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# American Zen's "Japan Connection": A Critical Case Study of Zen Buddhism's Diffusion to the West

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*Participant observation data from both Japan and the United States are used to correct the common argument in the sociology of religion that Zen Buddhism in America is mainly a deviant cult response to personal strains resulting from various social discontinuities and conflicts. While such explanations do shed light on the recruitment of some participants in new religious groups, they suffer from being exaggerated and from being historically and cross-culturally incomplete. The present analysis argues that the emergence of organized Zen in America must also be understood as the result of a process of culture diffusion of Mahayana Buddhism from East Asia to North America since World War II. This process has also involved a sectarian reformation of Zen in the course of its diffusion from Japan, suggesting that American Zen may be better understood as a sectarian rather than a "cult" movement. Data are provided by the author's accompaniment of an American Zen Master on his travels in Japan for the purpose of official confirmation by the Soto Sect as a Zen priest and teacher. Visits to numerous temples in the American priest's lineage provided extensive illustration of the reality of Zen's cultural and institutional diffusion to North America, of the ancient and traditional origins of this "new" American religion, and of the reformation it has undergone during its transplantation from East to West. The article concludes with an outline of a six-stage culture diffusion model for future research.*

In 1987 an American Zen Buddhist priest of European ancestry traveled to Japan for official confirmation as a "teacher" at the head temples of the Soto School of Zen Buddhism. He had devoted eleven years to the arduous training required for this role. It was a rare event — fewer than half-a-dozen Americans had preceded him, all in the previous decade. The episode was indicative of a recent, post-World-War-II phenomenon — the institutional diffusion of Zen Buddhism to North America (Fields, 1986).

Generally, the objective of this report is to place the episode descriptively and analytically in its broader historical and cross-cultural context. More specifically, the objective is to suggest a more complete framework for explaining the emergence of Zen in America than is currently provided by prevailing discussions in the sociology of religion that emphasize the social psychology of cult development. The following analysis argues that an adequate understanding of the emergence of Zen Buddhism



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in America must *also* pay serious attention to the process of culture diffusion through which this highly evolved and institutionally complex religion reached North American shores. The report draws from a qualitative field study whose primary methodology was participant observation. By traveling with the priest in question during his three-week pilgrimage in Japan, I accumulated extensive notes and numerous informal and focused interviews to supplement my simultaneous status as participating Zen Buddhist and trained sociologist.

Since World War II, the growth of Zen Buddhism in the United States has been dramatic, involving the establishment of hundreds of different centers. This development cannot be adequately explained, as some sociologists of religion have argued, only as a "cult" response to the stresses and strains of American life — although stresses and strains have played a role.[1] While many adherents are drawn to this 2,500 year old "new" religion because it offers a way to deal with suffering, its appearance and growth in America over the past half-century is also part of a process of cultural diffusion in which a branch of Mahayana Buddhism is once again moving from one culture to another. The founding histories of America's new Zen centers and monasteries make it abundantly clear that their emergence is the result of the cross-cultural diffusion of an established religion from Korea and Japan. Unfortunately, recent theories of "new religions" in America have largely ignored this process.

The enormous cultural differences between Japan and America may have obscured our understanding of Zen's emergence in the United States as part of a much broader historical process (Dumoulin, 1963). Yet, starting from its birthplace in India in the sixth century B.C.E., the original diffusion of Buddhism to China in the first millennium was easily as great a cultural leap as the more recent one from Japan to America. Historically, Buddhism has adapted itself many times to radically different cultures. The predominance of social psychological perspectives in the analysis of new American religions should not be allowed to obscure that it is happening again today in the United States.

Furthermore, often — initially (it is alleged) in the hands of the first Chinese "Patriarch" Bodhidharma, and later with the great religious innovator Eihei Dogen's reaction against established religion in Japan — the diffusion of Zen has involved a revitalization or reformation of the religion, a "return" to a more essential practice that is one of the hallmarks of sectarian splits from an established parent church.[2] The research reported here suggests that over only the past 40 years, as Zen Buddhism has taken institutional root in the United States, the same thing has happened in North America. Numerous instances of this comparative American Zen Reformation, as it might be called, revealed themselves during the field work. I will argue, then, that many of the distinctive features of Zen in America are better understood as features of a new "sect," rather than, as usually argued, of a new "cult" (e.g., Stark and Bainbridge, 1985).

[1]For a review of the controversy and identification of relevant literature, see Gussner and Berkowitz (1988).

[2]The church-sect paradigm originated with Max Weber (1958) and his student Ernst Troeltsch (1932). For a review of church-sect theory and its controversies, see Johnstone (1988). Classic expositions or applications include Pope (1942), Clark (1948), Yinger (1970), and Wilson (1970).

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Interestingly, however, most American sociologists of religion have shown limited interest in these historical developments.[3] As ably reviewed (and criticized) by several recent writers (Gussner and Berkowitz, 1988; Wilber, 1984), these sociologists have instead favored a modern version of a deviance theory of new religious movements that emphasizes motivations for participation and generally ignores or deemphasizes structural and cultural group origins. These deviance-oriented writers emphasize a sequence of mobilization that starts with sweeping cultural discontinuities and changes (e.g., Tipton, 1982), then leads to personal pathology and stress, and thence produces a search for social support or personal adaptation in various religious cults. Where the cults themselves came from is often ignored, assuming (incorrectly, in the case of Zen) that they are invented by participants as a means to cope with strain. In contrast, Stark and Bainbridge's more sophisticated theory of cult formation — even though it does emphasize the role of deviance and personal stress — does not commit this last error, but grants instead that Zen Buddhism and other Eastern religions in America are examples of "imported cult movements." They too, however, gloss the important role of institutional culture diffusion.

