

## THE APPROPRIATION OF JAPANESE ZEN BUDDHISM IN BRAZIL

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The news through the grapevine was that the Japanese abbot, who had been in Brazil for some years, had lost his position at the temple Bushinji, in Liberdade (a Japanese neighborhood in the city of São Paulo). The headquarters of the *Sôtô Zenshu* school<sup>1</sup> in Japan, under strong pressure Japanese-Brazilian community, released him from his services. After several months, the Brazilian nun Claudia Dias of Souza Batista took his place. Ordained in Los Angeles in 1980 (when she received the Buddhist name of Koen) and having lived six years in a monastery in Nagoya, Koen returned to Brazil in 1994; soon after she was invited to the abbess position. Ironically, the Japanese-Brazilian community preferred an indigenous Brazilian nun to a genuine Japanese monk.

Historically, the Japanese-Brazilian community maintained some diacritical cultural traits preserved and away from Brazilian society (such as language and religion) to maintain its ethnic identity. (Saito and Maeyama 1973) Although second and third generations have begun assimilating Brazilian culture (Cardoso 1973) and are quite integrated in the country, the abbess position of the only Zen Buddhist temple in São Paulo is not one that the community can leave in the hands of a “foreigner.” Buddhism is a fundamental aspect of the Japanese world vision and of the Japanese social structure. How, then, was a Brazilian nun to get the highest position inside a

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<sup>1</sup> Sôtô is the Zen Buddhist sect brought to Japan by the Japanese monk Dôgen (1200-1253) after a trip to China. *Zen* is the Japanese word that corresponds to *dhyâna* in Sanskrit and *ch'an* in Chinese. Its meaning is concentration or meditation, that is, Mahayana Buddhism meditation. Mahayana Buddhist developed in China, Korea and Japan. Japanese Zen Buddhism is the result of an amalgam of Indian Buddhism and Chinese Taoism and its introduction to Japan. Zen Buddhism values the direct and personal experience rather than intellectual and rational speculation and iconic worship. This differentiates it from traditional Buddhism. Hence, meditation (*zazen*) and paradoxical thought in the form of *kôan* (questions without rational logic) play a fundamental role in the transmission of knowledge (Heinrich Dumoulin, 1992).

Buddhist sect and, still, how could she be accepted by the Japanese-Brazilian community?

If we examine the above more closely we will see what happened. The Japanese *Roshi* (abbot) came from a context in which Zen Buddhism was highly institutionalized and structured due to its nine centuries of history in Japan. Moreover, due to the patrilineality and primogeniture, which are both part of the rule of succession within Japanese society, the young men who enter the monasteries to become monks are firstborn children of families that possess monasteries. Consequently, laity becomes a profession as any other, a way of making a living inside a rigid structure.<sup>2</sup>

Facing this situation, the *Roshi* decided to leave Japan in search of a more “active” Zen Buddhism. Having worked with Shunryu Suzuki *Roshi* in San Francisco in the 1960s, Moriyama *Roshi* shares Suzuki’s ideas that foreigners have “a beginner’s mind (*shoshin*), one which is empty and ready for new things.” (Suzuki 1970: 21) When interviewed, he said that in Japan, monks’ interests were directed towards social practices and commission received by services rendered to the community (funerals and worship of ancestors) rather than spiritual work. Meditation (*zazen*), debates with the abbot (*dokusan*), studies of the dharma,<sup>3</sup> retreats (*sesshin*) and manual labor done inside the monasteries (*samu*) that aided in the path to Enlightenment were not regularly practiced properly. However, upon arriving in Brazil, the *Roshi* was faced with a Japanese-Brazilian community that demanded him to perform the same practices which he was not willing to do in Japan: “the masses” (sic—as the members of the sect denominate the rituals in Brazil), weddings, funerals and worship of ancestors, instead of a practice founded in the spirituality of the meditation.

