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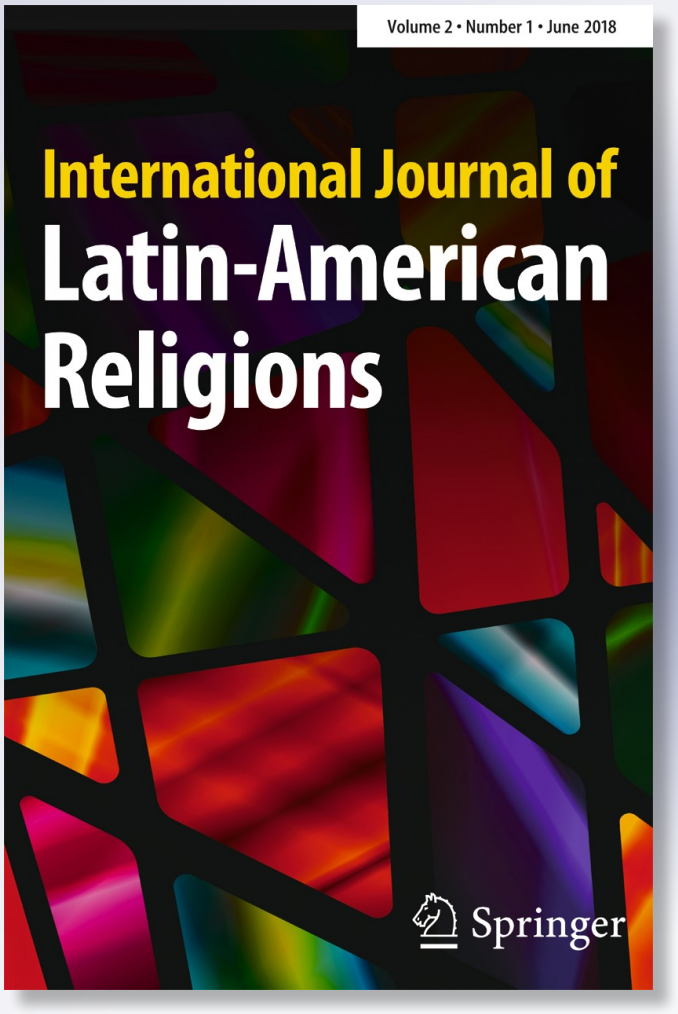

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Southern dharma: outlines of Buddhism in Argentina

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Abstract This article offers an overview of the Buddhist groups created in Argentina in recent decades as a contribution to the study of pluralization within the national religious scene and as a way of comprehending the spread of Buddhism in the West. The first part of the paper examines the early textual appropriation of Buddhism by certain Orientalist literati and intellectuals. The second part describes the history and main features of the Buddhist groups linked to Asian immigration from China, Korea, Japan, and Laos. The third part focuses on exploring the history and main sociocultural features of groups whose membership is mostly composed of Argentine converts who have no Oriental ancestors. The crossing of paths and the encounters between Argentine Buddhist groups are then described along with the appropriation of their ideas and practices by different alternative institutions having no links with official Buddhism, and the broader impact of this religion on national society. Finally, the conclusions reflect on the global decentralization process Buddhism is undergoing and the challenges this religious minority must face locally.

Keywords Buddhism · Argentina · History · Globalization

Introduction

In recent decades, the Argentine religious scene has been undergoing a process of change characterized by a decrease in adherence to Catholicism and growing pluralism in the salvation goods on offer. Since its birth, Argentina has harbored a wide range of religious minorities, especially with the democratic and ideological opening in the early 1980s when alternative forms of religiosity became more visible and began to seriously compete for Catholic believers. We can thus observe a drastic change in Christianity in this country, particularly with the emergence of Charismatic, Pentecostal, and

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neo-Pentecostal groups (Giménez Béliveau 2008). In addition, a growing deinstitutionalization and deregulation of religious beliefs and practices is being accompanied by greater autonomy and nomadism of the faithful since new forms of membership do not rest on long-term institutional ties (Mallimaci 2013). The so-called New Religious Movements are also gaining strength. They include Afro-Brazilian traditions, the New Age, the neo-Hindu groups, and a diversity of religious heterodoxies of assorted origins.

Until recently, there was no precise information about Argentinians' religious affiliation, because since 1960, the Argentinian Population and Household Census had omitted this question. However, several recently conducted nationwide surveys are again providing data on Argentinians' religious affiliation: 76.5% Catholic, 9% Evangelist, and 11.3% professing no religion. Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses constitute 2.1%, while other religions including Jews, Muslims, and Afro-Americans constitute 1.2% (Mallimaci 2013).

One of the heterodoxies that has recently become present at the local level is Buddhism, one of the greatest world religions that has gradually spread around the world over the last 2500 years. Although there are no exact data on the number of Buddhists, we estimate there are approximately 40 Buddhist organizations with a total of around 30,000 adherents. This means that with a population of over 40 million inhabitants, Buddhists in Argentina barely make up 0.08% of the population. However, Buddhism has undergone exponential growth, especially during Argentina's democratization period in the mid-1980s. In our case, the pluralizing of the religious sphere in recent decades manifests itself in the establishment of more than 80 Buddhist centers, attracting new members and occupying spaces previously monopolized by Catholicism.

Argentine Buddhism presents variations as regards country of origin, school, and line, which makes this universe both extensive and varied. The compact space characterized by globalization permits the existence of a variety of Buddhist schools in Argentina's largest cities. Furthermore, new groups form continuously and there is a much greater number of followers frequenting different centers who are difficult to count, as their religious adherence is ephemeral, shifting, or deinstitutionalized.

The aim of this work is to account for the presence and diversity of Argentinian Buddhism by examining its history and the main social-cultural features of this religion's associated centers. In this way, we hope to contribute to the knowledge of one of the least studied religious minorities locally, thus contributing to the growing body of work on the pluralization of the religious scene in Argentina and the dispersion of Buddhism in the West.

We can identify three significant moments in the history of Argentine Buddhism. Firstly, a textual stage beginning in the early twentieth century in which a heterogeneous group of Argentine literati and intellectuals became interested in its philosophical aspects. Secondly, a period from the arrival of Buddhism in the 70s onwards, in which Buddhist institutions and teachers were established in the country through two well-differentiated modalities. One was through immigrants from the Far East who brought their beliefs, traditions, and religious practices. The other was through the work of Argentinians with no Asian ancestors who adopted Buddhist practices and ideas and invited religious leaders from other countries to teach this religion. The third stage originated at the beginning of the twenty-first century and has been characterized by the

consolidation of Argentinian Buddhist institutions, as witnessed by the emergence of a generation of native teachers trained in the country, the construction of Buddhist centers of converts, and the greater openness of institutions of ethnic origin. In the next section, we will focus on investigating the initial influence of Buddhist philosophical ideas on a certain enlightened sector of Argentine society interested in this Eastern religion.

