

Research Article



***Easternization of the East? Zen and Spirituality as Distinct Cultural Narratives in Japan***

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Zen Buddhism has for decades fascinated the West, and the former elitist tradition has in contemporary times become part of broad popular culture. Zen is for Buddhists, but it is also part of a general “Easternization” and alleged “spiritual revolution” narrative. In Japan, both Zen and “spirituality” are important factors in both media and the lived religious environment. This article aims to investigate how and to what extent “Zen” and “spirituality” are related as narratives and religious practices in a contemporary Japanese context. While there are overlaps, it is argued that the two domains are separate and that such a division is based on general differences in culturally constrained narratives (Western/Japanese, Zen/spirituality). Besides focusing on a concrete Japanese context, the article also contributes to research on global and transnational (Zen) Buddhism as well as to the field of comparative spirituality.

**Keywords:** Japan; Zen; Easternization; spirituality; new age; circulation

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### **Zen, Popular Culture, and Spirituality**

Is there a ‘Zen spirituality’ in Japan? The question is relevant both because “spirituality” (スピリチュアリティ) is an important feature of contemporary Japanese religion and popular culture, and because popular culture and ‘spirituality’ in the West very often include or are heavily inspired by Eastern Buddhist (particularly Zen Buddhist) ideas and practices. Is this kind of ‘Zen’ a source and important practice of spirituality present in contemporary Japanese popular and religious culture? What are the implications and possible explanations for any correspondences or differences? Apart from a concrete focus, this article also addresses in a more general sense questions of cultural transformations and circulations with their specific agencies, institutions, discourses, roots, and routes between East and West.

### **Cool Zen and the Art of Spiritualizing the West**

Zen as an elite practice and culture has for decades been a part of the Western intellectual tradition. Through international elite networks, Zen came to the West first as inspirational food for thought as far back as the late nineteenth century. Zen

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subsequently appeared within the counterculture movements of the late 1960s as a practice to be embraced by practitioners, for whom the “three trends of universalization, psychologization and individualization came together in the development of the concept of ‘religious experience’” (Braak, 2008: 6). Among scholars, Zen has long been a signifier of elite religion as opposed to the popular religion of the masses (Borup, 2014). Zen koans, Zen stories, and Zen meditation have been interpreted within the frames of mysticism, philosophy, and psychology, often placed at the top of an implicit evolutionary perspective.<sup>1</sup> Zen Buddhism in the West has most often been identified not with the religion of Japanese immigrants and their descendants, but with Euro-American, meditation-oriented, and spiritualized Buddhism.

Apart from its association with Buddhism and Japanese culture, Zen in the West has, especially since the 1970s, become a practice and idea no longer bound by elitist and religious barriers. Spiritual seekers, thinkers, artists, avant-garde poets, counterculture beatniks, and ecologically and socially engaged activists from the well-educated middle class have used Zen as an inspiring way of life to gain insight and move beyond institutionalized religion. Zen is also a symbol of what Heelas and Woodhead call the “spiritual revolution” (2005), wherein the self—rather than external gods, bodhisattvas, culture, and society—is both the origin and goal of spiritual development.<sup>2</sup> Zen meditation (*zazen*) is the epitome of such spiritualized Zen, not the least because “images of people sitting in the lotus position are the most commonly occurring religious image in news magazine ads” (Moore, 2005).<sup>3</sup> Zen has also become a mainstream supplier in the spiritual market, especially in the United States, “selling spirituality” (Carrette and King, 2005) with Buddhist journals such as *Tricycle* and *Shambhala Sun* and hundreds of Internet sites providing (Zen) Buddhist merchandise as part of a “commodified, global folk Buddhism” (McMahan, 2008: 262).

As a result of their manifold transformations, Zen Buddhist notions and practices have become detached from their religious or cultural origins, and have turned into ‘Zen’ as a mental ideal or therapeutic tool with which to live a pure and spiritual life.<sup>4</sup> Books on “Zen and the art of...” have become a commercial genre, and self-development stories in lifestyle magazines express the Western spiritualization of Zen as a brand of coolness and authenticity, semantically equivalent to “mind,” “quality,” “truth,” or spiritual essence. “Zen” sells Shiseido perfume, makeup, apps, tea, and MP3 players, and is a good brand, whether for health products, bars, restaurants, or cars. “Look inside to discover your

<sup>1</sup> One such example is Mircea Eliade’s *From Primitives to Zen* (1968), which on the one hand signals Eliade’s universalism; and on the other hand, his evolutionary ideas.

<sup>2</sup> Buddhism is thus categorized as part of spirituality and the holistic milieu rather than (traditional) religion (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005: 24, 156, 160 n4b).

<sup>3</sup> This may also be reflected in a survey on Buddhism in Germany (Prohl and Rakow, 2008: 21) in which 84 percent of the respondents found Buddhist practice to be “spiritual” rather than “religious” (57 percent).

<sup>4</sup> See Rocha, 2006: 114–117 on how Zen in Brazil has spread to a larger New Age audience. A parallel example of integrating Zen practice in a “native” religion is the “case” of a Danish Protestant church introducing *zazen* as a means of spiritual search, provoking some to claim that the church was misusing its authority.

Zen” is the slogan for a Toyota car called Yaris Zen, a “truly enlightened decision,” and among the sites of the Japanese National Tourist Organization’s (JNTO) “spiritual tour,” several Zen temples are described as offering “spiritual experiences.”<sup>5</sup> “It is all very Zen” has become a meaningful sentence, and finding your “moment of Zen” has, since having acquired the status of a Daily Show mantra, become a meaningful truth claim (see Irizarry’s article in this volume).

Zen in the West has become the epitome of a general “Easternization” process, particularly because of practices related to “the Way of Zen” being “recognized as genuine spiritual activities” (Campbell, 2007: 36). Zen is a true metaphor for the “massive subjective turn of modern culture” (Taylor, 1991: 26), wherein both institutionalized Zen Buddhism, spirituality (as phrased by the mantra “spiritual, not religious”), and secularized popular culture are indebted to a brand image of quality. The idea of a “semantic stretch” (Lloyd, 2012: 85–86), in which sharp divisions and semantic boundaries are transgressed, but not transcended, encapsulates the transformative life of “Zen.” Rather than being an *empty* signifier, the concept of Zen is a *floating* signifier that points to a general meta-narrative relating to both religious, spiritual, and secular/popular levels of representation, which could be formulated like this: Once upon a time, absolute Truth was experienced and transmitted via teachings, practices, and institutions so that each individual through serious effort could experience the same authentic Truth, represented and symbolically accessible through metaphors pointing directly to authentic reality.<sup>6</sup> The “portable practice” of *zazen* and the “transportable message” of Zen teachings, “susceptible to being transformed or reordered without being denatured” (Csordas, 2009: 5), are to a large extent plastic and transformable, generalizable and universal (*ibid.*), but also embedded in concrete networks of meaning, discourses, and routes of dissemination. Ancestor belief and funeral services are quintessential for East Asian and hence Japanese religious traditions, not to mention Zen Buddhist institutions, which have integrated such practices as important ritual and economic bases. These parts of “cultural” Zen have little recognition in Western Zen, unlike individualized spirituality.