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<sup>2</sup> “During the past century Sôtô Zen, like all Buddhist institutions in Japan, has witnessed tumultuous changes. Its population of clerics has changed from (at least officially) one hundred percent celibate monks to more than ninety percent married priests who manage Zen temples as family business. [Sôtô Zen] operates only thirty-one monasteries compared to nearly fifteen thousand temples, the vast majority of which function as the private homes of married priests and their wives and children (William Bodiford, 1996: 4,5).

<sup>3</sup> Word originated of *dharman*, which appears in the Vedas and has the sense of decree, law, practice, obligation, morality and religion. Buddhism uses *dharma* meaning Buddha’s law or teaching (*Tricycle* magazine, 1997: 63).

The conflict became more serious when the Japanese *Roshi* found a group of Brazilians very interested in learning meditation and the teachings of the Buddha and Dôgen. From the moment these Brazilians entered the temple and began to interact with the Japanese-Brazilian community, conflicts began and resulted in the *Roshi's* leaving. Some of his Brazilian followers also left the temple and founded a new Zen center in São Paulo, where the *Roshi* is a spiritual mentor. The Brazilian abbess took his place in the temple and soon started putting in practice all the activities so strictly or, according to some, more strictly than they would be done in Japan. One practitioner said:

“When Moriyama was in charge of the temple, I felt he tried to adapt Japanese Zen to Brazilian culture, it was more flexible. With Koen, as she recently arrived from Japan, I feel she tries to maintain the patterns and rules by which she lived in Japan. She tries to impose everything, the rhythm, behavior and discipline of the Japanese practice. She is very inflexible.” (Cida, forty-year-old astrologer)

The ethnic identity of a group is built in relation to another group. In this context “the concrete intergroup relationships and conflicts” should be examined, “simultaneously in the symbolic level and in the level of the social relationships.” (Durham 1986: 32) Conflicts emerge when ethnic identity is threatened, that is, when two groups use the same values to identify themselves.<sup>4</sup> The Japanese community in Brazil attempted to preserve and retain some of its cultural traits that are now part of a global domain. In this context, one can understand the tension on the issue of which group: Japanese immigrants and their descendants, Brazilians of non-Japanese origin, has the “true” ancestors’ culture. (Oliveira 1976: 5; Rocha 1996: 30, 86-99)

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<sup>4</sup> Here there is a conflict of motivations, practice and aspirations that is similar to the American one. In the US there is a conflict between what is called “white Buddhism” practiced by the white upper middle class and upper class that praises meditation as a path to enlightenment and the so called “ethnic Buddhism”, of the immigrants, which is basically devotional and oriented to the community. For further discussion on the concepts of “white” vs. “ethnic Buddhism” see Fields, 1994: 54-56; Foye, 1994: 57; Nattier, 1995: 42-49; Prebish, 1993: 187-206.

Nevertheless, we must be careful not to think of cultures as “organically binding and sharply bounded.” (Robertson 1995: 39) Between the Japanese community and Brazilian society at-large there are Japanese descendants who were educated in both Japanese and Brazilian culture and, as a result, display mixed cultural patterns. They dwell in the interstices of society and comprise a small group of practitioners who, beginning to go to the temple because of family pressure, end up attending the activities offered for indigenous Brazilians. Many descendants told me in interviews that one of the factors for the choice of “Brazilian Zen” over the “Japanese community Zen” was the language spoken. Most descendants do not understand Japanese, the language spoken at the rituals for the Japanese community. They feel more comfortable among indigenous Brazilians because their Zen activities are conducted in Portuguese.

### **The Appropriation of Zen Buddhism in Brazil**

In addition to developments in São Paulo, other Zen Buddhist centers emerged in Brazil. In 1985, the Center of Buddhist Studies (CEB) was created in Porto Alegre (capital of the Rio Grande do Sul State). CEB was comprised of practitioners from several Buddhist schools. In 1989, also in Porto Alegre, the Japanese monk Ryotan Tokuda inaugurated the temple *Sôtô Zen Sanguen Dojô*. This temple exclusively focused on Zen Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> Since there are non-Japanese immigrants in Porto Alegre, the practitioners of this temple are indigenous Brazilians. Accordingly, this practice emphasizes daily meditation, retreats and studies of the *dharmā*, distinguishing Brazilian Zen from the traditional Japanese practices of “masses” and funerals.

