



# The Rivers of Dharma in the Face of Religious Challenges: A Comparative Analysis of Three Japanese Buddhist Temples in Brazil

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## Abstract

The article aims to develop a comparative reflection in view of three Japanese Buddhist temples: the Honpa Honganji (connected to the True Pure Land School); the Hompoji (Honmon Butsuryū Shū), and the Dokozen Busshinji (Sōtō Zen), located in the North of the State of Paraná, more specifically in the cities of Londrina and Rolândia (Brazil). As sources, materials derived from fieldwork are used, as well as interviews conducted with monks and practitioners. From the theoretical point of view, religion is understood as a symbolic system, as proposed by Clifford Geertz, open to the possibility of appropriations, according to Michel de Certeau. In addition, certain propositions of Michael Pye regarding religious transplantation are used. As a discussion, it is suggested that the circumscribed temples develop different responses to the problem of the death of first-generation immigrants and the discontinuity of the Japanese language in Brazil. The comparison is made through three parameters: the profile of the monks, the language used in materials and preaching, and the characteristics of the faithful.

**Keywords** Japanese Buddhism · Temple · Comparison · Brazil

## Resumo

O artigo pretende desenvolver uma reflexão comparativa tendo em vista três templos budistas japoneses: o Honpa Honganji (ligado à Verdadeira Escola da Terra Pura); o Hompoji (Honmon Butsuryū Shū) e o Dokozen Busshinji (Sōtō Zen), situados no Norte do Estado do Paraná, mais especificamente nas cidades de Londrina e Rolândia (Brasil). Como fontes, são utilizados materiais derivados de trabalhos de campo, bem como entrevistas feitas com monges e praticantes. Do ponto de vista teórico, a religião é compreendida como sistema simbólico, tal como proposto por Clifford Geertz, aberta à possibilidade de apropriações, segundo Michel de Certeau.

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Além disso, são utilizadas certas proposições de Michael Pye a respeito da transplantação religiosa. Como discussão, sugere-se que os templos circunscritos desenvolvem diferentes respostas ao problema da morte dos imigrantes de primeira geração e da descontinuidade da língua japonesa no Brasil. A comparação é feita por intermédio de três parâmetros: o perfil dos monges, a linguagem utilizada em materiais e pregações e a característica dos fiéis.

**Palavras-chave** Budismo japonês · Templo · Comparação · Brasil

This article examines three Japanese Buddhist temples in Brazil: Honpa Honganji (belonging to the Jōdo Shinshū or True Pure Land School), in Londrina city (State of Paraná); Hompoji (Honmon Butsuryū Shū [HBS]), in the same city; and, finally, Dokozen Busshinji (Sōtō Zen), in Rolândia city (Paraná), about 23km from Londrina<sup>1</sup>. Japanese Buddhism was originally an ethnic religion but was forced to accommodate itself to Brazilian society from the immigration context. This text comparatively approaches how the three cited strands developed this process in different ways in the region. As sources, interviews and materials derived from fieldwork and collected between 2014 and 2022 are used regarding the temples in question. Three analytical parameters are mobilized: the profile of monks, the language used, and the characteristics of the public (religious communities)<sup>2</sup>.

The reflection developed here is justified in view of several aspects. Firstly, it is possible to emphasize the expressiveness of Japanese culture in Brazil at different levels, considering that immigration was formally initiated in 1908, generating long-term effects on local society. As will be highlighted later, the cities of Northern Paraná are privileged to understand the phenomenon. Due to the characteristics of

<sup>1</sup> The True Pure Land School was founded in the thirteenth century by the monk Shinran, based on devotion to Amida Buddha through the recitation of his name (nenbutsu) in order to be reborn in the Pure Land (Gonçalves 1971: 58-59). In the early seventeenth century, however, the school was fragmented into two subdivisions: the Nishi (Honpa) Honganji and the Higashi (Ōtani) Honganji, referring to the west and east, respectively (André 2022b: n.p.). The Honmon Butsuryū Shū, in turn, was created in the nineteenth-century Japan by Nissen Shōnin, having as its foundation the recitation of the name of the Lotus Sutra (daimoku), grounded in Nichiren Buddhism created in the thirteenth century (Elias 2016: 192, 131). Finally, founded by Monk Dōgen, Sōtō Zen is a school that, likewise created in the thirteenth century, is founded on the practice of meditation (*zazen*) (Gonçalves 1971: 59, Suzuki 2005: 54, 61). Unlike the True Pure Land School and the Honmon Butsuryū Shū, Zen is a meditative rather than strictly recitative strand. It is not the intention of this paper to discuss the characteristics of these schools in Japan, and so for further exploration, it is recommended to check the scholarly production in this regard.

<sup>2</sup> It would be possible to highlight a fourth parameter related to the religious service provided. However, during the discussion around the three criteria mentioned, a reflection on the conceptions and practices inherent to schools is carried out, as well as their adaptation in the Brazilian historical context.

Other authors have analyzed some of these parameters in relation to Japanese Buddhist temples located in other regions of Brazil, such as Regina Matsue (2002) about the True School of the Pure Land in Brasília (Federal District), Cristina Rocha (2002) about Sōtō Zen in the state of São Paulo, and, among others, Gonzaga and Apolloni (2008) about Pure Land temples in the city of Suzano, also in São Paulo. Although certain characteristics of the temples in North Paraná are similar to the phenomenon in São Paulo and the Federal District, there are particularities that will be discussed below that justify the present article.

land occupation in the late 1920s, several Japanese colonies were formed (Oguido 1988: 87-90, 92, 100-105). Despite the obstacles posed by authorities linked to the two countries, the Japanese colonies allowed a reconstruction of certain elements of the social, economic, cultural, and political organization existing in pre-migratory Japan. This is currently reflected in the existence of associations, schools, and religious temples, among other institutions that offer important signs of this accommodation to Brazilian society.

Japanese religions, among which it is possible to highlight the different Buddhist schools, are part of this process of cultural accommodation. As shown in this paper, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, in the face of the challenge characterized by the progressive death of first-generation immigrants and the discontinuity of the Japanese language, the temples in Northern Paraná responded in various ways to accommodate these changes. Some temples resorted to syncretic practices linking elements of Buddhism to the repertoire of religions of the mediomistic matrix popular in Brazil (Shoji 2003: n.p.). In addition, they began to offer potential responses to immediate problems linked to unemployment, as well as physical and mental illness.

In this sense, this paper is also justified in view of the possibility of understanding this fluid phenomenon. This phenomenon exists both in the case of Japanese Buddhism in Brazil and a broader scope when reflecting on the characteristics and challenges inherent to the accommodation of religions at first ethnic in a cosmopolitan setting colored by the competition between distinct religious fields.

This paper also seeks to contribute to the academic production on Buddhism in Brazil, marked by authors such as Frank Usarski, Rafael Shoji, Ronan Alves Pereira, Eduardo Basto de Albuquerque, Ricardo Mário Gonçalves, R. Matsue, C. Rocha, and E. Gonzaga, among others. In 2002, an important collection on the subject was published, titled *O Budismo no Brasil*, edited by Usarski (2002a, b), which outlined some of the epistemological guidelines for the analysis of Dharma in the country, mainly regarding the categories of immigration and conversion Buddhism. It is also worth mentioning the issue edited by Shoji and Usarski (2008) and published in the *Japanese journal of religious studies*, from Nanzan University, considering the centenary of Japanese immigration to Brazilian territory.

The academic production on Buddhism in Brazil has increased in recent years, although it is still lacking when compared to other religious manifestations, such as Catholicism and Pentecostalism. Recent reflections have been marked both by the deepening of the previously built guidelines and by the emphasis on dimensions initially less explored by seminal research, such as noninstitutional practices (André 2011, 2016a, b, c), forms of reception (Luiz and Serafim 2021), and online manifestations (André 2018). Finally, this paper also intends to offer contributions in relation to academic reflections on the process of diffusion of Japanese Buddhism in other regions of the world, highlighting the local case, considering the expansion of schools, which was intensified in the postwar (Deal 2015: 219).

## Theoretical and Methodological Definition

In methodological terms, we used procedures derived from oral history, as proposed by Thompson (1992). At first, some figures related to the Buddhist community in both cities and connected to the circumscribed temples, among monks and believers, were selected as interviewees. For the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared in advance, containing relatively few open-ended questions. During the conversation, as much as possible, the subjects were allowed to construct their narrative, with few interventions from the interviewer. The material, collected both in the homes and in the temples themselves, was recorded on audiovisual equipment, and later transcribed. The interviewees authorized the use of the interview for research purposes by signing an informed consent form. Except for the monks, the other interviewees were kept anonymous.

The analysis of the interviews was carried out taking into account the discourse produced by the subjects, contextualizing their position within the religious institution in focus. In addition, attention was paid to both the narrative set and to certain passages, or even specific words, mobilized by the interviewees, which is clear, as will be discussed in the course of the article, concerning the former supporter of Hompoji Temple who used expressions derived from the mediumistic religious matrices to refer to the practices with the Honmon Butsuryū Shū.