### **Zen Roots and Routes: Global Zen, Cultural Zen, and the Art of Studying Invented Traditions**

Popular images in the West of Zen as a spiritual path for a large crowd of countercultural individuals are far from typical Japanese Zen Buddhism. Broadly generalized, a meta-narrative of living Zen Buddhism in East Asia is (and, to a large extent, has always been) related to institutionalized, collective religion, which is hierarchically represented by patriarchs functioning as ritual specialists and mediators of absolute truth and a trans-empirical otherworld on behalf of the majority population. What Grace Davie calls “vicarious religion” (2007) is thus at least as applicable to traditional lived religion in an Eastern (and also a Zen Buddhist) context as it is an emblem for an allegedly typical

<sup>5</sup> Toyota poster: Zen Yaris (2011). <http://www.japantravelinfo.com/trade/pdf/spiritualtour.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Such a general narrative is typically found in the writings of D. T. Suzuki and in much Western esotericism and contemporary literature on “spirituality,” focusing either on its universality or Japanese/Eastern particularism.

modern religiosity in a Western (Christian) context: the priesthood perform religious activities on behalf of a “passive” majority of adherents. It need not be an expression of an American Zen master’s arrogance in marketing invented ideals of authenticity when he claims that the reader of his book “has more knowledge about Zen than any random person you might meet in Japan” (Warner, 2010: 238). The question, of course, is: What “Zen” is he talking about?

The Zen narrative mainly known in the West is not unknown in Japan because the modernization and individualization of (Zen) Buddhism has also been part of an indigenous transformation process rather than a one-way construction from West to East. But this narrative has also been imported to and constructed in Japan via East-West interactions because global routes have also had repercussions on their Asian roots. The latter, too often ignored in scholarship on global religion, can be seen as a kind of “reverse orientalism,” or expressed through metaphors such as a “looping effect,” or a “feedback effect” (McMahan, 2008: 57), in which the circulation of ideas is “mirrored,” transformed, and returned through East-West encounters—the most widespread metaphor probably being the “pizza effect.” Just like the pizza’s transformation from Italy to the United States and back to Italy, religious inventions of authenticity based on cultural encounters and identity creation through mirror images were means of religious identification processes in Hindu India and Buddhist Sri Lanka in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Bharati, 1970).<sup>7</sup>

In their endeavor to transform dark images of an antiquarian folk—and later persecuted—religion, Meiji era (1868–1912) intellectuals managed to shape a rationalized and spiritualized version of Buddhism that catered to an internationally minded elite in both Japan and the West (Ketelaar, 1990). To some extent, the “Protestant Buddhism” of Sri Lanka had its counterpart in “Protestant Zen” (Sharf, 1995) in Japan, where “pure Zen” (*junsui zen*) became the mantra of a textualized, universal philosophy, psychology, science, and theology, and Zen became the ideal of the unmediated experience so much valued in nineteenth-century trends to psychologize religion. Furthermore, the writings of D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and his friend and Zen scholar Shin’ichi Hisamatsu (1889–1980) in particular helped to construct the image of Zen as an expression of Japanese fine culture (e.g., the tea ceremony, martial arts, gardens, calligraphy) and, in general, the spiritual soul of “Japaneseness.” While *junsui zen* was primarily an elitist construct for an intellectual segment of society, Zen culture (*zen bunka*) and popular Zen (*daishū zen*) were invented traditions with a broader appeal, both “Japanizing” Zen and “Zenizing” Japan. These are universalized and culturalized discourses “in terms of language of metaphysics derived from German Romantic idealism, English Romanticism, and American Transcendentalism” (McMahan, 2008: 125), but the embeddedness and entanglement in networks and routes of agency, space, and discourse provided at least as much inspiration and impact from East to West. D. T. Suzuki was “an important figure in the earliest attempts to spread Zen beyond East Asia and harmonize it with Western thought and practice” (ibid.: 122).

<sup>7</sup> One example of this is the influence of Western “blue-eyed Zen masters, vipassana and psychotherapy practice on Korean Buddhism” (Joo, 2011). Other examples of transformations and reinterpretations of Tantra can be seen in Urban (2003).

The “Suzuki effect” (Faure, 1993: 54) has had a great impact on Western practitioners and scholars of Zen, but it has also played an important role in Japan,<sup>8</sup> particularly among philosophers of the Kyoto School and Buddhist scholars, where Suzuki still stands out as a unique personality.<sup>9</sup> As a lived religion and cultural paradigm, the impact and importance of “Suzuki Zen” is more difficult to measure. The fact that there are institutionalized or lay Zen Buddhist meditation assemblies (*zazenkai*, one of which, Sanbō Kyōdan, Sharf [1995] described as a new religious movement) and the fact that the manufacturing of Zen gardens and martial arts as “Zen” was generally accepted in Japan (Yamada, 2009: 241) obviously points to such relational inspiration. Such “Western inspired” Zen is seen in a Rinzai sub-temple in the Myōshinji main temple complex in Kyoto. Here, the priest Kawakami, after having returned from his stay in the United States, “has reached out to both Japanese and non-Japanese in his efforts to promote an authentic style of Zen meditation and practice” (Nelson, 2013: 196). Though combining *zazen* with yoga and garden views in a temple, which is “a perfect location for extended encounters with new combinations of spiritual traditions” (ibid.: 199), it will “take a new alignment of the tradition and its sociocultural context (or perhaps the appeal of a popular television show) for the practice to gain even a fraction of its popularity in the West” (ibid.). Most visitors to the temple are Westerners searching for authentic Japanese Zen.<sup>10</sup>

While post-Zen deconstruction since the 1990s has left little space for continued Zen romanticism in academia, new kinds of questions can also be raised with reference to the general study of religion. Investigating how and to what extent Zen is or is not part of contemporary Japanese spirituality not only points to general trends within Japanese religion, but also to questions of a “comparative spirituality” between East and West. Have there been analogical developments or genealogical relations, generating circular transformations? Are “spiritual Zen” and “funeral Zen”<sup>11</sup> (*sōshiki bukkyō*) simply two

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<sup>8</sup> On the Suzuki effect, see Faure (1993) and Borup (2004 and 2008). Additionally, “Suzuki Zen” has been accommodated among not only Western, but also Japanese psychologists (Young-Eisendrath and Muramoto, 2002). Psychotherapy was imported to Japan from the United States after the Second World War, but had its local predecessor in the 1910s as “mental cure” (*seishin ryōhō*), advocated by the Zen priest Hara Tenzan (Yoshinaga, 2014). Ando (2003) furthermore refers to the Western popularity of Zen and *zazen* in his approach to presenting Zen to a Japanese audience. In Kanazawa, a D. T. Suzuki museum has been built to honor him as a known citizen of the town, attracting local and national visitors. In some of the larger bookstores, small sections have even been dedicated to Suzuki.

<sup>9</sup> In a conversation with Buddhist priest Otani Kōshin, the well-known anthropologist Ueda Noriyuki exclaims admiration for D. T. Suzuki, asking “I wonder if there will ever again appear such a person for Japanese Buddhism” (Otani and Ueda, 2010: 268).

<sup>10</sup> I interviewed rev. Kawakami twice in 2009 and 2010 and have followed up with e-mail correspondence.

<sup>11</sup> “Funeral Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō*) was first coined in 1963 by a scholar of Buddhism, Tamamuro Taijō, to describe and criticize Buddhism of the Meiji period as primarily focusing on mortuary rituals. He and later Buddhists and scholars have also used this as a derogative term for contemporary (Zen) Buddhism (Bodiford, 1992).

distinct fields, signaling two different cultures and two distinct sociologies of knowledge?