From the viewpoint of American culture, of course, Zen does indeed fit Stark and Bainbridge's definition of "cults" as "deviant religious movements" that do not originate from a parent church in the wider host society (1985:ch. 2). From a cross-cultural perspective, however, Zen does not fit these authors' cult definition, but is rather a "sect" — a distinction that is crucial for the analysis to follow. In many respects, it must be granted, Stark and Bainbridge's analysis of the origins of "cults," including their very brief treatment of Zen Buddhism in America, is quite compatible with the supplemental argument advanced here. For instance, Zen's nontheistic orientation is entirely consistent with their argument that religious cults are most likely to arise under highly secularized historical circumstances when established churches are weak. An adequate explanation of the rise of a social or religious movement, however, must also account for its institutional and organizational origins, and the impact those origins may have on its subsequent development, as well as for such obviously important processes as recruitment and general social conditions in the host society (i.e., secularization) that favor the emergence of particular new forms.

In a sense, then, the following analysis is an argument for *extending* Stark and Bainbridge's "subcultural evolution model" of cult development (ch. 8) to include the process of culture diffusion that this case study evidence shows is vital in the case of American Zen. In general, the prevailing deviance explanations of cult development suffer not so much from being irrelevant as from being incomplete. The present report suggests a more comprehensive view.

Further confusion stems from a tendency of some researchers, including Stark and Bainbridge, to lump uncritically together as "cults" centuries-old Eastern religions with a hodgepodge of transient, "bible-based" Christian, magical, or therapeutically oriented "new-age" collectivities. While many sociologists of religion have avoided the stigmatizing term "cult," favoring instead such labels as "new religions," they never-

[3]For instance, see Beckford (1985), Bromley and Shupe (1981), Cox (1977), Glock and Bellah (1976), Levine (1984), Lofland (1966), Needleman and Baker (1978), Parruci (1968), Robbins and Anthony (1981), and Tipton (1982).

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theless have generally persisted in lumping them all together because of their presumed common cult-like features.

Such analytic mixing of apples and oranges is very misleading for several reasons. First, it overlooks deeply historical and broader social and cross-cultural forces at work in the emergence of the American forms of ancient religions. Second, it somewhat overemphasizes the cultural disruption and personal pathology involved in the recruitment process (see Gussner and Berkowitz, 1988). Third, as Shinn has shown (1987), the alleged cult-like features fail taxonomically to distinguish the groups in question from more established religious collectivities. Fourth, it blurs the fundamental structural and religious differences between these various religious groups. And finally, it seriously underestimates the institutional growth and strength of the Eastern religious groups in America, preferring instead to assume they are marginal, transient, and few in number.

Certainly, local groups of Zen Buddhists share some of the qualities often associated with "cults" — for instance, a "charismatic" leader, a communal life-style (at least for those connected with a monastery or residential center), physically strenuous practice, the "rediscovery of an old revelation," status outside the religious mainstream, use of a "new" terminology, interest in mystical experience, and emphasis on achieving peace of mind (Shinn, 1987:17; Johnstone, 1988:87-88). Furthermore, there is no question that Zen appeals to many whose suffering makes them more receptive to alternative religious paths. Indeed, the transience and suffering of life were the focus of the historical Buddha's original "Four Noble Truths."

What is missed by many deviance-oriented sociologists of religion, however, is that such suffering is an integral, existential part of the human condition, not the fate merely of the marginal and the deviant, or of younger Americans adapting to the decline of 1960s counterculture (Tipton, 1982). Established churches and sects alike have offered solace and community to their followers over the centuries and around the world. To be sure, as one recent research reported, a significant minority of American "converts" to Eastern religions did bring a deep sense of personal difficulty to their practice (Gussner and Berkowitz, 1988). The *majority*, however, were *not* primarily motivated by personal pathology. One reason for this may ironically be that the religious practices required by many Eastern religious groups, including Zen Buddhists, are difficult and demand sustained commitment. Such commitment, in turn, requires strong positive reasons for staying with the practice and a sufficiently healthy frame of mind to persevere. As one recent essay by a psychoanalyst noted, effective Zen practice requires a certain minimum of good mental health in order to maintain a demanding practice (Brickman, 1986). Evangelical and new-age seekers after ready solutions and quick comforts soon discover their error and move on.[4]

Furthermore, as Wilber emphasizes (1984, 1986), the appeal of Zen must also be understood in its own terms — as a means for cultivating a transcendent "religious"

[4]A similar criticism has been made by Hardacre (1984) of prevailing explanations of "new religions" in Japan as merely expressive or emotional responses to various social strains. In her study of Reiyukai Kyodan, a modern off-shoot of Nichiren Buddhism, Hardacre argues, as in the present article, that the origins of the new religions in Japan must also be understood in terms of their cultural and historical context, as well as in terms of their instrumental effectiveness.

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basis for living that is evidently not adequately provided in many traditional Christian or Jewish churches and synagogues. The major ancient Eastern religions, according to Wilber's "structural-hierarchical" analysis, are fundamentally different in this regard from most of the other "cults" with which they are often compared. Specifically, the great Eastern religions share a "trans-rational" and transcendent orientation that sets them structurally at odds with the "pre-rational" orientations of most of these other "cults."[5] As Preston suggests in his valuable study of the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Zen is distinctive for its methods of socially "constructing transcultural reality" (1988).

Furthermore, one recent review (Melton, 1988) has found that America's post-World War II "cults" are, in fact, far more numerous, in a few cases have considerably older historical roots, and have been more durable than most writers on "cults" have realized. They are not as numerically "deviant" as has often been supposed. Excluding both sects and established churches from his count, Melton's 1988 survey identified 836 "nonconventional" religious groups (i.e., "cults") — far more, he notes, than the scant dozen that have been the focus of most major cult studies during the period. Of the 786 cults whose date of origin could be identified, 22 percent (169) were founded before the 1940s, and 41 percent (319) during the 1970s or 1980s. Seventy (9%) were identified as "Buddhist-Taoist."