The intellectual appropriation of Buddhism in Argentina

Before the actual formation of institutionalized Buddhist groups, this religion was initially characterized by an intellectual appropriation of its doctrine and worldview beyond any institutional context, ritual, or practice. This appropriation is based on what Edward Said calls the "textual attitude of Orientalism," which seeks to represent a strange reality through a book that translates it: "the Orientalist is necessary because he catches some useful jewels in the depths of the Far East; we cannot know the East without its mediation." (Said 2002: 58). Thought of as an Oriental jewel which philosophers and the Western literary set must rescue, it is Buddhism as "a text without context" (Baumann 2001).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many representatives of Argentinian culture were attracted to Buddhist and Hindu philosophy (Gasquet 2008). During that period, the main hub for the study and diffusion of these ideas was the Theosophical Society. This institution was brought to Argentina towards the end of the nineteenth century by Argentinians who had contact with this religious movement abroad. Throughout the early twentieth century, it was marked by the presence of renowned figures from scientific, literary, and political circles in Argentina such as José Ingenieros, Alejandro Sorondo, Leopoldo Lugones, Alfredo Palacios, and Joaquín V. González. In 1907, Olcott, President of the Theosophical Society at the international level, came to give a series of lectures, a moment that could be identified as a boom period for the Society. In the decade from 1910 onwards, with seven "branches"—study groups—in Mendoza, Rosario, Córdoba, and Buenos Aires, it received the status of Argentine Republic National Section. In 1921, it was officially founded as a Civil Association, obtained its legal status, and established its headquarters in the Province of Santa Fe. However, in 1940, this institution entered a period of stagnation and dwindling membership (Quereilhac 2008).

Nevertheless, interest in all things Oriental, for example Vicente Fatone's work on Japanese mysticism and Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, continued to grow. Fatone was an Orientalist philosopher who strove to introduce Indian thought into the Argentinian cultural horizon. In 1934 and in 1936, he gave a series of lectures in Buenos Aires entitled *The Greatest Philosophers of Buddhism*. After a study trip through Asia, in 1937, he was appointed professor of History of Religions at La Plata National University, where his book "Nihilist Buddhism" (Fatone 1941) was published. In 1957, he was appointed ambassador in India and in 1960, professor of Philosophy and History of Religions at the University of Buenos Aires, from where he continued to spread a doctrine that was largely unknown in his country (Harvey 1998). His contribution paved the way for Argentinian Orientalism, deeply influencing writers from the *Grupo Sur* literary circle such as Eduardo Mallea, Victoria Ocampo, Héctor Murena, and Jorge Luis Borges (Gasquet 2008).

Furthermore, from the mid-twentieth century, Argentinian interest in an intellectual interpretation of Buddhism was boosted by the translation of recognized works by foreign authors such as D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, Hubert Benoit, Christmas Humphreys, Eugen Herrigel, and by some local ones, of which *Zen and the Crisis of Man* by D.J. Vogelmann (1967) is the most important. Within this context of receptiveness to Eastern ideas, Zen calligrapher Kazuka Sakai delivered a lecture on Buddhism in Argentina in 1955. The event took place at the National Library in Buenos Aires and was presented by writer Jorge Luis Borges. Twenty years later, in 1977, at the Coliseo Theater in Buenos Aires, Borges himself gave a lecture entitled "Buddhism," which was subsequently published in his book *Seven Nights* (Borges 1980; Magalhães and Carvalho 2013). This well-known writer of encyclopedic wisdom and candidate for the Nobel Prize on multiple occasions was greatly influenced by Buddhist ideas and at the same time became one of its disseminators at the local level. Another text that is worth mentioning is his work of synthesis *What is Buddhism?* (Borges and Jurado 2000).

Another Orientalist with great influence in the country was Spanish Jesuit Ismael Quiles, who migrated to Argentina in 1932, where he became dean at Salvador University in Buenos Aires. In 1967, he founded the School of Oriental Studies at the aforementioned educational establishment, where he held the Chair of Buddhist Studies. Among his many works, the book *Buddhist Philosophy* (Quiles 1968) is one of the most important.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the outstanding work done in Argentina by two internationally renowned Orientalists: Carmen Dragonetti and Fernando Tola. The latter, of Peruvian origin, realized noteworthy academic activity in his country during the first half of the twentieth century. In 1964, he traveled to India as cultural advisor at the Embassy of Peru. After his return to South America in 1970, he created the Chair of Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires. He met his Argentinian wife, Carmen Dragonetti, at the University of Lima, while she was studying Sanskrit, Pali, and Buddhism. Within the context of their work as researchers at the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), in 1989, they created the Institute of Buddhist Studies Foundation, where significant work of teaching, research, translation, and publication of original canonical texts was carried out. In this regard, the *Journal of Buddhist Studies* published by the Foundation, the first and to date the only academic journal of research on Buddhism in the Spanish-speaking world, was significant. It appeared from 1991 to 1998, a period in which 12 issues were published on the historical, philosophical, linguistic, and sociological aspects of Buddhism. The work of translation and publication undertaken by this pair of Orientalists is extremely profuse. It is worth mentioning here *Dhammapada: The Path of Dharma* (Dragonetti 1967), *Lotus Sutra of the True Doctrine* (Tola and Dragonetti 1999), and *Philosophy of India: From Veda to Vedanta. The Samkhya System* (Tola and Dragonetti 2008).

In the mid-1980s, things moved from a textual to a contextual stage of Buddhism, in which text (its philosophy and psychology) is inserted into matrixes composed of languages, practices, rituals, and various paths of development. Just as Baumann (2002) reported when discussing Western Buddhism in general terms, there are three ways in which this religion has been introduced into the Argentinian sociocultural context: firstly, through Oriental immigrants who were seeking to preserve their

original religion and traditions, secondly, by the work of missionaries who arrived in the country in order to gain converts, and thirdly, by Argentines without Oriental ancestry who adopted Buddhist practices and ideas and invited religious leaders to teach in the country. These different forms of arrival shaped two basic types of Buddhism. The first is ethnic or immigrant Buddhism, favored by Asians or their descendants, who total approximately 5000. The second is a Buddhism of converts, whose membership of 25,000 mainly comprises individuals with no Oriental background. We will now explore the history and main features of the institutions of ethnic Buddhism.

Ethnic Buddhism in Argentina

This type of Buddhism is linked to waves of immigrants from Laos, Japan, China, Taiwan, and Korea who arrived in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although the number of immigrants from the aforementioned countries totals 150,000, the majority did not practice Buddhism (Bianchi 2004; Carruitero 2012). However, those who did founded the institutions we are about to describe.

