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Intellectuals and Japanese Buddhism in Brazil

This study concentrates on the discovery of Japanese Buddhism by Brazilian intellectuals as a group of spiritual practices and as a body of spiritual wisdom. The study has been realized through readings and meetings with Japanese Buddhist monks and/or Japanese immigrants. These intellectuals defend a religious experience based on a universal notion of representations of Japanese Buddhism, which provides them with a non-dualistic philosophical perspective and a unique psychological experience. Through innovative spiritual experiences these intellectuals have broken the tension created within the dispute between secularized science and the Catholic hegemony, both predominant in the intellectual panorama.

KEYWORDS: Japanese Buddhism — intellectuals — Zen in Brazil — Buddhism in Brazil

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THIS STUDY analyzes the discovery of Japanese Buddhism by Brazilian intellectuals. Writing to various groups, the intellectuals used poetry, history, tales of romance, philosophical-religious reflections, memories and confessions, as well as music and children's literature, to communicate their spiritual experiences. This history is marked by the conjugation of practices and textuality of intellectuals and parts of the middle-class, with various religious knowledge from Euro-Christian, African, and Native Indian cultural inheritances that have presided over Brazilian society for three centuries. Frank USARSKI (2002), a Brazilian researcher of Buddhism, does not consider this to be a religious phenomenon of the masses. As a result, measuring the impact of Buddhism on Brazilian culture is difficult because such intellectuals have produced different discourses in their theoretical base and among their constituencies. In the following analysis, to realize the commonalities and differences in the game of connotations, we considered reading as a cultural practice which serves as a developer of senses and understanding (CHARTIER 1996).

There are two main lines that organize the historical understanding of Buddhism in Brazil. These lines sometimes intersect each other, and other times move in a parallel manner. In one line, there is Japanese immigrant Buddhism and in the other, the discovery of generic Buddhism by intellectuals as well as the meetings of many of these intellectuals with the immigrants and their teachings.

The relationship between Brazilian culture and Japan is very old and extensive, stretching far beyond the mass migration of Japanese immigrants to Brazil during the twentieth century. While the Portuguese Jesuits converted Brazilian Indians in the sixteenth century, companions of the same religious order were in Japan. These priests preached Christianity to the Japanese, studied, and wrote about Japanese culture, history, and Buddhism. It is not possible to establish tangible connections between the readings of Brazilians and these old Portuguese works, in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, we can infer that an influence was felt through the clearer and more audible teachings of the French, English, Germans, and Americans, who would renew references to Buddhism.

The Initial Discoveries

From the second half of the nineteenth century until the 1950s, Buddhism from India and from Japanese poetry was discovered through Europeans who studied the Orient. It is possible that some ideas from Brazilian writers, such as Fagundes Varela (1841–1875), Machado de Assis (1839–1908), and Raimundo Correia (1859–1911), were inspired, metaphorically, in the European fantasies of a fan-

tastic Asia (COELHO et al, 1969). As a matter of fact, in 1912, Augusto dos Anjos used to express personal anguish poetically using Buddhist ideas (ANJOS 1976).

In addition, philosopher Farias Brito reflects on Buddhism in two of his texts. In a small history book in 1891, he states that India influenced the Western world and that the life of Christ has many aspects in common with Buddha's life — both being gods and human, and that there were communications between them through unknown passageways. He predicted a future revolution when the Eastern and Western world would be united through Buddha and Christ (BRITO 1966). In 1914, Brito stated in his book *Interior World* that Eastern and Western fusion was possible through spiritual cleansing supported by Buddhism and Christianity. He considered Buddha to be a philosopher on the pain of existence and when he met the true light, he revealed it to the world. Brito recognizes that Buddhism unified Chinese and Japanese culture because it was above custom-based cults. In a criticism extremely advanced for his time, he identifies and responds to such prejudiced statements such as, “Buddhism is the religion of nothing”, by posing the question, “How can that be possible if Buddha advised people to escape from addictions, practice virtues and purify the heart?” On the contrary, it is an idealistic religion, the philosophy of a deep and enlightened spirit (BRITO 1914).

Japanese Buddhism: Old Travelers and Haiku

When a diplomatic relationship was established between Brazil and Japan, the writer Aluísio de Azevedo arrived as the first vice-consul to Yokohama in 1897. During his stay he wrote his observations and findings concerning Japanese culture and the country in general. Despite being some of the first Brazilian writings that focused on Japan, the text was ignored and virtually forgotten for decades. Afrânio Peixoto, Azevedo's close friend, stated that Azevedo intended to write about culture, beliefs, tradition, poetry, customs, and public and private virtues. Published posthumously, AZEVEDO (1948) expresses opinions close to those of French authors and mentions little regarding his own experience while living in the country. This is why there is little information on Japanese Buddhism as discussion of it is restricted to the political role of the bonzes of ancient and medieval times.