In another recent survey using data from a secondary source (Morreale, 1988), the present author identified 480 specifically *Buddhist* centers or practice groups in the United States, the vast majority (91%) founded during the 1970s or 1980s.[6] Of the total (480), 36 percent (175) were explicitly Zen Buddhist. These data show clearly that a remarkable and very recent institutional development has occurred in American religion, one that requires more of an institutional, cross-cultural, and historical explanation than the deviance approach criticized earlier can provide.

Another purpose of this report, then, is to help redress the imbalance of recent sociological treatments of Zen Buddhism in America by locating the post-War emergence of American Zen centers in a broader context. As noted, initially, the means for doing this presented themselves when the opportunity arose to accompany an American Zen master to Japan and to witness and record his official "ordination" as a "teacher," or Sensei, by the Soto Sect of Zen Buddhism. The author, who is both a professional sociologist and a Zen "student," accompanied this teacher — a man named John Daido Loori — and his entourage to both of the head temples of Soto Zen, where ceremonies

[5]Drawing from developmental structuralism in psychology, sociological theories of religion, and both Western and Eastern religious writings, Wilber has formulated a theory of religious evolution that emphasizes the emergence of ever more highly spiritual and transpersonal religious outlooks (1984, 1986). Ancient "archaic" forms of religion were followed in Wilber's structural-developmental historical scheme by "magical," then by "mythic," then by "rational," and finally by the most transcendent or "transpersonal" forms of religion. According to Wilber, practitioners of the great Eastern religions — Hinduism, Sufism, and Buddhism — have most effectively articulated the last of these stages. Religious experience at that point involves "the dissolution or transcendence of the experiencer himself. . . . [T]he subject-object duality is radically transcended, so that the soul no longer contemplates Divinity, it becomes Divinity." It experiences what Tillich called the "Ground of Being."

[6]These and subsequent statistics were produced by the present author's analysis of a tabulation of the hitherto statistically unanalyzed data provided in Morreale's 1988 compendium, *Buddhist America: Centers, Retreats, Practices.*

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were conducted in recognition of Loori's many years of study with his own teacher.

In addition, the pilgrimage visited numerous other Japanese Zen temples of importance in Loori's "lineage." An account of these contacts with Loori's "ancestors" will help to drive home the point that American Zen must also be understood as part of a process of the cultural diffusion of an ancient, established, "mainline" religion, not merely as a form of transient, deviant or "cult" participation. The following account describes the pilgrimage, with a particular focus on evidence pertaining to (1) the *sectarian* (as distinguished from "cultic") reformation of Zen as it has moved to the New World, and (2) the deeply historical origins (i.e., the "ancestors") of this so-called "new" American religion. Both types of historical data document the paper's general argument that a more comprehensive cross-cultural framework is needed to complement the more common "deviance" explanations of Zen in America. In the final section, a formal model of culture diffusion as it has applied to Japanese Zen in the West is outlined for use in future research.

## *ANNOTATED OBSERVATIONAL NARRATIVE*

### *Zuise at Soji-ji Monastery*

Long before sunrise, a Zen master is led by senior monks into the enormous Butsuden, or Buddha Hall, of Soji-ji Monastery in Japan — one of the two head temples of the Soto Sect of Japanese Zen Buddhism. He is followed by a few of his own students. The master has arrived for Zuise, a ceremony that will officially celebrate and confirm completion of his training as a Zen teacher and receipt of the full Soto "transmission" from his teacher.

The Butsuden is cavernously empty, an endless sea of dimly lit tatami mats. The master disappears momentarily behind the front altar to offer incense to the monastery's thirteenth century founder, Keizan Zenji. Keizan is one of the master's important "Dharma ancestors," from whom his own "transmission" can be traced, master to disciple, over the centuries. The master's students are led to a rear position opposite the main altar.

Insofar as the Butsuden has seen many Zuise ceremonies over the years, the scene is not unusual. What *is* unusual is that the younger master is an American, as are his students. Only a few Americans have been recognized in Zuise by the Soto Sect of Japanese Zen — the country's largest branch of Zen Buddhism, and these all within the past decade. The event is a symbolically poignant yet brief episode in the cultural diffusion of Buddhism to America. It is, of course, too early to know what impact this development may have on Western, Judeo-Christian values and thinking, although it is clear the impact has already been substantial in academic and artistic circles, and among a small but growing number of committed practitioners.

Although Zen masters made their first appearance in America just before the turn of this century, it was not until after World War II that any Americans began to train seriously to attain that status themselves. Completion in the 1980s by the first American Zen teachers of their formal training marked a turning point in the transplantation of Japanese Zen Buddhism to American soil. An issue at this historical juncture was

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how Zen would achieve authentic status as a new dimension of American culture outside of its Oriental-American communities. Loori came to Japan in hopes that the Zuise now in progress would play a significant role in this process. It will be followed by a second, identical ceremony at Eihei-ji Monastery, the other great co-head temple of Soto Zen.

The two principals in this April, 1987 American pilgrimage to Soji-ji were Zen master John Daido Loori-sensei, founder of Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, New York, and his teacher, Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi-roshi, founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles.[7] It is the invisible "transmission" between these two men — born, reared, and trained on opposite sides of the globe — that lies at the heart of the diffusion of Zen from East to West.

The pilgrimage also enabled Loori and his students to become more familiar with their religious "ancestors," and with the historical antecedents and cultural contexts that led to their own, new-found Buddhist practice. Indeed, the pilgrimage powerfully documented the ancient and traditional origins of their "new" American religion. A further but unanticipated result of the research pilgrimage was an accumulation of evidence that the American Buddhist child is in many ways more religiously robust and fundamentalistic than its Japanese parent.

