

AMERICAN MINDFULNESS: A CASE STUDY OF THE TRANSNATIONAL  
RECEPTION OF “MINDFULNESS – MAINDOFURUNESU” IN JAPAN

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Over the past few decades, “mindfulness” has become popular and spread throughout the world, from North American to Australia. It has been applied in numerous context: mental health, education, and business, among others. Although mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist meditation practices, it has been removed from its religious contexts and secularized. Significantly, this standardized form of mindfulness, which can be called American Mindfulness, has been reimported back into Asia. In the case of Japan, American Mindfulness has become popular at the public level, and there are prominent Zen Buddhist priests claiming that American Mindfulness is in fact a part of Japanese Zen. Through analysis of the broader Japanese cultural environment and the Japanese Buddhist context, this thesis will explain how Japanese Zen Buddhists come to make their claim on American Mindfulness.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, “mindfulness” has spread throughout the world and can be found in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, among other regions. It has taken hold especially in the United States, and also other “Western” nations, and it has become prevalent in medicine, mental health, education, business, and other realms. Although it originated in the religious context of Buddhist contemplative practices, and traces its history through such figures as Jon Kabat-Zinn, Seung Sahn, and Thich Nhat Hanh, longtime Buddhist practitioners and teachers, it has been denatured or stripped of its religious trappings and become ‘secularized mindfulness.’ Significantly, this secularized mindfulness, which we can call American Mindfulness, has been reimported back into Asia. In the case of Japan, we find prominent Zen Buddhist priests claiming that this American Mindfulness has always existed within Zen Buddhism as a subset despite the fact that historically this seems not to be true. By tracing the history of the development of the concept of “religion,” or *shūkyō*, in Japan, the rising popularity of “spiritual” practices, and the resulting cultural matrix, one can understand how Zen Buddhists have made the move to claim that American Mindfulness “has always been part of Zen.”

It is difficult to strictly define the meaning of “mindfulness”. The word “mindfulness” itself is one among different translations for the Buddhist concept of *sati*. In addition, in modern and contemporary America, the definition of “mindfulness” has been broadened and modified by different groups for different purposes. Particularly in popular discourse, “mindfulness” has gradually become a catch-all and vacuous

buzzword with wide-ranging applications. However, although there is no singular definition for this “American Mindfulness”, there are several important factors which have helped to frame the discussion.

First, the word “mindfulness” is a translation of the Pali term “*sati*” or in Sanskrit *smṛti* (Wilson 15-16). The word “*sati*” itself can have multiple meanings. Specifically as a Buddhist technical term, “*sati*” can mean awareness, attention, or alertness. Although there is thus some fluidity within its originating context, there is a coherent constellation of related meanings. The fluidity and ambiguity of American Mindfulness seems to be of another order altogether.

Second, as “mindfulness” gradually developed in America to the extent that it could be characterized as a “movement”, the term “mindfulness” has come to such connotations as “paying attention” and “being present”, and it could otherwise be broadly interpreted to suit a range of diverse purposes (2-4). As mindfulness has been increasingly covered by influential national newspapers and television broadcasters in the US, and has been praised by celebrities and politicians, the term “mindfulness” has gradually accreted greater symbolic power over time. During the 2010s in America, the range of what practices could be identified as related to “mindfulness” has widened significantly, ranging from “mindfulness” as psychotherapy in the form of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to “mindfulness” as self-help practices in the form of anything from Mindful Eating to Mindful Orgasms.

This study limits the definition of “mindfulness” to the distinct “American Mindfulness” movement as identified by Jeff Wilson in his monograph *Mindful America*. In particular, he identifies the critical watershed period of development for the

mindfulness movement in America as the 1970s, as three of the most important sources of mindfulness teaching appeared then: vipassana meditation teachers trained in Asia, the Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Buddhist practitioner, doctor, and scientist Jon Kabat-Zinn (31). As the mindfulness movement continued to develop with accelerated pace, the 2000s stood as the transition period for the mindfulness movement to go mainstream. From then on, mindfulness has become a popular practice beyond the Buddhist framework, to such an extent that it has become a “basic part of the spiritual vocabulary of North America” (41).

Furthermore, among other significant recent developments of mindfulness, Wilson brings attention to the phenomenon of American or Americanized Mindfulness being exported internationally now that it has become entrenched in American society, and how the study of the local reactions to this phenomenon in other countries might be helpful in understanding the transnational flow of “mindfulness”; yet, there have been no major studies of the transnational flow of American Mindfulness, in particular back into Asia. The present study aims to help fill this lacuna identified by Wilson.

Following Wilson's use of mindfulness-related publications and websites as a general indicator for the popularity of mindfulness (3-4), it is clear that in recent years there has been a significant build-up of mindfulness activities in Japan. In mainstream media, there are numerous publications on mindfulness in Japan, as evidenced by both Japanese works and English works in Japanese translation, and mindfulness has been covered multiple times by NHK, the Japanese national broadcasting service. There are also in Japan many advocates of mindfulness on a smaller scale, ranging from academic

organizations such as the Japanese Association of Mindfulness (mindfulness.jp) to commercial organizations such as the Mindfulness Project (mindfulness-project.jp).

Although it might still be too early to attempt to capture the full picture of American Mindfulness in Japan, it is possible to review the general historical developments of the importation and popularization of American Mindfulness (Fujii 69-71). According to Fujii, certain streams of “Asian Buddhism”, in this case referring to South and Southeast Asian Buddhism, were introduced into modern Japan in the 1990s. In particular, two prominent representatives of “Asian Buddhism” visited Japan: the Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh in 1995, and the Cambodian master Maha Ghosananda in 1997. During their visits, they both stressed “mindfulness” in their teaching. At around the same time, “medicalized mindfulness” was also introduced in Japan. Notably, Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Full Catastrophe Living* was translated into Japanese in 1997. By 2012, he was invited specifically to hold Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) workshops in Japan by Yutaka Haruki, the executive director of the Japanese Psychological Association. As a result, Fujii identifies one relatively prominent milestone for the growing influence of American Mindfulness in the year 2012, when the Japan Theravada Buddhist Association changed the title of their Japanese translation of Henepola Guraratana’s *Mindfulness in Plain English*. The book was first translated in 2007, and the title was then simply translated using the single native Japanese word “*kizuki*” meaning attention or awareness. In 2012, the title of the book was changed to “Mindfulness: the *kizuki* meditation” with “mindfulness” being transliterated using the Japanese katakana syllabary as *maindofurunesu*. Within the broader context, this

linguistic change closely correlates with the accelerating growth of “mindfulness” as a specifically foreign or non-Japanese concept and practice.

Consequently, in this study, I will examine the specific case of the importation of “American Mindfulness” into Japan, and the reactions of Japanese Buddhists in general and Japanese Zen Buddhists in particular. Through this examination, I aim to demonstrate the Japanese cultural matrix that would ground and make meaningful the Rinzaï Zen institution’s claim of American Mindfulness’ genealogy within Japanese Zen. First, I will demonstrate that the Japanese cultural environment is conducive for the importation and development of American Mindfulness. In particular, I will show that American Mindfulness fits relatively well into the niche in Japanese society created by the modern Japanese traditions of wellbeing-oriented practices, which might be termed alternative medicine (*daitai iryou*). Second, within the context of this cultural matrix, I will examine the attitude of an influential Japanese Rinzaï Zen institution as represented through their official magazine and show that it is significantly accommodating of American Mindfulness. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that although this attitude might be open to criticism, nevertheless it represents a development which fits within the larger contexts of the Japanese cultural environment and the Japanese Buddhist framework. In particular, I argue that their arguments set forth in support of claims about American Mindfulness are understandable results of the interaction between the Japanese cultural environment and the perspectives and motives of representative figures and publications of the Rinzaï Zen institution. Specifically, my examination will proceed in three stages through three chapters.

In the first chapter, I will analyze the broader historical context of the Japanese religious traditions in order to identify certain important related themes that are directly relevant to the conduciveness of the Japanese environment toward American Mindfulness. I will discuss the pertinent historical development of these core themes and show their influence in contemporary Japan.

In the second chapter, within the context of the broader Japanese cultural environment, I will analyze the modern and contemporary Japanese traditions of “spiritual” alternative medicine as represented by the practice of Reiki, a kind of spiritual force thought to reside as psycho-physical energy within everyone. I will discuss the relevant characteristics of the niche partially created by these traditions through their historical development and interaction with broader societal trends and how certain characteristics of American Mindfulness fit into this Japanese niche.

In the third chapter, I will examine in detail two influential Japanese Buddhist publications. In particular, I will examine the two special editions on “mindfulness” of the nonsectarian Buddhist magazine *Daihōrin* and the Rinzai Zen Buddhist magazine *Zen Bunka*. Through the examination of the special edition of *Daihōrin*, I will identify the general tone of the Japanese Buddhists’ reactions to American Mindfulness. Through the examination of the special edition of *Zen Bunka* within the previously established context, I will identify the specific attitude of the Rinzai Zen institution behind *Zen Bunka*. In particular, I will examine the surprising claim by influential Rinzai Zen Buddhists, that American Mindfulness is inherently a part of Japanese Zen. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how this is not a vacuous claim, but rather it is grounded in the Japanese cultural environment and in the Japanese Zen Buddhist framework.

## CHAPTER II

### THE JAPANESE ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO AMERICAN MINDFULNESS

Although the importation of American Mindfulness into Japan is recent, the attitudes of Japanese Buddhists and their reactions to this phenomena need to be interpreted within the context of the historical development of Japanese religions and religiosity. The primary reason for this is that, in principle, the modern history of religions and religiosity in Japan is a history of the decline of traditional religions and of the search for alternative religiosity or spirituality. Starting with the pivotal contact with the West in the late Tokugawa period, the Western conception of "religion" was imported into and imposed on Japan. Furthermore, this introduction of "religion" in modern Japan would hail a series of changes which would eventually engender and accentuate two important, related underlying tendencies of contemporary Japanese religiosity. In particular, the Japanese government readily appropriated and endorsed the Western Protestant concept of "religion" for their own political purposes. The Japanese government continued their policies concerning the matter of religion, and the Japanese people gradually albeit not entirely adapted to the use of "religion" as imposed by the government. In contemporary Japan, both the concept of "religion" and the resultant linguistic and ideological shifts are still present and influential. First, there is the generalized antipathy of the Japanese people towards the very concept of "religion", and toward institutionalized religions in particular. Second, there is the relative openness toward alternative spiritual practices that might fulfill spiritual needs without being necessarily affiliated with traditional religions or religiosity. These tendencies would

eventually prompt certain adaptations even from traditional Buddhist quarters, and ultimately they would also provide a conducive environment for the importation and development of American Mindfulness in Japan.