The Japanese monk Tokuda founded the Zen Buddhist *Sôtô* monasteries of Morro da Vargem, in Ibiracú, in the State of Espírito Santo, and Pico dos Raios, in Ouro Preto, in the State of Minas Gerais, respectively in 1977 and 1985. Today, their abbots are indigenous Brazilians, who were disciples of Tokuda and studied in monasteries in Japan. According to the Brazilian magazine *Isto É*: “the Zen monastery Morro da Vargem is visited annually by four thousand people, and receives seven thousand children of the State, who go there to learn environmental education.” (*Isto É* 03/12/97: 62) Besides maintaining an ecological reserve

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<sup>5</sup> More recently, *Sôtô Zen Sanguen Dojô* followed the orientation of Moriyama *Roshi* from the São Paulo Zen Center and his French disciple Zuymio Joshin.

and the Center of Environmental Education since 1985 (Paranhos 1994: 151), the monastery established the “*House of Culture*” to patronize fine artists who should devote themselves to creation away from the city. The monastery Pico dos Raios is also linked with the external community. Monk Tokuda teaches acupuncture to the monastery’s practitioners who offer this service to the community.

These monasteries attract urban people who are not necessarily Zen Buddhists, but are interested in oriental religions and meditation. How then, did these Brazilians who have a Catholic background make such symbolic migration to Zen and what is the meaning of a religion as Zen, Buddhism in Brazil today?

### **BUDDHISM AND NEW PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR**

#### **The Western Construct of Zen**

In this century one can see the immense expansion of religion, or, as Pierre Bourdieu says, “the expansion of the market of symbolic goods.” (1982) After the 1950s, with the territory redefinitions, increase in laicism, implementation of mass communication, internationalization of economy and immense migratory flows, new life expectations were created. As the century comes to a close, there is a spiritual search out of the western canons, such as the Catholic or Protestant religions. People seek holistic movements that are characterized by symbols attached to nature and to the idea of healing the planet and the individual.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, movements connected to a way of life that integrates man and nature. In the eyes of the west, Eastern religion seems to address this search. The idea that a new lifestyle that included meditation and a connection with the sacred would bring health and happiness paved the way for the popularization of several Buddhist sects, among them Zen.

In the US, the counterculture movement of the 1950s and 1960s aided the popularization of Zen Buddhism among indigenous Americans. In Brazil, its arrival was due more to its connection with the Japanese-

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<sup>6</sup> “Disease is lack of harmony, it is opposed to healing, which is the way to the psychophysical (physical body), psychological (emotions and feelings) and psychospiritual (subtle energy) liberation. The path to healing has as a goal health, that is, enlightenment. The way to transform disease into health is the spiritual practices, purification and accumulation of merit and wisdom (through virtuous actions). The Buddhist body is a healthy and enlightened body.” (Lama Shakya in a workshop in São Paulo, 1996).

Brazilian community than this search for inner spirituality. Even though attempts at publicizing Zen Buddhism within Brazil by Brazilians (Gonçalves 1990; Azevedo 1996) began as early as the 1960s, it started to be popularized among indigenous Brazilians in the late 1970s (Paranhos 1994) and grew to a religious phenomenon by the 1990s. (Rocha 1999b)