Also concerning methodology, fieldwork was conducted on different occasions in the temples under analysis, having in mind procedures suggested by Proença (2008). The observation was made both during the rites performed in these places and on other occasions, paying attention to different aspects of the variables selected here. The notes derived from this process were recorded in a field diary, allowing, later, the consultation of collected data. In addition, publicity materials used by the temples were collected. Last, but not least, it is worth mentioning the good receptiveness by which the author of this article was welcomed in the temples. This constitutes important research information, suggesting the openness of these institutions to academic contact, which is not always the case considering researchers involved with research around the religious phenomenon (Proença 2008, p. 22-24).

From a theoretical point of view, we use the propositions of the German phenomenologist Pye (1969, 1971), the American anthropologist Geertz (2008), and the French historian Certeau (2014). The first proposes an important discussion about what he calls “transplantation of religion,” in view of the dynamics of the religious phenomenon, especially when there is a displacement from its historical context of “origin” towards another that has a predominantly different repertoire. According to Pye (1969: 237-238), there would be three elements that characterize this movement: (1) contact, (2) ambiguity, and (3) recovery.

Contact refers to the stage at which one relatively well-structured and coherent religion would come into contact with certain aspects of another (Pye 1969: 237), which is particularly important in the present paper about the impact of Buddhism brought to Brazil by Japanese immigrants from 1908 onwards. However, it is necessary to define what Pye (1971: 93) calls a “coherent religious pattern,” as the issue generates theoretical controversy (Martim 1996: 217).

A relatively coherent religion would not be understood as a “pure” repertoire that would be contaminated with aspects of external semantics. Pre-migratory Japanese Buddhism itself is emblematic in this sense, insofar as it is divided into several schools (three of them are discussed in this article) and characterized by centuries of syncretism with the cult of the kami that would provide the basis, at the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth, for Shintoism as a structured religion (Kuroda 1981: 19). This is not to say, however, that there was not a minimally organized set of concepts and practices, although they were open, like any other repertoire, to the process of interpretation by the historical subjects involved.

To understand this repertoire, religion is understood as a symbolic system of a sacred character (Geertz 2008: 66-67). Having a partially systematic repertoire of conceptions, religions guide the practices of the adepts, without, however, being able to control them in an absolute way, since the different appropriations of the practitioners could re-signify and reconstruct the symbolic systems.

The concept of appropriation (Certeau 2014: 38-40, 90-91), which refers to the tactical potential of readers (in a broad sense), is used here to appropriate and re-signify the texts (also understood in their semantic range), which may involve books, cities, or religions. It is precisely the “savagery of reading” that would allow the dynamism of the religious phenomenon, inserted in a dialectical relationship involving repertoires and readings, control strategies, and resistance tactics. For this reason, the image around immutable traditions is fallacious, insofar as religion is the territory of historicity.

Appropriations would be privileged channels to understand the second element of Pye’s theory (Pye 1969: 237, Pye 1971: 90-91), that is, ambiguity. Once religion is transplanted among different historical contexts, as is the case of Japanese Buddhism in Brazil, its practitioners start to selectively appropriate certain aspects of the symbolic system present in Brazilian culture. One of them, as will be discussed in the development of this article, concerns the incorporation of concepts and practices inherent to the mediumistic and Afro-Brazilian religions. The stage of ambiguity would be marked by syncretisms, which would enable zones of ambiguity (or, more precisely, ambivalence) that would allow multiple (and possibly contradictory) interpretations around the associated aspects (Pye 1971: 89-90).

However, two aspects need to be flexed in Pye’s theories regarding the stage of ambiguity. First, it would be a short, medium, or long-lived phase that would be “resolved” in three different ways, either by assimilation, fusion, or even dissolution of one of the senses of syncretism (Pye 1971: 92-93). To claim ambiguity as a phase may be theoretically fragile, framing the phenomenon in a teleology that is directed toward a particular direction in time. More important in the case is to understand the specific meanings of the issue within particular historical conjunctures, independent of a possible future resolution process.

Second, the syncretic movement does not occur between two repertoires to the same degree, since there would be a relatively established symbolic system (Japanese Buddhism) that, in turn, would appropriate elements (and not the whole) of the semantics of the other, such as Catholicism, the mediumistic, and Afro-Brazilian religions. This is not to say that the latter is not coherent repertoires, but that the unequal balance is mediated by historical agents, operating in a certain scenario

permeated by power relations, and involved with religious dynamics, in general immigrants accommodating themselves to Brazilian culture.

Finally, the last aspect of Pye's theory (Pye 1969: 237-238) would be the question of recovery. Faced with the perception that the transplanted religion would face certain problems, especially those derived from the ambiguity phase, certain historical subjects would seek to recover the "essence" of the tradition in the past. As Pye himself (Pye 1969: 238) points out, this is a theological problem, since the core of a given religion would be a matter of interpretation by social actors, who tend to interpret it as an original heritage that would have been threatened by external corruptions.

## Buddhism in the Period of Silence

Once the theoretical and methodological framework used in the present article is established, we seek to historicize the phenomenon under analysis. In the contact phase, Japanese Buddhism was introduced in Brazil in 1908, marking the formal beginning of Japanese immigration to the country. However, during the first half of the twentieth century, with exceptions, religion developed no-institutionally and mainly in the private sphere (Maeyama 1973: 415), especially in homes through the *butsudan*, the altars dedicated to Buddhas and other ancestors (André 2016c: 447). It was not, however, exclusive to Dharma, and a similar situation can be highlighted in the case of religions such as Seichō-no-ie, the Sekai Kyūseikyō, and Tenrikyō. Formally, Buddhist temples, with a few exceptions, began to emerge in the 1950s (Maeyama 1973: 415).

There are several reasons that led to what was called "religious silence" in the first half of the twentieth century (André 2011: 113). The main reasons are political in nature, insofar as the Japanese government itself and the emigration companies discouraged immigrants from proselytizing any kind of Japanese religion (Lesser 2001: 188). For this reason, there was a significant restriction regarding the arrival of monks to Brazil, except for Tomojiro Ibaragui, an HBS monk who arrived in the country on the first ship bringing Japanese families (Nakamaki 2002: 73-74). Even so, Ibaragui came as a "common" immigrant, even constituting a family (condition for immigration in the period) and was unable to develop institutional religious practices until the 1930s (Nakamaki 2002: 78-79).

Despite the case of Ibaragui, the most common situation was the absence of monks during the period, a reason that led lay immigrants to develop religious practices during wakes and funerals, reading sutras, so that they became known as "sutra readers" (Handa 1987: 384, 483). Even so, it is important to emphasize that these substitutes, due to the distinct circumstances of Brazilian society, gained a certain authority before the other Japanese and descendants, eventually playing a significant role in the construction of the first temples in the 1950s.

The recommendation that monks and other religious leaders did not immigrate to Brazil, in turn, referred to the appropriation by the Japanese authorities in relation to the representation of Brazil as a Catholic country (Lesser 2001: 188), despite the religious diversity existing in the territory at that time. In this sense, it was suggested

that immigrants convert to Catholicism, which would theoretically allow them to be better accepted in Brazilian society, which is an important point.

At the immigrants' inn in Kobe, Japan, a kind of preliminary catechism was carried out to introduce Catholicism to potential immigrants, considering that religion remained a relative minority in Japanese territory at the time. In 1933, the literary Ishikawa Tatsuzō, one of the critics of the circumstances under which Japanese immigration had been developed, drew attention to this catechism in his novel entitled "Sōbō." Even though it is a literary representation, Ishikawa emphasizes the strangeness immigrants felt when entering a church, being surprised by the height of the ceiling and the naked man crucified at the back of the hall (Ishikawa 2008: 59). In this sense, the potential conversion was a political strategy to better accommodate the Japanese in Brazil, although religiosity was in fact situated on a tactical terrain of appropriations.

The Japanese authorities' recommendations were not innocent, considering that an immigration project was designed so that it would not only displace population contingents between the two countries but also potentially result in diplomatic and commercial approximations (Seto and Uyeda 2002: 72, Sakurai 2000: 218). Furthermore, they probably did not ignore the racist discourses and practices that, derived from the nineteenth-century European scientific repertoire, were used in Brazil with the aim of disqualifying Japanese immigrants.

Japanese immigrants were seen as a danger to Brazil's efforts to "lighten" the complexion of the population, and people of Japanese descent were seen as an inferior race from the physical, moral, and intellectual points of view. The debates discussing Chinese immigration to Brazil, held in the second half of the nineteenth century, were a failed example. From the perspective of Brazilian politicians, there was no differentiation between Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Both populations were framed as yellow (Dezem 2005: 66-120, Lesser 2001: 160).

In fact, racist ideology was present in a variety of practices throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The supposed danger derived from the imperialist stance carried out by Japan between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was intensified after the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) (Dezem 2005: 149-150). During the government of President Getúlio Vargas, especially during the *Estado Novo*<sup>3</sup>, measures were put in place to restrict the development of Japanese culture in Brazil, such as the prohibition of speaking the native language in public and private spaces, the closing of schools in which the language was taught, and the necessity of Japanese-Brazilians to carry safe-conducts during their territorial displacement (Lesser 2001: 237, Takeuchi 2001: 27, 32).

