order “to realize the ultimate reality of Being,” “Zen deliberately dares to run this risk” (Izutsu, 1991: 131). Zen, however, does not aim at a state in which the conscious subject and cognitive function are totally lost. Rather, as Izutsu says, “once the world has been thoroughly turned into chaos, Zen restores order to it once again, though this time in a form altogether different from the previous one” (Izutsu, 1991: 119). What Zen seeks, then, is the reconstruction of a new order through this process of turning the world into chaos. Izutsu explains this as follows:

Various things return once again. The flower that has been nullified revives again as a flower. Yet “again as a flower” does not mean that it recovers the “essence” of flower. It is, rather, in a non-essential way. Thus, in this newly reordered world, all things are mutually distinguished, and yet are not fixed essentially; they are transparent to one another. (Izutsu, 1991: 119)

The order reconstructed out of chaos does not posit a new essence. Rather, it gives rise to a state of unobstructed interpenetration in which things are “transparent to one another.” Let us now consider this process more concretely.

Izutsu describes “the true aspect of Reality as seen by Zen” as that which, “while being absolutely unarticulated, at the same time articulates itself moment after moment so as to constitute the empirical world” (Izutsu, 1991: 136). The question, then, is how this self-articulation occurs. What must be kept in mind is that the “Nothingness” at issue in this non-articulation is “a Nothingness that conceals within itself an inexhaustible creative energy,” and not “nothingness in a merely negative sense” (Izutsu, 1991: 156). This Nothingness is the origin of the world. From the standpoint of articulation, this means that “‘Emptiness’ or ‘Nothingness,’ while in itself being absolute non-articulation, nevertheless, in either case, potentially contains all articulations that constitute the whole ontological world, through the alayic semantic ‘seeds’ of each respective language” (Izutsu, 1991: 162). As Izutsu states, “non-articulation, as such, self-articulates with its total ontological energy,” the total ontological

energy of chaos is directly connected with self-articulation. There, it “does not permit the intervention of ‘essence’” (Izutsu, 1991: 136). Izutsu formulates the process of moving from articulation to non-articulation and then to articulation once again as “articulation (I) → non-articulation → articulation (II).” In *Consciousness and Essence*, he further explains this in the following terms:

The course of Zen training may be figuratively represented by the shape of a mountain spreading to the left and right with the experience of kenshō at its summit. The base of this triangle is the empirical world; the line ascending toward the summit is the so-called upward path, while the descending line from the summit back toward the empirical world is the so-called downward path. In terms of the mode of being of the Zen practitioner himself, the upward path is the state of not yet having attained enlightenment, while the downward path is the state of having already attained enlightenment. (Izutsu, 1991: 142)⁴

Izutsu explains this structure by referring to Qingyuan Weixin’s formulation: “seeing mountains [and waters] as mountains [and waters]” → “seeing mountains [and waters] as not mountains [and waters]” → “seeing mountains [and waters] simply as mountains [and waters]” (Izutsu, 1991: 145). At articulation (I), “the world is sharply articulated in an essential manner” (Izutsu, 1991: 146): a mountain is a mountain, and a river is nothing but a river. At the stage of non-articulation, however, “the crystals of ‘essence’ melt and begin to flow,” and “the lines of articulation are wiped out” (Izutsu, 1991: 146). At this point, mountains and rivers disappear. Then, at articulation (II), “a world of things spreads out before one’s eyes which, at first glance, differs in no way from the world of the first stage” (Izutsu, 1991: 147). Mountains are mountains, and rivers are rivers. Yet here “articulation returns, but ‘essence’ does not return” (Izutsu, 1991: 147).

In articulation (II), “all beings are transparent to one another.” Here, “fish are, as fish, fully articulated and distinguished, and birds, as birds; and yet, between this bird and this fish, there is a mysterious ontological intercommunication and ontological fusion” (Izutsu, 1991: 165). In other words, things are articulated, and yet articulation no longer functions as essence. At this point, “that which has no point of coagulation within itself opens itself in all directions and

4) Nishihira points out the incongruity involved in positioning non-articulation, as depth-consciousness, at the apex (Nishihira, 2021: 128-129). However, the source of this structure of consciousness in Izutsu lies in his studies of Sufism, and it may be understood as having arisen from the fact that, in that context, God is found in heaven above.

flows” (Izutsu, 1991: 166). Articulation no longer fixes things as essences.