The 1980s were marked by a significant wave of Taiwanese, followed by Chinese immigrants. In 1985, the Buddhist segment of these immigrants created the *Asociación Budista China en la Argentina*. This school follows the Chan line, a school of Mahayana Buddhism developed in China from the sixth century CE onwards, although it incorporates practices of Theravada Buddhism such as Vipassana meditation. Master Pu Hsien arrived from Taiwan in 1988 and founded the Tzon Kuan temple, situated in Buenos Aires' Chinatown. The congregation of about 550 is mainly of Taiwanese or Chinese origin, but there is a small number of non-oriental Argentinians who attend the community's ceremonies, celebrations, meditation sessions, text study, and Master Pu Hsien's lectures. Master Dzau Dzan is the only Argentinian to be ordained a monk inside the community (Giannattasio 2003a). Another institution linked to Chinese immigration is the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Monastery, established in 1992 during Master Hsing Yun's visit. His aim was to provide religious support and traditional ceremonies for the Buddhists among the Chinese and Taiwanese communities. Hsing Yun was born in China in 1927 and is currently the 48th patriarch of the Chan School, Lin-Ji (Zen Rinzai in Japan). During the civil war, he moved to Taiwan and began his advancement of Humanitarian Buddhism by founding the international Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, which maintains an ecumenical lay posture of social service. Chueh Kae, the current master of the Argentinian headquarters, made his mark by opening this institution to Argentinians interested in Buddhist philosophy but with no Oriental ancestry. Thanks to his knowledge of Spanish and his painstaking translation of religious texts, non-immigrants began to flock to the organization's Buenos Aires Grand Temple. Alongside traditional ceremonies, they teach courses in Buddhism, meditation, cuisine, martial arts, yoga, and stretching.

Some Argentinian Japanese immigrants belong to Jodo Shinshu, or True Pure Land Buddhism, founded in Japan by the former monk Shinran Shonin in the thirteenth century. Its distinctive practice is the recitation of the formula "Namu Amida Butsu" ("I take refuge in the Buddha Amida"), an invocation to a heavenly being described in the Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, whose objective is to obtain happiness, prosperity, and

positive reincarnation. The school has its Honpa Hongwanji temple in Buenos Aires, led by a reverend trained in Japan, a group of 500, which is mainly frequented by Japanese immigrants and their descendants. One of the main motives for the establishment of this religion in Buenos Aires in the 1970s was the need to gather the remains of the Japanese deceased on Argentinian soil in a single location in order to officiate the funeral rites according to Buddhist tradition (Di Risio and Irazabal 2003).

Another Buddhist school that emerged in the thirteenth century and has been present in the country since the mid 90's is Nichiren Shoshu. Its temple in Buenos Aires is mainly attended by members of the Japanese community of around 400 families. This Buddhist school focuses on studying the Lotus Sutra, one of the most popular and influential Mahayana texts, and suggests that the recitation of the Nam Myoho Renge Kyo mantra ("Veneration of the Lotus Sutra") is the direct path to enlightenment.

Korean Zen, which arrived together with the wave of South Korean immigration in the 1980s, completes the panorama of local ethnic Buddhism. The Han Ma Um Zen school, whose spiritual leader is Master Tae Heng Se Nim, has centers in Korea, the USA, and Argentina. The local temple is in Buenos Aires, and there is also a monastery in Tucumán Province. They are led by a senior monk and two intermediate monks of Korean origin. Their positions last 2 years, and they rotate with other countries. Its 2000 members are mostly middle class Koreans and, to a lesser degree, upper class Argentinians. The former share their practices with Presbyterianism and the latter with Catholicism. Another Buddhist center of Korean origin is the Zen Koryosa temple, presided over by Zen masters Kyung Hyun Sunim and So Mok Sunim. The former was ordained a Jogye order nun in Korea in 1960 and came to Buenos Aires in 1998 to lead the temple in Flores neighborhood. The latter was ordained in the Pomosa Temple in 1973 and came in 1999 to assist Kyung Hyun. In 2003, they founded the Argentinian Zen Buddhist Center in Buenos Aires to advance the teaching and diffusion of the religion beyond the Korean immigrant community (Giannattasio and Irazabal 2003).

Finally, a Buddhist wave arrived in 1980 with 2000 refugees from Laos who had fled the chaos in their homeland after the Vietnam War. They arrived in Argentina under an agreement with the United Nations, bringing Theravada Buddhism as part of their sociocultural baggage. They founded a temple in the province of Misiones, which enjoyed on occasion the presence of Laotian monks. But over time, part of the community converted to Catholicism, Pentecostalism, or Mormonism due to the pressure to adapt exerted by the Argentine Government, and to the fact that there were no religious specialists or Buddhist images to facilitate the practice of their religion. Nevertheless, certain rites were preserved in the domestic sphere along with some collective celebrations (Bianchi 2004).

Although ethnic Buddhism consists of organizations linked to Asian Buddhist immigrants, in recent years, it has manifested a dual character that includes Argentines with no Oriental background. Especially centers linked to the Chinese and Korean immigration have tried to attract new members from outside the collectivity through activities that have more in common with the Western imaginary about Buddhism, such as the practice of meditation and philosophical study. The minority but growing presence of native Argentinians challenges the categorical distinction between immigration and convert Buddhism. These institutions increasingly take the form of parallel congregations, in which activities are divided according to the expectations of the different types of members (Numrich 1996). In contrast to the clear outward projection

of these institutions, the Japanese ethnic Buddhism of the Nichiren Shoshu and the Jodo Shinshu, as well as the Laotian Theravada, has remained restricted to the Asian migratory context, providing a clear example of Buddhism as a refuge of ethnic identity.

Convert Buddhism in Argentina

The early textual appropriation of Buddhism that took place in the twentieth century paved the way for a sector of Argentinian society to become familiar with notions like illumination, *satori*, meditation, *karma*, and *nirvana*, simultaneously arousing an interest in this religion, its teachings and practice. This laid the foundations for the development of convert Buddhist institutions in the country. Convert Buddhism is represented locally by four main traditions: Zen Buddhism, Tibetan, Theravada, and Soka Gakkai. All these emerged in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Their members are mostly middle or upper middle class Argentinians with no Oriental background who combine their participation in Buddhist groups with an urban secular lifestyle. Their backgrounds reveal a distancing from their inherited Catholicism and their passage through Oriental groups and a wide range of disciplines linked to the New Age (yoga, reiki, martial arts, and alternative therapies).