### Spirituality in Japan

“Religion” is a Western concept translated into Japanese as *shūkyō*. It is debatable to what extent the premodern understanding of *shūkyō* as (mainly scholarly Buddhist) “sect-teaching” corresponds to premodern Western or contemporary Japanese uses of the term (Josephson, 2012: 1–17). To many Japanese, the concept’s Christian and nineteenth-century theological connotations focusing on doctrines, faith, engagement, membership, and mono-affiliation do not correspond to the ideas and practices which could otherwise, in a phenomenological and comparative light, be characterized as “religious.”

If “religion”—especially in a transcultural sense—is fluffy, then the concept of “spirituality” is equally or even more fluid and problematic. While some scholars find it to be a signifier referring to a process of religiosity going from a traditional focus on an other-worldly authority (“God out there”) to a personal search for authority within (e.g., Heelas and Woodhead, 2005), other scholars have questioned the phenomenon and relevance of the concept (e.g., Voas and Bruce, 2007).

‘Spirituality’ is furthermore used and manufactured in its diversity in both Western and Japanese contexts as a term used by religious practitioners who understand themselves as “spiritual” rather than “religious”—typically pointing to ‘true religiosity’ beyond institutionalized religion. While spirituality in the West is often heavily influenced by Eastern traditions, Japanese spirituality often incorporates Western spirituality or “Westernized” Eastern spirituality.<sup>12</sup>

Spirituality (as *reisei*) was probably first coined by D. T. Suzuki to describe a universal, non-institutional, experience-based “true religiosity,” as opposed to its connotation of spirits, ghosts, or otherworldly forces and the negative implications of the concept of institutionalized religion (Shimazono, 2012: 9; Horie, 2009–2011). “Spiritual,” or *supirichuaru* (スピリチュアル), and “spirituality,” or *supirichuariti* (スピリチュアリテイ), are of more recent use. Both are mostly related to non-institutionalized religiosity, and the latter term is almost exclusively used by researchers, whereas the former is used as an emic, generic folk term. The term *seishin sekai* first denoted a specific section in bookstores in 1978 (Shimazono, 2012: 4), containing books on spirituality that appealed

<sup>12</sup> While some scholars’ personal interests in spirituality are evident from their explanations of spirituality booms or even “spiritual revolution” (Kashio, 2010, referring to Heelas and Woodhead, 2005), other scholars take a more critical view. Horie Norichika thus claims that “the Western notions of spiritual and spirituality are more religious than the Japanese equivalent” (Horie, 2009–2011: 2), wherein being spiritual often has a connotation of being foreign and fashionable. According to Prohl, “it seems safe to argue that New Age thought has become so popular in Japan not so much because of some fundamental similarities with traditional Japanese religions, but because it serves conveniently to fuel the highly influential self-orientalistic discourse on Japanese religions” (Prohl, 2007: 369).

especially to women who took part in spiritual movements (*shin reisei undo*). While largely overlapping with Western New Age, there are some advantages in distinguishing between the two. In terms of content, it can be said that the typical New Age ideas of a turning point and a dawn for a new age came to an end with the Aum Shinrikyō event,<sup>13</sup> and it seems plausible to use notions of “spiritual business” only with reference to the post-Aum “spirituality boom” (Gaitanidis, 2011: 188). The contemporary concept of *supichuariti* seems to suggest a more light and positive image than the *seishin sekai* of the 1980s (Arimoto, 2011: vi), just like the power spot boom is a more positive version of the traditional concept of “this-worldly benefits” (*genze riyaku*).<sup>14</sup> And where New Age and *seishin sekai* could also be said to be a socially organized antithesis to the material world, contemporary spirituality is mainly individualized and this-worldly, with well-being and health as major keywords (*ibid.*: 42).<sup>15</sup> Self-expression and a post-secular search for authenticity are also part of contemporary Japanese culture, and a “psychology culture” or “therapy culture” (Koike, 2012: 42) based on networks rather than religious institutions (Itō, 2012: 121) is widespread.<sup>16</sup> Though still not the accepted norm in Japanese religious institutions, “living for one’s own fulfillment has become the dominant cultural meaning of *ikigai*” (Matthews and Izquierdo, 2008: 171), and few Japanese identify their *ikigai* (feeling of happiness or well-being) with religion (*ibid.*: 176). As opposed to the pre-Aum “boom in the occult” (Tsuji-mura, 2008: 46), “the current boom in spirituality [has] changed from emphasizing peculiarity and abnormality to a more relaxed daily routine, and the focus has changed from middle-aged women who have an interest in these mysterious phenomena to younger women” (*ibid.*). The users of the spiritual world are often well-educated, economically secure, and conscious consumers and thus often have more economic and cultural capital than the average Japanese.<sup>17</sup> The “new spirituality has an individualistic inclination and prefers loose networks to structured organizations” (Shimazono, 2012: 18), and while it is often distinct from religion, thus signaling a general process “from religion to spirituality”

<sup>13</sup> Aum Shinrikyō was a new religious movement whose sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 has caused a lasting negative image in Japan of new religions in particular and religion in general. On the aftermath of Aum and the “Aum effect,” see Reader (2012) and Baffeli and Reader (2012).

<sup>14</sup> While this-worldly benefits as objects of ritual transactions are typical for all religious traditions in Japan throughout history, the promotion of sacred places (e.g., shrines, temples, wells, mountains, etc.) as “power spots” is a recent phenomenon. Though basically identical to previous sacred places with possible this-worldly benefits, the notion of the power spot has often been used in discourses related to the new spirituality.

<sup>15</sup> As opposed to this, Paul Heelas has argued that the new spirituality in the West is post-materialistic and thus not consumerist (Heelas, 2008: 173, 188). Kashio (2012) expresses a different opinion on the essence of Japanese spirituality—namely, that its focus is on self-transcendence and self-denial.

<sup>16</sup> On the relations between religion and psychotherapy in contemporary Japan, see Harding, Iwata, and Yoshinaga (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Many more women than men, peaking in their 30s, attend spiritual services ([http://www2.fgn.jp/mpac/\\_data/8/?d=200809\\_02](http://www2.fgn.jp/mpac/_data/8/?d=200809_02)). The LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) segment in Japan has a higher education and income than the general populace (<http://www.esquareinc.com/news/2006/pdf/LOHAS05Summary.pdf>).

(ibid.: 6), “from another viewpoint religion and new spirituality are complementary” (ibid.: 3. See also Koike, 2012: 54). Counseling, therapy, healing, reiki, astrology, alternative medicine, fortune telling, feng shui, yoga, and meditation are some of the practices that can be found in traditional religion, but which are also typical of the new type of individualized spirituality experienced and manufactured in Japan or on spiritual, holistic travels abroad.<sup>18</sup>

Although it is very difficult to define or demarcate,<sup>19</sup> Japanese spirituality often seems to be related to individual, inner purification and transformation, and to be self-induced, imposed, or mediated by charismatic persons by means of non-intellectual insight or non-empirical forces (e.g., energy, power, superhuman beings). Such general characteristics are also present in the large number of books written by foreigners and translated into Japanese, which are on sale in spiritual bookshops (such as Book Club Kai in Tokyo) and in the spirituality/*seishin sekai* sections of larger bookshops. Many books by Japanese authors on topics such as yoga, fortune telling, healing, astrology, or feng shui are strongly influenced not only by “original” Asian traditions, but also by American New Age. The present “yoga boom” is thus one example of this, being imported not from India, but from America and England (Itō, 2012: 117ff.). This “return import” of “Westernized” versions of Eastern spirituality expresses a “display of self-Orientalism with which the authors elucidate the historical religious concepts of Asia and ‘Asian religions’, parallel to the adaptive approaches of Occidental travelers to India, Zen romantics, and adepts of Asian mysticism” (Gebhardt, 2012: 553). Foreigners (especially Americans) are also overrepresented in vipassana courses, yoga classes and studios, and the few mindfulness courses<sup>20</sup> provided mainly in Tokyo. A “Westernized” and reverse “Easternized” spiritual and cultural exchange is thus an important aspect of the so-called “spiritual boom.”<sup>21</sup> However, rather than embedding the rise of the new spirituality in a purely Western export narrative, local patterns of response to late modernity and global