In 1939, Konder and Almeida, Brazilian travelers in Japan, adopted a historical point of view in order to narrate their experiences. After being published, they incorporated this country into the Brazilian intellectual horizon. For the most part they made use of European and American eyes to confirm their ideas. Alexandre KONDER (1939) wrote a promotional piece in which Japanese Buddhism is a part of Japanese history from antiquity until contemporary times. Making use of other authors, some of them still eminent today, Konder clearly distinguishes between the historical data and the prevailing mythology during an era where

mythology was valued by fascism. He points out that Buddhism matured before arriving in Japan having traveled along an extensive itinerary, and it influenced Japanese culture by adapting itself to Shinto. He briefly discusses the diversity of Buddhist schools and teachers in a narrative occasionally interrupted by history: Nara, Heian, Saicho, Kobo Daishi, sects of Kamakura with Honen, Shinran, Nichiren, and Zen. L. NOBRE DE ALMEIDA (1939) also wrote about Japanese history and received an award for this work. He mentions, in rare and loose phrases, Japanese *religiosity*. He talks mostly about his own journey stuffed with quotations from Japanese and American authors. He compares Bushido to the Christian knights. The samurai correspond to Western knights and their values of honesty, loyalty, and bravery result from Zen Buddhist doctrine.

Many other travel books have also been written by Brazilians (LESSER 2001). With these books we see that knowledge of Japanese Buddhism, albeit marginal, has a rich heritage and has been a part of the highest levels of cosmopolitan culture where Brazilian intellectuals circulate. However, these books do not mention anything regarding Japanese Buddhism in Brazil. After Konder and Almeida's writings, Japanese immigration to Brazil continued for more than thirty years, but they preferred to consider international sources for their research where Japanese Buddhism, Mahayana, was thought to deviate from Buddha's original message. This may explain the disregard they show Mahayana Buddhism in their narratives. However, another concept was developed when Buddhism was discovered among Japanese immigrants, in particular Zen.

While these narratives are from real journeys, there are also journeys that come from the poetic experience. Goga noticed that the Brazilian interest in haiku is very old. In 1915, the writer, Afrânio Peixoto, observed similarities between Brazilian ballads and Japanese haiku. To GOGA (1988), this was a result of Peixoto's readings of French writings on Japan. However, Peixoto was a close friend of Aluísio Azevedo and it is certain that he talked to his friends about Japanese poetry. Moreover, Goga realized that Brazilian haikuists associate this poetic expression to Zen Buddhism due to its conciseness, condensation, intuition and emotion, and use of few words to express a "sudden illumination." This was explained by European authors who made the connection between Basho and Zen, and also by the essays of D. T. Suzuki which positively link Japanese and Zen culture. Through small and intersecting pathways, Zen entered into Brazilian culture. The immense appetite for haiku can be seen in an anthology composed of one hundred authors, most of them native Brazilians, of various ages, background and tastes, over a period of one hundred years (SAITO et al, 1990). It can be questioned whether the poetic alternative would also mean an interest in the Zen experience. This identification of Zen with haiku is widespread. In a newspaper, a columnist associates haiku with *kōan*; both hold an imperfect oral expression, impossible to be contained in words, but possible of being demonstrated through poetic imagery and allusions (MOISÉS 1997).

The famous poet, Guilherme de Almeida, gave haiku a Brazilian face introducing the rhythm of words associated with each other, as in the poem “Those Days”: “Indigo butterfly / that a golden pin / pinned in April” (*Borboleta anil / que um louro alfinete de ouro espeta em abril*) (ALMEIDA 1996, 27). As a matter of fact, Almeida had such familiarity with Buddhism that he published an anthology of Theravada texts (ALMEIDA 1968). In 1948, he translated an anonymous poem in the magazine, *The Theosophist*, on the duality of the world (ANONYMOUS 1948). Would he have truly known Japanese Buddhism? We do not have enough information to verify this possibility.

Zen, the Organizing Center of Japanese Buddhism in Brazil

Another significant historical period of Buddhism in Brazil starts in the 1960s and is characterized by two elements. The first is the essays of Buddhist writers, impelled by the counterculture movement, mainly from D. T. Suzuki’s work. Zen studies have grown in legitimacy due to the support of the international academic community, finding new Brazilian readers along the way. The other Japanese Buddhist schools have had relatively few readers. The second element is the blending of intellectuals and Brazilian practitioners with the variety of Japanese immigrant Buddhists in the state of São Paulo. The most well received school among Brazilians was Soto Zen, due to the translation of books and the hospitable disposition of the Japanese monks that immigrated to Brazil.

Information on Zen was found through newspapers, magazines, books, and oral means. The first Brazilian translation was Suzuki’s *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* by Azevedo. In 1967, Professor Ricardo Gonçalves launched an anthology of Japanese translations. The essays of Suzuki, Herrigel, Blyth, Watts, Humphreys, and others were translated into Spanish, English, French, and even German, spreading Chinese and Japanese *kōans* which enchanted through their paradoxes and pointed towards a more authentic and spontaneous existence, forming the first notion of Zen.