Within minutes, two hundred or so black-robed monks file in and precisely align themselves in blocks on either side of center. Morning service begins. It consists of prolonged chanting, punctuated by numerous bows and gongs. With its elaborately choreographed movements and complexity of sounds, service at Soji-ji is considerably more embellished than the simple chanting at Doshin-ji, Loori's monastery in New York State.

The Zuise ceremony itself is short and includes processions to several rooms and small temples within the monastery for various observances. Back again at the great hall, chanting still in process, the Vice-Abbot arrives for the final ceremony (the Abbot is ill). Soon it is over. Official photographs in the Abbot's garden conclude the episode.

During the year prior to the pilgrimage group's arrival in Japan, extensive preparations had been made by Loori's teacher through the huge Soto bureaucracy at Soji-ji and Eihei-ji monasteries. In addition to staying briefly at these two centers, the group's primary hosts for their two-week journey were various members of Taizan Maezumi's family — the Kuroda family — which has become prominent in contemporary Japanese Buddhism. Of the five living Kuroda brothers, four (including Maezumi) have become Zen priests, three of whom received the group during its travels.

### *Ancestral Temples at Yokohama and Kamakura*

The day after the group's arrival in Tokyo, and before going to Soji-ji for the first Zuise, it is welcomed by Takeshi Kuroda-roshi to his temple in Yokohama, about 30 kilometers away. "Roshi" is a term in Japan that means, in effect, "venerated teacher."

[7]As illustrated in the bibliography, both Loori (1988) and Maezumi (1977) have contributed writings, as well as organization, to the emergence of Zen Buddhism in the United States. A brief account of Maezumi's activities in America and of the founding of his Zen Center of Los Angeles, may be found in Fields (1986).

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It is normally confirmed only later in a Zen teacher's life and is a title of great honor. Prior to that time, a confirmed Zen teacher is called "Sensei." Takeshi is Abbot of Zenko-ji and is one of Maezumi's younger brothers.

Following the tradition of centuries for pilgrims, the group first goes to the Butsuden for three full bows and chanting. We then learn at lunch that Takeshi-roshi is President of the Zenko-ji Scholarship Society for Priestly Study Abroad, which has sponsored visits of several young priests to Loori's monastery, and to Buddhist temples in Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka. Much of the income for such missionary activity (and for the elaborate decoration of his temple) comes from Takeshi's endless rounds of funeral and memorial services for members of his "sangha," or parish. Such services are the bread-and-butter of Zen priests in Japan.

Later in the day we drive through the Yokohama spring rain to Soji-ji, where Loori will participate in his first Zuise, described earlier. Soji-ji was founded by Keizan Zenji in 1321 and moved to its present site in 1898. It and co-head temple Eihei-ji serve as headquarters for some 15,000 local temples in Japan, as well as for Soto establishments around the world.

Of the three or four other Americans who have ever come to Soji-ji for Zuise, two have been Maezumi's disciples. The first was Bernard Tetsugen Glassman-sensei, who is now abbot of the Zen Community of New York. The second was Dennis Genpo Merzel-sensei, abbot of the Kanzeon Sangha, in Bar Harbor, Maine.

Although occasional surges of interest in Buddhism occurred among such famed Americans as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau more than a century ago, it was not until after World War II that serious, sustained Buddhist practice took root among Americans of European stock. And, as shown by the data presented earlier, it was not until the 1970s that permanent centers of Zen or other Buddhist training, staffed by qualified teachers and clergy, emerged in America. Examples today are the Providence Zen Center, the Rochester Zen Center, the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Shasta Abbey of California, and the Zen Mountain Monastery of Mt. Tremper, New York, to name a few of the larger ones.[8]

After registering, we are led to Soji-ji's old guest quarters, pungent with the smell of tatami mats. Later that evening we are escorted to a smokey, Japanese-style zendo, or meditation hall. Just as at Doshin-ji, Loori's monastery in New York, the monks at Soji-ji practice sitting meditation, or "zazen," twice a day. Regular zazen is the heart of Zen Buddhist religious practice. Modern medical and psychological research has documented the generally healthy changes caused by meditation, such as calmness, concentration, and reduced stress.[9] Advanced practitioners often slip into a deep but alert state called "samadhi," which, for a few, may lead to the profound, consciousness-changing experience of "kensho" or "satori." This is the so-called "enlightenment experience," a kind of breakthrough to an integrated perception of one's place in the universe.[10]

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[8]The list of emerging Buddhist centers in America is much longer than this. For fuller accountings, see Fields (1986), Prebish (1979), and Morreale (1988).

[9]For reviews of clinical research on meditation effects, see Walsh (1980) and Benson (1975).

[10]Practitioners' descriptions of their own kensho experiences may be found in Kapleau (1980).

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Another vital aspect of Zen training is the meditation retreat, or "sesshin," in which practitioners spend a week or more in zazen for eight or ten hours a day, along with breaks for work, formal meals, and services. We learn that Soji-ji offers only two sesshins per year, while Loori's monastery offers them monthly. The widely acknowledged decline of Zen Buddhism in Japan generally is also reflected in the fact that few of Soji-ji's graduates either teach or practice zazen once they return to their family temples.[11]

Later the next morning, after Loori's Zuise (described earlier) and formal leave-taking, the group boards a train for Kamakura, a few miles to the south. It will visit temples of some of its other religious "ancestors," and then indulge in sightseeing, including Kamakura's Diabutsu, or Great Buddha statue, whose 37 foot bulk was cast in bronze six centuries before.