<sup>18</sup> A JTB (Japan’s Tourist Bureau) survey showed that 41 percent of the respondents had been to places with spiritual power; 44 percent of whom replied that gaining such power was the main reason for going there ([http://www.mylifenote.net/2008/07/29/20080729\\_jtb.pdf](http://www.mylifenote.net/2008/07/29/20080729_jtb.pdf)). Interestingly, Hawaii as a “sacred place” is the object of books, magazine articles, and travels. While Japanese Buddhism in Hawaii is experiencing a general decline, these ideas of “authentic traditions” are to a certain extent also expressed by Japanese traveling to Hawaii to see their own culture in an “exported” version, maintaining aspects of “traditional Japan” (Borup, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Kashio Naoki (2012: 5–12) thus distinguishes between four kinds of spiritual cultures in his broad understanding of the “spectrum of spirituality:” clinical culture (e.g., therapy, counseling, healing, terminal care), religious culture (e.g., meditation, pilgrimage), environmental culture (e.g., deep ecology), and popular culture (e.g., anime, manga, “power spots”).

<sup>20</sup> Mindfulness has not yet (Autumn 2012) boomed in Japan, but it is offered in a few places as a part of other services and practices (e.g., The Morita School of Japanese Psychology, Tokyo Stress Reduction, or The Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo). It is also suggested that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), because of its success in the West, “might be suitable to teach ... to westernized Japanese youngsters” (Kawano and Suzuki, 2006: 357).

<sup>21</sup> This is thus an interesting parallel to how Buddhism in America has become “inculturated and less dependent on affiliation with Asian antecedents for legitimation than was the case in the past” (Jones, 2007: 219).

routes of communication should also be recognized (Shimazono and Graf, 2012: 482). One indicator of such global circulation would also be to see “Westernized” Zen spirituality in a Japanese context.

### Is there a Japanese (Zen) Buddhist Spirituality?

Religion in Japan is generally in crisis (Reader, 2012), and Buddhism itself is faced with the “prospect of decline” (ibid.: 16). The temple priesthood in particular “struggles with an image problem caused in part by how they stage and conduct funerals and memorial services” (Nelson, 2013: 47). “Funeral Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō*) and the traditional Japanese system of temple household registration (*danka seidō*) is often criticized and held responsible for the negative images of a conservative, static, and socially segregated temple Buddhism. To counteract such negative images, attempts have been made by a group of younger clergy in particular to create a more positive and joyful image of a living religion, actively taking part in important this-worldly affairs. Such initiatives, furthermore, are responses not only to the continued challenges of secularization and the often more progressive new religions, but also to the challenges of a spiritual market beyond religious affiliation. What has been termed *socially engaged Buddhism* also has a Japanese equivalent (*shakai sankā bukkyō*) with networks, events, and practices that often go beyond traditional sectarian ties. Voluntary work, terminal care, environmental issues, and human rights are also seen in traditional Buddhist institutions, but often as focus areas for individuals and networks in what Nelson calls “experimental Buddhism” (Nelson, 2013).<sup>22</sup> More spectacular cases include the Buddhist fashion shows at Tsukiji Honganji (Tokyo), the Open Terrace Café at Kōmyōji (Tokyo), priests’ monthly gatherings with “life talk” and vegetarian dining, live music performances by priests, and the Vows Bars (pronounced *Bōzu Bāa*, *bōzu* being colloquial for *obōsan*, priest), where monks/priests engage customers in Buddhist talk while serving as bartenders. Even “Zen cafés” related to Zen Buddhism have sprung up, using the “Zen” (rather than 禅) emblem as a brand image, just as it is used in the West.<sup>23</sup> Although it is still too early to conclude anything about the significance of the socially engaged Buddhist relief work related to the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, it might be the most obvious example of a possible resurgence of Buddhism (and religion) in Japan.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> One such example is [higan.net](http://higan.net) which is an Internet-based network of young Buddhist priests ([www.higan.net](http://www.higan.net)).

<sup>23</sup> One example of this can be seen on this homepage: [www.myoshin-zen-c.jp/event/event\\_zencafe.htm](http://www.myoshin-zen-c.jp/event/event_zencafe.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Essays by Buddhist priests and books on Buddhism and religion seem to have provided explanations and concern for the victims of the great earthquake (*Asahi Shinbun* 15 [November], 2011). In addition, Zen Buddhist institutions and individual priests have taken part in this work, and Myōshinjiha *kanchō* Kōno Taitsū, in dialogue with Buddhist scholar Yamaori Tetsuo, agrees with such explanations of a growing interest and positive image of Buddhism in a magazine focusing on the topic: “Why is it booming now? Religion for the sake of Japan” (*Bungeshunju* 12, 2012: 313–322). See also Shimazono (2012) and Watts (2012) on Buddhism and the aftermath of the tsunami. The fact that many worried women have been met with the calm and comforting attitude of Buddhist monks in their relief work has been a factor in explaining an apparent

While overlapping in content and scope, there is, however, good reason to distinguish between socially engaged Buddhism and what could be termed “spiritually engaged Buddhism.” Whereas the former activities are mainly directed toward society at large (the community, nation, world) in an attempt to change society through human and social efforts within religious institutions, the latter focuses on individual and inner purification and transformation.<sup>25</sup> Such practices also overlap with the new spirituality field in terms of ideas and ideal outcomes—for example, through purifying or relaxing the mind (*kokoro*) in a stressful world or realizing the authentic self (*jikaku*). Kashio stresses the importance of self-denial (*jiko hitei*) in Japanese spirituality, especially in relation to clinical psychology, environmental spirituality, and meditation (Kashio, 2012: 19ff), and Gaitanidis refers to self-cultivation as a core element of new spirituality in Japan (Gaitanidis, 2012: 375). Following Shimazono, if we understand Buddhism not as a religion of salvation, but rather as a teaching through which everyone can attain enlightenment in individual experiences, then “Buddhism is rather close to the New Spirituality Movements and Culture” (Shimazono, 1999: 130).

What is often understood and manufactured as the quintessential (and Buddhologically legitimate) spiritual practice is the Buddhist “ritual of realization” (Tanabe, 1999: 199): meditation. Yoga, vipassana, *naikan*, and *mikkyō meisō* are examples of the kinds of contemplative practices and rituals of realization that are also seen in the new spirituality, both represented in bookshops and by individual specialists. *Zazen* as a mental and bodily means of self-cultivation is the quintessential Zen Buddhist version of such rituals of realization.

The fact that neither the general public<sup>26</sup> nor the Zen priests or parish members actually practice *zazen* in large numbers has become a truism amongst scholars of Zen Buddhism in Japan (Reader, 1986; Bodiford, 1992; Williams, 2005). According to surveys conducted by the two largest Zen sects, Sōtōshū and Rinzai-shū (as represented by Myōshinji), *zazen* is not a widespread practice, and Kasai (2012: 86) is probably not wrong when he believes

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“Buddhist image boom” (<http://diamond.jp/articles/-/20390>). Whether this “boom” is descriptive or rather prescriptive for Japanese post-tsunami Buddhism is still to be seen.