In order to understand which Zen Buddhist discourse was appropriated in Brazil by indigenous Brazilians after the 1970s, one must realize that there is a pervasive frame of reference in the European and North American form of Zen. The appropriation and construction of Zen took place in many Western countries and have had a similar departing point. D. T. Suzuki (one of the first Japanese to write on Zen in English), and the Kyoto School scholars were fundamental for the creation of a main discourse of Zen in the West. As Robert Sharf observed, “for Suzuki, Zen was ‘pure experience—a historical, transcultural experience of ‘pure subjectivity’ which utterly transcends discursive thought.” (Sharf 1993: 5) Sharf argued that Suzuki was writing during the period of Nationalistic Buddhism (Meiji New Buddhism—*Shin Bukkyō*) “as a response to the Western universalizing discourse.” Under this pressure Suzuki and several other writers such as Okakura Kakuzō, Watsuji Tetsurō, Tanabe Hajime and Nishida Kitarō, influenced by the ideas of *nihonjinron* (the discourse on and of Japanese uniqueness), struggled to recreate Japanese national identity as something special, which was identified with the Way of the Samurai (*shido*) and Zen Buddhism. For these authors, Zen, as the very essence of the “Japanese Spirit,” denotes the cultural superiority of Japan. Moreover, because it is an experience and not a religion, Zen was able to survive the Enlightenment trends of the west and was viewed as rational and empirical. (Sharf 1993)

The global expansion of Zen Buddhism carried *Shin Bukkyō* ideas with it. However, it was appropriated, indigenized and hybridized locally. Similarly, Brazilian Zen took part of this process of “glocalization”<sup>7</sup> of Zen Buddhism.

### **The Non-Japanese Brazilian Construct of Zen**

The interviews that I conducted with indigenous Brazilian practitioners showed that the interest in Zen Buddhism occurs via the US, through the

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<sup>7</sup> For further analysis of the term “glocalization” and the local-global problematic, see Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity—Heterogeneity,” in: *Global Modernities*, M. Featherstone, S. Lash and R. Roberston (Eds.) (London, Sage, 1995).

media,<sup>8</sup> books on Zen, movies<sup>9</sup> and travels. In fact, all of the people interviewed described their first contact with Zen through books. (Rocha 1999a) The US is a strong source of ideas and materials on Zen for several reasons. One reason is that the English language is readily accessible to Brazilians than Japanese. In fact, most of the books on Zen available in Portuguese were originally in English. Moreover, due to the fact that these practitioners come from the intellectual upper middle class and the vast majority is of university graduate liberal professionals, many of them can read the books in English before they have been translated. Some buy books on Zen on the Internet at the site <http://www.amazon.com> and/or subscribe to American Buddhist magazines, such as *Tricycle*. Some practitioners even choose to travel to Zen Centers in the US, as outlined below:

“In San Francisco, I felt Zen is more incorporated [than in Brazil]. There, the abbot is a whole unit; it seems Zen is already incorporated in his personality, emotion, action, and intellect, in his whole being. So much so that the lectures aren’t on classical texts. People go there and open their hearts, they open their mouth and speak, what comes out is Zen. Koen san [the Brazilian nun] lived in Japan for many years, she comes from a Japanese culture, which sometimes has a difficult interaction with the Brazilian way of being. There [in the US], the monks are American and the community is already forty years old. So they have a local color, the main core of Zen was preserved, but it is not so much Japanese. I felt more affection there, which is a western thing. When I left I went to say good-bye to the abbot and he hugged me! When I arrived here, I went to the temple to hug people and it didn’t work.” (Olga, fifty-year-old economist)

“After I arrived home from a *sesshin*, I looked up a book about the experience of *zazen* by an American nun, Charlotte Joko Becker. Her talks with her disciples were published in two volumes. She is also a westerner, so she understands well what goes on in the mind of a westerner that

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<sup>8</sup> The word Zen is fashionable in the West: one sees Zen perfume, shops, beauty parlors, restaurants, magazine articles and architecture. In Brazil, it is a common expression to say someone is “Zen,” meaning very peaceful and tranquil.