It is interesting to see how racist discourse in the broader sphere was disseminated by the country's intellectual and political elite, being appropriated by "ordinary" people. Francisco de Campos, minister of justice during the *Estado Novo*,

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<sup>3</sup> The *Estado Novo* (New State, 1937–1945) characterizes a period in Brazilian history in which the government was established through a coup d'état headed by Vargas. The situation was marked by an authoritarian stance approached, ideologically, from the countries of the Axis, although Brazil was positioned with the Alliance during the World War II.

went so far as to disqualify the Japanese, emphasizing elements such as racial inferiority; moral weakness; and low-level culture, whether regarding religion or materialism, and to the militaristic stance, indicating the danger of Japanese presence in the border regions of Brazil in that historical context (Lenharo 1986: 132).

In the 1930s and 1940s, the sale of land by the Paraná government to a private company, *Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná* (CTNP), turned the municipality of Londrina into a frontier through the commercialization of land lots (André 2014a). The report of a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian (André 2015) was collected through oral accounts and documented the diffusion of anti-Japanese discourses in the border regions. She was one of the first Nisei in Londrina and one of the first to master the Portuguese language, as did her mother, prodigiously learning the language both at home and at school. She narrates that during the celebration of Brazil's Independence Day at school, and she had been invited by Vitorino Gonçalves Dias, then a physical education teacher, to carry the Brazilian flag. An excerpt from the interview (André 2015: n.p.) was transcribed below:

And Professor Vitorino said [that] on September 7 I was going to carry the flag. And I was very happy, right? [...] September, which was the biggest party in the city [...] Then I got there when it was time to pick up Professor Vitorino, right? He took it and separated it: you take this, you take this, and I with the Brazilian flag [...] When I'm about to leave, a teacher comes in, whispered to Professor Vitorino, came over to me and took the flag out of my hand. And I didn't understand, I was just scared looking and she took it, went over there and took the flag, then, Professor Vitorino had a face like that, you know? Then he came close to me [and] he said: no, don't get bothered [...] And for me, if it was born in Brazil, it is Brazilian, so that's why I wanted you to take the Brazilian flag, but that teacher thinks that you are not Brazilian, you look like a Japanese, so on September 7 you cannot carry the Brazilian flag. At that time I saw that I had a different face from the others. [...] I felt it, you know?<sup>4</sup>

From the point of view of those who assumed the anti-Japanese discourse, such as the anonymous teacher, it would be absurd for a “Japanese” girl to carry the Brazilian flag during the country's most important celebration. Even though she is Brazilian (according to the principle of *jus solis*) and has mastered the Portuguese language, she still has a “Japanese face.” This refers to the complex identity of Nikkei

<sup>4</sup> In the original, “E o professor Vitorino falou [que] no dia 7 de setembro eu ia carregar a bandeira. E eu fiquei toda feliz, né? [...] Setembro que era a maior festa da cidade [...] Aí chegou lá na hora de pegar o professor Vitorino, né? Pegou e separou: você pega essa, você pega essa, e eu com a bandeira do Brasil [...] Quando eu ‘tô saindo, entra uma professora, cochichou com o professor Vitorino, veio perto de mim tirou a bandeira da minha mão. E eu não entendi, eu só fiquei assustada olhando e ela pegou, foi pra lá e levou a bandeira, aí o professor Vitorino tava com uma cara assim, sabe? Aí ele veio perto de mim [e] falou: não fica magoada não [...] E eu pra mim nasceu no Brasil é brasileiro, então por isso que eu queria que você levasse a bandeira do Brasil, mas aquela professora acha que você não é brasileira, você tem cara de japonesa, então não pode em 7 de setembro carregar a bandeira do Brasil. Nessa época que eu vi que eu tinha uma cara diferente das outras. [...] Eu senti, sabe?”



in Brazil: to be civilly Brazilian, but “physically” Japanese (Seto and Uyeda 2002: 257).

Another important aspect of her report concerns the capillarity of the anti-Japanese discourse, which has spread even in border regions, becoming practices of physical or symbolic violence. On the other hand, there is also a significant element in the interview: the recognition of Dias in relation to her Brazilianness, summed up in the words “[...] for me, if it was born in Brazil, it is Brazilian [...].” This is an indication, perhaps, of how identities constructed from top to bottom are not absolute, and can be appropriated and reframed, referring to everyday forms of resistance (Certeau 2014: 43–44).

During the first half of the twentieth century, the historical context in question created obstacles to the constitution of institutionalized Japanese religions. The pressures on Japanese-Brazilians during the war would have strengthened these obstacles, including the closure of schools, the prohibition of speaking Japanese in public and private spheres, and the emphasis on racial hatred, which resulted in school fires (as happened in Rolândia [Maesima 2012: 144–147]) and physical aggressions justified by nationalism (Fujikawa 2018: 40–44).

One of the most emblematic episodes was the beating of Seiko Jimbo in Paraguaçu (SP), a religious leader linked to HBS who, during the recitation of *daimoku*, was attacked by Brazilians who believed that Jimbo was praying for Japan’s victory in the war. He would have persisted in his prayers until he fell (Nakamaki 2002: 89–90), which later became an epic narrative among HBS supporters in Brazil, as reported by one of the interviewees in this research (André 2016b: n.p.), who lived in Londrina and attended the Hompoji Temple.

Despite the obstacles to religious institutionalization, there were some noninstitutional forms of religiosity during the period, as the first immigrants transplanted, in the sense proposed by Pye, concepts, and practices that continued to guide their practices, still reconstructed according to the characteristics of the receiving society. The role of the monks’ substitutes should be highlighted here. The monks’ substitutes played the role of religious leaders themselves in the monks’ absence and ultimately constituted important pillars for the local religious demands. In Londrina, there are indications that Mankichi Nakatsukasa fulfilled this role, being the layman responsible for conducting religious rites even before the arrival of Japan’s first formation monk, Yasuyama Bonsui, who would take over the Honpa Honganji Temple in the early 1950s (André 2017: n.p.).

In addition to monks’ substitutes, domestic religiosity was practiced through improvised *butsudan*, considering that the cult of ancestors had to be rebuilt in Brazilian territory due to the deaths that occurred, generating new ancestors (André 2016c: 462). Finally, it should be remembered that the cemeteries of cities like Londrina and Assaí (State of Paraná) are marked by tombs from the first half of the twentieth century that have Buddhist symbols, eventually syncretized with Catholic elements (André 2011: 156–170), creating ambiguities, perhaps, due to the very distance in relation to the institutions.

In this text, we chose to analyze the development of Buddhism in Londrina and Rolândia, considering the significant presence of Nikkei in these cities. Through the approximate crossing of statistical data, Londrina’s Nikkei population in the 1960s

was 8,978 individuals, corresponding to about 6.65% of the total population, composed of 134,821 people (Suzuki 1969, p. 14, Arias Neto 1998, p. 299). When the Company started selling lots in the region, the first buyers were Japanese families, intermediated by agents of the company responsible for advertising and negotiating with the different groups of immigrants and descendants present in Brazil in the period, such as Germans, Italians, and Japanese (in this case, the agent was Hikoma Udihara) (Maesima 2012: 74, 77-79, Oguido 1988: 90).

The company built intense advertising aimed, to a large extent, at immigrants dispersed throughout Brazil, who could become landowners. This practice was particularly seductive, considering that many immigrants worked as settlers on the land of employers (André 2014b: 82-83). Another significant aspect of the company had to do with the facilitation policy regarding the structuring of ethnic colonies. These colonies were frowned upon during this period by nativist groups, such as the Society of Friends of Alberto Torres, who accused CTNP of forming ethnic cysts in the heart of Brazilian territory (Maesima 2012: 68, 92).

However, thanks to the company's policy, which also constituted a strategy to promote the sale of land in a country so marked by immigrant populations, in Londrina (which was also part of the Gleba Roland, in the 1940s became the municipality of Rolândia), five sections were established bringing together Japanese families (between 1931 and 1938), conceived in the form of a *mura* (Oguido 1988: 87-90, 92, 100-105, Maesima 2012: 107-109), the local organizational structures existing in Japan of the period (Benedict 1972: 74-76). The *mura* had relative organizational autonomy, comprising schools and associations, with the *murachō* in front of them, literally the "chief" or "leader" of the *mura*.

In the case of Rolândia, before its political breakup in relation to Londrina, eight sections were established along the same lines between 1932 and 1939 (Oguido 1988: 151-156). The data is significant as, over time, a German identity was built around Rolândia's territory, in view of the significant presence of the ethnic group in the locality. However, this homogeneous identity representation is fallacious, considering that other groups were present in the city, remembering that there are more Japanese sections in the locality than in Londrina. Even today, the Japanese-Brazilian presence can be verified through festivities, monuments in public squares, the Japanese Agricultural Museum, and the Dokoza Busshinji temple, the only Zen in the North of Paraná.

In both cities, anti-Japanese conceptions and practices were also present. In addition to the episodes of tension in everyday life, as seen (André 2015: n.p.), there were also deliberate criminal acts. One example of this was the fire in a Japanese school in 1938, of which the lawsuit, however, ended up being archived (Maesima 2012: 144-147). It is likely that the offense in question was motivated, in part, by the nationalist policy of the Vargas government, which had created a series of restrictions on the immigrant population in the country.