Japanese Zen Buddhism has seven institutions which boast around 5000 adherents (Carini 2009, 2012). One of these, the Serena Alegría ("Serene Happiness") temple, was founded by Ricardo Dokyu, an Argentinian interested in Zen, who traveled to Brazil in 1984 and spent 18 months at Belo Horizonte's Zen Center and at the *Pico de Raios* Buddhist monastery in Ouro Preto. He was ordained there in 1985 before returning to Argentina. He later spent 10 years in Japan training in Zen, from 1991 until his return in 2001. In 2002, he was formally recognized as a master and began to spread Zen in his homeland. Dokyu is currently lecturing on Zen and running a meditation group in Buenos Aires. He organizes monthly meditation days and occasional *sesshins* (periods of intensive meditation) over several days. Dokyu has gained access to diverse institutional circles to advance his missionary activities. The group consists of around 50 adherents, several of whom have been ordained Zen monks.

The Dojo del Jardín ("Garden Dojo") or Nanzenji Zen group came into being when the Argentinian Aurora Oshiro was allocated an area to practice Zen meditation in the Buenos Aires Japanese Garden (a public space administered by the non-profit Japanese Argentine Cultural Foundation and one of the largest gardens of its type in the world, outside Japan) in 1987. A permanent membership core of 30 was formed, and there was a large movement of new participants interested in trying meditation. In 1993, Aurora participated in the international Jogoji Summer Camp in Japan, a temple guided by Master Ikoroshi, one of the few Japanese willing to teach Zen to foreigners. In 1995, she returned to Japan to reside in a temple, occasionally returning to lead her local group in Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, the local participants continued practicing in the Dojo del Jardín. In the following years, Aurora invited other members of the Dojo del Jardín to Japan to experience traditional Zen monastic life. In 2000, the group suffered an important setback when it was evicted from the Japanese Garden by its new administration. Its followers continued to meet in transitory locations. Now lacking the Japanese Garden link, the center became known as "Zen del Sur" ("Southern Zen"

or "Nanzenji"). Aurora Oshiro spent 10 years in Japan, obtained the title of Zen master, and became her temple's leader. In 2005, she returned to Latin America and settled in Peru, where she became abbess of a Buddhist temple linked to Japanese immigrants. She occasionally visits Nanzenji, which is run by Aurora's son, Argentine monk Senpo Oshiro.

Another group formed in the 1980s on the initiative of an Argentinian who traveled abroad to study Zen Buddhism is the *Ermita de Paja* (Straw Hermit) led by Jorge Bustamante, a recognized master in his homeland. He became interested in Zen in the 1970s through the readings then available and, thus motivated, traveled to France in 1984 to practice in the La Gendronière temple, founded by Taisen Deshimaru, the charismatic master who introduced Soto Zen (one of the two major Japanese Zen schools) in Europe and founded the International Zen Association. There, he was ordained a monk, and after his return in 1985, he formed a meditation group. Bustamante continued to travel frequently to France, and in 1992, his center in Buenos Aires was given its name. He maintained his ties with the AZI until they were severed in 1994, due to differences with the leadership. The following year, Bustamante met his current master, Sama Tangen, who became the Ermita*'s* figurehead. Bustamante's community possesses over a hundred non-oriental Argentinian members.

In 1995, a new group was formed linked to the Deshimaru Zen line led by the Frenchman Stéphane "Kosen" Thibaut, who performed missionary work in Argentina and other Latin American countries. He is one of Deshimaru's three disciples with formal master training from Niwa Zenji, at that time abbot of the Eiheiji monastery—the main temple of the Soto school—and highest Soto Zen authority in the world, after Deshimaru's sudden death. At the beginning of the 1990s, he split from the International Zen Association and founded his own network of Zen centers in Europe. In the mid-1990s, he began to visit Argentina, guiding meditation retreats and establishing the Latin American Zen Association. The organization is the biggest Zen group in the country, possessing over 20 dojos and a temple, Shobogenji, situated on Mount Uritorco in Córdoba Province, besides several meditation groups in Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Cuba. In recent years, this institution entered a new phase with the consecration of the first Zen teachers trained in the country: Toshiro "Taigen" Yamauchi and Ariadna "Dosei" Labbate.

There are also two masters teaching in Argentina, who trained in Zen in the USA. The first is Buddhist priest Seizan Feijoo, an Argentinian with no Oriental background who lived in the USA for 40 years, studied Zen and was ordained in the Daihonzan Chozen-Ji temple in Hawaii with his master Hosokawa Sogen from the International Zen Dojo. On returning to Argentina in 2000, he established the *Cambio Sutil* (Subtle Change) center. He currently runs this meditation group of around 30 people and organizes meditation *sesshins* in Christian retreat residences, lectures, and seminars in which Zen and karate are practiced. One of the features of the *Cambio Sutil* Zen center is that it belongs to the Zen Rinzai School, the sole group of its kind in Argentina.

The second example of a US Zen master is that of Augusto Alcalde, the impetus behind Diamond Sangha's first period in Argentina. Born in Córdoba, for 25 years, he devoted himself to teaching Zen Buddhism to diverse groups formed during his religious leadership. It all stemmed from his interest in Zen Buddhism's development in the 1970s. He found a model in Robert Aitken, the renowned American master and founder of Diamond Sangha, to continue his study and teaching of Zen. In 1985, he

organized the Sangha Vimalakirti practice group. Aitken's visit to Argentina in 1989 was a landmark in the history of Argentinian Buddhism, the first time an internationally renowned Zen master had visited the country. Subsequently, the community would continue to be active for another decade. However, in 1999, Alcalde resigned as Diamond Sangha master and the local group disbanded. A few former students searched for a Diamond Sangha Zen master, and Daniel Terragno, a master of Chilean origins who had lived in the USA for more than 40 years, was invited. The ex-students invited him as he was the only Spanish-speaking Diamond Sangha master and was closer culturally to the Argentinians. Since 1999, a new group has formed with old and new members. Diamond Sangha's presence acquired a new identity under the name of *Viento del Sur* (Southern Wind) and a new master. Terragno began to visit Argentina twice a year holding 1-week *sesshines* in Córdoba Province (in summer) and a Catholic spiritual residence in the Buenos Aires suburb of Florencio Varela (in winter). In 2012, Ricardo Toledo, one of the group leaders who started practicing Zen in 1987 with Augusto Alcalde, was appointed assistant teacher by Daniel Terragno. *Viento del Sur* is currently well established with 15 years of existence and represents the culmination of Diamond Sangha's institutionalization in Argentina, a process which commenced almost 30 years ago with Sangha Vimalakirti (Carini 2013).

Another Zen center locally led by a Spanish-speaking foreigner is Zendo Betania, whose headquarters is in Spain. It dates back to 1929, when the Christian priest Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle was sent as a missionary to Japan and began to study Zen with Harada Daiun. Later, he met the Catholic nun Ana María Schlüter Rodés, who, after lengthy stays in Japan, was granted permission to teach Zen in Spain in 1985. There she founded Zendo Betania. One of her disciples is Pedro Flores, a Zen master since 2002, who gives Zen introductory courses and *sesshins* in several Spanish cities. The group dates from 2003 when Flores commenced his annual visits to Argentina. The congregation consists of 50 members and their uniqueness lies in their style of Zen "for Christians" since they pronounce both creeds in their practices, rituals, representations, and world view (Carini 2012; Puglisi and Carini 2017).