<sup>9</sup> The recent Hollywood movies “The Little Buddha,” “Seven Years in Tibet” and “Kundun,” were very successful in Brazil. Even though they dealt with Tibetan Buddhism, they are directly associated with Buddhism itself and not specifically Tibet.

embraced Zen Buddhism. She speaks as we do; we understand very well what she says about the psychic processes, about the psychology of a western person, in this case of a Brazilian person. I really didn't feel any difference. The American style of Zen is closer to ours." (Maria Helena, forty-nine year old University lecturer)

"I think the Americans and Brazilians have a similar language to talk about Zen." (Cida, forty-year-old, astrologer)

Dwelling in the cities, these practitioners have diverse motivations from the immigrants and descendants who seek to reaffirm their ethnic identity through religion. Mass, urban society, especially in Brazil, is characterized by abandonment, isolation; poverty, violence, lack of liaisons; break of the family nucleus; competition in the labor market and lack of leisure time. Since Catholic tradition was unable to find an answer or overcome these demands, alternatives were sought—among them, religion. The very religion, which gives concrete and effective answers for the individual to live this present moment, will be the one(s) of choice. For the lower social classes, the answer is in the Evangelical Churches and the Afro-Brazilian religions, where the symbolic effectiveness happens in the present time. Accordingly, urban upper middle-class Brazilians seeks Zen Buddhism because it appeals intellectually to them as a philosophy of life. Their main concerns are, among others, to relieve stress and to acquire inner peace, turning this symbolic field into a miscellany of religion and leisure.<sup>10</sup>

"I became more focused and my anxiety has decreased with Zen practice. Now I find more satisfaction in life. Zen practice means tranquility to me, the fruition of living in the present moment." (Cida, forty-year-old astrologer)

"I went through various other practices before I found Zen. It answered my needs of harmonization. Because my job is very stressful and I have to deal with a lot of people, I need harmony in everyday life. Life in big cities is very stressful." (Bernadette, thirty-seven year old advertiser)

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<sup>10</sup> Leisure in the sense of breaking with daily life not seeking a mere entertainment, but looking for an inner spirituality in order to obtain knowledge of the self. This concept was taken from interviews with practitioners.



According to a lay monk who works in the *Bushinji* temple in São Paulo, many of the practitioners who come to meditate for the first time are going through a difficult moment in their lives.

“When a new practitioner arrives here, he/she is usually going through a difficult moment, a crucial moment...his cultural background is western, is Christian or Jewish. He is very close to the concept of miracle. When you are emotionally sick, you go to a hospital, you go to a Candomble, Umbanda,<sup>11</sup> to a priest or to a temple. This works as anesthetics, it calms you down. ...People arrive at the temple hoping that they can find the answer to their troubles here. But when they sit to meditate hoping for tranquility, this is their goal, everything starts to hurt, the whole body starts to hurt...and then the mind is in pain too. And when they start to cry? When they start to know themselves? There are people who don't want to know about this. They are afraid, they are looking for the miracle, they don't want to see the horror of their troubles. Sometimes people leave the temple very agitated. Their idea of meditation is of being in heaven. Only one out of ten people who come here for the first time end up staying.” (Hoen, forty-nine year old lay monk, computer consultant)

Another characteristic of the population who seeks Zen Buddhism is that they are in search of their “inner self.” Frequently, people I interviewed said they sought Zen meditation as a way to learn about themselves. Zen meditation worked in place of psychotherapy or in conjunction with it.

“Self-understanding is one of the main things I look for in *zazen*.”  
(Leonardo, twenty-two year old student)

“I don't know if you heard Sensei's lectures...She says that to know yourself is to know Buddha's way. On the other hand, there is psychology. What is psychology? Is to know oneself. ...I think *zazen* gives you this knowledge about yourself. It is a wonderful tool in this sense.” (Haruo Hirata, thirty-nine year old economist)

Zen Buddhism can be an activity of leisurely moments. Many Brazilian practitioners go to meditation sessions on the weekends and retreats on holidays. The consumption of goods is easily identifiable in the sales of

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<sup>11</sup> Brazilian-African religions.

books, magazines,<sup>12</sup> courses, retreats, clothes and utensils for meditation, as if *satori* (Enlightenment) itself were possible to be obtained in the same way as you acquire merchandise.