In articulation (II), even the standpoint of vision is transformed. Izutsu notes that Dōgen says one must leave behind “human seeing,” that is, the perspective peculiar to human beings alone; pass beyond the level of “the variously different ways of seeing according to each class of beings,” which appears at a higher dimension including the perspectives of heavenly beings, dragons, fish, and hungry ghosts; and leap still further to the point at which “water sees water” (Izutsu, 1991: 178).

The problem that arises here, however, is how such articulation (II) is to be expressed. The moment one utters words such as “flower” or “bird,” “Being is immediately differentiated into such things as flower and bird” (Izutsu, 1991: 166 - 167). Yet even if one chooses silence at this point, silence may express the world of non-articulation, but it cannot express the world of articulation (II) (Izutsu, 1991: 362). It is within precisely this aporia that Zen dialogue takes place.

What must be noted here is that, even with regard to articulation (II), Izutsu points out that “the things (the articulations of Being) seen by one whose mother tongue is Sanskrit differ, even at the stage of articulation (II), from the things (the articulations of Being) seen by one whose mother tongue is Chinese” (Izutsu, 1991: 161). To be sure, even Zen language may thus seem unable to escape cultural constraints. Izutsu nonetheless maintains that, “however different the concrete modes of articulation may be, every articulation of Being is a self-articulation of primordial non-articulation, and, in every case, the totality of all things that emerge in articulated form presents one and the same total world of Being” (Izutsu, 1991: 161). This is because every articulation is, at the same time, immediately non-articulation and immediately chaos, and in this sense signifies “the whole universe.” It is here that Izutsu finds the possibility of dialogue in Zen dialogue.

5. Zen Dialogue

How, then, does Zen dialogue take place? This section examines its structure. Izutsu writes that, “from the standpoint of Zen, the difficult problems of linguistic communication that arise within modern theory, together with the many complex issues related to them, stem chiefly from the disproportionate emphasis placed upon the communicative function of language. With regard to language, priority should rather be given to its function of semantic articulation” (Izutsu, 1991: 408).

He further points out that “horizontal linguistic communication lacking metaphysical depth is, from the Zen point of view, a trifling matter devoid of existential significance” (Izutsu, 1991: 408). In contrast to such horizontal linguistic communication, or horizontal dialogue, Zen dialogue takes the form of vertical dialogue. Of course, Izutsu is to be read here against the background of the horizontal and vertical directions of consciousness. Izutsu regards this vertical dialogue as one in which “two human beings, two existences, that is, two mutually parallel existential mechanisms of the self-verbalization of the non-verbal, in the process of correlative unfolding, mutually call to and respond to one another moment by moment, creating at every moment an entirely new dialogical scene” (Izutsu, 1991: 406).

If the words used in horizontal dialogue are those that, grasped in the horizontal direction of consciousness, are completely subject to the determinations of “essence” within culture, then the words used in vertical dialogue are words that, having thoroughly pursued the vertical direction of consciousness, newly emerge from the dimension of non-articulation through linguistic alaya-consciousness, and further as words characterized by *jiji-muge*, the unobstructed interpenetration of thing with thing.

1) The Structure of Zen Dialogue

What, then, is the nature of the language used in Zen dialogue? Izutsu points out that, “in the form of Zen historically developed in China from the Sung period onward, the nonsensical use of language in Zen is recognized on two different levels” (Izutsu, 1991: 363). The first level is “the meaninglessness intentionally employed within the kōan system established in Rinzai Zen,” while the second is “living Zen utterances prior to kōan, and entirely unrelated to kōan” (Izutsu, 1991: 363).

At the first level, kōan is employed in a secondary manner within an established system. That is to say, the dialogue contained in a kōan is not treated as the living dialogue that originally took place, but rather as something later taken up and used by another practitioner. At the second level, by contrast, the utterance contained in a kōan is understood in its original status as a “living Zen utterance,” prior to its systematization as kōan.