Japanese language teaching faced obstacles for more than a decade, by being prohibited to children under ten in 1932, to children under fourteen in 1934, and becoming illegal in 1941 (Kumasaka and Saito 1973: 451). It is possible that the effects of these language policies had medium and long-term duration in Brazilian territory since the linguistic domain has drastically declined from the first to

the second generation. Japanese speakers, who do not always dominate reading and writing, had almost disappeared from the second to the third (Suzuki 1969: 131).

## Institutional Buddhism and Its Challenges

### Three Temples in Northern Paraná and the Institutional Situation of Schools in the Country

From the second half of the twentieth century, despite the suggested permanency, a process of social, economic, and identity change for the Nikkei unfolded. Japanese-Brazilians, in general, started to consolidate themselves economically in the North of Paraná, which implied a social ascension and consequent resignification of their public identity, until then strongly marked by the anti-Japanese discourse (Fernandes 2010: 10). In Londrina and Rolândia, Nikkei crossed different segments of society, playing the role of farmers, local producers, market owners, photographers, teachers, etc. Later, when they started to occupy political positions, the fact would be flaunted by memorialists (Oguido 1988: 228-237, 271-287) as a source of pride for the “community,” not always as homogeneous as painted by these writers.

At the same time, starting in 1955, Japan entered the Era of Rapid Economic Growth, along the lines of American culture strategically imposed with the end of the World War II (Cole 2015: 88, 102-103). As a result, Japan’s image would change, from a militaristic nation to become an icon of international capitalism, with significant implications for the representation of Japanese-Brazilians as well.

It is precisely in this period of social, economic, and identity change for Japanese-Brazilians in Northern Paraná that the different Buddhist schools began to organize themselves institutionally. However, it is important to note that this institutional structuring happened only considering the demands made by the faithful themselves in the previous period, as well as noninstitutional practices such as those carried out by substitutes for monks such as Nakatsukasa, in Londrina, before the arrival of a Japanese monk connected to the True Pure Land School. Therefore, practices preceded institutions and not the other way around.

This was the case regarding the Honpa Honganji Temple, whose construction began in 1949, was founded in 1950 (Luiz 2017: 13-14), according to a stone monument existing in the premises of the place, even before the official arrival of the first formation monk (André 2017: n.p.). The temple was built based on the efforts of several members of the existing Japanese groups, who raised funds and helped with the construction in the form of collective effort, a relatively common practice among the Nikkei associations linked to the sections (Luiz 2017: 13-14, André 2015: n.p.).

The temple in Londrina belongs to a period slightly before the construction of the South American headquarters, the Temple Honpa Honganji do Brasil, located in the city of São Paulo, which was built only in 1954 (Usarski 2002b: 14). There were other precedents in Brazil, such as a study group held in Cafelândia (State of São Paulo) in the 1930s, which became a cult center in 1934 (Nakamaki 2002:

89, Matsue 2002: 194)<sup>5</sup>. In any case, the expansion of the school understood as a mission, started to occur in the 1950s by the Japanese matrix itself as a result of post-war Buddhism, seeking to internationalize itself in consonance both with the countries that received Japanese immigrants, such as Brazil and the USA, and with the spatialities where the religion spread through intellectual interests, such as Great Britain and Germany (Baumann 2002: 45).

Although the Nishi Honganji and the Higashi Honganji are linked to the same branch, the True Pure Land School, their institutional strategies are different at the local, national, and international levels. There is some circulation of elements between both subdivisions, such as, the dissemination of rites and festivities, for example, in the Honganji journal, a trilingual periodical (Portuguese, Spanish and Japanese) published in Brazil by the Nishi Honganji (Jornal do Hongwanji 2020: 2).

However, as institutions, both operate in various ways in Brazilian territory, one can highlight, in the case of the Higashi Honganji, the initiation of non-descendant monks since at least the 1980s. This is the case of the University of São Paulo professor Gonçalves (2002: 181) and engineer Murillo Nunes de Azevedo, even though their ordination took place in Japan (Gonçalves 2002: 181, Matsue 2002: 204). Both are important figures in the spread of Buddhism in Brazil, having passed through different schools, such as Sōtō Zen and Shingon before establishing themselves in the True Pure Land School (Gonçalves 2002: 174, 179 and 181; Matsue 2002: 203-204).

Although the picture cannot be generalized, and there are still Japanese monks in the Higashi Honganji, the situation seems to be different in the temples of the Honpa Honganji, where non-descendant religious leaders are rare. There is currently a perception that the aging of the followers would demand changes in the doctrine in Brazil, as suggested by Bishop Kajiwara (2020: 2) in an article published in the Honganji Journal. However, the designation of monks for the temple in Londrina, whether Japanese, Japanese descendants, or non-descendants, including in terms of language, is apparently not part of an institutional strategy to spread the religion to a wider audience (André 2022b: n.p.), which probably applies only to the headquarters in São Paulo.

Hompoji Temple, in turn, had been built in 1950, first in the city of Assaí and later transferred to Londrina in 1965 (André 2016b: n.p., Nakamaki 2002: 95-96). Its original wooden structure is still preserved in the temple's courtyard. It is likely that the transfer was derived from the central position occupied by Londrina in the region from an economic and political point of view, in parallel with a certain exodus of Japanese descendants from Assaí in the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>5</sup> The data present in the academic production about the group in Cafelândia are conflicting, as Hiro-tika Nakamaki (2002: 89) emphasizes that it was a cult center, while Regina Matsue (2002: 194) states that it was a temple. The difference here is important, since the temple status demands the international recognition of the school for such, which, with exceptions, occurred only in the 1950s. Furthermore, in view of the research produced, it is not possible to know whether the site in Cafelândia belonged to the Nishi Honganji (Honpa branch) or the Higashi Honganji (Ōtani branch) belonging to the True Pure Land School.

As a school, the temples belonging to the Honmon Butsuryū Shū in Brazil are in a different situation, since their institutional structuring occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, more precisely in the 1930s. The first cult nucleus was constituted in 1936 in the vicinity of Lins (SP), having been elevated to the condition of the temple, Taissenji, in 1937 (Nakamaki 2002: 85-86). Despite the restrictions for non-Christian religious leaders to enter the Brazilian territory, T. Ibaragui took charge of the place. After a series of difficulties in establishing a religious community of Honmon Butsuryū Shū in the country, the monk was invited to assume the religious functions at Taissenji in 1937 (Nakamaki 2002: 85-86).

Another characteristic of Honmon Butsuryū Shū concerns the local ordination of monks since 1939, when Ibaragui himself performed the initiation of Seihan, Myōshun, and Seidai Gohonzon (Nakamaki 2002: 87). This is an aspect that, among other Japanese Buddhist schools in Brazil, came to be realized only decades later, which has a significant impact on the expansion of Honmon in the country. Between 1965 and 1984, the branch started to send Brazilian monks to Japan in order to train them, including non-descendants, as is the case of Kyōhaku Correia (Nakamaki 2002: 102), currently the head bishop of the temple in Mogi das Cruzes (State of São Paulo), the Ryushoji. This was accompanied by the creation of different organs within the institution, such as the expansion department (André 2016b, n.p.), with the aim of spreading the religion beyond ethnic boundaries.

An interesting feature of the Honmon Butsuryū Shū in Brazil refers to the constitution of two dissident groups, the Seitaisengumi in 1953 and the Shimbokukai in 1959, both in the city of São Paulo. There is evidence that the segments developed syncretic appropriations in relation to concepts and practices of Afro-Brazilian religions (Nakamaki 2002: 96-97), creating a zone of ambiguity that would have justified the dissidence.

This created discomfort among the school authorities who, in the 1960s, sent the monk Jun'yō Nitige Mimaki, then supervisor of the religion in Brazil, both to promote expansion and to solve the problem of Seitaisengumi and Shimbokukai. The groups were reincorporated, which even involved the dispute over a Gohonzon by Shimbokukai members (Nakamaki 2002: 96-97). It is interesting to note that syncretism was probably understood as a deviant ambiguity by the dome of the school, demanding a resolution to recover what was understood as the orthodoxy of the doctrine, in line with the theoretical observations of Pye (1971: 237-238). As will be discussed below, this presented implications for the temple in Londrina.

The third temple discussed in this article is Dokozen Busshinji, built in 1964 (being, at the time, one of the three Zen temples in Brazil [Rocha 2002: 222]), constituting the only Buddhist temple in Rolândia, meeting the demands of the local Zen faith. In terms of school, Sōtō Zen has certain characteristics similar to the True Pure Land School and Honmon Butsuryū Shū, such as the question of missions, but at the same time significant differences with regard to the popularization of meditation in the West.

The Sōtō ZenShū Community of America was established in São Paulo in 1955, representing, in Brazil, three temples: the Dokozen Busshinji in Rolândia, the Busshinji in São Paulo, and the Zengenji in Mogi das Cruzes (Rocha 2002: 222-223). Like other branches in the country, Sōtō Zen has designated Japanese monks

to assume the religious functions of the temple, such as Ryohan Shingu at Busshinji since 1956 (Albuquerque 2002: 152), which implies that the rites are performed in the Japanese language.