“Enlightenment is now regarded as a fetish, an image of power, a merchandise. The possibility of a trance, of a touch of energy, of a hug of divine love, etc., is so desired in the present social context as the acquisition of a car, an appliance, a trip to a famous place. Thus, religious advertisement has already incorporated the mimetic desire of ownership as any other advertisement of the consumption society.” (Carvalho 1992: 153)

Most of the practitioners interviewed had a common Catholic background. Buddhism is different from Catholicism in that it is based on the absence of God and the idea that everybody is his own Buddha (literally “Enlightened being”). Through meditational practice, discipline or devotion (depending on the Buddhist school), anyone can attain Enlightenment and become a Buddha. In Buddhism, the way to realization does not involve something similar to the Christic identification as in Christianity; the “Son of God’s” support does not exist. Enlightenment is not seen as a union with a Supreme Being, but as an accomplishment of a supreme state. However, these two symbolic universes—Catholicism and Zen Buddhism—are not exclusive: many practitioners associate the figure of Jesus Christ to that of Buddha, both bringing a word of wisdom to humanity. (Rocha 1999a)

The New Age movement, from the late 1970s as a development of American counterculture and the Age of Aquarius, it questioned the role and the meaning of religion. Similar to Buddhism, the New Age movement had as a principle the notion that we are all God, and therefore we should seek an inner spirituality not attached to the ego so that we could contact the “true I/God.” (Heelas 1996: 2, 3, 19) Brazilian practitioners subscribe to such New Age ideas. In the interviews conducted, they mentioned the absence of God and the individual responsibility for their own Enlightenment as reasons for their attraction to Zen Buddhism.

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<sup>12</sup> There are four magazines published quarterly in Brazil. Two of them are exclusively Zen Buddhist: “Flor do Vazio” is published in Rio de Janeiro, “Caminho Zen” is published in Japan by the *Sôitô* School in Portuguese, for the Brazilian market. “Bodhigaya” and “Bodhisattva” are two Buddhist magazines that comprise articles mainly on Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.

Moreover, in Buddhism, men and nature are part of the same whole. Nature was not created to serve men as dictates the Christianity. To that respect Robert Bellah says:

“The biblical arrogance in relation to nature and the Christian hostility to impulsive life were both, strange to the new spiritual atmosphere. Thus, the religion of the counterculture was not, in general, biblical. It was drawn from several sources, including the American Indians. Its deeper influences, however, came from Asia. In several ways, Asian spirituality offered a more complete contrast to the rejected utilitarian individualism than biblical religion. Asian spirituality offered inner experience instead of external accomplishment, harmony with nature instead of exploitation of nature and intense bond with the guru instead of a relationship with an impersonal organization. Mahayana Buddhism, above all, under the form of the Zen, supplied the most important religious influence to the counterculture.” (Bellah 1986: 26)

Most of the practitioners interviewed referred to this connection between Zen and nature to explain their choice of religion as one practitioner noted:

“...The way Buddhism sees nature is different from Christianity. For Buddhism, there is life in all the elements of nature besides men themselves. There is life in the plants, rocks, mountains, and water, in everything. But in Christianity, things are different. I realized this reading the Genesis, which deals with creation. There it says God created the animals to serve men. That shocked me. Men took their ethnocentrism too far. Men subjugated animals and plants. Today we are watching the destruction of the planet...Buddhism has a different way of approaching this problem. And this is fundamental for me. To integrate nature is for me a spirituality which has to do with my life story.” (Maria Helena, forty-nine year old University lecturer)

Furthermore, *Zen Quarterly*, a magazine published by the *Sôitô* School of Zen Buddhism in Japan, also subscribes to this discourse and deals frequently with the ecological issue in its articles:

[A]s we approach the twenty-first century with the mindfulness of compassion and non-violence, our Buddhist challenge is to cultivate the Buddhist teachings that will stop the crimes against the environment and will reform our money-oriented world. (Okumura 1998)

The French anthropologist Louis Dumont argues that in the contemporary world religious practice is a choice of private forum, since “the dimension of value, which hitherto had been projected spontaneously in the world, was restricted to...the spirit, the feeling and man’s volition.” (Dumont 1985: 240) In a process of *bricolage*,<sup>13</sup> the practitioner chooses characteristics of different practices to condense them into a spiritual quest. Thus, each practitioner constructs his/her religion as a unique praxis, different from all the others, mixing various traditions in order to build a new contemporary spirituality.