The first level functions as a pedagogical dialogue directed toward the transition from articulation (I) to non-articulation. At this level, “the meaninglessness of words is used methodologically” (Izutsu, 1991: 363). In other words, precisely because language at this level is an expression of non-articulation, “Zen language must be thoroughly nonsensical, remain nonsensical, and be deepened in its meaninglessness” (Izutsu, 1991: 363). It is for this reason

that Izutsu positions the kōan as follows:

Zen utterances methodically employed as kōan stake everything on meaninglessness. A kōan is a means by which the conspicuously accentuated meaninglessness of an utterly nonsensical (or apparently nonsensical) utterance is thrust upon human consciousness, so as to drive ordinary consciousness to its limit and finally force it to break through its natural outer shell. (Izutsu, 1991: 364)

Here Izutsu takes the example of “the cypress tree in the courtyard.” This is Chao-chou’s reply to the question, “Tell me, what is the significance of the First Patriarch’s coming from the West?” On the surface, in terms of the ordinary function of language, this does not constitute dialogue in the ordinary sense. In this sense, it is meaningless. And yet the phrase “the cypress tree in the courtyard” itself still has meaning. Izutsu describes this by saying that “the practitioner, taking as a first clue this faint remnant of what still seems to be meaning, eventually approaches a dimension of absolute meaninglessness in which even the residue of meaning is no longer left” (Izutsu, 1991: 364). In other words, he finds in this residue of meaning the element that makes Zen dialogue possible.

Another kōan that Izutsu discusses in comparison with “the cypress tree” is Chao-chou’s “Wu-Word,” also known as “Chao-chou’s Dog.” In response to the question, “Has the dog the Buddha-nature?” Chao-chou replied, “No!” (*wu*). Izutsu describes this as a case in which “one reflects on its meaning to the utmost, eventually reaches the ultimate limit of rational thought, and then, by taking one further step and making a subjective leap into the world of absolute meaninglessness, suddenly finds there the state of enlightenment” (Izutsu, 1991: 365).

Whereas “the cypress tree” still has a referent in the external world, Chao-chou’s “No!” (*wu*) is, by contrast, a case in which “the articulating function of language negates itself in an articulated manner” (Izutsu, 1991: 366). For this reason, Izutsu points out that “in determining the degree to which a given expression is suited to becoming a kōan, the articulating function of language comes positively into play” (Izutsu, 1991: 366). From this, it may be inferred that Izutsu suggests a staged pedagogical use of kōan. At the same time, however, as will be discussed below, Izutsu also points out that “the cypress tree” itself has the further function of “disclosing a new horizon of meaningfulness,” leading from non-articulation to articulation (II) (Izutsu, 1991: 367).

Let us now turn to the second level. This level can be understood as a mode of utterance

that proceeds from non-articulation to articulation (II). Izutsu describes it as “living Zen utterance prior to kōan, and entirely unrelated to kōan; at this level, language, though totally meaningless for ordinary natural reason, is perfectly meaningful from the standpoint of the primordial experience of Zen” (Izutsu, 1991: 363).

At the first level, that is, at the level of language directed toward the transition from articulation (I) to non-articulation, virtually any expression could serve, so long as it was grounded in meaninglessness, since what mattered there was simply the expression of non-articulation. At the same time, however, precisely because its aim was pedagogical, namely, to lead the practitioner to non-articulation, it was necessary to address the practitioner in a way suited to leading him toward non-articulation. For that reason, the kōan, refined as a pedagogical means, came to be employed. At the second level, by contrast, utterance proceeds from the dimension of non-articulation into articulation (II), where things are articulated in a manner of unobstructed interpenetration. The first level aims at the transformation of horizontal dialogue into vertical dialogue. It is only at the second level that vertical dialogue is realized in the full sense.