The memory of Loori's "ancestors" is evoked during a visit in Kamakura to Engaku-ji, a Rinzai temple founded in 1282. It is a sunny, tranquil place. As we wander, Loori quietly refers to the centuries of zazen, of sesshins, of transmissions that converged here to make the transplantation of Zen Buddhism to America possible. This was the temple of Abbot Soyen Shaku, one of the first Japanese Zen Buddhist teachers in America. It was here, too, that Soyen Shaku's famous students, D. T. Suzuki (1961) and Nyogen Senzaki (1953), both trained before joining their teacher in America. Without the work of these three men, Loori suggests, Zen would probably not be flourishing in the United States today (also see Fields, 1986). Their efforts were a very conscious response to the decline of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Sesshin is still offered at Engaku-ji five times a year.

*Abbot Installation at Kirigaya-ji*

The next day is important for the Kuroda family. One of Maezumi's younger brothers, Junpu Kuroda-roshi, will be installed as Abbot of his temple, Kirigaya-ji, located in an outer section of Tokyo. Also, one of Maezumi's nephews will become a senior monk at his Shuso Hosen ceremony on the same occasion. Junpu Kuroda's abbot installation, called Shinsanshiki, or "Ascending the Mountain," will occur first.

Arriving at Kirigaya-ji, we pass the adjacent Buddhist graveyard bristling with wooden memorial prayer stakes. The stakes, which are placed at the request of and with a payment by families of the deceased, are a reminder again of the daily rounds that occupy much of the time of modern Zen priests in Japan. Such preoccupation with ritual prayer-offering is as yet absent among Zen teachers in America. We remove our shoes and are taken upstairs for lunch with many family guests. Here Loori meets Maezumi's mother. They bow deeply to each other. Later, he explains it was an important meeting, somehow, for at that moment "dharma" and biological lineages seemed to coverge.

Later, back downstairs, Shinsanshiki begins. Preceded by attendants, Junpu enters, bows and chants at several side altars, and then climbs the high altar. Soon there occurs a ritualized form of verbal dueling called "dharma combat." This is an exchange in which one Zen practitioner either tests his own Zen insight or that of another,

[11]See Reader (1985, 1986) for descriptions of the "decline" of Zen in Japan.

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often in the form of a question about Zen practice from one of the sutras — the religious texts of Buddhism. In ancient times, and currently at Doshin-ji, the exchange was (is) spontaneous and unrehearsed. In modern Japan, however, the confrontation is usually prepared in advance and is highly ritualized. With commencement of the exchange, the robed combatants stride forward in turn with great gusto, bellowing their confrontations to the Abbot up front, withdrawing, then, after he answers. Shinsanshiki concludes with a reading of congratulatory letters. The shorter Shuso Hosen ceremony follows immediately. Official photographs mark the end of ceremonies. Loori's own Shinsanshiki ceremony occurred at his own monastery late in 1989, with many of our Japanese hosts in attendance.

*Dogen's Eihei-ji Monastery*

Next day, our destination is Eihei-ji, where Loori will celebrate his second Zuise. Founded in 1243 by one of Japan's greatest Buddhist teachers, Eihei Dogen, Eihei-ji is located some 300 kilometers west of Tokyo, near Japan's northern coast. It is raining as we arrive. A calligraphy sign at an inner gate warns: "Only those concerned with questions of life and death need enter here."

Long before sunrise next day, Loori's second Zuise takes place. It is much like the ceremony at Soji-ji. Before service, he disappears with others behind the altar to offer incense at a reliquary containing some of Dogen's ashes. Loori has been greatly influenced by Dogen's recently translated writings, and he often assigns them to his students. "I met Dogen today," he comments later, obviously moved by the encounter.

After the hour-long morning service and its ancient choreography of chants, deep bells and wooden percussion sounds, and after the Zuise ceremony itself, we follow Loori and other officiants to several separate altar rooms, and then on to an inner chamber for official photographs. Afterwards, we sip green tea in another chamber with an older monk who is a high-ranking monastery official. He is also a "dharma brother" of the late Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, who has become well known to American practitioners as the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center and the author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1970).

*Ancestral Temples on the Sea of Japan*

Within an hour we are on a train for Obama, a small town about 90 kilometers to the southwest. We will visit two small neighboring monasteries, Bukko-ji and Hosshin-ji. Both are important in Loori's "dharma lineage," as each Zen Buddhist's lineage of transmission is called. On our arrival, we walk sunny back streets first to Bukko-ji. Its abbot, Tangen Harada-roshi, is the last "dharma heir" of the late Sogaku Harada-roshi and is one of the few Japanese masters of koan study to accept Western students. Sogaku Harada, his teacher, is important in Loori's lineage because Sogaku's combined Rinzai and Soto training was transmitted to a master named Hakuun Yasutani-roshi, who is, so to speak, Loori's "dharma grandfather." That is, Yasutani was one of the teachers from whom Maezumi received the transmission before passing it on to Loori.

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All ordained Zen Buddhists, whether lay practitioners or clergy, can (with a few liberal historical assumptions) trace their "lineage" back to the original Shakyamuni Buddha in India. Zen masters, or teachers, form the basis of this lineage, for each one becomes a "dharma heir" when his teacher judges him ready and "transmits" the "Buddha-dharma" to them. This transmission essentially involves acknowledgement by the elder master of the disciple's fundamental Zen insight and completion of training. The training — often requiring many years — is no small accomplishment, for in addition to mastery of extensive ceremonial and academic knowledge, it requires a deep perceptual or mystical understanding to a point, as one famous koan expresses it, of thoroughly "seeing your original face, the face you had before your parents were born." Transmission is also an authorization to teach subsequent disciples.