To finish this journey through Zen groups formed in Argentina, it is necessary to highlight the seminal influence of two Japanese missionary teachers who spread activities in the country. One of them is Ryotan Tokuda who arrived in Brazil in 1968 to lead a temple of Japanese immigrants. Tokuda became known for opening its doors to non-Japanese Brazilians and for spreading Zen throughout the country beyond the community (Rocha 2000, 2001). This teacher initiated his visits to Argentina in 1984 and lived in Buenos Aires for a while organizing intensive Zen meditation practice working days. But, while the beginnings of his mission were promising and there were groups interested in his teaching, Tokuda has not returned to disseminate Zen in the country since 1986 and the local group related to him was dissolved. However, many Argentine Zen masters, among whom we can mention Augusto Alcalde, Ricardo Dokyu, and Aurora Oshiro, expressed the influence in their lives of their encounter with Tokuda, making it necessary to consider this first experience as a landmark that sealed paths and crystallized vocations later taken up in other contexts. Another case of a Japanese missionary master on local soil is that of Daigyo Moriyama, who arrived in Brazil in 1993 to head the Japanese Bushinji Temple community. His time in Brazil (1993 to 1996) was of intense dissemination work, not restricted to Japanese immigrants, and he set up numerous Zen centers in Brazil, Uruguay, and

Argentina. In Argentina, along with his French disciple Joshin Bachoux, he founded a Zen center called *Dojo del Arbol* (Tree Dojo) that operated from 1996 to 2002 after which Moriyama's activities in the country ceased.

Tibetan Buddhism is present in Argentina through nine institutions that encompass the four main schools of this religious tradition: Kagyu, Gelugpa, Sakya, and Nyingma. The *Kagyu* school of Tibetan Buddhism is the most important in Argentina with four local centers. The first of these is the *Camino del Diamante* (Diamond Way) Buddhist Center, which follows the teachings of Lama Ole Nydahl. This renowned Danish master traveled with his wife Hannah to the Himalayas in 1969, where he met the XVI Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, and former leader of the Kagyu School Karma line. In 1972, after several years of study, he began to spread the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism worldwide. Nowadays, there are about 600 Diamond Way centers in different countries, and it is one of the main lay Buddhist organizations in the West. The local headquarters was established in downtown Buenos Aires in 2003. Since 2012, a group of committed adherents rented a spacious property in the suburb of Vicente Lopez, where a new center with six permanent residents functions. Here, daily activities such as introductory talks about Buddhism, XVI Karmapa meditation, the projection of Lama Ole videos, and preliminary practices of Vajrayana (Ngondro) were held. In 2003, the Argentinian and Uruguayan communities acquired 57 ha in the town of Villa Serrana, Uruguay, where they founded the Karma Dechen Ling Retreat Center. There, courses and meditational retreats run by the Lama Ole or one of his traveling masters are held.

Another group belonging to the Kagyu School (and Karma line) is the Kagyu Techen Choling institute also known as *Jardín del Budismo Mahayana* (Mahayana Buddhist Garden). Founded in 1983 after renowned Lama Sherab Dorye's visit to Argentina, it is the oldest Vajrayana organization in the country. The local resident masters are Lama Sangye Dorye (Horacio Araujo) and Lama Rinchen Kandro (Consuelo Navarro Ocampo). Both studied Buddhism in France in the 1980s and are direct disciples of Bokar Rinpoche and Kalu Rinpoche. The Kagyu Techen Choling institute functions in the Belgrano neighborhood, Buenos Aires, and in the town of San Andrés de Giles, 100 km away, where there is a spiritual retreat center. The activities cover introductions to Buddhism, meditation for the new arrivals, and rites peculiar to Vajrayana Buddhism for those who already took Buddhist vows. They offer classes in the Tibetan language, seminars in Buddhist philosophy, and Tibetan yoga. The group's publishing project, Editorial Dungkar, has already published a dozen titles. Several of them are proof of the arduous translation work into Spanish from Tibetan, English, and French carried out by Sangye Dorye and Rinchen Khandro.

As opposed to the previous two groups, the Dongyuling Center belongs to the Kagyu School's Drugpa line. Founded by Lama Drubwang Dorzong Rinpoche and Lama Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche during their 1986 visit, its leader is Gerardo Abboud, an Argentinian who after graduating as an engineer in 1970 went to the Himalayas to study Buddhism for 14 years with notable Tibetan masters (including the XVI Karmapa). Abboud currently combines running Dongyuling with frequent trips working as a Spanish-English translator for many distinguished Tibetan lamas including the Dalai Lama. This group also functions in Belgrano, a residential neighborhood in Buenos Aires, where meditation sessions followed by talks based on audience questions are held. Members perform their own Vajrayana rituals receiving personal

guidance from Abboud. Similarly, since 1991, a Dongyuling center led by Argentinian Michel Hanono has functioned in Bariloche, where a teaching and practice scheme akin to that of Buenos Aires exists. Furthermore, those responsible for the Dongyuling center supervised the building of two *stupas*.[1] The first was consecrated in 1997 in the town of Tandil and the second in 2005 on Mount Otto, Bariloche.

Completing the local *Kagyu* school panorama is the Phuntsok Choling group, belonging to the Drikung line. Its leader is Argentinian Jorge Luis Varela, whose religious name is Konchog Norbu. Formed in 2004, its spiritual leader is Lama Khenpo (a spiritual degree) Phuntsok Tenzin Rinpoche. He is a Tibetan monk who in 1996 started running Chilean Drikung centers. The center functions in an apartment in the Recoleta neighborhood of Buenos Aires and offers activities including monthly courses on Buddhist philosophy, Vajrayana Buddhism ritual practices, and retreats which the spiritual leader presides over on his occasional visits. Varela offers classes in Yoga and Tai Chi and also practices Chinese and Tibetan medicinal therapies.

The Gelugpa School (headed by the Dalai Lama) is present in Argentina through three different institutions. First of all is the Argentine Buddhist Association established in 1999 by Osvaldo Puglisi, a Chan Buddhism, Taoism, and Kung Fu instructor, who learnt these disciplines from the Chinese master Chen Chin Wen. At the beginning of the 2000s, Puglisi organized Geshe Ngawang Sherab's and Lama Gangchen Rimpoche's visits to Argentina. Both are renowned monks of the Gelugpa School. In 2004, he coordinated the first visits of the "Sacred Relics of the Venerable Buddha Shakyamuni," brought by Lama Gangchen on his world tour. Puglisi is currently teaching workshops on Buddhist philosophy and Chan meditation in a center in Villa del Parque neighborhood. Furthermore, he organizes Geshe Jampa Tenzin's Argentinian visits. He is another monk in the Gelugpa tradition who often travels from his Indian monastery to perform purification rituals, cures, and initiations.