### Religion and Religiosity in Japan before the Importation of Western "religion"

Before the importation of the Western concept of "religion" into Japan, there did exist traditions and practices that might be compared to Western religions. Although there were significant differences between these Japanese traditions and Western religions, they did serve to fulfill certain common cultural needs, with arguably the most representative example being the need to make sense of death and the afterlife. . These traditions and practices would remain important in contemporary Japan, despite later changes due to the influence of the Western concept of "religion". I will first analyze a case study of one Japanese religious tradition in order to show how its attendant religious concern is changed but still relevant in contemporary Japan, despite the dismantling of the original religious tradition. Then, I will briefly explain the key underlying aspects of Japanese religions and religiosity as a whole, as unearthed by scholars of Japanese religions.

One representative example of a pre-"religion" Japanese religious tradition is the Tokugawa "*danka*" system (Hur 108). Although this system of religious affiliation was administered from top-down by the Tokugawa government for political reasons, it did also serve to address the perennial Japanese concern with death and dying. More specifically, Japan has had contact with the West before Matthew Perry forced the



opening of Japan in 1853, with Jesuit missionaries introducing Catholicism to Japan in the 16th century. In his monograph, Nam-lin Hur stresses this earlier contact and argues that the Tokugawa government's support and enforcement of the Buddhist danka system were primarily due to their animosity towards Christianity. Danka, or "patron household", was a system imposed by the Tokugawa government, in which any given Japanese household would be affiliated with one Buddhist temple. The household would support the temple financially, and in return, the temple would provide services, chief among them non-Christian certification and funerary and memorial rites. In addition to charting the historical development of the danka system until the early years of the Meiji era, Hur also analyzes the structure of the Buddhist funerary and memorial rites in order to uncover the underlying Japanese elements. The various Buddhist funerary and memorial rites, such as erecting memorial tables or the annual Bon festival, are analyzed by Hur as newer Buddhist re-interpretations of older Japanese practices. Through this analysis, he arrives at the commonly accepted goal of Buddhist funerary and memorial rituals as linked to native Japanese cultural concern. Namely, that goal is to guide spirits of the dead into becoming "ancestors".

More relevant to the discussion of contemporary Japanese religions and religiosity, the Japanese concern with death and dying continues into the present (Suzuki 1-2). Ethnographic case studies edited by Suzuki Hikaru shows the importance and relevance of funerary practices in contemporary Japan as they underwent changes throughout history. In recent history and into the present, Japan has experienced numerous transformations in the realm of politics, economy, demography, and environment. Yet there has been a consistent concern with fundamental issues such as the

meaning of life and death. One can see this, for example, in the high degree of concern with funerary rituals.

While the forms and practices have continually undergone change, the regularity and consistency of funerary and memorial practices have been fairly consistent. From the modern period onwards, there has been an increasing professionalization of funerals and the innovation of new funerary practices. On one level, there is an understandable conflict between professional funerary services prioritizing efficiency and growing demand for the prioritization of the dying individuals themselves. On an arguably more fundamental level, there is also a noticeable trend in contemporary Japan of opting for unconventional funerary practices, such as cremation or Tree-Burial.

Furthermore, this Japanese preoccupation with death and funerary practices is not an abstract generalization; rather, it is directly relevant to Japanese individuals (Kawano 65-66). According to Kawano Satsuki, one of the most important emergent problems with the conventional family gravesite tradition is the necessity of maintenance. In accordance with tradition, the gravesites themselves requires tending to, and the spirits of the dead also require annual memorial rites performed for their sake. Within this context, one alternative that emerged in Japan is cremation and ash scattering, as represented by the Grave-Free Promotion Society of Japan. Although Society members can have multiple reasons for their preference, one shared reason which emerged through interviews and surveys is ontological, posthumous "self-sufficiency". Importantly, to Society members, theirs is only a rational decision. Their primary concern and the source of their psychological distress is that their peaceful afterlives are conventionally heavily dependent on living relatives, and also that this would put a heavy burden on them.

Therefore, a rational solution would be to reduce this dependence on living relatives to the smallest possible extent. Yet, in fact, the work of the Grave-Free Promotion Society turns out to be the exception that proves the rule, as the vast majority of Japanese continue the tradition of grave site burial with ongoing memorial services.

From the above examples, it is clear that pre-"religion" native Japanese religious concerns are still important in contemporary Japan. Within this broader context, some scholars of Japanese religions have opted to take a complementary approach. By accounting for the historical and cultural nuances of Japanese religious traditions, they identify the operational, underlying patterns or aspects of these traditions and of Japanese religiosity as a whole. Among others, there are two notably important aspects that affect the understanding of the modern and contemporary Japanese religious milieu.

First, there is a focus on tangible, this-worldly benefits. In their book, Ian Reader and George Tanabe emphasize the Japanese perspective and examine what they termed the "common religion" of Japan through the interpretive principle of *genze riyaku*, or this-worldly benefits (Reader and Tanabe 29). "Common religion", as the authors defined it, refers not to any particular religions in Japan but rather a set of sentiments, beliefs, or customs that are commonly shared by a vast amount of Japanese. More importantly, the common thread running through this Japanese common religion is a focus on this-worldly benefits. However, for the Japanese this-worldly benefits do not only mean materialistic benefits but also spiritual benefits, and the two are effectively inextricably linked. In addition, the primary justification for identifying this-worldly benefits as the most important aspect of the Japanese common religion is its almost axiomatic or self-evident

status. In brief, for most Japanese this-worldly benefits is not something extraneous to their "common religion" but instead it is simply a given matter and a priority.

Furthermore, the principle of this-worldly benefits has great explanatory power in the analysis of various Japanese religious phenomena. One clear example is how this principle could help with interpreting the results of earlier surveys conducted by Western religious studies scholars. In these surveys, the surveyed Japanese picked both "Buddhism" and "Shinto" as their religions, which resulted in more than a hundred percent of Japanese people being religious or having a religious affiliation. By taking into account the concept of a "common religion" in Japan and the interpretive principle of *genze riyaku*, it is possible to make sense of these seemingly absurd results. From the perspective of most major Western religions, belonging equally to more than one religion is usually not acceptable. However, for many Japanese, the performance of petitionary rituals in both Buddhist and Shinto contexts enhances the possibility of petitionary fulfillment.

Second, there is the adaptability of religious traditions. In the first place, adaptability or flexibility are the features of any religion. However, as mentioned above, in the case of Japanese religions, the degree of adaptability or flexibility is to the point that many Japanese people can belong to or at least identify with multiple "religions" at the same time. More specifically, in Japanese Buddhism, this great degree of adaptability can be seen through the example of *mizuko kuyo*. In *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan*, William LaFleur examines the Buddhist ritual of *mizuko kuyō*, which is a ritual performed by some Buddhist temples. The two primary goals of this ritual are to ease the unborn fetuses suffering and facilitate their reincarnation, and also to provide peace of

mind to the grieving mothers. In addition to the historical development and theological details of the ritual, what is arguably more relevant to the discourse of Japanese religiosity is the charge of "inauthenticity" often leveled at Japanese Buddhists who have an abortion within the context of a larger Japanese Buddhism narrative (10-11).

According to LaFleur, a significant number of non-Japanese observers, both from the West and from other parts of Asia, found the idea of lending religious approval to abortion hard to justify. In addition, some non-Japanese Buddhists would refer to the Buddhist "First Precept" against taking life, and even to the proscriptions against abortion by early Buddhists. In this context, the common theme of the arguments was a general concern with the sanctity of human life, and that to abort a fetus is ethically inauthentic for a practicing Buddhist. On the one hand, the *mizuko kuyo* ritual has always been controversial. It was only performed by a small number of Buddhist temples, and as some have argued, these temples also engaged in the problematic practice of advertising their services through newspapers and radios, thus potentially over-commercializing women's deepest fears and concerns.

On the other hand, there is a legitimate family of theological frameworks and justifications for the ritual. Although there is not space here to elaborate on these fully, they involve notions of reincarnation and family relations that can never be severed in a cosmological sense, a sense that predates the importation of Buddhism into Japan and continues into the present. One can see this in the primary deity adopted into the *mizuko kuyo* ritual, the Bodhisattva Jizō, to whom the offerings to the unborn fetus are typically made. While this deity originated in early Indian Mahayana Buddhism, it has taken on a specifically Japanese personality and function as the protector of travelers and children,

as a transmogrification of a benevolent *kami* or god that accompanies the journey of the family in life and in the afterlife. While this is a distinctly Japanese adaptation of the larger Buddhist mythological pantheon, it can still be interpreted within a relatively standard Buddhist framework of incarnation and interdependence. Practices surrounding Jizō illustrate the particularity of Japanese religious developments over time and their adaptability, patterns that foreshadow the manner in which American Mindfulness has been imported and adapted within the Japanese framework.

#### The Pivotal Western Contact & the Importation of the Western Concept of "religion"

One of the most important events in the historical development of Japanese religious traditions was the extensive Western contact at the end of the Tokugawa period. The Western concept of "religion" arrived in Japan, and it would leave a lasting influence on Japanese religious traditions and religiosity until the present day. In particular, this foreign concept would engender a new anti-"religion" tendency in Japan, and to an extent also lay the groundwork for the later intensification of the pragmatic search for alternative religious/spiritual practices.

From the beginning, "religion" as a distinct conceptual unit did not exist in Japan until after Western contact (Josephson 3-4). According to Jason Ananda Josephson, the concept of religion did not exist in Japan until the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when it was introduced from the West. Josephson, who studies the political, social, and ideological construction of the modern concept of "religion" from the late Tokugawa period through the Meiji period, shows that in the late Tokugawa period, in response to

Western pressure, the Tokugawa authorities began to suppress what they regarded as ideological elements unsuitable for Japan as it entered modernity, such as “superstition” (20). This suppression took place although they conceded and allowed for the freedom of religion in Japan as demanded by Western colonial powers. By the Meiji era, the translation for the Western term "religion" was standardized as *shūkyō*, and the term was conceived of as legal and political terminology to be used in treaties and negotiations with Western powers.