Although Japanese immigration to Brazil commenced in 1908, it did not include the immigration of Buddhist monks due to the Japanese authorities’ fear of potential conflicts with Catholics, those similar to the ones that occurred with Protestants. Spiritual assistance was given by the immigrants themselves. In the city of São Paulo, the construction of Buddhist temples and the arrival of Japanese monks from various denominations, with a few exceptions, occurred after Brazilian re-democratization in 1945, when the right to religious freedom became better preserved by republican authorities. In 1955, Soto Zenshu was established in São Paulo for the purpose of providing services to the immigrant communities. Master Shingū Ryohan came from Japan as a superintendent, from 1956 to 1985. In 1960, Japanese followers bought the property located at 285 São Joaquim Street. Originally cult-like, it later developed into a more

open place of worship. Since 1961, public sessions of Zen meditation (*zazen*) have taken place twice a week for people who are interested, in this case, mainly intellectuals. Shingū used to depend on temporary Japanese missionaries and used auxiliary monks among immigrants and Brazilians who took part in the ceremonies.

Starting in 1971, there were retreats (*sesshin*) for Brazilians that lasted three to four days, where people would eat and sleep in the temple and participate in a program of ceremonies, lectures, and usually *zazen*. Shingū's lectures, based on Dogen, emphasized the practice of meditation. Shingū did not speak Portuguese, and all lectures directed to the Brazilian public were translated by people from the Japanese colony. This changed in the 1990s when Shunkyo Aoki and Daiko Moriyama were successively made the new superintendents. Aoki and Moriyama used English to communicate with Brazilians, and Japanese with Japanese people and their descendents who had lived in the United States and Hawai'i.

Two testimonies help explain the cultural environment of the time in São Paulo. Architect Ryu Ohtake remembers that there was little understanding of the Zen talks given by Kan'ichi Sato, a swimming teacher, and that, since the 1960s, there has been a Japanese presence in Brazilian cuisine and cinema (CENNI 1993). The other testimony, by movie director Carlos Reichenbach in 1993, certifies that he was introduced to Zen at the beginning of the 1960s when he went to the temple on São Joaquim Street and that he frequented the Japanese cinema (REICHENBACH 1993). These testimonies indicate some of the cultural territory that Zen reached.

From a historical perspective, the temple on São Joaquim Street was an intersection of religion and culture until the 1990s. In this place, Japanese and Brazilians encountered each other but with different cultural meanings. The temple provided an occasion for the Japanese and their descendents to get closer to the culture of their ancestors and preserve their ethnic-cultural heritage. However, Brazilians were more attracted by the practice of meditation which does not exist in Brazilian culture. The silent observation and calming of the self were novelties, available to everybody, without the need of any financial contribution, affiliation or intellectual preparation. Zen Buddhism exploded in Brazilian culture bringing with it unknown experiences.

Morro da Vargem Monastery

In the winter of 1974, a group of young people who used to attend the *sesshin* on São Joaquim Street were able to purchase property in the city of Ibirapu, located in the region of Morro da Vargem, near Vitória, in the state of Espírito Santo. Supported by Ryotan Tokuda Igarashi, a Soto Zen missionary in Brazil since 1968, they founded the first Zen Buddhist monastery in Brazil, with the agreement of Shingū Ryohan. This monastery was founded in a precarious building

that did not possess any electricity and was accessible only via steep trails. The rules of daily practice, work, and training, were implemented from a Japanese Zen monastery under the leadership of Tokuda. After the group of young people completed training in Japan, only one returned, Cristiano Daiju. Daiju gave a more monastic dimension to the Brazilian monastery.

Odetta Lara, a movie and TV star, visited Morro da Vargem monastery and was impressed by the discipline and by the poverty of the place. She had a positive impression of monk Tokuda. In numerous books, Lara narrates how she documented her intention to resolve her personal anxieties through Zen. Her Zen experiences were international and although they started in Brazil, she continued through the United States and Japan. She shifts from the readings of Suzuki's theory to that of Kapleau. She evaluates negatively the fact that she did not have a permanent monk at her disposal in the monastery due to Tokuda's absences. When she expressed to Tokuda her intention of going to Japan, she was surprised with his observation that training was in decline in Japanese monasteries (LARA 1997).

Different from the previous travel narratives in Japan, Lara's narrative reveals her impressions of temples, monasteries, and urban life. She met Daiju, who was studying there and helped her. She went to the smallest and largest places, such as Eihei-ji. Her perseverance increased when she started to identify Buddhism in Japanese customs. She also thought that if training had declined it was because it was unnecessary as it had already been absorbed by the people: "The teaching was now migrating to where it was being called "the West," which is only oriented towards material values and was now lacking in values more valuable and imperishable" (LARA 1997, 130). Upon returning to Brazil, Lara continued to remain faithful to Japanese Zen by publishing her books, translating books from other authors, and promoting retreats at her country house in Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro. In an interview to a major newspaper in 1997, Lara states that she first encountered Zen at a lecture she attended at the Morro da Vargem Monastery (GONÇALVES FILHO 1997).