However, with the progressive interest of the non-descending public in the activities of Sōtō Zen, more specifically the *zazen* sessions, initiatives emerged to form a native clergy. At first, people like R. M. Gonçalves and M. N. de Azevedo were initiated in Brazil (the former helping Ryohan Shingu linguistically), later completing their training in Japan (Gonçalves 2002: 174, Matsue 2002: 203). Although the cases in question cannot necessarily be generalized, considering the relative distance of non-descendants in terms of institutional bonds, especially monastic ones (Rocha 2002: 237), there was the constitution of a native clergy. Currently, one of the most popular figures linked to the Zen universe in media terms, Cláudia Coen (André 2018: 1242), is a non-descendant who was assigned, in the 1990s, to Busshinji in order to meet the demands of the Japanese and Brazilian communities (Usarski 2002b: 18-19)<sup>6</sup>.

In fact, as will be discussed in greater depth, later on, Zen began to attract a non-descending public relatively early on, with *zazen* sessions being held in the 1960s to attend to this segment of the population, due to the school's own diffusion beyond institutional channels. On an international scale, it is possible to highlight the action of intellectuals such as Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki in the mid-twentieth century, who began to accommodate Zen conceptions and practices in a Western perspective, dialoguing, for example, with philosophy (Rocha 2002: 242-243).

The publication of Suzuki's works in English, highlighting books such as *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (Suzuki 2005), allowed for wide dissemination outside Japan, including in the USA. His ideas were appropriated by the beat movement in the 1960s, with authors such as Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg (Baumann 2002: 49-50, Rocha 2002: 243). In Brazil itself, the intellectualized pre-knowledge of Zen through books was important to attract the non-Beat public, differentiating the diffusion mechanisms of the school when compared to the others<sup>7</sup>.

Having outlined in a preliminary way the history of the three schools in Brazil, it is important to return to the Japanese Buddhist scenario in Northern Paraná. The schools in question were quite popular in Japan since the thirteenth century, and it

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<sup>6</sup> Cláudia Dias Baptista de Souza, who became Cláudia Cohen from her Buddhist name, is a journalist who worked as a reporter for *Jornal da Tarde*. Coming from a Catholic family, she was initiated into Zen Buddhist practices and received ordination in the USA, having completed the formation process in Japan (André 2018: 1250-1251). In 1995, Coen was assigned to Busshinji Temple. However, in 2001, she left this (Usarski 2002a, b: 19) and founded Tenzuizenji Temple (later Taikozan Tenzuizenji). Also located in the city of São Paulo, the temple was recognized as such only recently, in 2018 (Comunidade n.d.: n.p.). Usarski (Usarski 2002a, b: 19) highlights that, in the period in which she was at the head of Busshinji, Coen was involved in tensions with a religious belonging to Sōtō Zen, which may have led to dissidence and the formation of Tenzuizenji.

<sup>7</sup> As suggested by the current monk in charge of the Honpa Hongwanji in Londrina, Marco Takaaki Yasunaka, whose Buddhist name is Entai Yasunaka (André 2022b: n.p.), eventually non-descendants contact the temple with the purpose of knowing if there is a meditation practice, which is not the case of the True Pure Land School. That is, this public profile eventually seeks Buddhism without specific knowledge of the symbolic system referring to the schools.

is possible that their constitution in Northern Paraná did not start from theological preferences, but from the very experience of the first-generation Japanese before immigration. In other words, the motivation to constitute the religious schools would have been the family custom, not doctrinal inclinations.

The very construction of Dokozan Busshinji in Rolândia in the 1950s is emblematic, considering that it is one of the three Sōtō Zen temples founded on Brazilian territory in the period: the choice for the city would have been made by Takashina Rōsen, high prelate of the school who had traveled to the country in the years in question, considering the larger number of families belonging to the school in the city when compared to other areas such as Londrina (André 2022b: n.p.).

In fact, one practice that preceded the institutions led, from the outset, to a significant change in Japanese Buddhism in Brazil when compared to that existing in Japanese territory. For example, in Japan, monks usually belong to families that assume, in a hereditary way, the religious functions of the temples; in a Brazilian context, monks took on the strictly religious tasks, being designated by the school headquarters, while Japanese-Brazilians started to manage the temples (e.g., in relation to finance), becoming presidents (Matsue 2002: 195-196, Rocha 2002: 226).

### Challenges for Japanese Buddhism in Brazil

Buddhist temples in the North of Paraná (as well as those present in different regions of the country), since their institutionalization process, started to face a common challenge which generated different responses: the progressive death of first-time immigrants' generation and the difficulty of maintaining religion among descendants of second and third-generation (André 2011: 93).

One of the main factors that led to this discontinuity precisely concerns the difficulties of preserving the Japanese language among the different generations. This is because at least in the first decades, the Buddhist rituals in these temples were performed exclusively in Japanese. One of the interviewees in this research (André 2016a: n.p.) belonging to the second generation says that during her childhood, she had no interest in attending Honpa Honganji, considering that the rituals were only in Japanese (although she understands the language, she only speaks Japanese in a domestic context). In fact, even though her mother is a Buddhist and frequented the temple, the daughter converted to Catholicism, participating in the rites at the Catholic Church *Rainha dos Apóstolos*, also close to her home (André 2016a: n.p.).

The crisis faced by the temples is significant insofar as non-Buddhist religions started to attract Japanese and descendants, as is the case with the daughter, who converted to Catholicism despite her mother's Buddhist customs. The Catholic churches are not the only source of competition, though its impact is quite significant. In addition, the recommendations issued by the Japanese authorities when immigrating to Brazil promoted the appropriation of the image of the Catholic country.

Furthermore, in the 1920s and 1930s, a Catholic project, especially in São Paulo, aimed to convert the Japanese "paganism" "inlaid" in the country's border regions, developed by priests like Domingos Chohachi Nakamura, Emilio Kircher,

and Agostinho Utsch (Yokoyama 1998: 49, 55, 58). In the North of Paraná, the project was delayed, taking place in the 1950s, when the Church Imaculada Conceição was built, with the support of Nikkei from the region, remaining a reference place among Catholics of Japanese descent until today. In addition, when the work was completed, a prayer center for Japanese and descendants in the rural region of Londrina (Emaús) was also conceived, which lasted for a few years (André 2015: n.p.).

### The Profile of the Monks

In face of the challenges, the responses were, and remain, varied and even contradictory. It is possible to develop a reflection on three different parameters: the profile of the monks, the language, and the audience. Starting from the first point, in the case of Honpa Honganji, the monks are appointed by the headquarters, and there is the numerically little formation of local clergy. A survey conducted on the website of the South American Buddhist Federation Jodo Shinshu Honpa Honganji in 2022 shows that most monks are Japanese, with a few cases of Japanese descendants and few exceptions involving non-descendants (Federação n.d.: n.p.). The situation is different, for example, in the Higashi Honganji, where the number of non-descendants is more expressive, although still a minority (Missão n.d.: n.p.).

In the Honpa Honganji of Londrina, since its foundation in 1950, most of the monks were Japanese who became religious in Japan, assigned to different regions of the world with the aim of spreading the Dharma. Until 2019, the monk in charge of the temple, Genyū Katata, was a young religious man who has resided in Brazil for about 10 years, having learned the Portuguese language for communication purposes, although he continued to perform most ceremonies in Japanese. Coming from Japan, Katata, who belongs to a monastic family, having been born in a temple, participated in a missionary work program for other countries and was assigned to work in Brazil (André 2014a: n.p.).

However, in 2019, Katata was transferred to the city of São Paulo and, in his place, the monk Entai Yasunaka was appointed, who remains in charge of the temple until the present (2022). He is a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian (Nissei) from Mandaguari, a city located about 70 km from Londrina. It is interesting to note that, being a son of immigrants, Yasunaka is fluent in both Japanese and Portuguese, both used in the Honpa Honganji ceremonies. The monk received his initiation in Brazil in 1987 and was ordained in 1999. However, his assignment to the temple in Londrina was not motivated by the fact that he comes from the same state, Paraná (André 2022b: n.p.). It is important to emphasize that Yasunaka was the first Japanese-Brazilian monk at the temple, a move that has occurred only recently since the foundation of the place in 1950.

On the other hand, Hompoji and Dokoan Busshinji temples seem to be moving in the opposite direction. In the case of the Hompoji temple, the monk currently in charge of the institution in Londrina is Gyōgen Campos, who is not of Japanese descent, having started his ordination in Brazil, although he traveled to Japan to learn the principles of HBS. This is an interesting case, as he is a non-descendant



endowed with authority in a temple whose public associates with Nikkei and non-descendants.

As seen, the situation of HBS is different because there have been national ordinations of monks since the 1930s and 1940s due to the seminal work carried out by Ibaragui in the first half of the twentieth century. There is also the presence of the first Buddhist temple in the country in the vicinity of Lins city. Therefore, even though Hompoji was transferred to Londrina in 1965, the religious structure was established earlier in Brazil, allowing for the national ordination of new monks who could circulate in different regions of the country.