2) The Field of Zen Dialogue

What kind of relation, then, obtains between the interlocutors when this vertical dialogue takes place? A clue to this question is Izutsu’s interpretation of the *shiryōken*, or the “Four Standards of Lin Chi.” In this context, the Object is not necessarily assumed to be another human being. Still, Izutsu’s explanation of the Subject-Object relation by means of the *shiryōken* provides a useful clue for considering the relation between interlocutors. Izutsu explains the *shiryōken* in greater detail in “The Structure of Selfhood in Zen Buddhism,” included in *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy: Collected Papers of the Eranos Conference*. Originally, the “Four Standards” meant “four basic standards by which a Zen master might measure the degrees of perfection of his disciples” (Izutsu, 2008: 129). Izutsu, however, understands them not simply as pedagogical criteria for assessing disciples, but as “the four principal forms which the same Field of Reality can assume” (Izutsu, 2008: 130). Izutsu defines the *shiryōken* as “the four basic functional forms of the Field of consciousness and Being produced by the ‘no-mind’ subject through borrowing the site of the ‘mind’-based Subject-Object opposition” (Izutsu, 2019b: 433). That is to say:

The first, “the man is snatched away, while the environment is left intact,” is the case in which

the whole Field has become entirely the Object (“environment”), and the Subject (“man”) has completely disappeared. The second, “the environment is snatched away, while the man is left intact,” is the exact opposite: the case in which the entire energy of the Field has wholly moved over to the side of the “man.” The third, “the man and the environment are both snatched away,” is the case in which both the “man” and the “environment” have had their manifest character effaced, and the whole Field appears, so to speak, as a field of Void. The fourth, “the man and the environment are both left intact,” is the case in which subject and object both appear, side by side. (Izutsu, 2019b: 433)

Now, in “The Problem of Linguistic Meaning in Zen,” Izutsu takes as his point of departure the state in which “the man and the environment are both snatched away.” This is because this Field is precisely one of absolute non-articulation. He states that the Field in which “the man and the environment are both snatched away” “can at any moment, instantly incline toward the pole of the ‘Subject’” (Izutsu, 1991: 370). The “entire energy” of this Field, which as absolute non-articulation is the whole world, “crystallizes in the form of the ‘Subject’” (Izutsu, 1991: 370). When this happens, the Field passes over into the state in which “the environment is snatched away, while the man is left intact.” Izutsu sees a typical instance of this in Pai Chang Huai Hai’s statement, “I alone sit on top of the highest mountain” (Izutsu, 1991: 370). Precisely because the Field of absolute non-articulation is free and unobstructed, however, just as it may crystallize into the “Subject,” it may also crystallize into the “Object.” This is precisely the situation of the Field in which “the man is snatched away, while the environment is left intact,” with “the cypress tree in the courtyard” and “three pounds of flax” taken as typical examples.

Izutsu adds, however, that “the free and unobstructed Field may also, at times, snatch away neither the Subject nor the Object, and establish both Subject and Object together” (Izutsu, 1991: 372). This is the Field in which “the man and the environment are both left intact.” Izutsu sees typical instances of this in Feng Hsueh’s “I always remember” and Chia Shan’s verse, “the monkeys return behind the blue peaks, embracing their young; a bird has alighted before the deep-green rocks, carrying a flower-petal in its beak” (Izutsu, 1991: 372). The articulation that emerges in this Field can, on the surface, still be understood within ordinary articulation. In this Field, however, “the thing is at the same time also the I”; it is “the Field of a non-temporal and non-spatial primordial Being that unfolds in the world of time and space as the subtle fusion of the I and the thing” (Izutsu, 1991: 373).

When the Object is another participant in dialogue, in what kind of Field does Zen dialogue take place? Izutsu does not address this point. Nevertheless, whichever Field the two participants

in dialogue may occupy, dialogue can remain possible insofar as they share the common Field of absolute non-articulation. Furthermore, the *shiryōken* itself is, needless to say, only a provisional and highly fluid articulation. Even if both interlocutors are in the Field in which “the man is snatched away, while the environment is left intact,” they may, in the next moment, find themselves in another Field in response to the act of the other interlocutor. Such free and unobstructed transformation takes place within the tension between the two.