There are several groups of practices, associated with Zen Buddhism in Brazil, which are recurrent in the interviews: practices of healing (Yoga, Shiatsu, Do In, T’ai Chi Ch’uan, Acupuncture), practices of self-understanding (many kinds of psychotherapy, Astrology), martial arts (Ai Ki Do, Karate), eating habits (vegetarianism, macrobiotics), and other religions (Spiritualism, African religions, Mahikari, Rajneesh/Osho). As one practitioner said:

“I don’t think there is only one line of thinking. Only one line of thinking can’t supply all your needs. You have to pick some things that have to do with you, and if you think that something is too radical to one side, you should look for something on the other side. I think you will end up disappointed if you pick only one thing...There’s a word nowadays that has everything to do with the end of the millennium, when you stop following only one thing, it is ‘holism.’ You take something without worrying with lines of reasoning. You know I don’t care much for strict lines of reasoning. I think you have to get the whole, the essence, because everything is basically the same, all these practices say similar things.” (Ricardo, twenty-seven year old physician)

“Meditation, as we are learning here [in a Zen retreat], can be a holopraxis [holistic practice] too. It will never be an affiliation, the exclusive form of work or technique. I’ll never do this again in my life. I want to stay absolutely free. The moment we live decides which practice we should do. I think we have to be open to the different praxis, which are offered to us. I like to have a plurality of instruments at hand.” (Francisco, fifty-nine year old business consultant)

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<sup>13</sup> In concept of “bricoleur” given by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *La Pensee Sauvage*.

This approach to religious practice is justified using the Zen Buddhist idea on “non-attachment.” According to Buddhism, what causes people to suffer is their attachment to things and their lack of understanding that everything is impermanent. This ignorance of impermanence creates the expectation things will be the same. There is a famous Zen saying: “If you see the Buddha, kill the Buddha” meaning you should not get attached to the idea of the Buddha, but practice it. This is interpreted, by practitioners, as the impossibility of one religion being the permanent answer to their spiritual needs. The same practitioner praises Zen Buddhism as a religion that does not request loyalty:

You have to keep picking the little things you believe in and they will work for you as a step to go further. So, you leave things behind when you have no use for them anymore. You shouldn't say ‘I believe in this...’ It's funny because the monk himself said this. ‘You cannot get attached to Zen Buddhism.’” (Ricardo, twenty-seven year old, physician)

Moreover, due to this process of *bricolage* and hybridization, being a regular practitioner in one place does not stop someone from doing the same in another. It is possible that the same person participates in meditations and retreats at a center of Tibetan Buddhism, and, at the same time, goes to a Japanese Zen Center and is ordained lay monk/nun in both places, receiving Tibetan and Zen names. (Paranhos 1994: 155)

In fact, Zen, Tibetan, Korean and Singhalese monks are more and more present in many Brazilian cities, especially São Paulo. *Dharma Centers* (Brazilian Buddhist centers) bring their spiritual mentors from abroad (in general twice a year) so that they can give workshops, promote spiritual retreats and disseminate their teachings.<sup>14</sup> Many followers undertake regular

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<sup>14</sup> Among the *Tibetan Dharma Centers* of São Paulo are: *Shi De Choe Tsog*, whose mentor is Gangchen Rimpoche; *Tibetan Center Chagdug Gonpa Brasil*, coordinated by the American Lama Tsering Everest and by the mentor Chagdug Rimpoche; *Tibetan Center Maha Bhodi*, whose mentor is Geshe Kelsang Gyatso; *Nyingma Institute*, whose mentor is Tartang Tulku and the *Tibetan House* (located at the Associação Palas Athena). In São Paulo there is also the Temple *Sôtô Zenshu Bushinji*, directed by Koen Murayama, and the Zen Buddhist Center *Cezen*, whose mentor is Moriyama *Roshi*, both connected to the Japanese Zen Buddhism; the *Dharma Center Sanata Dharma Saranam*, coordinated by Artur Eid, whose mentor is