Paulo César Lopes, while asking himself if a Christian could be a Buddhist, confessed that his first encounter with Zen was through a book written by a Vietnamese monk that Lara had translated to Portuguese. Lopes observed that he had incorporated Zen teaching practices, such as paying attention to breathing and synchronizing his steps while walking. Moreover, he incorporated Zen into his daily life by having an open mind and practicing meditation (LOPES 2004). This form of Christianity led him to Buddhism, where he discovered the value of the "priest in the desert" and the Catholic mystic saints.

Reading and Training

As Zen training spread, some readings concerning it were interpreted in a man-

ner typical of Brazilian culture, as I will discuss below. In 1967, Antonio Xavier TELES (1972), a university professor, wrote an introduction to philosophy to his students with a preface by law philosopher Miguel Reale. Surprisingly, because of his educational character, there is almost a full page entitled “How to do Zen meditation.” It seems that the author trained in *zazen*, for he describes “how to sit” and what attitude to keep. For Teles, the body becomes secondary and he focuses on removing everything that disturbs the mind, concentrating on the unconscious, which acts and works. He calls to our attention that Buddhism neither states nor denies eternal life but only considers life to be very short for obtaining answers.

CIFLOVEDO (1952 and 1968), the pen name of Cícero Flores de Azevedo, a doctor from the state of São Paulo, read D. T. Suzuki and wrote some personal reflections. In 1952, he published his first work, “Illusion, Desire and Nirvana,” where he reveals that he discovered Theravada Buddhism. In 1968, with “Anguish and Bliss,” he turns to Zen considering that Western science, in its fight against suffering, has not eliminated fear, tedium, nor spiritual poverty, which are all noticeable in rich and poor people. Ciflovedo states that from a far-away origin an art of living exists which is a source of illumination and wisdom. This art transcends the limit of ego and does not belong to the individual but to the world. Buddha is the coronation of effort, not only of the individual, but of humanity’s as well. The themes that Ciflovedo develops are the multiplicity, the unit, being and existing, production, extinction, self realization, acquisition, attachment and identification, body, thinking, eagerness, self-knowledge, tranquility of mind, liberation, vigilance of practice, action, contemplation, illumination, technical processes, politics and wisdom, and destruction of the ego, among others.

Based on the work of D. T. Suzuki in 1967, Ernani Barroso made free use of contemporary culture to reflect on Zen. He concentrated his analysis on the image of the ego. He observed that there are similarities between Christianity and Buddhism through their commandments and precepts. Moreover, both recognize the illusion of the ego as the origin of suffering: “Eliminate the selfish ego and Buddha mind will appear by itself, Christ will appear where he has always been” (BARROSO 1977, 111). He states that Zen is not interested in the concept of God but it does not intend to destroy the essence behind words such God and soul, but to destroy the ideas which mask them with “images and resemblances”- the unconscious extrapolations of the father/mother complex in our inner self. If recognized, paradise and nirvana, with similar identities, are within the reach of everybody (BARROSO 1977, 17).

The biggest curiosity regarding Barroso is that Bruno Pacheco, one of his nephews, followed in his footsteps of studying and writing about Zen. At the age of eighteen, he learned meditation from Barroso who had been practicing it for ten years. Through a state of calmness and a vegetarian diet, he changed his personal existence through “Zen is my path” (PACHECO 2004, 13). He denies

that Zen is a religion, philosophy, or dogma. It is a state of spirit, based on the here and now; a simple, spontaneous everyday life. He states that in all Japanese Buddhist schools the difference is the duration of the process. Through *zazen*, Soto Zen influenced Japanese life, letting go of the idea of sacredness for one of daily practice in everyday life; through doing the minimum, or only the essential, by paying attention, through daily consciousness, all aspects of culture can be transformed. Art becomes a means for discipline, attention, concentration, and spiritual elevation.

Elsewhere, Antônio Carlos Rocha refers to the figure of Tokuda as one of his Zen initiators (ROCHA 1984). In “The Zen Stones,” he identifies the Western interest in Zen as international (ROCHA 1986). In the novel, “The Path of Self-Perfection,” he narrates the ordination of a Brazilian monk. The temple in the novel is idealized as being both Theravada and Zen, making a syncretism within Brazilian culture, a sign of the coming third millennium and of the establishment of a universal fraternity. As a result, there is an approximation to Spiritists and Theosophical ideas which are displayed in passages where the main character meets a group of spirits called Milinda Panha, as well as a being coming from the lost continent, Mu (ROCHA 1991).