Another organization related with the Gelugpa tradition is *Centro de Meditación Kadampa Argentina*, belonging to the New Kadampa Tradition, an international network that boasts about 1200 meditation centers and groups worldwide. They were founded by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso in 1991 after his split with the Dalai Lama, Gelugpa orthodoxy, and Tibetan Buddhism in general.[2] The Argentinian Kadampa Meditation Center has its headquarters in the Palermo neighborhood and five other branches in Buenos Aires. The first master responsible for Argentina is Brazilian Guen Kelsang Togden, who learnt the Kadampa tradition in Canada and was ordained a monk in England. In 2010, he traveled to Argentina to run the local NKT branches. They offer a three-level study program: "General Program," "Fundamental Program," and Teacher Training Program." These are based on over 20 books published by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. Moreover, there are meditation courses and various tantric rituals, or *pujas*, among which is the Dorje Shugden's controversial cult. Today, she runs the Kadampa centers of Argentina, Peru, and Uruguay. Guen Kelsang Rinchung, a young Argentinian who studied Kadampa Buddhism in Europe, became a nun in 2012.

[1] A mound-like or hemispherical structure containing Buddhist relics, typically the ashes of Buddhist monks, used by Buddhists as a place of meditation.

[2] On the conflict that gave rise to this separation and its consequences for Buddhism in the West, see Usarski (2006).

The third local Gelugpa center is the Yogi Saraha Tibetan Buddhism Study Group. It belongs to the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), a religious organization consisting of an international network of 150 branches, founded by Lama Thubten Yeshe and its present leader, Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. The Argentinian group is led by the nun Thubten Kundrol, an Argentinian who studied Tibetan Buddhism in Japan, Italy, and the USA after leaving Argentina in 1979. After returning in 2004, she began to spread her teachings in Buenos Aires by giving courses based on the *Lam-Rim* (Stages on the Path), a fundamental text in the Gelugpa School. Moreover, she offers a "Basic Program in Tibetan Buddhism Studies" as well as meditation classes, tantric rituals, and a therapeutic technique called "pranic self-heal."

As regards the other Tibetan Buddhism schools, since 2010, the local center of the Sakya tradition has been in the Palden Sakya Buenos Aires Group, led by the Argentinian Federico Andino (Jñāñavajra), who was authorized to teach by Lama Khenpo Pema Wangdak, a former student of the 41st Sakya Trizin and the Sakya school's current leader. An Oriental studies graduate from the Universidad del Salvador, Andino, combines teaching Tibetan Buddhism classes at that establishment with being resident master of the Palden Sakya Group, where he runs a school-like study program on Buddhist philosophy for new adherents through online lectures. Moreover, the Palden Sakya Group possesses a Dharma Center in Belgrano whose members meet occasionally to listen to Andino's talks, meditate, and practice Vajrayana rituals. Furthermore, Lama Khenpo Pema Wangdak and other Sakya Tibetan masters make occasional trips to Argentina to impart teachings and initiations.

Completing the spectrum of Tibetan Buddhist groups is the Nyingma tradition represented locally by the Comunidad Dzogchen Argentina Tashigar Sur, led by the Tibetan master Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, leader of the International Dzogchen Community, which has study centers in many European and Latin American countries. Namkhai is a renowned master of Dzogchen, a system of ideas and initial practices considered to be the most elevated, particularly in the Nyingma tradition, and in Tibetan Buddhism in general. Tashigar Sur has its headquarters in El Durazno, Córdoba Province. There, more than 300 disciples from other Latin American countries and the rest of the world congregate annually to receive Namkhai Norbu, who travels to spread the tradition's teachings. Moreover, Tashigar Sur has numerous practitioner groups (gakyil) in various Argentine cities, which hold occasional meetings devoted to practicing yantra yoga (Tibetan yoga), the vajra dance, and other Vajrayana practices (Carini 2014, 2016).

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition is a group belonging to the Vipassana Meditation, an international organization founded by Narayan Goenka on the teachings of his master Sayagyi U Ba Khin. This organization is known for the inclusivist and rationalist nature of its teachings, as well as for the emphasis it places on secular, intramundane ethics.[3] They hold weekly meditation sessions at adherents' homes in various Argentine cities and offer 10-day intensive courses. The first was held in 1994 in the town of Lobos, and until recently, at various rented venues in Buenos Aires, Mendoza, and Córdoba Provinces. In 2005, the Argentine Vipassana Association acquired 22 ha in a rural area of the Brandsen District (Buenos Aires Province) and started building the Dhamma Sukhada Center with capacity for 120 students. Since

[3] On the origin of this organization and the main features of its worldview, see Carini (2017).

2013, they have held their 10-day courses there. So far, 90 Vipassana Meditation courses with 5000 attendees have been held. In 2017, a second Vipassana meditation center was inaugurated in Argentina: Dhamma Viriya, located in the city of Capilla del Monte, Province of Córdoba.

To conclude this journey through Buddhism converts, the Argentine Buddhist organization with most adherents, numbering around 20,000 is the Soka Gakkai Internacional de la Argentina (SGIAR), which is part of the International Soka Gakkai, a lay Buddhist organization founded by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in 1930. It originated as a lay branch of Nichiren Buddhism, the school from which it separated in the early 1990s after decades of conflictive coexistence.[4] Since 1960, the organization has spread around the world thanks to the efforts of its third president, Daisaku Ikeda. They hold many social and cultural events: lectures, seminars, exhibitions, and festivals. SGIAR was founded in 1964 by a group of Japanese immigrants, although nowadays, the majority of its members are non-Oriental. Its headquarters in the Villa Urquiza neighborhood of Buenos Aires boasts a 1000-seat amphitheater. Moreover, SGIAR possesses other centers in Córdoba and Neuquén Provinces. However, the bulk of the activities take place at weekly meetings in private homes, so the exact number of local SGIAR groups is unknown (Gancedo 2012; Giannattasio 2003b; Welsch 2016).

Crossings, encounters, and alternative appropriations

In relation to the links between different groups and Buddhist associations present in Argentina, the available data indicate that crossing, meeting, and articulation are rare, and when they do exist, they usually occur in an individualized manner as a consequence of the mobility of the spiritual seekers themselves in their exploration of a religious alternative. In the case of the encounter between the Buddhism of converts and ethnic Buddhism linked to migration, except for the aforementioned cases of parallel congregations, there is no fluid link either. Nevertheless, several special occasions did bring together all or part of the Argentine Buddhist field, making possible the meeting between organizations, teachers, and students of different origins. The development of this type of event has the potential to produce a collective identity at a national level, so we will give some examples below.