trips to the centers, which originated the religion, such as in the US, Japan, Nepal, India or Tibet. These *Dharma Centers*, widespread around the city, help to disseminate this new holistic view of life. These Brazilian centers have joined the eastern religious circuit, whereby the Brazilian practitioners travel to other centers around the world sharing the same ideas and lifestyle. This metropolis propitiates a spiritual encounter with the East due to the readily available information through mass communication and technology. It is then the middle and upper middle classes who inhabit these urban sites, which are attracted to Eastern religions and who become part of the transnational religious circuit. José Carvalho refers to a cosmopolitan religious practice:

“The progressive construction—instead of a plunge in the tradition—of syncretic systems, more and more spiraled are supported by a religious culture in constant enlarging movement. That is, through a process of massive diffusion, since a kind of universal religious culture is more accessible to everyone, this religion is build from standard information of how the religions of the world were—of the Aztecs, Incas, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, etc. Everything is molded in a kind of religious common knowledge, which emerges as ‘pan-traditional’ or cosmopolitan.” (Carvalho 1992: 153)

This association of different practices and religions, which marks the end of the century, incorporates a holistic view of the individual that is opposed to the fragmentation of the modern societies. Zen Buddhism, as a universal religion, appeals to westerners also because of this holistic perspective. Thus, Brazilian Zen Buddhists have appropriated their new religion into their daily lives in order make sense of the modern world.

### Conclusion

It is stimulating to map the population that practices Zen in Brazil. By focusing on the aspirations, motivations and lifestyles of Brazilian Zen practitioners, we understand how something *a priori* “foreign” to an eminently Catholic country is borrowed and hybridized into local cultures. Buddhism has a tradition in Brazil, on the one hand, of ethnic affirmation of Japanese immigrants and descendants as well as a search for a fulfilling

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Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, from Sri Lanka; and the Zen Buddhist Korean temple *Tzong Kwan*, whose mentor is Pu Hsien.

religious identity for urban demands. Zen Buddhism is the preference of the urban upper middle class, a more intellectualized population, which associates Zen to a philosophy of life rather than as a religion.

Practitioners affirmed, “Zen Buddhism teaches us to live daily life, to search for inner peace, to have a more holistic viewpoint.” All the people interviewed made a point of choosing attributes of different religions and constructing their own, as a *bricoleur* would do. Each person had an idea of the sacred, which was constructed by him or her. The central practice of Zen Buddhism, meditation (*zazen*), is seen as an individual practice and Enlightenment (*satori*) is seen as the result of this individual effort. Brazilian Zen Buddhists desire to take responsibility for their own *karma* and *satori*. Additionally, Zen Buddhism is chosen because it is a “simple” religion, that is, it has no dogmas and it is connected to everyday life.

Essentially, Brazilian Zen is part of the process of *glocalization*. The Western construct of Zen, built during the counterculture and New Age movements, is appropriated and hybridized into the local “Brazilian color.” The ideas the west attributes to Zen are the main qualities that make Zen the religion of choice for the Brazilian intellectual upper middle class. These include thoughts on rationality, empiricism, and individual experience, Zen’s “down to earth” and “concrete” approach to daily life and the individual responsibility for your own *karma*. With globalization, a cultural hybridization is taking place (Featherstone 1995; Pieterse 1995), and it is likely that this urban sector of Brazilian society finds transcultural affinities with their counterparts elsewhere. The rapid flow of information through books, newsletters, internet, e-mailing lists, trips abroad to retreats and Zen Centers, visits from monks/nuns/*Roshis/gurus* to Brazilian centers, causes Brazilian practitioners to absorb and indigenize, or in the words of Jan Pieterse, “to make a *mélange*” of foreign influences and local creations.

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