In his academic work at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rocha identifies Zen in a singer’s poetry, composed by the Minister of Culture, Gilberto Gil. Rocha’s conductive thread is D. T. Suzuki’s work, with the starting point being the testimony of Gilberto Gil, who, when arrested by the Brazilian military regime in 1974 and left isolated and disappointed, had spiritual experiences: “And it came up, this cosmic thing of leaving earth, through meditation, breathing, posture, relaxation; diminishing the richness of diet while adopting a life of parsimony” (ROCHA 2004, 46). Many of Gil’s song lyrics express these experiences. In “Empty Glass,” he exposes the emptiness of everything; in “Orient” the work journey refers to inner quests; in “It is Necessary to Learn Only To Be,” he teaches that all of us should be students; retreats and training appear in “Spiritual Rituals”; a reflection on day-by-day life in the lyrics of “Meditation”; the importance of being in the moment in the lyrics of “Here and Now”; the experience of the new in each moment in the lyrics of “New Era.” The author complements this information by saying that Gil also talks about God in his song “If I Want to Talk to God” (ROCHA 2004, 97).

ROCHA (2004) concludes that Gilberto Gil answers to the impasse of contemporariness through alternatives from art, music and Zen, which offered an encounter with oneself. The chaos is abolished and the Path is met. Zen is meditation and in Gilberto Gil’s song lyrics it is Buddhism, describing situations of pain, suffering and anguish, and the recipe for overcoming this, through the understanding of the moment and the help of a life illuminated. In this way, Rocha, who had previously identified Zen in Japanese culture, now discovers Zen in Brazilian popular music.

Counter Culture and the Transformation of Existence Through Zen

Luiz Carlos Maciel, a journalist, promoted Zen in many newspaper articles. In 1978, he compiled them in a book which discussed some of the important themes of counter-culture, such as the opposition of East and West, Zen in the West, existentialism, rock music, evolutionism, the ideas raised and articulated by Foucault, *Macumba* (black magic), the origin of science, Buddhist psychology, magic, and others. He showed friendly appreciation for Murillo Nunes de Azevedo's book *The Hurricane Eye*, which portrays a wide panorama of religions and Eastern philosophies. Maciel noted that Nunes de Azevedo finds in Zen a final deputation of all Eastern doctrines by sitting still without doing anything. He encountered, as well, an anthology of Buddhist texts from Gonçalves (MACIEL 1978).

Nelson Coelho, a writer and journalist in love with Japanese culture, discovered Zen in the United States and São Paulo. Through Zen literary experimentation he writes tales and romances expressing his disillusion with Western civilization and culture, aligning himself with the counter culture. In "Zen: Experience of Freedom," he speaks of his Zen itinerary. In the 1950s, he was a Brazilian newspaper correspondent in New York, when he read Watts, Suzuki, and others. When he returned to Brazil, he discovered the Zen Temple on São Joaquim Street and frequented meditation sessions. Although he lacked the strength to continue meditating, he was fascinated by Zen theory: "To stay there during one hour, quiet and still, it lacked meaning and it did not answer my anxieties.... Strictly speaking, my experience of Zen only started in 1970, when I decided to return to Soto Zenshu Temple to practice zazen. Besides the strict practice, twice a week in the temple and everyday at home, there was also the presence and example of Mestre Shingū Ryohan" (COELHO 1978, 17–19).

Coelho also met other monks. As a result, he started to reflect on meditation, illumination, reality, ego, whole, good and evil. He states that through Zen, he realized his place in the cosmos. Coelho emphasizes, therefore, that Zen Buddhism has given him a philosophical perspective and a specific psychological experience, in contrast with Zen from Western culture which create and enlarge the dualism of body and mind.

After the death of Orides Fontela, who was known among intellectuals for her poetry, her entire output was collected in one volume (FONTELA 2006). Complimented by respected critics of Brazilian literature, Fontela was ignored as a Zen practitioner for years and associated with a typically Western creative process and to modernity. Critics have never associated Fontela with other haiku artists. DIAS (2006, 3) says that Fontela weaved her poems through images of flowers, birds, mirrors, stones, fire and time, transporting them from the concrete to the abstract. With concision and without sentimentalism, she inter-connectedly expressed dissatisfaction related to things, words, and life. She writes in her

verses about the annihilation of objects and destruction of forms in a peculiar way, as if you are tasting Zen in the Brazilian earth: “The birds / return / always / and always. Time carries itself out. It builds itself / the vanishing form. / The birds / return. Always / the birds. Childhood returns slowly.” (*Os pássaros / retornam / sempre / e sempre. / O tempo cumpre-se. Constrói-se / a evanescente forma / Os pássaros / retornam. Sempre os / pássaros. / A infância volta devagarzinho.*)

Beyond Institutional Limits

Heródoto Barbeiro is a TV and radio journalist who has revealed his Zen experiences in interviews and writings. He was introduced to Zen through Ricardo Gonçalves, when he was studying history at the University of São Paulo where he later taught for twelve years. He became interested in meditation and started practicing in his home while receiving precepts from a lay follower of Shingū Ryohan. In 2005 he published a book on Buddha with another follower, only raising the value of Zen. His Zen experience is marked by his participation in the *sesshin* and attendance of Shingū’s lectures. He learned that “it is possible to carry your church on your back.” He confesses: “I became a wandering and simple Buddhist, attentive to the life of a journalist. I have been trying to practice Buddhism by myself, and to understand the profoundness of Siddharta Gautama’s teachings, the historical Buddha, since then” (BARBEIRO 2005, 114). He collects many inferences from Zen anecdotes and became one of the few critics of the Japanese Buddhism syncretism which would distance Brazilians from Buddhist teachings.