A "koan" is a question or statement that is assigned to students in order to short-circuit their usual rational means of understanding, all for the purpose of experiencing for oneself that more fundamental perception that is the heart of Zen insight. There are hundreds of koans in the history of Zen Buddhism. One of the best known in the West is Hakuin Zenji's "the sound of one hand clapping." In relatively modern times "koan Zen" has come to be associated with the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, while the Soto sect has come to emphasize "just sitting" — long, disciplined years of zazen that is intensely alert but focused on nothing in particular. Both of the sects evolved in eighth and ninth century China. Loori's lineage includes both Soto and Rinzai transmissions, which converged in the teachings of Sogaku Harada-roshi. A similar convergence occurred with Eihei Dogen, who also studied with both Soto and Rinzai masters. It is impossible to undertake daily practice at Loori's monastery today without awareness of these earlier masters.

We reach Bukko-ji Monastery. After paying respects in the small Buddha Hall, we are warmly greeted and served tea. Afterwards, the Abbot shows us his new zendo, or meditation hall. It is an unusual feature in the average Japanese local temple; except at a few training monasteries, we learn again that most Zen Buddhists in Japan rarely practice zazen.

We do not stay long. Following a narrow trail along the rice paddies, Hosshin-ji is visible in the distance. Our goal is the grave of Sogaku Harada. Once there, Loori offers incense and prostrates himself before his ancestor. One by one, members of the group do likewise. Before departing we are shown the tiny quarters and garden occupied by the senior Harada. Back at Loori's temple, Doshin-ji, Harada's inscribed memorial panel stands with others on the Buddha Hall altar.

*Lineage Connections in Kyoto*

The next two days are spent in Kyoto, the famed capital of medieval Japan, where the group splits up temporarily for individual sight-seeing. I visit various temples of significance in Loori's lineage. The first is Myoshin-ji, with its dry and planted gardens. I know from Maezumi, who stayed here the night before, that the Rinzai practice at Myoshin-ji, with its seven sesshins a year, is one of the strongest in Japan.

Later in the day, I make my way to Kennin-ji, one of Dogen Zenji's first temples. Kennin-ji was founded in 1202 by Eisai, who is credited as the founder of Zen Buddhism

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in Japan. Some say that Dogen studied briefly with Eisai at Kennin-ji, before his studies with Myozen, who transmitted to Dogen here in 1221. Myozen and his student left Kennin-ji in 1223 for extensive travels in China. But in stark contrast to this rich past, the temple seems desolate now, in decline. The grounds and gravel paths are empty. Hanging laundry, parked cars and bicycles, and miscellaneous trash cans bedeck quarters once sacred. Tetsugen Glassman-sensei had the same impression a few years before.[12]

*Family Guests at Unsen-ji*

After our sight-seeing, we travel on as special guests to the family temple of a Japanese monk who has accompanied us throughout our travels. This priest, Seido Suzuki, came to study and assist for two years at Loori's monastery in New York. Suzuki's father is still the abbot of Unsen-ji, a very small temple serving a tiny farming community high in the mountains of Hiroshima Prefecture. On arrival, we are welcomed by the Abbot and the temple's board of directors. Toward evening, we are treated to a modest banquet whose joviality, singing and flowing saki together generate, we all agree, the social high point of the pilgrimage.

Early next morning we do zazen, joined by two board members. They are obviously unaccustomed to it. Influenced by his long stay at Doshin-ji, the younger Suzuki plans to build an "American-style" zendo at Unsen-ji next year. It is ironic, perhaps, that a revitalized Zen Buddhism in America is being carried back to influence the ancient, but weakened, practice in Japan. This morning's sitting is a rare event at the temple. Later in the morning our vans arrive.

*Maezumi's Family Temple*

The day is spent travelling northwards to Otawara, an agricultural city 140 kilometers north of Tokyo. Here is located Koshin-ji, the temple where Taizan Maezumi was reared and where his oldest brother, Kojun Kuroda-roshi, is still abbot. At Koshin-ji, Loori will meet yet another "ancestor" — Maezumi's father, Baian Hakujun Kuroda, who was the first to transmit to his son.

The next morning we awaken at 4:30 for dawn zazen. Unlike most temples we have visited, by the Butsuden door we find stacks of round black meditation cushions, indicating that zazen is a regular practice at Koshin-ji. This is not surprising, since it was here that Maezumi began his Buddhist studies with his father, who transmitted to him in 1955. Maezumi left Otawara as a young man to study with the Rinzai master Osaka Koryu-roshi, who eventually transmitted to him also. Then, after periods of study at Komazawa Soto University in Tokyo and Soji-ji, Maezumi volunteered in 1956 to assist in founding a Soto temple in Los Angeles. He is now an American citizen. In Los Angeles he met his third teacher, Yasutani-roshi, a Zen master visiting from Japan who had been trained in both the Soto and Rinzai traditions, and who would also soon transmit to Maezumi. In 1967, Maezumi founded the Zen Center

[12]As movingly recounted by Peter Matthiessen (1986), Glassman-sensei visited many of the same temples as described in the present account.

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of Los Angeles, where a half-dozen American Zen teachers have since been trained, received the transmission, and then gone out to establish centers of their own. Of these, five are major residential centers with hundreds of members, and 46 are smaller nonresidential Zen centers or sitting groups.

Loori is one of the teachers trained by Maezumi who have moved on to establish major centers of their own. Originally, Loori began his formal Zen studies with Eido Shimano-roshi at Dai Bosatsu Monastery in New York State. In 1976, he met Maezumi and began to study with him at his Los Angeles center. Later, in 1980, Loori founded Doshin-ji, or Zen Mountain Monastery, in the Catskill Mountains of New York. By 1986 the long process of "shiho," or "dharma transmission," was completed, giving Loori full authority to teach students of his own. Since its founding, Doshin-ji has grown from a struggling enterprise with a handful of students and a few hundred dollars in the bank to one of the country's best-known Buddhist training monasteries, with over three-hundred students and a permanent staff of senior monks. Zen Mountain Monastery is one of the tangible results of the ongoing cultural transplantation of Japanese Zen Buddhism to Anglo-American culture.