It is also worth noting that there has been an expansion department of the religion since the 1970s, focused precisely on the spread of religion among the Brazilian public, including non-descendants, which was motivated by the visit of the aforementioned monk Mimaki in the mid-1960s (Nakamaki 2002: 74). There are goals to be accomplished, such as the faithful inviting a certain number of people to participate in the rites, and ultimately becoming new followers. Regarding the issue of the monastic body, Brazil's HBS website listed twenty religious leaders (among monks, bishops, and archbishops, remembering that the terminology around hierarchies was adapted from the Christian nomenclature [Elias 2016: 138-139]), seven of which are non-descendants, one of whom is a superior bishop, Kyōhaku Correia (Budismo primordial n.d.: n.p.).

The Dokoza Busshinji Temple also has a Brazilian nun, Haruko Jisshun, being a descendant of second-generation Japanese. Sōtō Zen in Brazil, as seen, has also carried out initiations in the country. This is a more recent process when compared to the one carried out by HBS, dating back to the 1960s, and carried out by the Busshinji Temple, in Bairro da Liberdade, in São Paulo. It is important to note that the most well-known nun in Brazil, Cláudia Coen, who was responsible for the spread of Buddhism in the media, mainly on YouTube, is also not of Japanese descent, having been ordained in the indicated period (André 2018: 1241-1242).

However, in the early years of Zen in Brazil, as suggested by the experience of different intellectuals (Gonçalves 2002:173, Albuquerque 2002: 152) at the Busshinji Temple in São Paulo, the ceremonies and instructions related to meditation sessions were taught by exclusively Japanese monks, although figures like RM Gonçalves became assistants and translators for monks like Ryohan Shingu (Gonçalves 2002: 174). In contrast, in Rolândia, the first monks were immigrants and descendants, as is the case with the first monk at the head of Dokoza Busshinji, Dōgen Fujii, of the first generation. The practice remained and is currently maintained by Jisshun (who, incidentally, received his lay ordination from Coen).

The profile of the monasticism in question is particularly significant in the case of Zen, considering that the Nikkei and non-descendant audiences tend not to be mixed up in the different practices (which also occurs in São Paulo [Rocha 2002: 225]), demanding from the religious leaders the use of different languages according to the ritual in focus. It should also be noted that Jisshun is the first woman in Dokoza Busshinji's monastic body.

The profile of the listed monks offers important clues to understand certain characteristics that Japanese Buddhism has assumed in Brazil, more specifically in the North of Paraná. First of all, only in the case of Hompoji Temple, the designation

of a non-descendant monk, supported by the school's own seminal history in Brazilian territory, is not casual, being part of the expansion logic initiated by HBS since 1965. In the cases of Katata, Yasunaka, and Jisshun, their designations to their respective temples were not the result, as suggested by interviews granted by the monks to the (André 2014a: n.p.; 2022a: n.p.; 2022b: n.p.), of strategic action by the schools in order to promote certain aspects, such as the case of the expansion at Honmon Butsuryū Shū.

Although the temples in northern Paraná are not disconnected from the history of their respective schools in Brazil, the data presented here point to an important cleavage in relation to the headquarters in São Paulo, which has not been mapped so far by academic production. In the headquarter temples, the appointment of monks meets strategic demands, as is the case, for instance, of Coen's appointment as head of Busshinji in the 1990s, replacing Moriyama Roshi, in view of the former's ability to work with both Japanese-Brazilian and non-descendant publics (Usarski 2002b: 18-19). In the temples of North Paraná, with the exception of HBS, the transit among monks is the result of a certain casualness, although the characteristics of the religious are decisive for the development of their activities and implications, as will be developed in the following items. In this sense, in these particular cases, the focus is more on the idiosyncrasies of the monks than on the strategies of the schools on a national and international scale.

## The Language

The origin of the monks is an important issue, given that national ordinances would decrease dependence on Japanese headquarters, allowing for better accommodation of the Dharma in Brazilian territory. This goes directly to the question of language, the second variable analyzed here, considering that Japanese speakers have drastically decreased to the point that only a small portion of third-generation descendants has any affinity with the language of their grandparents. RM Gonçalves (2002: 20), referring specifically to the True Pure Land School, alerted some years ago to the need of using Portuguese language in ceremonies and the translation of Buddhist texts as a condition for maintaining Japanese Buddhism in Brazil (Usarski 2002b: 20), which has occurred in a still very irregular way comparing the different schools in the country.

At Honpa Honganji, the ceremonies performed by Katata were held mainly in Japanese, with little need for Portuguese, according to field observations. This does not necessarily mean that Katata was a traditional monk, as he makes use of different strategies during the rites to make them dynamic and more interesting (especially for young audiences), such as playing guitar in the middle of the celebrations and singing Nenbutsu (André 2014a: n.p.). Together with his wife, he also used to play with his band, baptized as Oteirazão (which associates the word *otera*, or temple in Japanese, with the augmentative in Portuguese), at Bon Odori, a mortuary rite held in August and open to the public. However, probably due to the use of Japanese, the faithful who participate in ordinary ceremonies are almost entirely Nikkei, probably descendants of the first practitioners in Londrina.

In Yasunaka's case, the ceremonies are performed first in Japanese and then in Portuguese, given the monk's linguistic proficiency as a Japanese-Brazilian. However, soon after the religious was assigned to the Honpa Honganji in 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic emerged on an international scale, so that the temple's in-person rites were suspended (although they were broadcast online on the channel maintained by the religious [Marco Yasunaka n.d.: n.p.]), beginning to return to relative normalcy only in 2022 (André 2022b: n.p.). Still, on the subject of the Internet, the Honpa Honganji is disseminated on a page in Portuguese belonging to the school in Brazil more broadly, presenting some fundamental texts, as well as a listing of temples and monks active in the country.

In general, in the Honpa Honganji, the rites have two fundamental moments: in the first, of liturgical character, the hymns of the True School of the Pure Land are sung, and the letters of Rennyō<sup>8</sup> are recited; in the second, a quick lecture is given (André 2022b: n.p.). In the case of both Katata and Yasunaka, considering the different language abilities, translation occurs only in the last part, keeping the liturgy specifically in Japanese. This is an aspect that, as will be seen later, differs in the other schools

With all due specificities aside, the structure of the ceremonies in the different Buddhist temples (with the exception of the *zazen* sessions in the case of Sōtō Zen) is similar, consisting, first of all, of recitations and liturgical chants, and then the talks were given by the monks. The liturgy is articulated from the use of different texts, according to the schools, as well as varied intonations (even, e.g., between subdivisions of the same branch, such as the Nishi and the Higashi Honganji [André 2022b: n.p.]). In the case of Dokozen Busshinji, one of the differentials is that even part of the recitations is done by the Jisshun Nun in Portuguese, even using intonations in the local language. On the other hand, in consonance with the Temple of the True Pure Land School, the lectures are given in both languages.

On a table located at the entrance to the main hall of the temple, there are different promotional materials, some of them in Portuguese, such as folders (one of them teaches how to do *zazen* on a chair), issues of the magazine *Caminho Zen*, as well as materials entirely in Japanese. In general, the interior of the temple does not have posters, and it is full of iconic objects, mainly statues of the Historical Buddha, of the patriarchs of Zen (mainly Dōgen) and Kannon, the *bodhisattva* of mercy, reminding us that there are no doctrinal taboos in relation to the use of images. Unlike the other two temples discussed, although Sōtō Zen has a website in Portuguese regarding the school in Brazil (Comunidade s.d.), there is no listing of temples and monks in the country, so Dokozen Busshinji is not mentioned.

On the other hand, as a temple of Sōtō Zen, Dokozen Busshinji holds *zazen* sessions, although in smaller quantity and, moreover, in a more irregular way than the ceremonies described above. During these occasions, which will be described and analyzed more accurately in the next item, the language used by Jisshun is

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<sup>8</sup> In the fifteenth century, Rennyō was considered a restorer of the True Pure Land School in Japan (André 2022b: n.p.).

Portuguese, in line with the profile of the public that participates in the meditation practices.

At Hompoji, the picture is quite different. Firstly, there are several promotional materials in Portuguese, such as folders and posters, which can be viewed or distributed to supporters and visitors during the ceremony. The school has a website that also provides data in Portuguese. The website, besides being pleasant in terms of design and layout, discloses doctrinal elements which inform the temples in Brazil and the monks that lead them (Budismo primordial n.d.). Secondly, Hompoji's internal decoration, generally devoid of iconic images, presents posters with passages of important texts for HBS in Portuguese, inserting the visitor in the religious context and composing part of the symbolic system of the school<sup>9</sup>. Finally, apart from the main recitation of the school, the *daimoku*, much of the ritual is performed by the monk in Portuguese, from the sutras sung to the sermons themselves, as in the case of Dokozen Busshinji.