From Zen to Amida

Besides Zen readings and training, Ricardo Mário Gonçalves and Murillo Nunes de Azevedo expressed another facet of Buddhism in Brazil. Spreading and defending Japanese Buddhism since the 1960s, they revealed challenges, dialogues, and counterpoints within their intellectual involvement.

Gonçalves is a unique figure among Brazilian intellectual Buddhists because of his knowledge of Japanese and other Buddhist traditions. As a professor, he wrote few books about Buddhism but published numerous articles and essays, which discuss Japanese Buddhist history and Buddhist views on philosophy, psychology, and theology.

He began his experience with Japanese Buddhism in 1958 in Hompa Honganji Temple. From 1961 to 1971, he worked at Soto Zenshu Buddhist Community as the main assistant of Shingū. From 1972 to 1980, he was ordained in Shingon and collaborated with Koyasan. In 1981, he was ordained in Jodo Shinshu Otani-ha and in 1986, he was promoted to the same hierarchic level as that of Japanese missionaries. In 1971, as a historian at the University of São Paulo, he defended his PhD thesis regarding the historical consciousness of medieval

Japanese Amidism. In 1977, he defended his thesis on Zen Buddhism's influence in the development of the rational mentality and modernization of pre-modern Japan. Gonçalves is unique among Brazilian intellectuals because his research expresses the dialogue of a teacher who is at the same level as Japanese specialists. Gonçalves, without Japanese ancestry, is fluent in the Japanese language and, among other languages, reads Chinese.

His anthology, "Buddhist and Zen Buddhist Texts," made him known beyond the circle of Buddhist researchers. He considerably increased the number of scriptures from India, China, and Japan while reediting the second edition. For the first time, Buddhist texts from most Japanese schools, which had, up until that time, only been translated into English, were translated into Portuguese. Consequently, for the first time Brazilians had access to this rich religious universe.

Gonçalves defends the idea that the oriental spiritualities, including Buddhism, are "self-realization schools, rather than religions, strictly speaking" (GONÇALVES 1976, 13). They affirm that there exists an Absolute which is inaccessible through language. They believe that it is possible to recover the consciousness of being the Absolute self. Buddhism is considered to be a representation of a primordial knowledge, lost and recovered over the course of time. Nowadays, we think of the religious experience of Light, where Amida represents the main aspect, making a theology possible (GONÇALVES 2002), because Amida is the personification of the Absolute, of cosmic life, and from where consciousness sprouts and to where it returns (GONÇALVES 1976).

Given that Gonçalves has carried out ecclesiastical functions for almost fifty years, analyzing the past and present problems of Japanese missions, he is extremely optimistic regarding changes. In four essays, he develops themes such as the oppression of the Catholic majority over Buddhist immigrants, the progressive diminishing of Japanese followers, the lack of Portuguese learning among Japanese monks (although they have resided in Brazil for decades), the concern of the followers and Japanese Buddhist clergy regarding the maintenance of ceremonies for the ancestors, among others. As a solution, he advocates a return to Buddhist universality and the encouraging of the establishment of small Buddhist groups, discrediting the idea of having large-scale conversions.

Gonçalves's thinking is quite complex and this brief summary cannot do it justice. He considers Buddhism to be a wide-ranging system composed of ethics, philosophical and religious elements, as well as psycho-physiological practices of meditation and concentration. This would place Buddhism away from the Western categories, that reduce it to philosophy, psychology, or religion, which would be improper for a true perception (GONÇALVES 1982).

Another author of multiple facets is Murillo Nunes de Azevedo, who produced many Buddhist writings. In "Each One's Path: The Buddhism of Pure Land," he narrates his spiritual journey through several Japanese Buddhist schools. Graduating as an engineer, he specialized in railway transportation.

He was a university professor in his specialty and also in thinking of the Far East. In 1961 he came into contact with the leadership of Soto Zen in Brazil and Japan, traveling on different occasions to the Far East. In 1970, with Gonçalves, he turned his attention to Shingon, where he initiated himself in Japan. In 1982, he was ordained at Nishi Honganji.

Azevedo presents a coherent search through the various branches of Buddhism. His discourse goes deep into the institutional masters he met but he also refers to other styles of thinking. In his essay written in 1962, entitled “The Direct Way,” Azevedo advises people to “stop using gestures without purpose, reasoning without control, dwelling on thoughts without end. By stopping, we could dive into life and live in the hurricane without escaping from life. Everything that always surrounds us, the people, the situations, would appear new and pure. The non-stop running would cease. Everything would return to where it has always been and everything would merge within itself” (AZEVEDO 1988). In 1996, he says that freedom can appear one day, like a lightning, inaugurating a new state of consciousness, illuminating our darkness by giving it a more profound meaning. Regarding his move from Zen to Shingon he states: “I recognized the importance of Zen, but I was looking for something that could be introduced on Brazilian soil” (AZEVEDO 1996, 9). He was disappointed with the Shingon in São Paulo because he recognized that it had become mixed with African rituals, distancing itself from what he referred to as authentic Japanese Buddhism. This was far from his hope of being affiliated with a truly traditional organization.