After breakfast we assemble to climb the graveyard hill behind Koshin-ji. As we gather around his father's cylindrical grave marker, Maezumi lights a huge handful of incense sticks. They burst into flame, and he hands small clumps to members of the pilgrimage group. He sounds a tiny bell, and to the shallow "tonk, tonk" of a miniature mokugyo (a wooden percussion instrument), everyone chants. Each one approaches the grave in turn, bows fully to his dharma ancestor, and offers blazing sticks to the stone. Afterwards, back at the temple, we wait near the ancestor's bronze bust in the front courtyard for our taxis. Except for a last day of touring in Tokyo, their arrival marks the end of the group's pilgrimage in Japan.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

Two empirical conclusions emerge clearly from the study, both providing support for the general argument that prevailing explanations of Zen in America require historical and cross-cultural extension. The first is that the culturally authentic institutional diffusion of Japanese Zen Buddhism to a large and growing number of Americans of nonoriental descent is now a social fact. The American Zen studied here has been *imported*, more-or-less intact, from another culture through a prolonged process of culture contact and diffusion. It has not sprung up *simply* (and certainly not *only*) as a result of a small group of marginal Americans' responses to personal strain. And it is not simply another "new" religion to be lumped without analytic distinction with all manner of diverse cults, as some analysts have done. The reality of this cultural diffusion was symbolized by the official Japanese Soto confirmation of an American Zen master that was the focus of this research. In addition to authentication by the mother culture in Japan, American Zen has also taken institutional root in the form of such establishments as Loori's monastery. As shown earlier, such institutions now number in the hundreds. The institutional emergence of American Zen is but the most recent chapter of the historical process of Mahayana Buddhism's

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cultural diffusion from one culture to another over three millennia.

A second conclusion is that the transplantation of Zen from Japan to America has involved one of those revitalizations or "reformations" of religious practice that have been common in the history of both Eastern and Western religions. Such a reformation, indeed, was the intent of the various Japanese Zen masters noted earlier who came to America to teach. Yasutani-roshi, in particular, posthumously still provokes smiles in Zen circles with his grumbled comment that Zen priests in Japan are "just a bunch of funeral directors."

In the West, the most profound reform cycle to occur in Christian history was the Protestant Reformation. Periodic resurgences of Christian fundamentalism still occur with regularity. Such changes often involve a cycle of institutionalization by a parent "church," followed by a breaking away, deinstitutionalization, and reform by the new "sect" whose purpose is return to a purer, more inspired "original" practice (Weber, 1958).[13]

The history of Zen Buddhism in Japan has not been immune to these cycles any more than has Christianity. Dogen's return from China in the thirteenth century led to a reformation of Japanese Buddhism that was so threatening to established temples that Dogen retreated to a remote valley to found Eihei-ji, where he could more safely implement his reforms. In the seventeenth century, another reform movement was inspired by Zen Master Hakuin Zenji. Now the cycle is occurring again, but this time it is circling half the globe.

At a superficial level, the most visible evidence of the American Zen Reformation encountered during the research was the contrast between the affluent, baroque decor and evident wealth of many urban temples in Japan, and the simplicity and relative poverty of the Zen centers in America, including Loori's monastery. Far more essential, however, is the difference in daily practice that became obvious as the research progressed. The core of this practice is sitting meditation, which our travels made clear has declined in Japan (with notable exceptions). Other observers have been struck by the same trend (Reader, 1985, 1986). All of the great masters of Zen have stressed the central importance of sitting meditation (e.g., Dogen, 1985:30; Hakuin, 1982). Yet, most local Zen temples in Japan provide little encouragement or opportunity to practice zazen, and little mention is made of it in official Soto Sect literature (Reader, 1985, 1986). Many priests have abandoned the practice altogether. Even more rare are the intensive meditation retreats, or "sesshins," that are regarded as essential to breakthroughs in one's training. All of this stands in marked contrast to practices in most of the centers affiliated with Maezumi's lineage in the United States. An hour of zazen begins and ends every day at Loori's monastery, and week-long sesshins are monthly events. This is much more frequent even than Soji-ji or Eihei-ji, although some temples offer exceptions.

[13]For references on the development of (and controversy over) Weber's church-sect typology in the sociology of religion, see Demerath and Hammond (1969:70-71), and Johnstone (1988:94).

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## *OUTLINES OF A CULTURE DIFFUSION MODEL*

It is clear that with the successful transplantation of a reformed Japanese Zen Buddhism to American soil, a significant culture diffusion has occurred that has not been adequately described or explained by most contemporary sociologists of the "new religions" in America. What is needed is a framework that *includes* the social-psychological approaches that have dominated American discussions heretofore in a more comprehensive analysis that also recognizes the historical and cross-cultural dimensions of the diffusion process. The nature and history of Zen's diffusion from the Orient to America lies beyond the scope of this article; however, the experience described here suggests six different stages or factors in the diffusion process that should be taken into account in future analysis.[14]

The *first* is the *predisposition of the source culture to export elements of its own culture.* Japan's initiation of World War II in the Pacific was itself, of course, a major cultural expansion. The cultural discontinuities generated by her later defeat contributed to a number of more recent culture changes, including subsequent emergence of a variety of "new religions" in Japan which began to compete with Soto Zen. As Japan recovered from World War II, her expansionism resumed in economic form as part of the emerging global marketplace. Her growing exports included numerous other Japanese cultural elements in addition to Zen, but Zen was part of the export stream.