<sup>25</sup> Buddhist *shugyō* practice with individual participation aiming at changing, strengthening, purifying, or transcending the self can be categorized as such, although for some modern and demythologized Buddhists, non-empirical forces are nonexistent. It can, of course, be argued that the mercy of Amida Buddha can be experienced or classified as “spiritual.” A general phenomenological dividing line throughout Japanese Buddhism, however, could in this regard be drawn between those (ideally) aiming at transformation through “self-power” (*jiriki*) and those receiving Amida Buddha’s grace through “other-power” (*tariki*). The latter would thus typically not speak of personal transformation or “spirituality,” whereas the former, even in institutional discourses, would idealize personal efforts at purification, transformation, or salvation through “own power.” Asked why they carried no books on Shin Buddhism, the spiritual bookshop Book Club Kai replied that it—as opposed to Zen and esoteric Buddhism—did not focus on the individual’s world (*kojin no sekai*), but was more concerned with organized religion.

<sup>26</sup> A study conducted among 400 Japanese college students from the Tokyo area concluded that 80 percent were not interested in Buddhist teachings and that “largely there is no interest whatsoever in Zen” (Kawano and Suzuki 2006, 361).

the general Japanese image of meditation is related to yoga, *zazen*, and practices for religious and eccentric persons. In Myōshinji only 22.9 percent of temples had *zazenkai* for the laity, while the figure for Sōtōshū was 31.7 percent (Borup, 2008: 210), the latter having decreased from 3,749 in 1995 to 3,655 in 2005; in the same period the average number of participants had decreased from 15.9 to 12.4 persons (Sōtōshū Shūmuchō, 2008: 56–57). A survey from 2002 showed that only 6.7 percent of the respondents had participated in Myōshinji’s meditation assembly (*zazenkai*) (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā, 2002), and another survey revealed that from 1979 to 1995 2,778 people attended—nearly half of them in their twenties (presumably students from the Zen Buddhist university, Hanazono, earning educational merit)—and more than three quarters only attended once (Borup, 2008: 211). At a meditation assembly at Sōjiji, the average attendance of 60 people makes it “one of the biggest *zazen* groups in Japan” (Irizarry, 2011: 203); nevertheless, “most ‘new members’ came for one session, and never came back” (ibid.: 206).

While attending different Sōtō *zazenkai* in Tokyo,<sup>27</sup> several people talked about a “boom” in the number of attendants within the last year. Although neither such a boom nor an overall increase in the number of actual *zazenkai* participants can be documented, Japanese Zen Buddhism does not seem to be entirely “*zazenless*” (Reader, 1986). A number of people, most of whom are not otherwise institutionally related to Zen Buddhism, actually do practice *zazen*.<sup>28</sup> The number of *zazenkai* participants in Sōtōshū is believed to be an impressive total of 474,111 people (Sōtōshū shūmuchō, 2008: 57).<sup>29</sup> A third of the respondents in a Myōshinji survey said that they actually had experience with *zazen* (as opposed to only 17 percent within the Sōtō sect) (Kenkyū Hōkoku, 2002: 4–6).<sup>30</sup> Special initiatives to engage people in *zazen* are established by the Sōtō sect, such as *zazenkai* at Komazawa University and “Morning Zen” (*asa katsu zen*) at Tokyo Grand Hotel, where the “OL and *sarariman*”<sup>31</sup> can come to meditate before work to overcome the stress of life—whether related to the financial crisis or the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.<sup>32</sup> Individual Zen-inspired lay organizations such as Sanbo Kyodan and Ningen Zen, primarily addressing people interested in “spiritual Zen” beyond institutional affiliation, still exist,<sup>33</sup> as do smaller groups who meet in private in an ad hoc manner.

<sup>27</sup> The *zazenkai* at Seishōji and Komazawa Daigaku.

<sup>28</sup> Irizarry quotes priests from Sōjiji saying, “there has been a growing interest in *zazen* and the ‘Zen lifestyle’ in recent years, particularly among Japanese women in their thirties and forties” (2011: 206).

<sup>29</sup> This figure, however, also includes the possibility of individuals having been counted more than once.

<sup>30</sup> The discrepancy of this figure compared to the aforementioned 6.7 percent might point to the fact that some people participate in *zazen* outside of institutional and/or structured *zazenkai*.

<sup>31</sup> OL is a common term for “office lady” and *sarariman* (“salary man”) for a white-collar businessman.

<sup>32</sup> While the practice in Zen temples of arranging courses with *zazen* and monastic discipline for new company employees was more widespread in the 1980s, some temples still maintain this tradition; one of these temples is the Sōtō temple Seishōji in Tokyo.

<sup>33</sup> The Sanbō Kyōdan group has up to 20 *zazenkai* a year, with an average of 40 people participating—a number which has been stable over the last five years (interview with

American and global Buddhism has inspired Zen priests Fujita Isshō and Yamashita Ryōdō to “boost ‘Buddhism 3.0’ across Japan,” combining *zazen*, yoga and a search for happiness in their “updates” and “version 3.0” of Buddhism.<sup>34</sup> Some individual temples have opened up for new activities in order to attract people who are also interested in alternative kinds of spirituality. Temple yoga and Ayurveda are thus integrated in a monthly afternoon session with *zazenkai* at a Tendai temple (Entsūji), and although it is not common, combining such “Indian traditions” is not unheard of in individual Buddhist temples.

Participants might be interested in purifying their minds, finding peace of mind (*anjin*) or the roots of Japanese culture, overcoming stress or existential barriers, removing negative karma, finding meaning in life after tragic experiences or a sense of existential emptiness, or they might be “truth seekers” (*gudōsha*) in search of Buddhist realization of satori or “one’s original mind” (Borup, 2008: 212). Participating in *zazenkai* and experiencing *zazen* might be a performative ritual, a “ritual of realization,” or a “spiritual” means of finding one’s postmodern, authentic self. However, although some of these *zazen* practitioners are also inspired by Western Zen narratives and have read D. T. Suzuki, neither the responses to questionnaires nor the talks with participants and priests suggest that *zazen* is related to the concepts of “spirituality” or “spiritual” (*supirichuaru*).<sup>35</sup> While *zazen* is not generally practiced by more than a minority of (Zen) Buddhists, it is a ritual of realization that is also not unknown by contemporary Japanese. And while it could also be said to overlap with the practices and ideals of the new spirituality, it is, however, not generally conceived by *zazen* practitioners to be a part thereof. *Zazen* might be both transformable and semantically stretchable, but this seems not generally to be the case in Japanese Zen Buddhist institutional settings.

### Zen in the Media and Spiritual World

Moving from practice to context, another way to get an indication of the relationship between Zen and spirituality is by looking at representations in Japanese media and popular culture.

Although bookshops in Japan are challenged by Internet shops, they still provide potential customers with a market of information and, as such, function as a somewhat

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representative in Nov. 2012, and email correspondence). Compared to institutionalized Buddhism in Japan, foreigners are overrepresented in both groups.