Furthermore, in order to construct a centralized modern nation-state that could resist Western powers, Japanese authorities felt the need to erase anything that was deemed irrational, superstitious, and rooted in an ignorant past. In other words, in order to resist Western powers, it was at the same time necessary to conform to Western conceptions of modern statehood. In this way, the Meiji authorities readily labeled many folk customs, beliefs in animal spirits, and healing practices as superstitious barriers to "progress" and banned them.

This ultimately culminated in the Meiji authorities' invention of State Shinto (Hardacre 27-28). In her book, Helen Hardacre analyzed the historical development of Shinto and its relationship with the Japanese state during the period 1868-1988. Although the book spans more than a century, one of its central focus was how Shinto and specifically State Shinto was re-invented and used to support the militaristic ambitions of the Japanese Empire. Shinto was loosely defined before it was consolidated into a centralized religion, and in fact, the Japanese Empire conceived of State Shinto not so much as a "religion" but as a "science"(Josephson 93-94). The Meiji government legally endorsed a “nonreligious” Shinto, but before the privileged status of “nonreligious”

Shinto was enshrined into law, Japanese scholars, Buddhist monks, and Shinto priests were all arguing for the “nonreligious-ness” of Shinto. In fact, one of the aims of “Shinto fundamentalism” in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century was to integrate with science rather than to reject it. In this way, the penetrating influence of the European concept of "religion" into Japanese society is clear through the emphatic responses by the Japanese government and Japanese intellectuals sympathetic to the government’s causes. As is evident in the related laws and policies, one of the main ulterior motives of the Japanese government behind their claim of a “nonreligious” Shinto was to sidestep their forced guarantees of religious freedom. Furthermore, the rise and decline of the concept of “State Shinto” also illustrates the symbolic significance of convenient labels, and foreshadows the development of various practices nominally affiliated with the “spiritual” in general and of American Mindfulness in particular. Just as “State Shinto” can be “scientific” without any actual basis in science, aromatherapy as well as “American Mindfulness” can be called “spiritual” without any clear definition. In this sense, it is not the specific contents or meaning of the term that is important and pertinent, but rather the various symbolic connotations prompted by the use of a convenient label. And one of the most important connotations of “spiritual”, especially in relation to the importation of American Mindfulness in Japan, is that of its difference from and contrast with religion (*shūkyō*)

### The New Anti-"religion" Tendency in Contemporary Japan

An important factor in constituting the contemporary Japanese religious milieu is the general anti-"religion" tendency. This tendency has two primary and related manifestations. First, in general, Japanese people have considerable issues with religious



identity and with the conception of "religion". Second, one notable and concrete consequence of this is the emergence of a significant degree of aversion towards all forms of institutional religions and religiosity. In order to demonstrate this, I will present two representative examples: the ongoing controversy with the Emperor system and the relatively non-successful attempt by certain Zen institutions to present a non-"religion" image.

One notable example of the Japanese people issue with religious identity is the persistent difficulty in researching Japanese religiosity or spirituality (Tanaka 847). According to Tanaka Kimiko, for Japanese people, it is the norm to refrain from identifying as "religious". On one hand, this is a direct result of the historically complicated concept of religion (*shūkyō*). In general, Japanese people associate the term "religion" with specifically revealed religions such as Christianity, which also readily conform to the ideal Western framework of "religion". As a result, Japanese people often identify as "non-religious" (*mushūkyō*) in surveys as approximately a default. Recent, more culturally sensitive interviews and surveys conducted by Japanese researchers suggest that in general, the Japanese people are actually passive with regards to religious or spiritual matters. While the majority profess no strong positive or negative feelings, belief in or respect for spiritual existence is also present to a significant degree.

Arguably, this complicated issue with religious identity is not an independent phenomenon but rather the direct result of the importation of the Western concept of "religion". In his book explicating a theoretical framework of the religiosity/spirituality of the contemporary Japanese, Ama Toshimaro goes as far as to argue that there are two main conceptions of "religion" in Japan, that of "revealed religion" such as Christianity

and "natural religion" such as Buddhism (Ama 1-2). In brief, according to Ama, the Japanese conceive of institutional religions and traditional Japanese "religious" rituals and customs separately. In fact, while Japanese society is dominated by common rituals and customs and shrine and temple patronage only on special occasions, the average Japanese would insist that such rituals or practices are "non-religious". Accounting for these two conceptions, Ama explains the active dislike of the average "non-religious" Japanese toward "religion" in general and institutionalized religious organizations in particular. In brief, even in contemporary Japan the specific concept of "religion - shūkyō" as separate from cultural rituals and customs retains certain disagreeable nuances from its complicated and controversial history for the Japanese people. One relatively stark example, according to Ama, is how the average Japanese might be comfortable with cultural rituals or activities and even with the worship of their community's tutelary deities, but they might also look down on "religious" Christian preachers disturbing the peace on the streets (8). Although this might partially be a matter of convenient categorization, nevertheless it is the case in contemporary Japan that "religion – shukyo", in this case referring to institutional religions as separate from commonly accepted cultural traditions, is often looked upon with aversion and suspicion by the average Japanese.

Japanese attitudes toward "religion" can also be illuminated in relation to the "secularization" thesis, particularly in how Japanese scholars engage with and interpret the abstract framework of "secularization" in the case of Japan. From a specifically Japanese "insider" perspective, Hayashi Makoto engages specifically with the application of the secularization thesis in the case of Japan, in particular by considering it within the

broader context of the historical religious and intellectual development (Hayashi 44). In his article, Hayashi examines modern Japan with an emphasis on the period between the start of the Meiji Restoration and the issue of the Imperial Rescript on Education.

According to Hayashi, the general consensus among Japanese scholars of the time is that the secularization thesis does not apply in the case of modern Japan. If one is to account for such phenomenon as the rise of new religious groups such as Risshō Kōseikai and popular lay Buddhist movements such as Sōka Gakkai, the secularization thesis could not be directly applied to the case of Japan. These new religious groups and movements did not simply inherit the legacy of traditional religion. Due to the political climate and the church-state separation policy of the Japanese government, these groups underwent a certain process that appear to bear some of the marks of secularization, such as their transition from aggressive proselytization to more accommodating persuasion, but in fact do not really conform to it.

The emergence of new religious movements can better be understood as a laicization process, in which to a certain extent, the laity writ large is prioritized over religious institutions. In the case of Japan, it can be said that the Japanese government's aggressive pursuit of church-state separation led to the formation of the "religious sphere" and the secular, "public sphere". Although this historical progression was a complicated multi-step process and happened gradually over a long period of time, nevertheless its basic logic becomes clear through examining the concrete policies of the Japanese government. First, from 1868, the Japanese government began to deprive traditional Buddhism of its public role, and in particular of its role in performing public "religious" rituals. This was a direct attack aimed at the economic bases of traditional Buddhism.

Then, although the Imperial Constitution included a freedom of religion clause, the Japanese government successively issued the Imperial Rescript in 1890 and the ban on religious education in 1899. Ultimately, a nationalism based on the Emperor took its place as the public state religion of Japan. In brief, in modern Japan, what happened was less a substantial “secularization” of society and more a politically endorsed “laicization” of traditional religions. To the Imperial Japanese government, the key issue was centralizing power and reducing the power and influence of the religious elites, and the average Japanese people of the time were not quite forced to abandon their traditions and customs.

To a certain extent, new religious movements in Japan succeeded because they were able to find their social niche. New religious movements did tend to be discriminated against in the “public sphere” precisely because they occupied the “religious sphere,” but they found a foothold as lay movements free from some of the negative associations that plagued traditional, clerical religions. According to Hayashi, this problematization of traditional “religion” and “religiosity” is one key legacy of the modern period in Japanese history. As an example, in contemporary Japan, no less an august institution than the Emperor system itself can still be criticized due to its potential religiosity. Nevertheless, it was a fact that where laity felt the lack of a viable spiritual life in their private lives, new religious movements emerged to fill this void. The void and the need to fill it was, thus, in part a product of the importation of the distinction between “inner, private religion” and “outer, secular society” from the West.

Another prominent example of the multivalent conception of “secularization” in Japan is the emergence of “Cool Zen” and its middling success. Partially in order to

explain the phenomenon of “Cool Zen”, Jorn Borup argues that in contemporary Japan "Zen" and "spirituality" constitute two overlapping but distinct cultural narratives (Borup 70). As the anti-"religion" tendency in contemporary Japan continues to exert pressure on institutional religions, some among them, notably some Zen temples and institutions, have attempted to present a non-"religious" yet spiritual image. Some of the more eye-catching examples of these may include the opening of Zen bars and Zen coffee shops staffed by handsome young monks. Some of these institutions would even prefer using the English spelling for “Zen” over the native Sino-Japanese term. However, although these attempts enjoyed a certain measure of success, nevertheless they were not the miracle solutions that could revitalize traditional Japanese Buddhism. According to Borup, one of the main reason for the failure of these attempts lies in the fact that in Japan, the conception of "Zen" cannot be extricated from the problematic conception of "religion". In particular, by taking a Western "outsider" perspective, Borup shows that the cultural narratives or images of Zen in the West and in Japan are remarkably different although there are interactions and mutual influences. In the West, Zen has been transformed into a positive brand closely associated with genuine, individualized spirituality.

This Westernized Zen is being successfully "reverse-imported" back to Japan, partly due to its substantial resonance with Japanese spirituality. However, there is a significant gap between this Westernized "spiritual" Zen and traditional Zen, to the extent that they constitute different cultural narratives. On the one hand, there are socially engaged forms of Zen Buddhism in Japan, or "experimental Buddhism," which do align more with the image of Westernized Zen. On the other hand, traditional and institutional

Zen in Japan still maintains many traditional practices and traditional aims, which in general are not commonly associated with spirituality. For example, the strict, formal, and traditional meditation practices of *zazen* is still a mainstay of institutional Zen, and the ultimate aim of institutional Zen is still enlightenment. Media analysis also shows little overlap between "Zen" and "spirituality" as concepts and as narratives, and furthermore Zen in the West and Zen in Japan present different images. Ultimately, the issue with "Cool Zen" and other related movements notwithstanding, the broader conclusion is that due to historical reasons, there exist in contemporary Japan two separate cultural narratives of Zen: traditional Zen-as-"religion" and of "non-religious" spiritual Zen. That the latter is associated with the image of American Zen re-imported back into the Japan demonstrates the ambiguous and ambivalent attitudes Japanese have towards a single tradition refracted through diverse cultural lenses. As will become evident, this repeats itself with the case of American Mindfulness.