Another aspect of his work is to apply Buddhism to the cultural issues of our time. In “Human Reconstruction” (AZEVEDO 1971), he addresses the issue of mass communication and defends Buddhist meditation as a solution to existential anguish because it carries through the communication of a being who is awakened from conditioning. With examples from Zen, which bring about inner change, he conceptualizes Buddhism as a living art that is applicable to each individual, within one’s private religion, which is compatible with modern science. He explains Zen meditation and transcribes the rules of *zazen*, created by Dōgen. There are also photographs of Shingū Ryohan in *zazen*. Regarding reaching the final state, he affirms that it is one that is common to the wide variety of religions. Concurrent with his other texts, Azevedo defends the existence of an experience founded in a universal notion of Buddhism, focusing on Buddhist fundamentals which are common to other traditional religions.

Perspectives

In 1964, while movie producer Amâncio Mazzaropi was launching the movie “My Brazilian Japan” featuring Brazilian and Japanese people from the rural world, Brazilian intellectuals began to discover the Japanese Buddhism which

had taken root in Brazilian soil. Close to the end of the movie, there is a scene of a wedding at a Buddhist temple of Amidist orientation. We can notice that the *bonzo* wears ceremonial clothes and tie which indicate that he was an immigrant who became a Buddhist missionary. The movie does not hide the exotic.

On the other hand, most Brazilian intellectuals opted for Zen because it was the least “exotic” among all Japanese Buddhisms. Only Murillo Azevedo and Gonçalves experienced a path infused with strong ties to Amida. The era of building Japanese Buddhist temples in Brazilian society coincided with the beginning of the discovery of Buddhists among the immigrants even though only a few of them spoke Portuguese. However, the language barrier was somehow resolved by Brazilians and it was also the moment of impact and impasse of transformation into Brazilian modern culture.

The meetings, readings, and experiences of Japanese Buddhism form another chapter in the history of spiritualities that are not based on the Christian tradition, which had been predominant in Brazil for centuries. This religious search of intellectuals points to historical transformations at the level of belief and socialized experience, and to the level of stress endured by individuals in their everyday life. A large amount of the material examined expresses such elements in an explicit way and reveals that society is no longer static regarding its structures and conceptions of the world. If, concomitantly, there was an effort to internalize beliefs and rituals by the Catholic Church (CAMARGO 1973) as an answer to the impasse with modernization, social tensions, and culture alternatives, especially since the 1960s, there was a stronger movement, impelling individuals to demand a new means of expression through religions which had been, up until that point, considered strange. It is a historical process that has lasted at least one hundred years since the middle of the nineteenth century and it is part of the history of Brazilian intellectuals.

The religious philosophy of the intellectuals has unfolded into an array of alternatives. Some intellectuals claim a commitment to Buddhism while others consider Buddhism a mere curiosity. To some, it is the reaffirmation of their previous ideas of opposition to traditional Catholic religiosity. Here and there, Brazilian intellectuals question if Buddhism is a religion and some conclude that it is not a formal religion like Christianity. Others opted to reduce Buddhism to a way of self-realization. Breaking down differentiated barriers such as the end being common to all humanity and there are no differences between Christ and Buddha—we suspect that they would be presenting a new discourse to a previously known experience. However, all value the practice of meditation and, in this mapping, we do not find debates among intellectuals, not even with other spiritual schools of thought. Their allusions to a wider cultural world are indirect, moving away from popular religiosity, which is considered to be unrefined and distant from the original message, stuffed as it is with desires and material gains.

Many intellectuals such as Coelho, Gonçalves, Barbeiro, Azevedo, and others encountered among Japanese immigrants a “live Buddhism,” a body of wisdom and practices concerned with preserving the ethnic-cultural heritage of these immigrants as well as the universal Buddhist message. These readings are marked by an understanding that is tempered by a critical scrutiny of the culture. As true strategists, many intellectuals selected their own contents in order to distinguish themselves among the Japanese and establish their own identity. For example, for Coelho and Murillo Azevedo, Buddhism has a multiplicity of meanings and possibilities. Additionally, while Azevedo’s primary concern was to know a larger number of Buddhisms, Coelho’s concern was to use Zen as an instrument for resolving problems, almost like therapy. Both Coelho and Azevedo combined personal and textual experiences with the oral tradition of the Buddhist masters that transformed everything into a body of work that reflects their dissatisfaction with previous experiences (atheism to Azevedo, dogmatism to Coelho). The presence of immigrants pulled them into an Eastern world that was no longer imaginary but rather, a reality. Although different than what they had expected, this new world let them in, without asking them to leave behind their modern and urbanized Brazilian identity.