<sup>34</sup> *Japan Times* (August 5, 2014):

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/05/national/priestly-pair-set-out-to-boost-buddhism-3-0-across-japan/#.VBquqhZTCW8>. Also see their book (Fujita and Yamashita, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> These examples are from Borup (2008: 214–215), private talks with *zazenkai* participants in Tokyo in 2012, and questionnaires from a Tokyo Zen temple (gathered in 2012) that I was allowed to see. Responses from the latter about motivations for joining were: purify/settle mind (*kimochi wo kiyomeru*, *kimochi wo ochitsuku*, *shinjin wo antei*), know more about religion (*shinkyō ni naruka shiritai*), find experience (*taiken wo miru*), advice from friend (*tomodachi ni susumerareta*), try it once (*ichido taiken*), and search for self (*jiko wo mitsukeru*).

representative indicator of the market.<sup>36</sup> Placing Buddhism in a separate section parallel to other religions naturally points to its cultural importance as a major religion in Japan. Thus, the vast majority of books on Buddhism in bookshops (including Amazon.co.jp) are about history, art, doctrines, and the philosophies of particular lineages (*shūha*) or temples. Zen Buddhism in particular is presented as a symbol of Japanese tradition and culture and, as such, reflects the interests of some participants in *zazenkai* or tea ceremonies to identify or become affiliated with a piece of Japanese “high culture.”

Whereas many non-academic bookshops in the West would place any book on Buddhism under the category “spirituality” or “body and mind,” in Japan very few are placed in the “spirituality,” “New Age,” or “*seishin sekai*” sections. Most books in these sections are about Tibet as a sacred space,<sup>37</sup> and very few are about Japanese Zen. The books of one Rinzaï Zen priest and author, Noguchi Hōzō, are placed in the section for spirituality. One of these is about his experience as a monk in Tibet. In the book he praises the authenticity of this tradition as opposed to present day Zen Buddhism in China and Japan (Noguchi, 2009: 158). Another of his books is about fasting and *zazen* (2010). Here, in easily understandable language, he explains and gives advice about healthy living in contemporary Japan, thereby contributing to a publication tradition in which Zen and cooking are often related. An example of a Zen priest who is often portrayed in popular magazines is Koike Ryūnosuke. While being “mediatized” as a charismatic author who has written 15 books and sold a million copies in Japan, his “Zen” is modern, yet rather traditional in pointing to the teachings, institution, and history of the lineage. Popular author of fiction and nonfiction Gen’yu Sōkyū is another Rinzaï Zen priest and visiting professor at Hanazono University in Kyoto. He is one of a few authors who combine traditional Zen Buddhism, contemporary spirituality, and popular culture; he is fascinated by “religion as it is embodied in soothsayers and prophets ... *unio mystica*-understood moments of ecstasy, and ... the reverberation of enigmatic coincidences” (Gebhardt, 2012: 566). A movie based on one of his novels, *Abraxas*, is perhaps symptomatically “westernized’ ... through rock and esotericism” (Porcu’s article in this volume). Typically, while “Zen” is often used as a signifier pointing to cultural and spiritual depths, of the great number of books on “Zen and the Art of ...,” only a few are found in Japan in the form of translations of Western books.

TV programs and films (or books written by authors such as Nonomura [1996]) about young monks striving to overcome the hardships of monastic Zen life by means of endurance, or about Buddhist priests trying to combine family life with their religious

<sup>36</sup> Also see Jones (2007) for a parallel example of how to use bookstores as an indicator of the marketing of Buddhism.

<sup>37</sup> The idea of Tibetan Buddhism as an authentic and deeply spiritual kind of religion is popular in Japan. Besides *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* and *Magic and Mystery of Tibet*, books by and about modern lamas as well as those on how to draw mandalas are placed in these sections on spirituality. In addition, Tibetan incense and bells were used in a Kinokuniya bookstore in Tokyo to bring alive the atmosphere of this section. Interestingly, books by and about the Dalai Lama are mainly placed in the section on Buddhism. This might indicate a general difference between Japan and most Western countries; the former primarily regards the Dalai Lama as a religious and political figure, while the latter primarily considers him a symbol of spirituality.

vocation, sporadically appear in popular culture (e.g., *Abraxas no matsuri*; see Porcu's article in this volume). Like Buddhist manga (see Porcu's article in this volume)—some of which are written and produced by (Zen) Buddhist institutions—plots and structures typically follow the main Japanese narrative of Zen as an institutionalized, traditional religion.<sup>38</sup> Magazine and newspaper articles generally reflect the same tendencies.<sup>39</sup> Publications aimed at the Zen institutions' *danka* and a popular magazine published by the Sōtō sect, *Zen no kaze*, occasionally contain articles about *zazen*, some of which also refer to physical and mental health. These are, however, written and illustrated from the perspective of institutional interests, relating to Zen doctrines, history, and communal Sangha Buddhism,<sup>40</sup> as are the occasional articles in popular magazines about Zen and *zazen* aimed at either men or women.<sup>41</sup>

Another indication of a possible relationship between Zen and spirituality can be revealed by turning to books and magazines from “spiritual” bookshops such as Book Club Kai in Tokyo. Books on Buddhism in general are written by foreigners, such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and the Dalai Lama, while books on Zen are old classics written by Eugen Herrigel, D. T. Suzuki, and contemporary priests (e.g., Yamada Mumon). Zen and esoteric (*mikkyō*) Buddhism (but not Pure Land Buddhism) are represented, as these are seen to be catering to the individual. In the last two years (2011–2012), quarterly newsletters (e.g., Book Club Kai's newsletter) have contained hundreds of book reviews related to spirituality (yoga, Native American religion, shamanism, healing, Tibet, etc.), with only twelve reviews explicitly related to Buddhism,

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<sup>38</sup>As such, it is not surprising that the number of references to Buddhist temples is very low (and Zen temples nonexistent) in books on power spots. Being quintessentially linked to new spirituality as concrete sacred spaces in which spiritual energy is channeled to the (passive) receiver, the power spot boom is mainly about Shinto shrines and nature (forests, wells, mountains) and not “culture,” as signified by Buddhism. Thus, the few Buddhist power spots actually described are usually included because of their proximity to nature or because of being designated as traditional “*genze riyaku*” places related to traditional accounts of miracles (e.g., Kōbō Daishi-related temples).

<sup>39</sup> The examples described do not include academic journals or special Buddhist newspapers such as *Chūgai Nippō* and *Bukkyō Times*, the content of which would be more related to institutionalized Zen Buddhism. A search on the keyword 禪 in the Complete Database for Japanese Magazines and Periodicals from the Meiji era to the present (at the National Diet Library) is naturally not suggestive of any trends about Zen Buddhism, since the *kanji* (Chinese character) can also be part of a name, a destination, or articles with content not related to Zen Buddhism. However, the fact that the search resulted in 13,040 hits, with a steep increase since 2000, does make it plausible to suggest that Zen Buddhism is often portrayed or mentioned in Japanese media.

<sup>40</sup> An illustrative example of this is *Zen no kaze*'s articles about *zazen* (35, 2010: 4ff., 20ff.).

<sup>41</sup> *Zazen* and meditation spots for businessmen were themes in the magazine *President* (October 29, 2012). Komazawa *zazenkai* and the Sōtō sect's *Shōjin Project* were portrayed in the women's lifestyle magazine *Classy* (December 2012). In the magazine *Sarai* (July 2007), a cover story described the benefits of the vegetarian cooking found in Zen monasteries.

and none about Zen Buddhism.<sup>42</sup> The same tendency was also true earlier, as the publication *Spiritual Data Book* (*Supirichuaru dētabukku*) from 2007 shows. Out of 300 pages describing more than 1,000 books (plus DVDs and music), only twenty were explicitly related to Buddhism (three of which were written by foreigners) and fourteen to Zen (half of which were written by foreigners, one with the title *Osho Zen Tarot*), but several of the calendars and pieces of music were related to Tibet and meditation. Visiting a “spiritual fair” (*spima*) in Tokyo gave the exact same impression; neither Zen nor Buddhism were mentioned in presentation materials and when questioned about it, respondents did not see any logical connections.