Within this complicated context, it is difficult to delineate the exact borders between overlapping terms such as "laicization", "secularization", and "spiritualization". This is especially the case when accounting for the sometimes conflicting interpretations of the purported processes or trends operating in contemporary Japan. For example, the question of whether Japan is becoming more or less "secular" continues to be heavily debated by scholars with different perspectives. However, with specific regards to the importation and development of American Mindfulness in Japan, the most directly relevant factor is its interaction with the ambiguous but influential Japanese concept of the "spiritual – *supirituaru*". Therefore, the next section turns to those aspects of these theoretical frameworks that relate to the public conceptualization of the "spiritual", and

also of American Mindfulness to the extent that it has affinities with the Japanese sense of the “spiritual”. In particular, one of the most relevant aspects of these overlapping frameworks is their complementary explanation for a general tendency of the average Japanese people to search for non-“religious”, “spiritual” practices whenever possible.

The Tendency to Search for “Non-religious” Spiritual Practices and Spirituality in  
Contemporary Japan

A second important factor in the contemporary Japanese religious milieu is a general tendency of the Japanese people to prefer non-"religious" spiritual practices over "religious" practices whenever possible. This is evident in the emergence and popularization of an ambivalent conception of "spirituality" as an alternative to "religions" or religiosity. In general, there is no singular definition of “spirituality” in Japan, and to an extent it is precisely this inherent ambiguity that facilitates the popularization of this concept. However, the discussion concerning the Japanese conception of "spirituality" is usually framed with regards to the status and significance of “spirituality” in contrast to comparable concepts, such as centuries-old Japanese religious traditions or institutionalized “religion”. Therefore, the present discussion limits the definition of “spirituality” in Japan to the popular and ambiguous concept often rendered in katakana as *supirituariti*. In this sense, the exact definition of “spirituality” matters less than the commonly shared attitude or stance of the people who invoke or identify with the concept.

First, in a comparable manner to the twin conceptions of "religion" as *shūkyō* (institutional religions) and as common religion (shared cultural traditions), there are also in Japan similar twin conceptions of "spirituality", with the "spirituality" or innate spiritual aspects of Japanese religious traditions being compared unfavorably with a "new spirituality" in contemporary Japan as represented by a large section of the Japanese self-help movement. Relatedly, there is also in contemporary Japan an issue of selective attention, in which the fact of Japanese Buddhism being historically responsive to societal needs is overlooked and "new spirituality" is seen as more socially engaged and therefore relevant, even though there is much borrowing from traditional Japanese Buddhism, something that is mostly disregarded.

I will present two representative examples of the Japanese preference for "spirituality". First, there is a gradual change in discourse with regards to mountain worship and mountain climbing, in which people gradually shift their ultimate aim from traditional mountain worship to the search for a transcendental sacredness. Second, there is a growing critical perception of Japanese religious institutions and particularly their roles in society, in which scholars challenge their traditional and "religious" roles as religious institutions.

With regards to the peculiar Japanese conception of "spirituality", there are the works on the ambiguous and potentially misleading characterizations of this Japanese concept. Representing a more internal focus, Shimazono Susumu examines the changing conception of religion and spirituality in the contemporary world from an East Asian perspective (Shimazono 3-4). According to Shimazono, the emergence and growth of spirituality in economically advanced countries can be more appropriately interpreted as



a transition not from religion to spirituality but specifically from salvation religion to spirituality. Globally there is a trend of resacralization with different aspects. In Japan, the most prominent aspect of resacralization is the rise of spirituality in its various guises, including self-help movements based on spirituality. Spirituality here is most appropriately understood in its broad formulation, as connection with or relation to something sacred and beyond human control. As people from economically advanced countries feel growing discomfort with the negative and divisive aspects of salvation religion, they become more likely to turn to spirituality. However, from an East Asian perspective, the "new spirituality" as an alternative to traditional religions is not fundamentally against traditional religions. Contemporary spirituality does have its weak points, one of which is the difficulty in forming and sustaining a community. As this is a forte of traditional religions, some scholars consider spirituality and certain traditional religions to be complementary. At the same time, this is less applicable in the case of salvation religions. In general, there is a tension between the two spiritualities and between new spirituality and traditional religions, as they complement and oppose each other. For example, new spirituality and traditional religions might oppose each other in the case of Christianity in the West, where there exist numerous books criticizing new spirituality from a Christian perspective. This at least partially reflects a long history of the tension between Christianity and 'paganism' in the West.

However, new spirituality and traditional religions can more easily complement each other in the case of Japan, where syncretism has been the rule rather than the exception, and where animistic beliefs and practices, such as are found in Shinto, provide a ready receptacle for the spiritualization of imported religious or spiritual practices.

Accounting for this tension is necessary to the understanding of religions and their differences in the contemporary world.

At a more specific and technical level, Hirabayashi Jiro argues that in fact, the spirituality of modern and contemporary Japanese people is at its core Buddhist (Hirabayashi 174-175). Results of surveys of religious consciousness in Japan can be interpreted with regards to the influence of the historical translation of "religion" as *shūkyō*, and with modern scholarly works on religion. The result of this analysis is that the essence of the historical development of spirituality in Japan is a process of "re-creation", in which older ideas and concepts are repurposed for contemporaneous needs. One prominent example is that of the internationally influential Zen proponent, D. T. Suzuki. In his representative work, *Japanese Spirituality*, Suzuki posits that Japanese religious consciousness or spirituality can be traced to the systems of thought of the Zen and Pure Land Buddhist sects that arose in the Kamakura period. According to Hirabayashi, the reason for this is that ultimately the legacy of both Zen and Pure Land Buddhism rests on their successful "re-creation" of themselves as distinctly Japanese traditions. Within this context, contemporary Japanese spirituality can be interpreted from a Buddhist perspective, in that the typical Japanese identification as "non-religious" is related to Japanese Buddhism and its characteristic mechanism of "re-creation". To an extent, from a certain perspective, flexible adaptation to the point that it could be called "re-creation" is in fact one of the key and intrinsic characteristics of Japanese Buddhism. And according to this interpretation, the specifically Japanese "spiritual but "non-religious" identity is borne out of Japanese Buddhism, even though most Japanese people who self-identify as such might not acknowledge the connection.

In a detailed case study, Furusawa Yumi analyzes "mountain spirituality" in Japan through a comparative analysis of traditional mountain worship and modern practice of mountain climbing (Furusawa 45-46). As traditional mountain worship gives way to mountain climbing, famous Japanese mountains become contested areas between people of differing backgrounds. Modern literature concerning mountain and mountain spirituality shows the complicated and interrelated processes of secularization, resacralization, and spiritualization of mountains themselves and the practice of mountain climbing. According to Furusawa, the Japanese religious and cultural context allows for differing legitimate interpretations of the modern and contemporary practice of mountain climbing. On the one hand, the resacralization of famous mountains on an individual level can be interpreted as a continuation of the native and traditional Japanese custom of mountain veneration. On the other hand, the general process of the spiritualization of mountains and mountain climbing without adherence to any specific religion or ideology can also be interpreted as a process of secularization. In general, there exists in contemporary Japan a trend of seeking for a transcendent sacredness without relying on traditional religious institutions or categories, which can complicate theoretical frameworks such as secularization and spiritualization. As it is in the case of Japanese "mountain spirituality", the search for a transcendent sacredness through mountain climbing can, depending on the starting point and the perspectives, be interpreted as secularization, spiritualization, or perhaps both.

## The Japanese Environment Conducive to American Mindfulness

Overall, the two above-mentioned tendencies in the contemporary Japanese religious milieu, namely the conscious aversion to traditional religions and religiosity, and the search for “non-religious” alternatives whenever possible, have an extensive and multifaceted influence on Japanese religious traditions and practices. However, more directly relevant to the importation of American Mindfulness into Japan, these tendencies have also led to the creation of an environment conducive for American Mindfulness to develop in. The reason for this is that due to the combination of these two tendencies, especially in recent years, several Japanese religious traditions and organizations have found it expedient to adapt to larger societal trends. In particular, these traditions and organizations have been prioritizing pragmatic adaptations that would allow them to reach the largest audiences. Particularly from the internal perspectives of these institutions, their actions are less a compromise due to external pressure and more a strategic decision to suit contemporaneous conditions. This partially self-initiated process is also termed “reflexive secularization” by Issac Gagne. Generally, their adaptation process is more aligned with the new spirituality in contemporary Japan, to the extent that they could be considered a subset of the broader secularization process. However, these Japanese religious traditions and organizations have deliberately attempted and found relative success with this "reflexive secularization" process. As a result, American Mindfulness, which is likewise pragmatically tailored to the broadest possible audience, also fits in the Japanese religious environment.

From a theoretical perspective, in his article, Ian Reader provides a comprehensive overview of the secularization in Japan (Reader 8-9). Among other

points, he argues that Stark and Casanova are mistaken in using the case of Japan as evidence against the secularization process. According to Reader, secularization is a potent force in Japan, and the case of Japan proves that it is also a potent force globally. In Japan, there is a large amount of data concerning religious attitudes and practices, due to the numerous surveys conducted by both public and private organizations. These empirical statistics show the marked decline of both religious institutions and "folk" religions. In the case of religious institutions, the statistics show the decline of institutionalized religions, as represented by institutionalized Buddhism. There is clear evidence of Buddhist temples closing or rapidly losing attendants and of a trend of Japanese people finding alternative providers of death-related rituals instead of Buddhist temples and monks. This is notable because death-related rituals have long been the responsibility of Japanese Buddhism. In the case of "folk" religions or religious practices, the statistics lead to a similar conclusion, as shown by the decline in the number of households possessing Buddhist altars. In conjunction with the conventional secularization process, statistics complemented by fieldwork also provide evidence for a related but different secularization process. One example is the secularization of famous pilgrimage routes, such as the Shikoku pilgrimage. Although a few of the most famous pilgrimage routes are attracting more tourists, simultaneously the affiliated temples are undergoing a voluntary secularization process. Advertisement of these pilgrimage tours often downplay their religious components and prioritize the advertisement of local foods and physical beauties. Within this context, the presumed rise of "spirituality" in Japan can also be interpreted as a simple rebranding of the increasingly controversial term "religion".