II. Conclusion: Zen Dialogue and Dialogical Education Rooted in Religiosity

In this concluding section, on the basis of Izutsu’s theory of Zen dialogue examined in the preceding sections, I present one possible direction for religious education in the era of irreligion. What must first be confirmed is that the significance of Zen dialogue for religious education does not lie in introducing Zen into education as a form of religious content. In his later theory of Chaos - Cosmos, developed mainly in *Cosmos and Anti-Cosmos*, Izutsu lists not only Zen but also Lao-Zhuang thought, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vedānta philosophy, Kabbalah, and Islam as forms of thought that reached “the profound state of the ultimate zero-point of consciousness and Being” (Izutsu, 2019b: 47 - 48). What this section seeks to confirm, then, is not that Zen provides the sole model for religious education, but that Zen dialogue can be understood as one concrete form of dialogue in education rooted in religiosity. The theory of Chaos - Cosmos itself does not develop a concrete theory of education. The orientation toward Zen in *Consciousness and Essence* may be understood retrospectively within this broader framework of Chaos - Cosmos theory.

The examination undertaken in this paper shows that education must take as its premise the fact that human existence is deeply determined by culture and language. Whether or not we are aware of it, we are determined as cultural beings, and this condition must be presupposed. On this basis, education must begin from the impossibility of dialogue. As Buber states, “the relation in education is one of pure dialogue” (Buber, Smith trans., 2002: 116). Yet, as this paper has shown, dialogue is by no means something that can be taken for granted. The dialogue ultimately at issue here is vertical dialogue; nevertheless, even horizontal dialogue is marked by this impossibility. This situation may be described as the impossibility intrinsic to

education itself. Education must, above all, begin from this impossibility.

It may therefore be said that the key to opening dialogue from within this impossibility lies in a form of religious education grounded in Zen dialogue. What kind of field, then, is opened by Zen dialogue? In response to the question raised in Section 1—whether the ground of dialogue lies in the whole or in the individual—Izutsu may be understood as offering a paradoxical answer. For Izutsu, the individual is reached only by passing through the whole.

If Zen dialogue is understood primarily as the negation of the individual and as leading consciousness into Nothingness or non-duality, it may appear to dissolve the individual into the whole. Izutsu's interpretation, however, does not stop at this movement. For him, the negation of the individual as a fixed essence is followed by articulation (II), and it is through this return that the individual reappears—not as essence, but as existence. The distinctive feature of Izutsu's understanding of Zen dialogue therefore lies in the fact that the individual is not simply absorbed into the whole, but returns by passing through the whole of non-articulation.

While thus indicating the non-exclusive character of Zen dialogue, Izutsu also develops a theory of dialogue that differs from conventional theories of religious education. As Jackson states, dialogical approaches to religious education “do not set out to promote or to erode particular beliefs, including those of children in school” (Jackson, 2004: 165). From the standpoint of respect for diversity, religious education does not aim to undermine the beliefs of children. Even in approaches that emphasize spirituality, “reflection on truths and/or the cultivation of virtues” is respected (Carr, 2003: 219). Izutsu, however, takes a direction diametrically opposed to this. At least at a certain stage, he argues for the thorough dismantling of one's own beliefs and truths—and, as will be discussed below, virtues as well.

This position is somewhat unusual even from the perspective of general accounts of Zen dialogue. Practice (*gyō*), which is indispensable to Zen Buddhism, may also be understood as “reflection on truths and/or the cultivation of virtues.” In Nishitani's formulation, practice is, first of all, the manifestation of “the Dharma as truth” (Nishitani, 2001: 102). The “form” (*kata*) contained in practice appears as an “external norm” and, further, as an “internal norm,” to which the practitioner conforms both bodily and in everyday life (Koike, 2008: 112). Koike also emphasizes that Zen dialogue is established on the premise of “the continuation of practice” (Koike, 2008: 111). In Zen dialogue, it is indispensable that “on one side there is instruction, and on the other side there is the request for teaching”; thus, a practical relationship involving faith in practice and in the master is presupposed (Koike, 2008: 111).