Analyzing representative journals related to the field of new spirituality (*Trinity*, *Sotokoto*, *Star People*, and *Anemone*) shows the same tendencies. While astrology, UFOs, spirits, energy, health, organic food, power spots, and holistic travel are typical topics in these journals, Zen and Buddhism are only sparsely and indirectly represented in these publications from 2011 and 2012. Tibet is the topic of sacred space (*Anemone* 11, 2012: 26–29; 41, 2012: 32–33), and the Dalai Lama as a spiritual figure is portrayed because of his visit to Japan (*Trinity* 41, 2012: 7–9). A Buddhist temple is used as a backdrop for an interview between a professor and a politician (*Sotokoto* 3, 2012: 132–135), and Buddha figures are used in different articles as decorative objects. A mountain ascetic (*yamabushi*) priest is interviewed about transferring the Buddha’s power to human beings (*Trinity* 42, 2012: 96–99), a Shingon priest is one of several who is interviewed about human qualities (*ibid.* 39, 2011: 123), and two Buddhist temples and a Kannon statue are mentioned as power spots (*Trinity* 37, 2011: 51–56; 42, 2012: 20). In a presentation of the “power” times of the Japanese calendar, *shuni-e* is described as purification, *hanamatsuri* as an occasion to ward off diseases and become a *buddha*, and New Year temple visits as a means of getting new energy (*Trinity* 41, 2012: 22–35). Zen is referred to in an article about the martial art *shōrinji kenpō* (*Anemone* 10, 2012: 30–31) and in an article about meditation, *zazen* is briefly described as a means of purifying the mind (*kokoro wo kuria suru*, *Trinity* 39, 2011: 48–49). A brief notice about a Thich Nhat Hanh presentation and workshop does not explicitly mention Zen (*Star People* 36, 2011: 94). Again, Zen and spirituality seem to be only remotely connected in these magazines.

A recent trend, however, seems to have placed focus on Zen in popular literature. A special issue of *President* (December 5, 2011) on the holy sayings of the Buddha (*Budda seisho no kotoba*), which includes articles on Zen, power spots for businessmen, and interviews with known persons about religion, also contains an article about “Steve Jobs and Zen” (96–97). The success and premature death of Apple’s key figure not only interests the media as a good story; the fact that he was affiliated with the San Francisco Zen Center increases his symbolic value not just to a Western audience, but also to Japanese readers. Zen’s influence on Steve Jobs and Apple is thus the topic of several articles, either as a main topic (*Chūgai Nippō*, March 10, 2012) or as a remark in articles on

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<sup>42</sup> It should be stressed that only titles and abstracts were analyzed. Thus, actual content from the books referring to Zen and Buddhism is not included. The newsletter from Book Club Kai can be accessed at <http://www.bookclubkai.jp>.

Zen history and culture (e.g., *OFF*, June 2012: 16–21).<sup>43</sup> A search in the period of 2011 to 2012 in newspapers and magazines in which both Steve Jobs and Zen were mentioned generated 51 results. Several books about Jobs also refer to his Zen connections, and this relationship is explicitly used as a way to market a new edition of the Japanese translation of Suzuki Shunryū's *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, where a photo of Jobs on the cover is accompanied by the words “Zen Bible.” *Zen and Apple* is the fancy title of another recently released book. The book is a rather traditional account of Japanese Zen Buddhism embedded in a good story, where the author explains that Zen (in roman letters) in the USA is different from Japanese 禅 (*zen*), as the former goes beyond institutionalized traditions and self-cultivation practices by non-Japanese (Ishii, 2012: 4). At a *zazenkai*, a woman explained to me that she thought the (apparent) present increase of people attending *zazenkai* was due to the large number of books and titles about the Steve Jobs and Zen connection.<sup>44</sup> This “Zen boom,” as another participant called it, can very well be a direct effect of such stories in the media, which also have an impact—however moderate—on institutional Zen Buddhism, as was the case when Sōtō Zen International held a symposium to honor Steve Jobs.<sup>45</sup> “Mediatized” narratives also often have an effect in the “real world.” Looping or “spillover effects” are also part of cultural dissemination and religious transformations, of which the “Suzuki effect” in the Japanese context and a so-called contemporary “Jobs effect,” however limited, are examples.

The nonexistent overlap between Zen and spirituality in Japan documented above, however, not only points to differences in content, but also to discourses and interests as explained in the next section.

### **Zen and Spirituality: Interests and Symbolic Domains**

While some practice fields of Zen and the new spirituality overlap, the most obvious difference between the two is related to the contexts in which they are represented. The mass media typically positions them in different discursive domains, and the Zen/spirituality fields themselves are not often interested in being identified.

Zen as a brand in contemporary Japan signifies another story, which is also why Toyota calls their car “Yaris Zen” and uses commercials invoking Zen in the West, not in Japan. The “cool Japan” national brand campaign might refer to Zen as authentic culture and a smart mantra in the West, but “cool Zen” does not really make sense in a Japanese context—in a way, Zen in Japan is the antithesis of a modern, individualized “cool” self. The new spirituality has more in common with the Western Zen narrative than it does with the Japanese Zen narrative in idealizing the individualized authenticity narrative, while, however, not sharing the Western idealization of Eastern religion as “spiritual.” Japanese spirituality is, like New Age in the West, “polemically constructed vernacular

<sup>43</sup> The magazine that also contained his graduation speech from Stanford University included suggestions for Zen-inspired music (*zen ga wakaru ongaku*), namely John Cage and John Lennon, whose sympathy for Zen was a result of a lecture by D. T. Suzuki that Yoko Ono had attended (66).

<sup>44</sup> The same explanation is given in *Shūkan Bunshun*, October 20, 2011: 140.

<sup>45</sup> <http://soto-zen.net/wiki/wiki.cgi?page=News>.

expressions that borrow popularly invented terms available at the time to identify ever-present beliefs that are critical of established sociocultural norms” (Gaitanidis, 2012: 361). As a network of loosely affiliated individuals addressing individuals (and individual consumers), the spiritual world has an interest in distinguishing itself from traditional, communal, and institutionalized religion with all of its negative implications of a loss of authentic spirit. This is illustrated in a volume of *Star People* (31, 2009), in which the topic of “no mind” (*nomaindo*) is addressed in interviews with practitioners primarily of Advaita and Osho and in an article about the spirituality of Tibet and the “life of no mind” (30–31). The Buddhist influence on this idea is acknowledged in the foreword. But it is also stated that “no mind” is universal to all religions, not only Buddhist philosophy (8). In fact, just as traditional religions are bound (*sokubaku*) by institutionalization, so are the new religions, and applying such insights of no-mind—not through Buddhist practice, but through spiritual practice and ideas, as presented in (American-inspired) Advaita—is a challenge and opportunity facing contemporary Japanese individuals.