More concretely, Issac Gagne examines the unique Japanese process that he terms "reflexive secularization" (Gagne 154-155). According to Gagne, there is in contemporary Japan an ongoing process of formations of religion and of the secular. Analysis of Japanese new religions shows that they are undergoing a process of "reflexive secularization" in response to globalization. As new religions attempt to grow globally, they necessarily also undergo institutional changes, with the goal of addressing contemporary challenges to their development and in some cases existence. In general, the heyday of new religious movements in Japan is over, and now they are having to face serious challenges, including an aging Japanese population, the loss in the efficacy of old proselytizing strategies, and widespread skepticism of religions due to the Aum incident (discussed below). In this context, one potential solution for Japanese new religions is international expansion. However, this solution does necessitate the incorporation of local practices and therefore comes with institutional costs to the new religions. In the case of the new religion Kagamikyō, one local leader speculated that in the future a commonly recited ancient Shinto prayer would be replaced by a simple English prayer. Following this development trajectory of the new religion, it can be said that the Japanese religions and their Japanese members would have to bear the heaviest cost, to the extent that their distinctive religious and ethnic identity would be incorporated from minority position into the broader global movements. According to Gagne, in the specific case of the Kagamikyō, this does not seem to be a particular area of concern. Many members professed to approve of the religion's new direction, in particular, the increasing "non-religious" leisure and health activities.

Furthermore, this kind of "reflexive secularization", or similar processes, is neither restricted to one religion/religious organization nor is it an entirely novel phenomenon in Japan. One of the most defining events in recent Japanese religious history is the terrorist attack by Aum Shinrikyo in 1995. In his article, Levi Mclaughlin examines the broad academic consensus that this terrorist attack significantly changed Japanese society's overall attitudes towards religion (Mclaughlin 53-54). In brief, after this event new religions, and to a certain extent even institutionalized religions in general, are often perceived as dangerous by default. Although the consensus is sound in principle, the historical treatment of the new religious movement Soka Gakkai before and after the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin attack provides a counter-example. New religions in general and the Soka Gakkai, in particular, have been persistently perceived of as dangerous much earlier than the 1995 terrorist attack. Consequently, although negative rhetoric concerning new religions was intensified after the 1995 attack, they were not invented wholesale, as demonstrated by how the Soka Gakkai has been consistently attacked in the media even before 1995. The 1995 terrorist attack did effectively end mass religious movements and intensified public aversion to even "religion" as a term in Japan, and the event would leave a lasting influence on future Soka Gakkai's policies. Notably, the Charter of the Soka Gakkai International was adopted in November 1995. The currently effective Charter includes such progressive official and explicit provisions as religious tolerance, and the independence and autonomy of each international branches of the SGI.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have presented two of the most important aspects of the contemporary Japanese cultural environment: the anti-"religion – *shūkyō*" tendency

and the tendency to search for alternative spiritual (*supirituaru*) practices whenever possible. In addition, I have traced the modern historical development of the Japanese reception and adaption of the category of “religion,” starting with the forced importation of the Western Protestant concept of “religion” into Japan, which provides the supporting framework for these tendencies and consequently for the Japanese environment conducive to American Mindfulness. In the next chapter, I will approach the phenomenon of American Mindfulness in Japan from a complementary perspective, by examining the specific characteristics of American Mindfulness that have contributed to its success and popularity in Japan.



## CHAPTER III

### THE AFFINITY OF AMERICAN MINDFULNESS AND JAPANESE WELLBEING ORIENTED SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

In the previous chapter, I examined the peculiar Japanese cultural environment which proved to be conducive for American Mindfulness. In this chapter, I will examine the specific characteristics of American Mindfulness that make it suitable for Japanese consumption. First, American Mindfulness is a particular, co-opted, and secularized form of Buddhist practice. This general nature of American Mindfulness makes it aligned with the abovementioned influential tendencies of the contemporary Japanese cultural environment. In the Japanese context, American Mindfulness can be interpreted by practitioners to fulfill both requirements, in that within the popular Japanese conception American Mindfulness is not associated with institutionalized religion (*shūkyō*) and it also belongs to the generally positive category of “spiritual” practices. Partially, this is because scholars and commentators in America have already provided comparable interpretations of American Mindfulness. However, in addition, American Mindfulness is also more directly comparable to older, native, and popular Japanese traditions of wellbeing-oriented “spiritual” practices. In general, these “spiritual” practices which often claim therapeutic values can be considered one form of alternative medicine – *daitai iryou*, with one representative example of this family of practices being Reiki. As a result, this affinity makes American Mindfulness fit well within the Japanese cultural environment. Ultimately, these internal characteristics help explain from a complementary perspective why American Mindfulness has become popular in Japan in recent decades.

## American Mindfulness as Secularized Buddhist Mindfulness

The first characteristic of American Mindfulness that makes it suitable for the Japanese environment is its secularized nature, in comparison to the original Buddhist practice. In particular, this affinity of secularized American Mindfulness manifests through a spectrum of interpretations of American Mindfulness put forward by various scholars and commentators with the aim of establishing its status as separate from traditional Buddhism, in contrast with scholars and commentators who are quite critical of American Mindfulness. In general, the scholars and commentators justify this proposed separateness or independence by focusing on the differences between American Mindfulness and traditional Buddhism or Buddhist mindfulness, and in particular the potential advantages of American Mindfulness in certain contexts. At one end of the spectrum, there is the example of scholars taking a defensive stance and arguing that although American Mindfulness as it is might lack the holistic quality or the complete ethical system of traditional Buddhism, it has the advantage with regards to flexibility and adaptability to contemporary needs. At the opposite end, there is the example of scholars going so far as to criticize traditional Buddhism for its perceived rigidity and lack of contemporary relevance. In brief, although these scholars and commentators have different perspectives and argumentative strategies, nonetheless they all share an essentially positive assessment of American Mindfulness in general, and of its secularized nature and the attendant advantages in particular. I will show this positive assessment by surveying representative examples along the spectrum.

In the cases of arguments for self-sufficiency, there are those works which admit the criticisms of American Mindfulness coming from traditional quarters but ultimately

have the forward-looking aim of constructing or reconstructing a comparatively self-sufficient American Mindfulness. In their article, Monteiro, Musten, and Compson present and examine a dichotomy between traditional and contemporary mindfulness. More specifically, they take up the case of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in particular and more broadly Mindfulness-based Interventions (MBIs) to offer a defense of contemporary American Mindfulness. Their overarching framework is that of a clash between traditional Buddhists and contemporary practitioners of mindfulness, as the authors subject contemporary mindfulness to traditional and technical Buddhist-based criticisms (Monteiro, Musten & Compson 1-2). Accounting for the common aspects and the mutual interaction of traditional and contemporary mindfulness, nevertheless, Buddhist and American Mindfulness are nevertheless found to constitute distinct streams. In addition, the authors identify the common points of contention such as the fact that their techniques derive from "incompatible conceptual frameworks", and that contemporary Mindfulness-based interventions often omit ethics from their programs (5-6). In particular, this omission is critical because it can lead to inappropriate application and even "wrong mindfulness", such as employees learning to tolerate oppression or soldiers learning to use "mindfulness" to improve combat efficiency. The authors' provisional conclusion is that contemporary mindfulness is not entirely at fault. Certainly, there are "lapses of understanding" between traditional and contemporary mindfulness, and both streams of mindfulness have to contribute to a larger, more critically informed framework in order to avoid the misguided application of mindfulness (12).

As a representative of more straightforward defenses of contemporary American Mindfulness, there is also the work of psychologically-minded scholars, such as Rebecca

Crane at Bangor University. In brief, she begins by acknowledging that there are definite tensions between contemporary practices and ancient understandings (Crane 594-595). However, following the analysis of key features of ancient understandings and of the various tensions and challenges, ultimately she promotes the skillful integration of the contemporary and the ancient. For her, the ultimate goal is to establish a general Mindfulness-Based Program (MBP) as a field with its own integrity and principles.

In the cases of arguments for the superiority of American Mindfulness over traditional Buddhist mindfulness, there are apologies of contemporary American Mindfulness that aim to shift the entire paradigm and comprehensively legitimize contemporary mindfulness on its own terms. And some among these apologies even go so far as to present subtle as well as explicit criticisms of not just traditional Buddhist mindfulness but also the traditional Buddhist community at large.

From a more conciliatory perspective, Mark Knickelbine addresses the tension between traditional Buddhism from the position of Secular Buddhism (Knickelbine, August 12, 2013). Specifically, Knickelbine takes the position of Secular Buddhism, as an emerging movement among Buddhist modernisms that aim to reinterpret the core values of Buddhism in light of contemporary circumstances. In particular, Knickelbine's conception of Western or American forms of "Secular Buddhism" focuses on rationalizing and naturalizing traditional Buddhism so as to develop a Buddhism that is relevant to the current age. In addition, his article is partially in reaction to charges of contemporary American Mindfulness as "McMindfulness", as a commercialized and watered down version of traditional Buddhist mindfulness. In the first place, Knickelbine does acknowledge the valid criticisms from traditional Buddhism and the potential issues

with contemporary mindfulness. However, he argues that within this generally valid critical discourse, there are some particularly extreme allegations such as the allegation that mindfulness might "corrupt" Buddhist principles. From the perspective of secular MBIs, this clash between Buddhism and contemporary mindfulness instead represents a potential missed opportunity for constructive integration. In this view, the historical and future development of contemporary mindfulness can be reframed within a productive evolutionary framework.