The first of this type of event was the visit of the "Sacred Relics of the Venerable Buddha Shakyamuni," held for the first time in 2004 (and repeated in 2007 and 2011). These relics of the Buddha were donated to the United Nations, and since then, they have traveled the entire world to be venerated by the Buddhist community. As we noted earlier, in 2004, the event was coordinated by the Argentine Buddhist Association and by Lama Gangchen Rinpoche. It lasted 4 days during which a variety of activities open to all audiences were held: meditations, mantra recitations, lectures, courses, and film screenings. Many of the country's Buddhist groups, both ethnic and converts, were represented. Each Buddhist referent had its turn to guide a meditation or ceremony, and even martial arts, indigenous spirituality, and other religions had their place. The event

[4] The consequences of this conflict were that both sectors were involved in a series of scandalous mutual accusations—settled in judicial proceedings—which were reproduced in all the countries in which both were established and therefore took an international aspect (cf. Usarski 2006).

was covered by television media and was attended by a large number of participants over the 4 days, mostly Argentine citizens without Oriental ancestors. What the variety of activities, teachers, and Buddhist schools had in common was that they were all Buddhists and were there to contemplate and venerate the relics of the Buddha.

Another meeting that transcended the usual borders between different Argentine organizations was the First Latin American Zen Encounter, organized by the masters of Nanzenji, Aurora Oshiro, and Jisen Oshiro in the Japanese Association of Argentina of the City of Buenos Aires in 2014. This event brought together leaders such as Augusto Alcalde, Daniel Terragno, and Jorge Bustamante. Workshops, lectures, meditation practices, tea ceremonies, martial arts classes, photographic exhibitions, film projections, ikebana, calligraphy, and other artistic activities were offered to the attendees. In addition, there was a guided tour of the Japanese Garden, the Tzong Kuang Temple, and the National Museum of Oriental Art.

The third case of an event that goes beyond the usual limits among Buddhist groups and involves most of the Argentine institutions is the Vesak, which is celebrated annually on the streets of Chinatown in Buenos Aires, organized by the Fo Guang Shan monastery. As mentioned above, although Fo Guang Shan is an organization mainly linked to "ethnic Buddhism," in recent years, this institution has presented a dual character that also includes Argentinians without Oriental ancestors. In general, the event is attended by Buddhist leaders from the ethnic side as well as some referents belonging to Buddhism of converts, mainly Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, it usually enjoys the official presence of the Taiwanese Ambassador in Argentina and authorities of the Government of Buenos Aires. The ceremony draws a crowd of several thousand people with no formal link to Buddhism, attracted by the exoticism of the festivity and its affinity with the ideas and practices of Buddhism. So, the Vesak is a unique opportunity to make this institution visible to the rest of Argentinian society.

The impression left to the observer by events such as the visit of the Sacred Relics of the Venerable Buddha Shakyamuni, the Latin American Zen Encounter, or the Vesak held in Chinatown is that Buddhism is very much alive in Argentina, and although its adherents are a minority, there is an increasing number of non-oriental Argentinians interested in its practices and worldview. The great repercussion of the Dalai Lama's four visits (1992, 1999, 2006, and 2011) is another example of Buddhism's growing roots in the society. However, despite these exceptional encounters that reflect the great interest in Buddhism, we can say that there is still no collective Buddhist identity at the national level. Despite the spatial proximity of Buddhist centers of different denominations in cities such as Buenos Aires, many of its followers are unaware of the existence of other traditions or schools present in the country and primarily identify with their teachers and the transnational community.[5]

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning the greater influence of Buddhism outside the institutions described in this paper. In the first place, many Argentinians manifest a great affinity with Buddhism, and although they do not participate in any Buddhist center, they are interested in its philosophy and incorporate it into their small daily practices. Tweed (2002: 20) proposes the term "night stand Buddhist" for these people who do not identify

[5] As an example, within the Zen Buddhist subfield itself, disciples of master Seizan Feijoo frequently travel to a temple in Chile and another in Hawaii related to his line for intensive training periods, although this experience could be carried out in other local Zen groups.

themselves as Buddhists and who do not embrace Buddhism exclusively or completely, but who perhaps practice Zen meditation at home, acquire images of Buddha, or read books or web pages on Buddhism, without formally committing to the religion.

Second, there is an alternative Buddhism that borrows some traditional elements to reinvent them in contexts which differ from the official Buddhist circuit. Certain cosmological elements and practices are incorporated in Christian centers, alternative therapy areas, and New Age groups such as yoga and reiki centers. The Amigos del Tao Foundation provides a clear example of this type of Buddhism, a place that due to its characteristics could be included in the New Age or Alternative Therapies circuit. There, teacher Osvaldo Ribot leads workshops on Zen meditation and Tibetan meditation. Other activities taught are tai-chi, chi-kung, yoga, spherodynamics, and psychodrama. Ribot is also a Gestalt and transpersonal therapist and provides psychological guidance to his students. Another case that bears witness to the impact of Buddhism in non-traditional spaces is the Argentine Association of Zen Psychotherapy, an organization chaired by psychiatrist Jorge Rovner, who combines behavioral psychology techniques, psychopharmacology, neuroscience, and the practice of meditation. Although centers such as Friends of Tao Foundation and the Argentine Association of Zen Psychotherapy offer a series of practices linked to Buddhism such as meditation and reading of texts—together with oriental psychophysical exercises like yoga and chi kung—they differ from the groups mentioned in the previous sections due to the clear evidence of psychologization, hybridization, and secularization specific to postmodern Buddhism (Baumann 2001). In turn, they have some common elements such as the importance assigned to the intellectual study of Buddhism and the fact that they are less strict in the practice of meditation compared to ethnic Buddhist centers and converts. This is what Kone (2001), in his study of European Zen has called "borrow tradition," where the cosmology and practices of this religion are reinterpreted and incorporated in a new context.

Finally, it should be noted that Buddhism's impact is growing in the field of the arts, literature, and general imaginary culture in Argentina. It is possible to find in the country's largest cities everything ranging from a "Tango Zen" workshop to a beauty clinic called "Zen Space" or "Therapy with Tibetan bowls," and every kind of business in between like restaurants, health food shops, discos, tea brands, real estate offices, clothes stores, communication consultants who brand themselves as Zen, *satori*, *kensho*, *nirvana*, *samadhi*, *karma*, and Buddha. Buddhism is often mentioned in self-help magazines, and it has a growing presence in the media.

Final remarks

Although it is a recent phenomenon, Buddhism in Argentina is important for its diversity. We can find a wide spectrum of schools (Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana), traditions (Zen, Chan, Jodo Shinshu, Nichiren, Kagyu, Gelugpa, etc.), and lines, which are divided by ethnic character or converted members.