In general, the language options used in the three temples analyzed here have significant implications, especially on the issue of audience, as will be discussed in the next item. They are responses to a greater or lesser degree to the challenges of Japanese Buddhism in Brazil. However, it is important to emphasize the degrees of maintenance and linguistic adaptation, considering five dimensions: (1) in the liturgical part, the Honpa Honganji remains more conservative than the two other temples, maintaining recitations and chants specifically in Japanese<sup>10</sup>; (2) in the lectures, in all the temples addressed, the monks make use of both languages, which, however, presents idiosyncratic variations, with religious demonstrating greater or lesser linguistic mastery according to their profile; (3) the *zazen* sessions are applicable only to the case of Busshinji due to particularities of the school itself and are kept in Portuguese; (4) the texts and publicity materials are translated into Portuguese to a greater or lesser degree among the temples, although this is more emphasized in the case of HBS; (5) finally, still in relation to the Honmon Butsuryū Shū, there is a greater investment in the Internet pages, even though the Honpa Honganji has started to promote its contents through YouTube under the initiative of Monk Yasunaka. Despite the strong mediatization of Zen, the Busshinji remains less publicized in virtual terms<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> In the temples of Honmon Butsuryū Shū, as suggested by Elias (2016: 127), in general, images of iconic nature are not worshiped considering that the physical forms of several buddhas are transitory manifestations. On the other hand, the Primordial Buddha revered in HBS would be an ethereal manifestation. For this reason, altars, both in temples and in domestic oratories, have as their central object a composition of ideograms referring to the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to emphasize that the expression “conservative” does not refer, in this article, to a value judgment. Rather, it is a classification in relation to a religious institution that is less open to the flexibilization of its doctrines and practices in relation to external elements. The epistemological distancing also applies in the case of syncretic religions, not understood as corruptions of original beliefs. Strictly speaking, these are not categories that exist in pure states but involve different degrees of maintenance or flexibilization of belief.

<sup>11</sup> Among the several schools of Japanese Buddhism, Sōtō Zen is the most successful in terms of media insertion, appearing in magazines, television programs, and, more recently, YouTube channels. As stated, in Brazil, Nun Coen is one of the main promoters of this mediatized Zen.

## The Public

In view of the given presentation and analysis of the previous parameters, that is, the profile of the monks and the language used in the temples, the question of the public will now be addressed. This is a variable that is directly influenced by the elements in focus and at the same time presents important demands with regard to the transformation of these religious institutions in Brazil.

In view of the deliberate expansion project carried out by HBS, the composition of the public is quite significant. In an observation made in 2017, from a total of forty participants, six were non-Japanese descendants, but the proportion, on other occasions, can reach a balance between the audience profiles. It is likely that the role played by preaching in the native language has offered an accessible repertoire to those unfamiliar with Japanese, even allowing for unpredictable appropriations.

In line with the observations, Matsue (2002: 196–197) Rocha (2002: 229) around the composition of followers of temples from different schools in other regions of Brazil, the non-descendants of Hompoji seem to belong to the middle and upper class, having an intellectual profile and having “found” the temple after going through different religions, at the same time bringing part of the repertoire, which starts to be re-signified in Buddhism. In Japan, *daimoku* was a recitation that would allow the individual to achieve final liberation. In Londrina, it started to be used as a procedure to cure diseases, find employment, pass an exam, solve family problems, and even ward off harmful influences caused by certain entities, which can be interpreted as “confused” spirits. The report of a former adept interviewed here is emblematic:

[When I looked for the temple,] I was very depressed, chemically dependent on sleeping medication. And a colleague of mine, he took me [to the temple]. [...] The monks [...] had a very good spiritual energy [...] I had seven years of dependence on medication and I ended up freeing myself [...] because they had a [...] session [...] of Liberation inside the church, inside the temple. [...] They did the same thing that [...] the spiritual centers did, to give the pass. [...] They touched you, your hair, and they scared something away from you, some bad energy. [...] Touching, it was like a thwack as if it was a demon, an obsession [...]. (Anonymous 2017: n.p.)<sup>12</sup>

The former believer in question is an independent worker and had explored different religions, such as Catholicism, Neo-Pentecostalism, and Spiritism. In this case, contact with other fields allowed him to appropriate the HBS procedures, giving them new meanings referring to terms such as spiritual energy, liberation session,

<sup>12</sup> In the original, “[Quando procurei o templo,] Eu estava com depressão muito forte, com dependência química de medicamento para dormir. E um colega meu, ele me levou [para o templo]. [...] Os monges [...] passaram uma energia espiritual muito boa [...] Eu tinha sete anos de dependência de medicamento e eu acabei me libertando [...] porque fizeram uma [...] sessão [...] de Libertação lá dentro da igreja mesmo, dentro do templo. / [...] Eles faziam a mesma coisa que [...] o centro espírita fazia, de dar o passe. [...] Passavam a mão em você, no cabelo, e espantavam alguma coisa de você, alguma energia ruim. [...] Tocando, era tipo uma paulada assim como se fosse um demônio, um encosto [...]”.

pass, demon, and obsessions. The report is very significant, as it suggests the implications of the expansion of Japanese Buddhism in Brazil, bringing elements of other religions to the reading of the Dharma<sup>13</sup>.

It is possible to outline a hypothesis here, although further research is needed in order to support it consistently. It is likely that the syncretism with Afro-Brazilian religions perceived in Hompoji is inherited, in a certain sense, from the practices performed by the dissident segments of Honmon Butsuryū Shū themselves in the 1950s, the Seitaijūmi and the Shimbokukai, which demanded the intervention of a monk from the Japanese headquarters for their reintegration (Nakamaki 2002: 96-97). Despite this attempt to recover an orthodoxy, which fits the theoretical propositions of Pye (1969: 237-238), it may be that syncretic ambiguity has remained in certain temples as an appropriation of elements of a symbolic system from another repertoire with the aim of attracting new adherents, especially non-descendants.

Shoji (2003: n.p.) had already noticed a similar process in temples of the Shingon School in Suzano (São Paulo State), in which the monks themselves had promoted syncretism between Buddhist and mediumistic practices, meeting the demands of the “new” believers, from curing diseases to solving personal problems. One can question to what extent the phenomenon is new, as the so-called New Japanese Religions in Japan itself emphasized the resolution of immediate problems, which found significant repercussions in Brazil (Maeyama 1967: 38-39). However, it is important to point to these appropriations in Buddhism to suggest its changes in Brazilian territory.

But these appropriations are not always perceived in the same way by the historical subjects involved: MN de Azevedo, in the 1970s, distanced himself from Shin-gon (later approaching the True School of Pure Land) after realizing that syncretism with Afro-Brazilian religions began to take place (Matsue 2002: 204). In the case of Honmon in São Paulo, as seen, this dynamic demanded an act of reintegration by Monk Mimaki in the 1960s.

Returning to the public, in the case of Dokozen Busshinji (as well as other Zen temples in Brazil [Rocha 2002: 225]), the Japanese-Brazilian and non-descendant audiences are generally not confused, participating in differentiated practices, including from a linguistic point of view. On the one hand, Japanese-Brazilians from

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<sup>13</sup> A possible explanation for the process of syncretism between Buddhism and other existing religions in Brazil, considering initiatives carried out by monks and members of the associations responsible for the temples, concerns the competition between the different religious fields, providing contents that meet the demands of the potential practitioners. As Usarski (André and Luiz 2021: 30) points out, based on the considerations of Rodney Stark about the phenomenon of conversion, the process of transferring the faithful to another religion of the same matrix (as is the case, for instance, of distinct branches of Christianity, such as Catholicism and Pentecostalism) would be less traumatic, in that the practitioner would already know a significant part of the conceptions and practices inherent to the new belief, being led to learn relatively few aspects. The picture would change regarding the conversion to Japanese Buddhism, which has very different structural characteristics when compared to those existing in the Christian repertoire, demanding a significant learning of new content by the faithful. In view of this situation, it is possible that the syncretism of practices, such as the appropriation of mediumistic elements, constitutes a strategy for Buddhist leaders, both religious and lay, in the sense of offering more familiar content to the Brazilian non-descendant public, allowing greater viability for the conversion.

Rolândia tend to participate in mortuary celebrations, usually held in Brazil (and in Japan) by monks<sup>14</sup>. On occasions, the rites are performed in Japanese and Portuguese, in line with the characterization of the participants, who are not necessarily Zen adepts, going to the place to get involved in the mortuary sociability related to funerals and burials.

In this regard, the ceremonies do not differ significantly from those performed at Honpa Honganji. On the other hand, the composition of the audience varies almost entirely at the times when meditation sessions are held, which do not usually attract Japanese-Brazilians. In several observations made in 2016, in an audience of approximately ten people, about two were Japanese descendants, one of them being Nun Jisshun herself.

In the meditation sessions, the participating public involves non-descendants of Japanese people belonging to the middle classes, with a college degree already attained or in progress and who have had experience with other religions. This is the case with the faithful of Hompoji, except that in this one, the Japanese-Brazilians and the non-descendants share the same rites and spaces.

As seen, from the second half of the twentieth century in Brazil, meditative practices from the East began to gain popularity, highlighting, in Brazil, the action of Nun Coen (André 2018: 1242). In Dokoza Busshinji, as suggests Jisshun, meditation leads to new meanings of the practice, which would involve not only the search for Enlightenment but also other goals such as stress relief, overcoming psychopathologies such as depression and panic disorder, thus gaining therapeutic strains at first nonexistent among Japanese monks. The presence of non-descendants in meditation sessions can be explained by these reasons, as a form of alternative religiosity and therapy in relation to methods considered traditional.