Sueki also points out that “even in the case of Dōgen, to whom Izutsu often refers, the

Shōbōgenzō contains not only philosophical problems but also strict regulations concerning the minor details of everyday life, and to ignore this aspect would be one-sided” (Sueki, 2017: 149). Izutsu deliberately excludes such sectarian specificity and philosophically reinterprets Zen dialogue. The distinctive character of his thought lies in this negativity. Thus, Izutsu’s religiosity may be found in the dimension of non-articulation opened through this radical negativity and in the reconstruction of Being that follows from it.

Generally speaking, it may be said that what contemporary religious education aims at is “bringing pupils to a knowledge and understanding of religion” (Sealey, 1985: 83). However, from Izutsu’s perspective, religious education aims at the dismantling and reconstruction of being through religiosity. Through this religiosity, vertical dialogue becomes possible as an educational practice.

In this way, religious education rooted in religiosity opens a field in which educator and educand encounter one another as irreplaceable selves. Yet, as Izutsu’s interpretation of the *shiryōken* shows, this irreplaceability is grounded not in an independent and fixed self, but in a self that continues to move fluidly within its relation to the other.

Finally, I would like to suggest how Izutsu’s theory of Zen dialogue might be applied to actual educational settings. Sueki criticizes Izutsu’s Zen thought as moving “in the direction of playing in a lofty world, while the everydayness of ordinary people is either ignored or viewed only negatively” (Sueki, 2017: 149). He further points out that, although the *kōan* originally served as an “educational means,” Izutsu extracts from it only the problem of “language.” However, this paper has shown that Izutsu presents Zen dialogue as a way of overcoming the impossibility of dialogue. The structure of Zen dialogue itself may therefore be reinterpreted as indicating an educational method. Even so, it must be acknowledged that Izutsu’s Zen dialogue cannot simply be applied directly or widely in actual educational settings.

From this perspective, at least three possible educational directions may be considered. The first, and probably the most moderate, is intercultural exchange. Izutsu states that “this conviction of the ordinary person begins at once to be shaken from its very foundation as soon as he comes into contact with a different culture and feels that something is somehow strange” (Izutsu, 2019a: 96). In the present age, in which other cultures are often consumed as content, the question of how such intercultural exchange is possible requires separate examination. Nevertheless, it remains one important direction.

The second direction is the possibility of opening onto the ground of each individual’s existence through a questioning of everydayness by means of logos-centered language. In his

theory of Chaos - Cosmos, Izutsu recognizes various currents, including anarchism, as well as Western philosophies such as those of Nietzsche, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari, as forms of “chaotic” thought that attempt to collapse logos-centered order from within (Izutsu, 2019b: 249 - 253). Since such thought may be understood as reaching chaos through logos, Izutsu does not necessarily reject this direction. From this perspective, one possible approach would be to question existing “morality” within moral education. The relationship between religious education and moral education has long been discussed. In *Lao-tzŭ: The Way and Its Virtue*, Izutsu interprets *tao-té* (道德, morality) as follows: Tao is “No-Name” or “the eternally limitless and absolutely undetermined Reality,” while Té is “the natural creativity of the Way and its results” (Izutsu, 2001: 18 - 19). An educational theory based on such an understanding of *tao-té* may be understood, from the perspective of Izutsu’s Chaos - Cosmos theory, as a theory of chaotic moral education. In contrast to a theory of cosmic moral education oriented toward adaptation to articulation (I), such a theory seeks to reconstruct morality, existence, and the self on the basis of chaos. In this respect, it also corresponds to the structure of Zen dialogue.

The third direction, although it moves somewhat away from Izutsu, is to focus on linguistic art. The relationship between Zen language and Dada has attracted attention. Gustav Landauer, who may be regarded as one of the theoretical precursors of Dada, was influenced not only by German mysticism but also by Buddhism (Narita, 2021). Hugo Ball, a leading figure of Dada who was influenced by Landauer, wrote that sound poetry “returns to chaos” (Ball, Raimés trans., 1996: 60). This may suggest the educational potential of Dadaist linguistic art.

The present age is not only an age of irreligion; it is also an age in which the difficulty of dialogue has once again been laid bare. This difficulty can become an occasion that opens us to the ground of being. Dialogical education rooted in religiosity is the practice of continually opening dialogue from that ground. Herein lies one possible direction for religious education in the era of irreligion.

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