From a more overtly critical perspective of some voices among the traditional Buddhist quarters, Seth Zuiho Segal offers a standard apologetic argument for contemporary mindfulness (Segal, December 19, 2013). First, he establishes the pertinent issue, namely that mindfulness has been coming under increasing criticism from multiple perspectives. Next, he establishes the overarching theme of the apology: "Half a loaf is better than none." Then, with reference to academic and scientific studies, as well as personal experiences, he addresses each of the major strands of criticism of contemporary mindfulness in turn. Mindfulness is scientifically demonstrable to be useful, with regards to pain reduction and even aging. Historically, Buddhists have always had different goals and needs aside from enlightenment, so contemporary mindfulness practitioners' pursuit of happiness does not represent a deviation from the Buddhist tradition. And mindfulness is not usually taught outside of an ethical context, albeit that context might be implicit. Ultimately, Segal offers a ringing endorsement for contemporary American Mindfulness: that although there are valid criticisms of contemporary mindfulness, proper mindfulness programs and mindfulness teachers can address all such criticisms.

## Japanese "Spiritual Therapies" and the Discursive Space for American Mindfulness

The second characteristic of American Mindfulness that makes it suitable for the Japanese environment is its compatibility with the native Japanese family of “spiritual” alternative medicine. In order to demonstrate this compatibility, I will first briefly explore the more controversial side of American Mindfulness with reference to culturally sensitive and critical analysis of American Mindfulness by Western scholars. Then, I will examine the distinctive discursive place of alternative medicine as represented by Reiki within the broader Japanese cultural environment. Through correlation of the American or Western criticisms of American Mindfulness as cultural appropriation of Buddhist practices and the general public discourse of alternative medicine in Japan, I will show the specific affinity of the transformed or secularized American Mindfulness with the niche of the “spiritual” in Japan.

A comprehensive overview of the controversial side of American Mindfulness is provided by Jeff Wilson. In his monograph *Mindful America*, Jeff Wilson provides an account of the arrival and gradual transformation of "mindfulness" in the United States. Wilson takes as his starting point the overwhelming popularity of mindfulness and mindfulness activities in America (2). For demonstration, Wilson provides various examples: from the wide-ranging endorsements of mindfulness from different quarters to the money Americans spend on mindfulness, to the abundant mindfulness coverage by influential newspapers and television shows. The popularity of mindfulness in public discourse is simply a fact. As Wilson explains, the aim of *Mindful America* is to explore the processes of adaptation of mindfulness, namely the mystifying, medicalizing, mainstreaming, marketing, and moralizing processes. The main bulk of the book is

reserved for the analysis of these processes, through which Asian Buddhist traditions of mindfulness were transformed in America to be widely applicable to “nontraditional concerns” (3-4).

To an extent, Wilson’s monograph represents an increasingly influential approach among recent academic studies of mindfulness in America. In general, this approach is that of critical reflection on mindfulness and mindfulness activities in America as cultural appropriation of traditional mindfulness practices from Buddhism. In addition to Wilson's conceptual overview, recently there has also been a number of technical academic studies on mindfulness and MBIs with narrower foci and with an extensive discussion of American Mindfulness’s relationship to traditional Buddhist doctrines.

Through an examination of controversies concerning "mindfulness" and "bare attention" practices throughout Asian Buddhist history, Robert Sharf provides a more technical criticism of modern mindfulness. One illustrative example is that of the historical Zen criticism of what could be called "mindfulness" or "bare attention" practices (Sharf 476). According to Sharf, there are examples of Zen priests cautioning against certain kinds of meditation practices as early as in the 9th century. In the 10th century, Zen master Fayan Wenyi claimed that it is said that meditation practices focusing excessively on "inner stillness" could lead to "meditation sickness". "Meditation sickness" here means something along the lines of "zoning out", in the sense of losing touch with the world. Thus, one of the primary critiques of contemporary American Mindfulness has its roots in early Zen discourse (479). By pointing to this discourse, Sharf questions the fundamental claim to therapeutic effects of contemporary American Mindfulness. In brief, Sharf argues that in the apparent case that empirical data

suggesting the therapeutic value of mindfulness is in conflict with the experience of long-term Buddhist meditators, whether they are in Asian monasteries or in American practice centers, then he would rather lean toward questioning the data and its implications instead of the experiences of Buddhist meditators.

In addition to technical Buddhist critiques, there are also critiques of contemporary American Mindfulness with an ethical perspective. In their article, Ronald Purser and Joseph Mililo reexamine the application of mindfulness in the corporate environment and offer a Buddhist-based alternative. As they explain, individual-level "mindfulness" theories have been studied and employed by numerous scholars in recent years in the field of organizational studies (Purser and Mililo 4). However, in general, these mindfulness theories are divorced from traditional Buddhist canonical sources. The key issue then is that in this way, corporate mindfulness practices are essentially the products of the extraction and instrumentalization of traditional spiritual practices for immediate, tangible goals. The example of the application of mindfulness practices in a military context in America, in their view, is sufficient to demonstrate the great potential harm of "decontextualized and de-ethicized" mindfulness (15-17). Thus, they argue that today's in-vogue contemporary mindfulness practices are flawed, and traditional Buddhist-inspired understandings are necessary in order to rectify this situation (19).

These are examples of critiques of the ways in which American Mindfulness has diverged from traditional Buddhist thought systems and practices. Some of these critiques can also be found in the case of Japan, as presented by both scholars and practitioners. At the same time, the Japanese "spiritual" alternative medicine niche has also made for a friendly receptacle for American Mindfulness. As I will explain below, although these



spiritual practices have their oft-denied roots in Japanese religious traditions, their purported applicability and actual popularity derive significantly from the ambiguity of the Japanese sense of the “spiritual” and the sweeping claims of efficacy often made in the discourse of the “spirituality” niche. This niche not only provides a discursive space for these practices but also for American Mindfulness, due to their affinity.

Practices in contemporary Japan that are popularly referred to as spirituality (*supirituariti*) are both practice-oriented and seemingly intentionally ambiguous. The use of the term "spiritual" is still fairly popular and uncontroversial outside of the sphere of culturally critical academic discourses. On the more pragmatic side of the spectrum, "spiritual" has been used to promote sensitive sustainably minded tourism (Kato and Prozano 243-244), as well as the spiritual value of Buddhist end-of-life care (Mizutani 97). On the more speculative side of the spectrum, there are ongoing engagements with both the spiritual as a totalizing force for good (Matsumoto 23-24), as well as the spiritual as a key concept within all-encompassing conceptual frameworks such as "human potential science" (Yamamoto 31).

However, despite their generally uncontroversial status, one significant point of contention with regards to “spiritual” alternative medicine is the practitioners’ polemical rhetoric toward “religion”. According to Ioannis Gaitanidis, spiritual practices, and in particular "spiritual therapies", are the results of religious adaptations despite the abundance of rhetoric claiming independence from and superiority to “religion” by practitioners (Gaitanidis 353). In his critical analysis of the concept of "spiritual therapies" in Japan, Gaitanidis contextualizes spiritual therapies by connecting the practices with older Japanese new religious movements and with a certain definition of

Japanese spirituality itself. Gaitanidis identifies "spirituality" in general and "spiritual therapies" in particular as essentially a rebranding of already existing concepts and practices in response to the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attack (361). As a result, in general, spiritual therapies in Japan are not fundamentally different from other forms of faith healing. In addition, they also possess the contradictory characteristics of being able to both represent a form of anti-religious counter-culture and a form of contemporary extension of traditional Japanese healing rites. However, contemporary spiritual therapies in Japan do possess some novel characteristics, the most prominent of which is their discourse of superiority (370-371). Although the commercialization of spiritual therapies is not new, it has become more prominent in recent years, not unlike comparable development of more traditional healing rites. Due to the competitiveness of the spiritual market, "spiritual therapists" often make use of the same strategy, namely to construct a conceptual framework in which their superior status is assured. In addition to critiques of healing rites from a counter-culture perspective, spiritual therapists also claim their superiority on the ground of their Japanese-ness, and in particular their knowledge of Japanese-ness and consequently "what is best for Japanese people" (375). Ultimately, however, none of these strategies are novel in themselves, and the spiritual therapists' discourse of superiority is only to mask their similarity to faith healing.

In her more theoretical and descriptive article, Ueda Yumiko takes the practical popularity of spiritual practices as the starting axiom (Ueda 57-58). In her content analysis of the concept of "spirituality" and the recent "spiritual boom" in Japan, Ueda posits that Japan's spiritual boom might continue to grow because this specifically Japanese "spirituality" matches a demand in contemporary Japan. According to Ueda,

content analysis of television shows concerning "spirituality" shows that the image of spirituality in contemporary Japan is vague and multifaceted. Words and concepts often associated with spirituality include such differing items as "guardian spirit", "aura", "power spot pilgrimage", "lucky bracelet", "aromatherapy", and "healing music". There is a significant economic component to the Japanese spiritual boom, as there is a growing spirituality industry behind the spiritual boom. In Ueda's view, there is also a psychological component to the boom, with spirituality responding to a generalized need among Japanese people for *iyashi* – mental comfort or solace. Ultimately, Ueda presents spirituality as existing in an ambiguous position in contemporary Japan. On one hand, spirituality in Ueda's account is partially connected to the native Japanese custom of nature veneration, as exemplified in the practice of pilgrimage to power spots and sacred spots. On the other hand, spirituality in Ueda's account is primarily concerned with *iyashi* and happiness over overtly religious salvation. In brief, contemporary Japanese "spirituality" is neither clearly an extension of nor clearly an alternative to conventional Japanese religiosity, as demonstrated by the existence of diverse and relatively independent practices and concepts affiliated with "spirituality" (73-74).