Ethnic Buddhism is mostly represented by local chapters of international Buddhist platforms: the Chinese organizations Fo Guan Shan and Tzon Kwan, as well as the Korean Koryosa and Han Ma Um, and the Japanese Nichiren Shoshu and Jodo Shinshu. These schools have a wide presence in several Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Peru (Usarski 2012).

With respect to the Buddhism of converts, and as reported by Hughes Seager (2002) regarding the USA, three of the four traditions present in the country share their close association with 1960s counterculture and their emphasis on meditation: Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, and Theravada. The fourth organization, Soka Gakkai, is considered to be a phenomenon separated by its origin in the Japanese immigrant community, and because its main practice is the recitation of the Nam Myoho Renge Kyo mantra and not meditation. As in the case of ethnic Buddhism, part of the Buddhism of converts comprises the local headquarters of large international organizations such as Diamond Way, New Kadampa Tradition, Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, Soka Gakkai, Diamond Sangha, and Dzogchen Community, articulated around world-renowned charismatic leaders such as Robert Aitken, Lama Zopa, Stephane Thibaut, Ole Nydhal, Kelsang Gyatso, and Namkhai Norbu. Some of these institutions present a high degree of standardization in their organizational form, meditation practices, writings, and even aesthetic patterns, such as the Vipassana movement, Soka Gakkai, Diamond Way, New Kadampa Tradition, Sangha Kosen, and Dzogchen Community. On the contrary, other Buddhist centers are enclaves that, although they have links with communities and international teachers, were formed without a globalized model. Examples of this type of Buddhist centers are the Hermitage of Paja, the Subtle Change Zen Center, the Garden of Mahayana Buddhism, the Palden Sakya group, and the Buddhist Association of Argentina.

Argentina has become a destination for those who spread Buddhism in the West, as this country is frequently visited by Asian and Western teachers from all over the world. Indeed, the visit of different referents has been the starting point for the formation of many of the Buddhist groups of both ethnic origin and of converts without Oriental ancestors. Among the most outstanding religious leaders of Asian origin who have laid the foundations of Buddhism in the country are Pu Hsien, Hsing Yun, Ryotan Tokuda, Daigyo Moriyama, Lama Sherab Dorye, Drubwang Dorzong Rinpoche, Drugu Choegyal Riinpoche, Phuntsok Tenzin Rinpoche, Lama Ganchen Rinpoche, Lama Khenpo Pema Wangdak, and Chogyal Namkhai Norbu. The most notable foreign Western masters who have contributed to the development of Argentine Buddhism are Kosen Thibaut, Robert Aitken, Ole Nydhal, and Daniel Terragno.

The dispersion of Buddhism is not the mere transposition of a set of practices and representations from an Asian center to a Western periphery. Globalization implies the dissolution of Asia as the main or sole agent of authority. New legitimate learning centers outside this continent show a process of decentralization of this religion (Baumann and Prebish 2002; Beyer 1998). The diversity of origins that we can find, for example, in Zen currently present in Argentina, is evident, since there is a connection with European Zen (of Deshimaru's line in France and with Schlüter Rodés in Spain), another with North American Zen (the groups of Alcalde, Terragno, and Feijoo) and finally a direct affiliation with Japanese Zen through teachers that were formed there (Bustamante, Oshiro, and Dokyu). At the same time, it is important to highlight the presence of a first generation of leaders of Tibetan Buddhism native to Argentina, such as Gerardo Abboud, Federico Andino, Lama Sangye Dorye and Lama Rinchen, Luis Varela (Konchog Norbu), Osvaldo Puglisi, Thubten Kundrol, and Guen Kelsang Rinchung, trained in India or in Buddhist centers of other Western countries by religious referents of Tibetan origin.

The importance of Brazilian Buddhism in shaping Argentine Buddhism should not be overlooked. Many Asian teachers who came to Argentina to impart knowledge did so within the framework of their work of dissemination in Brazil, like the aforementioned Tokuda and Moriyama. In the same way, Tibetan Buddhist lamas and teachers came to Argentina from Brazil, such as Lama Ganchen and Guen Kelsang Togden. Even ethnic Buddhism has a link with Brazil, since masters Pu Hsien and Hsing Yun from the Tzong Kuan temple and the Fo Guang Shan organization, respectively, have a strong presence in the neighboring country.

In turn, as mentioned above, there is a second generation of leaders trained mainly in Buddhist centers in Argentina, such as Ricardo Toledo, Toshiro "Taigen" Yamauchi, and Ariadna "Dosei" Labbate. This new breed of native teachers, together with the construction of new Buddhist centers of converts, and the opening of ethnic communities to Argentines without Oriental ancestors has inaugurated a third moment of Buddhism in Argentina in the second decade of the twenty-first century, characterized by greater institutionalization, visibility, and maturity in local Buddhism.

To conclude, we need to wonder about the motives that have driven Argentinians with no Oriental background to favor a religion alien to the traditional Catholic socio-cultural framework. Probably, they are the result of the interest it stimulates both in its spiritual practices and its unusual vision of the world. In effect, for decades, there has existed a growing curiosity about meditation and Buddhist spiritual technology. Buddhist teachers emphasize the close links between Buddhism and a scientific worldview, which makes it especially attractive. Besides, many practices, ideas, and perspectives of this religion find a fluent dialog with a certain collective imagination and elements peculiar to the New Age movement, rooted in the collective consciousness of the Argentinian upper and middle classes. Lastly, another relevant factor in the impact of Buddhism has been its receptive attitude towards new means of communication. Thus, several authors have highlighted the wide variety of channels used by lamas, Zen masters, and other Buddhist leaders to spread their message, such as conferences, books, magazines, websites, and television (Baumann 2001; Usarski 2002).

In any case, the development of Buddhism in Argentina faces certain challenges. One of them is the matter of sustainability since in an emerging country whose economy has gone through several crises, forming and maintaining a new Buddhist group is difficult. For example, the aforementioned "Dojo del Arbol" founded by Moriyama was dissolved when the Argentine couple who officiated as local nexus suffered an economic crisis produced by Argentina's default in 2001. Another example that bears witness to these limitations is the lack of resources of the Laotian immigrant community to fund the visit of Theravada teachers and to finish their project of building a 14-m Buddha statue (which would be the largest in Latin America). Second, as other authors (Usarski 2012; Díez de Velasco 2012) point out, another limiting factor in the development of Buddhism is its concentration in large urban settlements. In the Argentinian case, almost all Buddhist groups are located in the City of Buenos Aires. To close, although no reliable quantitative data is available, based on experiences in other countries, such as Brazil (cf Usarski 2002), we can hypothesize that ethnic Buddhism faces a series of challenges, such as the aging of the population and the lack of arrival of new generations of immigrants. Perhaps, we should consider the opening of immigrant temples to Argentinians who are interested in Buddhism but have no Oriental ancestry as a subsistence strategy based on the search for new members.

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