Although in the case of Dokoza Busshinji the *zazen* sessions are not as popular as those held, for example, at the headquarters located in São Paulo, it is interesting to note that the presence of Brazilians of no Japanese descent did not lead to a greater degree of flexibilization of the symbolic system as in the case of HBS. At Dokoza Busshinji, it was not possible to observe syncretism with other repertoires, such as Afro-Brazilian religions. Furthermore, at the local level, there was no development of practices such as the cult to Aparecida Kannon, performed at the Busshinji of São Paulo, associating the figure of the *bodhisattva* Kannon, common in the Zen Buddhist universe in East Asia, with Our Lady Aparecida, a popular figure in Brazilian Catholic devotion.

The only area of ambiguity in Dokoza Busshinji seems to be the appropriation of *zazen* as a therapeutic mechanism by practitioners, although this is not emphasized by Nun Jisshun as a central element of the practice. On the contrary, the nun stresses that the search for *zazen* as a way to solve personal problems would be driven by

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<sup>14</sup> Since the seventeenth century, Buddhism assumed the monopoly of mortuary rites (Gonçalves 1971: 60), despite the attempt by certain families of priests, such as the Yoshida, to try to question this hegemony (Kenney 2000: 250). Even after the loss of the status of official religion with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the monks remained, as a matter of custom, connected to the issue of dealing with the dead. For this reason, whether in Brazil or in Japan, there is a criticism towards religion, synthesized by the expression *sōshiki bukkyō* (or wake Buddhism) (Kiyota 1969: 128-129).

individualism (André 2022a: n.p.), considering that, within Buddhism, the question of “self” would be an illusion that should be transcended to achieve enlightenment. However, Jisshun states that this profile of practitioners can start from individualistic demands to reach something deeper (André 2022a: n.p.).

In any case, there are important elements in the nun’s considerations, because it indicates the appropriations that the Western public makes regarding Zen as a religion focused on the individual’s well-being. Not coincidentally, there is a resistance on the part of those who do not descend from the *zazen* sessions to join the *sangha*, which implies collective commitments to maintain the temple and the teachings<sup>15</sup>. Even so, the local Sōtō Zen remained more religiously conservative, not deeply flexing the symbolic system as in the case of Honmon Butsurū Shū.

Additionally, the Honpa Honganji was the temple where the lowest adherence of the non-descendant public to the ceremonies was perceived. During a rite performed in 2014 by Katata, about thirty people attended, with only three non-descendants. The picture showed little change in this regard, to the extent that in an observation made in 2022, 8 years later, there were twenty-six people at a ceremony performed by Yasunaka: among them was one young non-descendant, while the rest of the audience was composed of Japanese and descendants (mainly first-generation) in their seventies and above, on average.

The number and distribution of participants vary only during the Bon Odori held in August (although it did not take place in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic), which usually involves hundreds of individuals. However, they participate in the occasion as part of the festivities of the local Japanese culture, not paying attention to the Buddhist context in which it takes place. Moreover, these people generally do not return to the temple as part of the *sangha* (André 2018, André and Luiz 2018).

Even among Japanese descendants, the absence of children and young people during the ceremonies, with the exception of Bon Odori, is notable. In an interview conducted with two participants belonging to the second generation of Japanese, it was pointed out that the Honpa Honganji no longer has *seinenkai*, that is, the youth association<sup>16</sup>. One of them even emphasized that he misses children running around the temple space, which is symptomatic of the aging of the followers and the little continuity of the religion among the younger population (André 2022c: n.p.).

Non-descendants, in turn, are composed of two categories of participants: on the one hand, spouses of Japanese-Brazilians who end up going with their partners to the temple, and on the other hand, external interested people who seek the Honpa Honganji, sometimes with the expectation that meditation practices are performed there, ignoring the differences between the schools (André 2014a: n.p., 2022b: n.p.).

<sup>15</sup> In Brasília (Federal District), Matsue (2002: 213) also observed the issue of emphasis on individualism and little involvement with the *sangha* in a Higashi Honganji temple. In fact, unusually, at the place in question, a form of meditation similar to *zazen* was developed despite the symbolic system of the True Pure Land School (Matsue 2002: 199-200).

<sup>16</sup> In general, Japanese religious institutions have youth, gentleman, and women’s groups.



Finally, Honpa Honganji distances itself from the zones of syncretism noticeable in Honmon Butsurū Shū. Moreover, although both schools are recitative in nature (taking, and daimoku as their basis), in Honpa Honganji, the monks move away from the question of immediate benefits such as curing illness or solving personal problems, keeping the symbolic system closer to an orthodox view (André 2022b: n.p.). The only perceived zone of ambiguity does not concern the appropriation of religious elements inherent to other repertoires, such as Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian religions, but the realization of secular activities such as the sale of *feijoada*, a popular dish in Brazilian cuisine.

The analysis of the audience question allows to understanding the different stances of the schools at the local level, implying or not the flexibilization of religious repertoires. On the one hand, the Honpa Honganji and the Dokoza Busshinji maintain a more conservative profile in doctrinal terms, with resistance to the creation of zones of ambiguity. The appropriations in both temples involve elements apparently secular to the practices, such as the sale of *feijoada* and the therapeutic issue (in the case of *zazen*). Still, the Dokoza Busshinji, although in a sensitive way when compared to the Sōtō Zen in São Paulo, enables a greater openness to non-descendants considering the issue of meditation, non-existent at the Honmon Butsurū Shū and the True Pure Land School. On the other hand, the Hompoji has made the symbolic system more flexible, deepening the syncretic ambiguity zones, by appropriating elements of the mediumistic and Afro-Brazilian religions, and starting to attract a more expressive amount of the non-descending public.

## Final Remarks

It would be possible to continue the reflection from other aspects, but this would escape the possibilities of the present text. Furthermore, the question is open, in that more fieldwork and interviews would need to be conducted, for example, with supporters of the Honpa Honganji and the Dokoza Busshinji. In any case, this article started from the following problem: how did three Japanese Buddhist temples develop in the North of Paraná, accommodating themselves culturally to Brazilian society? The central pillar of the discussion concerns how these aspects responded to the common challenge of Buddhism in Brazilian territory, concerning the progressive death of first-generation immigrants and the discontinuity of the Japanese language. Part of the answers concerns the need for expansion among non-descendants to establish an originally Asian religion in an initially strange society.

As seen, there were significant obstacles to the establishment of Buddhism in Brazil. At first, the Japanese authorities created restrictions for the proselytism of Japanese religions overseas, appropriating the representation of the Catholic country to avoid conflicts with Brazilian society, tensions that, incidentally, had existed since the nineteenth century with the anti-Japanese discourses, which made the Japanese racially, culturally, and morally inferior. Throughout the twentieth century, the statements were transformed into discriminatory practices, so that the Dharma remained, with some exceptions, focused on noninstitutional practices such as the domestic cult of ancestors, cemetery religiosity, and the role

of substitutes for monks, who created parameters which would make the institutional establishment of religions possible in the second half of the twentieth century.

From the 1950s, conditions for the institutional arrival of Buddhism in Brazil emerged. In Northern Paraná, the three schools began developing a different color from those existing in Japan: the monks would not be owners of the temples, but responsible for religious matters. Faced with the identified challenges, the schools created varied responses, with greater or lesser impact, which continue to move in Brazilian society, constituting an unfinished phenomenon. Three parameters were addressed: the profile of the monks, the use of language, and the target audience.

These parameters generated implications for the symbolic system concerning schools, such as syncretism with mediumistic elements in the case of HBS and the search for Zen as an alternative form of religiosity and therapy. It is possible to say that they all started to invest in native clergy and in the use of the Portuguese language to attract varied audiences but at different degrees of development. Hompoji and Dokoza Busshinji, until now, have found apparently more effective mechanisms to accommodate themselves to Brazilian culture, either by syncretism or by meditation as a way to achieve well-being, respectively.

On the other hand, Honpa Honganji remains more conservative, preserving more orthodox doctrinal boundaries, although there is an appropriation of Brazilian community activities, such as the selling of *feijoada*, which, however, does not affect to a greater degree its symbolic system of a religious character. The Dokoza Busshinji also retains a certain orthodoxy, although it has an easier time responding to challenges due to the popularity of meditation in the West.

The reflection developed allowed not only the analysis and interpretation of Buddhism in Brazil but, more specifically, its process of local accommodation. Although there are parallels with the São Paulo phenomenon, there are also differences that cannot be uncharacterized. Among them, it is possible to highlight that the temples in question, with the exception of Hompoji, develop survival strategies that depend only indirectly on the action of their respective schools, relying more decisively on the characteristics of the monks at the head of the local communities. This is different from the dynamics of the central temples in the city of São Paulo, suggesting the implications of a more localized look to dimension the phenomenon.

The changes suggested here should not be understood as corruptions of original beliefs, which would have been distorted by the Brazilian interpretations of conceptions and practices. The greater or lesser flexibility of Buddhism, as it has occurred throughout history, are indications of the historicity of this religion that hold impermanence as a central teaching of Dharma.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author declares no competing interests.

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