On a broader level, it can also be observed that over the course of their historical development in Japan, spiritual practices have adapted to external factors and gradually settled into the distinctive "spiritual" niche in Japanese society and culture. Through the historical analysis of the Reiki "healing technique", Hirano Naoko reinterprets the discursive place of the "spiritual" and spiritual healing. Specifically, by tracing the historical development of Reiki from its emergence as a healing technique until its contemporary conception as a self-help discourse, Hirano also traces the genealogy and

the development of the discursive place for the "spiritual" (81). In its early days, Reiki was developed as an alternative healing technique, which could also be termed in Japanese folk therapies (*minkanryōhō*). Especially in its 1920s form as "*reiki ryōhō*", or "spiritual energy/*ki* therapy", Reiki's discursive space was simultaneously located on the periphery of both medical care and religion (84). However, the founder Mikao Usui laid the groundwork for the contemporary adaptations of Reiki from its very beginning (88-89). As an example, Usui developed the Five Precepts of Reiki around 1922-1925, and not only was the Five Precepts similar to previous "health philosophies", its fundamental goal was to help people better adapt to living in society. Nevertheless, Reiki was neither unique nor an exception, as throughout the span of several decades from its emergence in the 1920s to the 1990s, Reiki developed and changed alongside other peripheral practices, such as yoga and macrobiotic diets. In contemporary Japan, these practices are often grouped together in the category of "self-help" by the publishing industry. Ultimately, by extrapolating from the case of Reiki, Hirano predicts that in the long term Reiki and comparable spiritual practices will likely fully establish their status in the peripheries of medical care, religion, and consumer culture as belonging to a distinct discursive space, in this case that of alternative medicine (*daitai iryou*)

In conclusion, I have characterized the more controversial aspects of American Mindfulness and shown the affinity between this controversial-in-America American Mindfulness and the existing niche of "spiritual" alternative medicine in Japan. However, American Mindfulness cannot be said to be completely uncontroversial in Japan, and in particular there is not one single consensus on American Mindfulness among Japanese Buddhists. In the next chapter, I will examine in details the reactions of some Japanese

Buddhists as represented by Buddhist publications specifically discussing American Mindfulness. I will also analyze the differing interpretations of American Mindfulness by Japanese Buddhists within the broader context of the Japanese cultural environment, and in doing so make sense of the claim by some Zen Buddhists that American Mindfulness is thoroughly a part of Japanese Zen.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE REACTIONS OF JAPANESE BUDDHISTS TO THE IMPORTATION OF AMERICAN MINDFULNESS INTO JAPAN

In this chapter, I will provide an exploratory account of the reactions of Japanese Buddhists to the importation of American Mindfulness into Japan by analyzing the special editions on mindfulness of two influential Japanese Buddhist magazines, namely *Daihorin* and *Zen Bunka*. Through analysis of the nonsectarian Buddhist *Daihorin* special edition, I will show the contentious discourse among Japanese Buddhists surrounding the topic of American Mindfulness. Then, through analysis of the specifically Rinzai Zen Buddhist *Zen Bunka* special edition, I will show how one segment of Japanese Buddhists fully embraces American Mindfulness. Furthermore, I will also show how this reaction of one important Soto Zen institution is not a break with, but is rather one form of, continuation of the larger Japanese Buddhist tradition.

#### The Special Edition on Mindfulness by the Magazine *Daihorin*

In this section, I will analyze the special edition on mindfulness by the nonsectarian Japanese Buddhist magazine *Daihorin* in order to provide a general overview of the discourse regarding American Mindfulness among Japanese Buddhists. First, I will briefly explain the magazine *Daihorin* and its importance. Then, I will analyze the contents of the special edition with an emphasis on identifying larger trends or themes with regard to the reception of American Mindfulness from the perspective of Japanese Buddhists.

In brief, *Daihorin* contains two important and related themes concerning American Mindfulness. Firstly, there is the acknowledgment of American Mindfulness' popularity and the need for Japanese Buddhists to at the very least bring it into the discussion. More specifically, there is the acknowledgment of the claims regarding American Mindfulness' therapeutic value. Whether the authors are more appreciative or more critical of American Mindfulness, overall they all acknowledge that American Mindfulness is an important topic of discussion for Japanese Buddhists, albeit with different arguments and implications. Secondly, and perhaps most remarkably, *Daihorin* displays an internal conflict within the broader Soto Zen Buddhist sect. The special edition includes articles both strongly supportive of and strongly critical of American Mindfulness, all written by Soto Zen Buddhist priests. Moreover, these general themes as exhibited in the *Daihorin's* special edition on mindfulness would foreshadow certain aspects of the consequent development in Japanese Buddhist discourse of American Mindfulness.

*Daihorin* is the official magazine of the influential Buddhist publishing press Daihorin-kaku. According to the organization's self-introduction on its website, *Daihorin* was one of the magazine titles of the publishing house Kokusaijoho, which was founded in 1922 by Ishihara Toshiaki (daihorin-kaku.com). Kokusaijoho published the first edition of *Daihorin* in 1934. Only four years later, in 1938, they published their first Buddhist book written by the influential Zen priests Sawaki Kodo. In 1966, Daihorin-kaku was established as an independent publishing house from Kokusaijoho. Since then, the company has continued to publish Buddhist magazines and Buddhist books. It has also branched out into selling Buddhist arts, and it has established a foundation for the

purpose of promoting Buddhist studies. In the case of the *Daihorin* magazine itself, it is specifically meant to be a “comprehensive Buddhist magazine with no adherence to any specific sects”, and the aim of the magazine is to “propagate Buddhism in general”. Contributions are solicited from experts from diverse fields with the goal of making Buddhism understandable to everyone.

### *American Mindfulness as an Important Topic of Discussion*

The first of the important themes of the *Daihorin*'s special edition on mindfulness is the acknowledgment of the popularity and influence of American Mindfulness in Japan. This special edition of *Daihorin* includes fourteen articles from a wide range of authors, from more scholarly minded psychologists and psychiatrists to influential Buddhist priests from various sects. Overall, most of the articles are standard essays by various authors offering their different perspectives on mindfulness in Japan. The special edition can be divided into two parts, with the first half designated for introductory overview and articles by psychologists and psychiatrists, and the second half designated for Japanese Buddhist priests from the different sects. In addition, there are four articles that are notable on their own. The first article is a comparatively neutral introduction to the definition and history of “mindfulness” by a professor of the prestigious Tokyo University (Minowa 58). There is also an article placed within the Japanese Buddhist section but is, in fact, a book review of a then-recent translation of one of Jon Kabat-Zinn's books on Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Inoue 108). Finally, the special edition ends with two strongly polemical short opinion pieces by two Japanese Zen priests, Maekawa (117) and Neruke (118).



The special edition on mindfulness sets the scene for the consequent discussion with an article written by Professor Kashio Naoki of Keio University, who is also the Director of the Keio Mindfulness Center. Immediately following from the academically inclined, comparatively neutral introductory article, this article is mostly a practical manual for mindfulness meditation (Kashio 62-63). The bulk of the article is devoted to fairly detailed and easy-to-understand instructions on several variations of mindfulness meditation, such as breathing meditation or body scan. Importantly, these instructions mostly match the typical instructions found in introductory guidebooks in America. The article also explains the making of a conducive environment for mindfulness meditation, and mentions several cautionary notes about practicing mindfulness meditation. Two particular cautions stand out. First, that it is necessary for practitioners to find a trusted guide or mentor before commencing practice because, according to the author, there are many mindfulness centers and teachers out there in Japan and not all of them are trustworthy. Second, it is necessary for practitioners to have a strong motivation because the benefits of mindfulness meditation might not be immediate. Finally, the author stresses that the ultimate goal in practicing mindfulness meditation is to integrate mindfulness fully into daily life, and also for further information the readers are recommended to buy the authors' recently published book on mindfulness. At this point, it is fairly evident that the "mindfulness" that was set up in this article and is to be discussed in the following articles is effectively the same American "mindfulness" as discussed by Jeff Wilson, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and others. In addition, in general, it is understood that this "mindfulness" is imported into Japan, and as will be evident in the

other articles, its perception as a foreign import is situationally important in understanding the interpretation and evaluation of mindfulness in Japan.

To briefly summarize the tones of the articles explicitly expressing opinions regarding mindfulness in Japan, their evaluation can be roughly divided into three major categories. First, there are articles written from the perspectives of the different sects of Japanese Buddhism, which generally claim a superior position whether they are vaguely positive or vaguely critical of American Mindfulness. Second, the special edition concludes with two shorter opinion pieces which are solidly skeptical and critical of mindfulness, both written by chief priests of Soto Zen temples. Third, as somewhat of an exception in tone, there is one article adopting an overwhelmingly positive and optimistic opinion of mindfulness and professing the hope that mindfulness could prove to be a useful tool for traditional Japanese Zen Buddhism. This particular article was written by the Director of the Soto International Center, which is affiliated with the representative and official online network of Soto Zen Buddhism in Japan - [Soto-zen.net](http://Soto-zen.net).

The popularity and influence of American Mindfulness in Japan are recognized, in particular by Japanese Buddhist priests, to the extent that they arguably perceive American Mindfulness as representing a legitimate challenge to Japanese Buddhism in general and their specific sects in particular. In this special edition on mindfulness, it is evident from the composition and the similarly themed titles that the overarching framework of this special edition is for contributors to compare mindfulness or mindfulness-associated practices with their own unique Buddhist sectarian perspectives. Specifically, the Buddhist contributors are evidently meant to compare the practice of mindfulness meditation with one or more representative meditation practices from their

own sects. Overall, the bulk of these articles is devoted to the technical discussion of one or more meditation practices, to the extent that one article from a Shingon Buddhist perspective barely mentions mindfulness at all (Oshita 90).

In general, most of the non-Soto Zen Japanese Buddhist authors in the special edition dismiss American Mindfulness as inferior, although they do consider American Mindfulness as a challenge worthy of discussion. This attitude can be seen through three representative examples.

In the first example, from the perspective of Hakuin Zen, the author argues that the main difference between Hakuin Zen meditation and mindfulness meditation is that rigorous practice involved in Hakuin Zen aims at traditional Buddhist goals, while mindfulness meditation does not (Matsushita 89). In the second example, from the perspective of Nichiren Buddhism, the author argues that “mindfulness” is merely another variation or manifestation of the one true efficacious practice, namely Nichiren-style chanting (Kageyama 106-107). This is because ultimately the way to Buddhahood is through “being mindful” of the right things, and thus variance is allowed to a certain extent. In other words, American Mindfulness might be helpful or efficacious to the extent that it is an acceptable variant of the true practice, Nichiren-style chanting. And in the third example, from the perspective of Jodo Buddhism, the author argues that even before this American Mindfulness was imported to Japan, there was already more than a thousand years of Japanese “mindfulness culture” (Asano 100-101). This is because one can find in Japan the finest “mindfulness experience” in not only various Buddhist practices but also various non-Buddhist practices such as tea ceremony, calligraphy, or even martial arts. He also claims that one good thing about the mindfulness boom coming

to Japan is that it is an opportunity for Japanese people to recognize anew all the good things about Japanese cultures, such as the aforementioned “true mindfulness” or “Japanese mindfulness”.

