Thomas Merton's interest in Japan and in Buddhism, particularly its Japanese manifestation Zen Buddhism, is well known. He wrote several essays, most of them collected in the two major publications MYSTICS AND ZEN MASTERS and ZEN AND THE BIRDS OF APPETITE. He read widely, concentrating primarily in translations of D.T. Suzuki, foremost expounder of Zen to the Western world, and Nishida Kitaro. He studied calligraphy, dabbled in haiku poetry, and even built a Zen garden at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

It is not surprising that Merton's essay, "D.T. Suzuki: the Man and His Work," has been the work most widely circulated in Japan. Merton recorded his impressions after he traveled incognito to New York in 1964 to meet and talk with Suzuki. He had invited Suzuki to the Abbey, but Suzuki, then 94, felt himself incapable of making the additional trip. Neither is it surprising that Merton's collection of Zen essays, with non-Zen material deleted, have been translated into Japanese. The other translations are of works on contemplation, spirituality, and monasticism. The Japanese translations are not, at this point, representative of the total scope of Merton's work.

The Thomas Merton Studies Center is indebted to Yasuwo Kikama, friend and correspondent of Merton’s, for information and materials. Translator of three major Merton works, Kikama first suggested that Merton write “special prefaces” for Japanese editions of his books, a suggestion to which Merton responded enthusiastically. In addition to Merton as translated into Japanese, we also list Kikama’s work on Merton, a collection of essays which confronts Merton’s spirituality as well as his poetry, social commentary, and literary criticism.

WORKS BY THOMAS MERTON

MERTON’S PREFACES FOR JAPANESE EDITIONS

Thomas Merton wrote special prefaces for four of the Japanese editions of his works, more than he wrote for any other single language translations. The prefaces have been published in English as follows.


WORKS ON MERTON BY YASUWO KIKAMA


Thomas Merton and D. T. Suzuki, photographed by Dr. Suzuki’s secretary at Butler Hall, New York June 1964