Since the 1960s, Zen practitioners have had successors and even though there appears to be no available data on them, the presence of one or another practitioner, new or old, in a specific cultural sector demonstrates the relevance of Zen. In addition, there is the growth of Buddhist and Zen publications and the increase of practicing groups within large Brazilian cities. The website DharmaNet lists thirty-six addresses of Zen meditation groups in Brazil in 2004, while during the 1960s and 1970s there was only the one temple, on São Joaquim Street. Zen and other Buddhist adherents fought boldly to gain editorial recognition in newspapers and magazines of large circulation, presenting itself as a spiritual alternative. It was a long journey of forty years.

The dimensions of its influence are difficult to measure due to the multiplicity of aspects spread by Japanese Buddhism in Brazilian culture. In the first place, writer Heloísa Prieto creates a children’s story where a family is taken in by a Japanese lady. When Maria-san gets hurt she is treated with acupuncture, a treatment foreign to traditional Brazilian medicine. According to her family, she got better with “the power of the mountain, a kind of magic energy called *shugendo*” (PRIETO 1998, 15), alluding to a form of esoteric Buddhism that is not explained. Through a book, the narrator realizes that Zen or Buddhism is synonymous with being calm, as she confesses,

Studying Zen Buddhism helped me to understand... that Maria-san was totally “Zen,” a follower of the middle way... the middle way is the way of integration. The huge majority of people spend their lives trying to separate everything into categories: that there are worthy and unworthy things, who is good and

who is bad, who is a winner and who is a loser. However, the middle way is to believe that everything mixes and completes everything else, and that nobody invalidates anybody else. (PRIETO 1998, 42–43)

This literature reveals alternative conceptions to a teenage public whose dimensions are unknown.

The second example is from Igor Rossoni who differentiates himself from previous authors through the application of Zen for understanding the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (ROSSONI 2002). In no way does Rossoni try to establish links between Zen readings or practices with Clarice Lispector. Rather, he addresses Zen as a meta-theory in order to examine her work, transforming into categories for understanding certain Zen aspects as a process of individualization and the Zen personal experience. For example, Lispector's writing process and *kōan*, the epiphany and *satori*, Clarice's eye and the Zen master's eyes, the eloquence of literary silence and *sunyata*, and the identity of opposites as both ponderable and imponderable. Rossoni's work suggests that Zen could also be used as an instrument of alternative literary critique.

The third example is from Coen, a Soto Zen missionary, who initiated her studies in Los Angeles without passing through the São Joaquim Street gates. Ordained in Japan in 1983, she stayed in monasteries for women for twelve years and returned to Brazil in 1995 when she was given the responsibility of overseeing the activities of São Joaquim Street for a six-year period after Moriyama. In 2004, she left and founded her own Zen community where she performs intense missionary activities. Her first book, *Live Zen: Reflections on the Moment and The Way* is a narrative of her experiences. In a debate on the death penalty, she says, "I was searching my mind for sacred texts that could agree with the death penalty. I know very little about texts. I know more about the experience of being, of having a respect for life." Through a peculiarly discursive Zen manner she reflects on everyday life. The traditional Buddhist teachings expose, in a suggestive way, revealing a sensibility in the use of words. While affirming that death does not erase actions, thoughts and words, she says: "They remain, going around, a whirlwind of memories in history. Everything returns. Causality. Karma. Who wants to live forever?" (COEN 2004, 67).

Visiting Morro da Vargem monastery, Coen links the maintenance of Japanese traditions by Brazilians with her own memories of her days in Japan. She appraises the founding of the monastery and the religious vocation of Cristiano Daiju as having an extraordinarily Zen dimension. Old friends left behind, he begged for money wearing sandals made of rice straw and sat in silence. As a result, "I left my testimony of who visited and appreciated (the monastery). There, in the region of Ibirapu, there is a very Zen monastery" (COEN 2004, 63). Therefore, Coen's thinking is a result of Zen influence through the absorption of Japanese tradition, giving to it a Brazilian tone without forgetting to consider

Brazilian culture in its diversity; challenging the notion that Brazil is somehow behind the times.

One piece of data reflecting the importance of Japanese Buddhism in Brazilian culture is the increasing and persistent publication of Zen books over the past three decades. The ongoing increase hints at the fact that Zen is not a transitory phenomenon of consumption (a passing trend) but instead a mainstay in Brazilian society. In this article I have tried to identify the cultural dimensions of a variety of experiences relating to Buddhism and inquired into the changes in perception and symbolic form that resulted from them. In their original writings Prieto, Rossoni, Coen, and Rocha shared original experiences in their writings that demonstrate new qualities of refinement. There is among Brazilian intellectuals a certain historical persistence with some revealing shifts in consciousness, at least when they begin to compare Buddha with Christ and Christianity with Buddhism. Consequently, they introduced a new spirituality which would compete with the dominant tradition at the center of Brazilian religiosity where only Christ is the central figure in religious discourses. Buddhism, read, re-read, appropriated and experienced, brought fresh alternatives. In Brazil, universal Buddhism gained substance through Japanese Buddhism.

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