Zen and Buddhist institutions similarly have an interest in separating the two domains (Zen vs. spirituality). While showing flair for being engaged as socially and spiritually relevant actors in contemporary society, they also need to protect their brand images as representatives of authentic traditional Buddhism. While individual priests might engage in healthy living, spiritual care, or yoga, the institutions need to draw a line, which emphasizes differences of religious identity. One reason for not integrating yoga as a practice parallel to *zazen* was, as told to me by a priest at one Zen temple, the danger of being associated with contemporary “cult phenomena.” Spirituality is thus often associated with negative images of a commercialized and superficial field not necessarily differentiated from the “dangerous” domain of new religions.<sup>46</sup> As such, this illustrates a parallel challenge within (Zen) Buddhist institutions. On the one hand, the institutions still define and brand themselves as ascetic (*shukke*) religions, and they thus need to distinguish between the clergy (*sōryo*) of lay Buddhism and their own lay (*zaiki*) adherents. On the other hand, in order to not become known as institutions that are only relevant as museums or places for conducting rituals related to death, initiatives for giving more lively images of a spiritually and socially engaged form of Buddhism have indicated that such distinctions should not be too strong. Thus, in both Rinzai and Sōtō sects there are different initiatives to engage the household affiliates (*danka*) as actively practicing believers (*shintō*) or even seekers (*gudōsha*) (Borup, 2008: 134ff). Contemporary Zen Buddhist institutions must also strive to maintain the Zen image of being closely related to an elitist tradition, while also attending to the challenges facing an institution with strong ties to its members and being relevant to popular culture and society at large. Only a few Zen priests relate to a spiritual market outside of institutional boundaries, and the majority of them are also closely affiliated with traditional Zen as a religion. Many Buddhist priests who have a family and a calendar filled with other duties simply have no interest in spending extra time on an activity that neither gives the individual priest financial nor symbolic capital. Refusing to let a tour company use the

<sup>46</sup> Since the “Aum affair” in 1995, religion in general has had a negative image in Japan, often being thought of as “dangerous” (Reader, 2012: 15).

*zendō* of a Tokyo Zen temple as part of a cultural experience package tour and refusing to let a cosmetics company and an herbal product company sell their products at *zazenkai* are illustrative examples of how temples demonstrate to what extent they are willing to give in to market forces.

Thus, the providers of both institutionalized Zen and spirituality have an interest in maintaining these two distinct narratives in order to protect their identity and market share. For users and consumers of both *zazen* and spiritual practice, the perspective seems, however, to be somewhat different. Just as there is typically no connection between being a temple parishioner and a meditation session (*zazenkai*) participant, there is no necessary connection between having an interest in *zazen* and in the spiritual world; and just like some practice yoga as a form of gymnastics, *zazen* can also be used as a secular technique for increasing well-being. While some continue to practice *zazen* for years—they are “seekers” (*gudōsha*) as typologically opposed to “clients” of religious services (e.g., memorial services, healing, astrology)—many are novices who will not follow the same *zazenkai*, either because they are “shopping” for other *zazenkai*, or because they consider it a once-in-a-lifetime experience. As such, *zazen* can also be an object of spiritual consumption. This investment (boredom, pain, time, personal engagement) with no direct outcome and obvious effort justification—typically not even promised by priests, who put more effort into explaining *how* to meditate rather than *why*—does not, however, make *zazen* as easily accessible as many other products and practices primarily aimed at a more passive consumption and engagement.

On the other hand, connections between and transferences from one field to another *may* occur. Two women at a combined *zazen/yoga/Ayurveda* session in a Tokyo Tendai temple each spoke separately of their own growing and deep interest in Buddhism after having been exposed to yoga. Yoga might be a stepping stone that connects the otherwise separate domains of Zen and spirituality, as it is both rooted in Asian tradition, with strong emphasis on self-realization, and a product of contemporary spirituality and health culture. The present “yoga boom” and a possible “*zazen* boom” might thus be the beginnings of future “crossovers” between domains and narratives, which are otherwise almost entirely separate.

## Conclusion

The “spiritual boom” is mostly a “mediatized” truth, whose representation in lived reality as a practiced field is still to be documented. However, since mass media both relates to and constructs reality, trends and tendencies do go hand in hand with the media, and both language and storytelling can generate interest and practice. While some aspects of spirituality are often presented in the media as “indigenous traditions” (e.g., power spots), they are very often deeply dependent on global trends and external influences. The earlier *mikkyō* boom and the present interest in Tibet as a sacred space are typical examples of these trends and influences, and the *seishin sekai* and new spirituality are to a very large extent based upon them. Some ideas and practices are imported as “foreign goods,” such as Western New Age astrology. Other Asian or Japanese practices have been re-imported as “Westernized” and “re-Easternized” ideas, practices, products, and discourses. Thus, fortune telling, reiki, feng shui (*fū sui*),

Ayurveda, and yoga are typical examples of these “traditional” Asian practices, which, because of the influence of Western New Age and new spirituality, have caught the attention of Japanese users and consumers in the media and in certain settings (e.g., spiritual fairs).

Modern Zen Buddhism, especially through D. T. Suzuki, was a product of the interaction between Suzuki (and other Japanese intellectuals) and Western scholars and practitioners, and the repercussions of these religious and cultural intersections are still very much visible in both the West and Japan. Thus, lay Zen groups, institutional *zazen*, and spiritualized, “scientificized,” and psychologized discourses about Zen are alive. If Zen is a typical product of the “Easternization of the West,” one can truly claim, in a historical perspective, that Zen is also a case in which the process is reversed and we can talk of the “Easternization of the East,” in which “Easternized” Western practices, discourses, or persons (such as Steve Jobs) rebound and affect the “Eastern” traditions in their transformed, “Westernized” versions. Both aspects of modern Zen and the new spirituality can be said to be products of such global interaction. The “pizza effect” as a metaphor for the transformed products of religious encounters in late nineteenth-century modernity could have as its contemporary metaphor the “curry effect” (Urban, 2003: 16)—several ingredients mixed to create an entirely new product with a new, distinct flavor.

If spirituality is used as an analytical concept to describe ritual practices aiming at inner transformation, there are spiritual elements in both the new spirituality as well as in institutionalized and mainstream traditional religions. Zen as “spiritual” (or *reisei* in Japanese) was already voiced by D. T. Suzuki and occasionally used by thinkers and practitioners within the “Suzuki Zen tradition” in Japan. Also, there are occasional examples of individual priests, spirituality providers, books, and magazines that combine the two narratives. Circulation between and semantic stretches across cultural and narrative domains *have* appeared.

Overall, however, the two fields of new spirituality and traditional religion very seldom interact or overlap. Zen and Japanese new spirituality in Japan generally belong to two separate domains with very little semantic, institutional, and practical interaction. As such, they parallel the differences often seen between traditional (Christian) religion and the new spirituality in contemporary Western contexts, although claims of a “spiritual revolution” still require more empirical evidence to justify its conceptual value. While Zen in the West often signifies spirituality and is used as a brand image in commercials and advertisements, Zen (禪) in Japan primarily signifies traditional religion. The brand value of Zen as a product and producer of “high culture” and traditional religion is kept alive as a cultural parallel to the image of Shinto as a nature religion and as a positive narrative counterbalancing the negative “funeral Zen” narrative. Participation in *zazen* may be motivated by strong feelings of belonging to such high culture and the “Japanese spirit,” which magazine articles and books on the subject also often emphasize. The new spirituality understands itself as an individualized and non-institutionalized form of engagement with the self. It is often “mediatized” as consumer culture and often perceived as such within Zen institutions and among *zazen*

practitioners, whose narratives do not include spirituality as (the *katakana*) “spiritual” (スピリチュアル).

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