A *second* factor is *pressure on the institutional agencies actually involved in exporting the culture pattern.* Concern among a few Soto priests, such as those mentioned earlier, over the institutional weakening of Zen practice in Japan, along with competition from a variety of new and popular religions, combined with calls from Japanese emigrants abroad, including those on America's west coast, to spur the Soto bureaucracy to become more active in its missionary activities after the war. As noted earlier, Maezumi came to the United States as part of this missionary wave. As recent data show, however, some missionary work had been done by the Soto Sect in the United States even earlier. Nearly 7 percent of the 175 Zen centers counted by Morreale in 1988 were founded before World War II.

A *third* important factor is the occurrence of *preparatory culture contacts* that lay a foundation for later diffusion. In the case of Zen's diffusion to America, these occurred mainly between 1893 (the seminal World Parliament of Religions in Chicago) and World War II, during which period several Zen masters, including the famous D. T. Suzuki, worked quietly in America, generating increasing interest and conversancy in Zen among the American intelligentsia. The "beat generation" of writers, including Alan Watts, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Synder, became influential intellectual proponents of Zen long before centers existed where one could actually practice. Maezumi's and his predecessors' missionary work in the established Japanese-American community in California also helped lay the groundwork for Zen's later diffusion outside that community. It was to this community that Maezumi's first American students came to seek him. All of this cultural groundwork prepared the soil for the institutional

[14]While each of these stages describes important aspects of the actual history of Zen's diffusion from Japan to the United States, the descriptions may easily be reworded to form general hypotheses for future testing.

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seeds of Zen to take root after the War. Zen's dissemination was also fostered by its nontheistic and transcendent focus, both reducing the chances of doctrinal conflict with mainline American religions and offering a dimension of experience not available in many established American churches.

A *fourth* condition in the successful culture diffusion was the *selective receptivity of American culture*. The trend toward cultural secularization and the structural strains adduced by many students of the "new religions" were undoubtedly relevant to some extent. Also, both the relative proximity of America's west coast and, in particular, the oft-noted innovativeness of California's regional subcultures were also important factors, as reflected in the fact that 53 percent of all the Zen centers in America are located in the far west, with 28.5 percent being in California. The relaxing of United States immigration restrictions in 1956 also probably played an important role. This is the year Maezumi first came to California.[15] More generally, a full 80 percent of America's Zen centers were not established until *after* 1960, indirectly suggesting that easier immigration for the Oriental teachers that head 22 percent of America's Zen centers was a major contributing factor.

A *fifth* factor is the *proclivity of certain people* in the "receiving" culture *to the new culture pattern*. As the diffusion-of-innovation research reviewed by Rogers and Shoemaker has generally shown (1971), the social characteristics of certain individuals in the receiving culture increase their potential as "adoptors" of an innovation — of Zen, in the present instance. These characteristics include not only youth and generally higher socioeconomic status (cf. also Stark and Bainbridge, 1985:ch. 18), but also, for a significant minority of adoptors, various stresses and strains for which a collective or religious solution is sought. It is at this stage and the previous one that the "deviance" theories reviewed earlier can shed some light on the receptivity of some Americans to Zen.

*Sixth*, the *strategies adopted by the institutions engaged in implanting the new cultural form* have a profound impact on whether it takes root. One successful (even if unconscious) "strategy" by Zen organizing groups in the United States has been their emphasis on religious discipline. Fifty-seven percent of the Zen centers counted by Morreale (1988) have developed "moderate" or "strong" forms of discipline. Quite a few centers, such as the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Shasta Abbey, and Zen Mountain Monastery, require monastic discipline. Although one might think demanding practice would scare away recruits, the net effect, as argued more theoretically by one economist (Iannaccone, 1989), has been to strengthen the centers. The role of monastic discipline in religious propagation is not new in the West, of course, as shown by the history of Christian monasticism. This strategy of discipline may help account for why Zen in Maezumi's lineage experienced the "reformation" described earlier, while some lines of Eastern religion in America did not.

Further, the formation of new centers has been aided by organizing through the various Zen "lineages" that have reached American shores. Not only does this lineage

[15] 1956 was also the year that China invaded Tibet, thus beginning a major eventual displacement of Tibetan Buddhism to the West. Data from Morreale (1988) once again confirm the importance of the date, revealing that 98 percent of the 305 other (non-Zen) Buddhist centers in the United States were established after 1960.

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structure generate new teachers or followers to propagate the practice, but the resulting new centers draw legitimacy in their new locations from their connection with an established parent center. Loori's pilgrimage to Japan may be seen as part of this broader strategy of legitimation.

A final growth "strategy" employed by some of the new centers is syncretism. That is, to make the practice of Zen more familiar and culturally meaningful, some teachers have sought to blend it with aspects of religion or other "spiritual" practice already familiar to Americans. Thus, the Zen Center of New York has drawn on various aspects of Judaism; Shasta Abbey has drawn from the Anglican service; and the Zen Mountain Monastery has offered numerous workshops on the mutual relevance of Zen practice and psychotherapy.

These six stages are preliminary in the sense they would undoubtedly need modification and refinement to be applied to the diffusion of other new religions to other countries in different historical periods. Nevertheless, their rudimentary formulation provides a sufficient basis to drive home the point that the prevailing deviance theories of American Zen as a "cult" phenomenon must be seen as wanting — not entirely incorrect, simply incomplete. While their approaches have appreciated some of the psychological factors that draw some individuals into practice, they have generally overlooked or deemphasized the structural and cultural origins of at least certain of the Eastern religions, like Zen Buddhism, that have reached our shores as a result of a persistent process of culture diffusion. This particular "new" religion, indeed, is but the latest episode in the travels of a world religion that has guided the practice of adherents for nearly 2,500 years.

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