However, aside from the overall dismissive attitude toward American Mindfulness, one notable theme found among the arguments of most of the contributing Japanese Buddhist priests is the necessary inferiority of American Mindfulness. In the case of the authors who are vaguely appreciative of American Mindfulness, their common argument is that American Mindfulness might have some merits, but the meditation practices of their own Buddhist sects also have these merits and are also otherwise superior in all regards. In the case of the authors who are vaguely critical of American Mindfulness, their common argument is that American Mindfulness is just a foreign fad with no religious or spiritual values. In either case, their overarching perspective on American Mindfulness is that although American Mindfulness is popular and commercially successful enough to be a topic worth discussing by Japanese Buddhists, nevertheless American Mindfulness has nothing substantial to contribute to Japanese Buddhism.

In comparison, this general attitude of non-Soto Zen Japanese Buddhists stands in stark contrast with the attitude of the three Soto Zen Buddhist authors, as they instead take seriously the challenge that American Mindfulness poses to traditional Buddhism in general and to Soto Zen Buddhism in particular. These three articles can be seen as an exception to the theme of the special edition to the extent that all three were written by prominent priests of one particular Buddhist sect.

*American Mindfulness as a Source of Internal Conflict for the Soto Zen Buddhist Sect*

Surprisingly, the three articles by Soto Zen authors have approximately the same starting point yet follow sharply different lines of argument to reach near total opposite conclusions. Specifically, in the *Daihorin* special edition on mindfulness, there is one significantly positive article and two significantly negative articles. Furthermore, more important than the fact that there is significant conflict in the interpretation of mindfulness within Soto Zen Buddhism is the fact that the two “factions” did not start from completely different axioms and did not completely talk past each other. In order to demonstrate this fact, I will briefly summarize and analyze the argumentative frameworks of the three articles written by Soto Zen priests.

Of the two articles critical of mindfulness, both were written by chief priests of influential Soto Zen temples. One was even written by a chief priest of Soji-ji, one of two headquarters of Soto Zen Buddhism. Both articles share similar themes and reach similar conclusions, although each focuses on a slightly different aspect of what is perceived as the issue with mindfulness.

On one hand, the article by the chief priest of Antai-ji focuses more on the foreign nature of mindfulness and the dichotomy of Japan versus the outside world (Neruke 119). In brief, his argumentative framework is as follows. First, he finds the mindfulness boom in Japan as surprising, because he does not think that there is any need for importation of katakana words or concepts. He then claims that mindfulness is merely another variant expression of “being mindful”, which already is something intrinsically important for Japanese. In fact, mindfulness can be found in traditional Japanese culture, such as tea ceremony, flower arrangements, and martial arts. In addition, he also argued that the

English word mindfulness is easy to misunderstand, and in fact in this regard the Japanese language is “superior”, because it contains various terms and concepts related to “attention”, and in fact there exists a natural connection in Japanese between “attention” and “consideration/compassion/sympathy”. Therefore, there is no need for Japanese people to learn mindfulness because they can just move right to the next, more advanced step, which is to simply be mindful of oneself and others. In conclusion, the mindfulness that is popular in the West is completely unnecessary in Japan, and in fact not only is it necessary to reaffirm the superiority of the Japanese “attention” to the Japanese people, but it might also be necessary to disseminate and advocate for this “attention” in the West.

On the other hand, the article by one of the chief priests of Soji-ji focuses more on mindfulness itself, and especially mindfulness’s potential for harm (Maekawa 117). Notably, he seems to have simply assumed that the consensus is that the American Mindfulness was born out of Zen in general and the practice of “Zazen” in particular. In brief, his argumentative framework is as follows. First, he immediately starts off by introducing an extreme hypothetical example: if mindfulness can “cure” a soldier of his trauma and allow him to return to the battlefield and kill more people, then that would obviously not be a good outcome. In his words, “to save only one is the same as to save none”. He then refutes one common justification for the appropriation of the practice of zazen: although many claim that zazen is a treasure trove from which one can take out anything according to one’s desire, in fact, that is a fallacious metaphor. From a proper understanding of Zen, there is so “treasure trove” in the first place. At this juncture, he presents his all-important principle as the crux of his short essay: whatever “it” is, and no

matter what effects “it” might have, if “it” can be separated from Zazen then “it” is not the essence of Zazen. The reason for this is that although such isolated practices might have positive effects in the short term, proper Zen Buddhists do not advocate for doing so because of the potential for long-term harms. In conclusion, “Zazen is only Zazen, and its only goal is Zazen”. There is nothing else to it.

The one significantly positive and optimistic interpretation of mindfulness was written by the Director of the Soto International Center. This article is important as it contains themes and arguments that are referenced, albeit indirectly, by the other two Soto Zen Buddhist articles in *Daihorin* and also by a Soto Zen Buddhist article published in a later, quasi-official public statement by a Rinzai Zen institution in the form of a special edition on mindfulness of their sect publication *Zen Bunka*. As such, it is worth analyzing the overarching structure of this article and its key arguments in some details. Specifically, the arguments of this article progress in three successive stages.

In the first stage, the author establishes the fundamentals of Soto Zen and mindfulness (Fujita 82). In brief, his argumentative framework here is as follows. First, Fujita Issho argues that the “common” definition of mindfulness can trace its roots to the Right Mindfulness of the Noble Eightfold Paths. In addition, the tradition of Soto Zen “cannot be expressed” by any terms except mindfulness. In fact, it is clearly necessary for Soto Zen practitioners to always be “mindful”. Furthermore, if mindfulness were to be equated with “careful” or “scrupulous”, then, in that case, one can find many explicit examples of mindfulness in classics of Soto Zen Buddhism. Therefore, as the popular mindfulness from overseas is now becoming even more popular in Japan, it is important to confirm that the “traditional fundamentals of Soto Zen” had always been an essential

element of this mindfulness. In fact, mindfulness can be connected to the legendary first and last teachings of the Buddha, so it is only “natural” to say that Soto Zen has inherited mindfulness, which is the “correct Buddhist teaching”.

In the second stage, the author specifically discusses mindfulness in a secular context, and also establishes the overall theme for his later direct comparison of mindfulness meditation and Soto Zen meditation (83). In brief, he first argues that the crux of the issue is that one can distinguish between “two kinds of mindfulness”: the traditional Buddhist mindfulness and the Western-made, secular mindfulness that is applied clinically. In this context, the most significant difference between the two is that while “Buddhist mindfulness” is meant to be an organic part of a “larger practice system”, “secular mindfulness” is a technique that could be “practiced independently” in many contexts. In particular, this “newly-created” Western mindfulness is nothing new. It is merely the act of taking one practice, removing it from its religious contexts, and then applying it toward different goals. However, precisely because of this, the criticism that Western mindfulness is not Buddhist is “irrelevant”. In fact, the efficacy of secular mindfulness is assured not by Buddhist authority but by “scientific evidence”. Therefore, the point of this article is only to clarify the two paradigms in order to prevent confusion. It is “not to judge whether Soto Zen or ‘mindfulness’ is right/wrong or superior/inferior”.

In the third stage, the author directly compares Soto Zen practice and mindfulness (84-85). In particular, the author chooses to compare the Soto Zen practice of *shikantaza* and the practice of “mindfulness of the breath”. He proceeds to identify several major differences between them and then presents his overall positive assessment of mindfulness. First, he argues that *shikantaz*” has no ulterior motive while the goal of



“mindfulness of the breath” is to improve the ability to focus on the breaths which in theory will lead to other practical benefits. The ultimate goal of *shikantaza* is “transcendent nirvana”, while the ultimate goal of mindfulness, to the extent that there is one, is to adapt to this world and satisfy oneself. In fact, “mindfulness of the breath” deliberately excludes “otherworldly elements” to focus on the quotidian here and now. On a slightly technical note, *shikantaza* is not a technique as such and thus ideally there is “no effort” involved there. Comparatively, “mindfulness of the breath” is a technique which can involve effort in honing. In fact, “mindfulness of the breath” is just one variation, and one can choose to be “mindful” of a range of subjects. In short, the main difference between *shikantaza* and “mindfulness of the breath” is that by nature *shikantaza* is a transcendent Buddhist practice while “mindfulness of the breath” is a this-worldly practice. However, in a long-term view, secular mindfulness could serve as “preparation” for people to better appreciate Soto Zen.

In brief, with regards to mindfulness, the article advances three related arguments. The first is that Soto Zen or at least elements of Soto Zen are also essential elements of American Mindfulness. The second is that comparing Soto Zen and mindfulness using the same standards is inadvisable. The third is that although the practices of Soto Zen and mindfulness might be different, ultimately mindfulness could eventually lead people to Soto Zen.

In conclusion, of the two Soto Zen articles critical of mindfulness, one focuses more on the superiority of Japanese culture, while one focuses more on the religiously transcendent nature of Soto Zen in general and the practice of Zazen in particular. However, it is notable that although the positive article is not quite as explicit,

nevertheless it does contain both fundamental axioms of the two critical articles. That is to say, although the positive article is on the whole appreciative of mindfulness, it both maintains the superiority of Soto Zen as natively Japanese and acknowledges the transcendent nature of Soto Zen practices. Therefore, the essential factor explaining the differences in opinions is in their interpretive frameworks and the potential motives for adopting these frameworks. In particular, in the special edition on mindfulness by the Rinzai Zen sect publication *Zen Bunka* published only slightly more than a year later, the Soto Zen priest and essayist Ryojo Sato contributed a positive article on American Mindfulness which incorporated many of the same or similar themes and arguments to Fujita's article in *Daihorin*. And significantly, within the *Zen Bunka* special edition on American Mindfulness, all of the articles share similar and purposeful interpretive frameworks.

#### The special edition on mindfulness of the magazine *Zen Bunka*

With the preliminary Japanese Buddhist context for the reception of American Mindfulness established, I will show how one influential Buddhist institution decided to fully embrace American Mindfulness and how its decision is consistent with Japanese Buddhist traditions. In my analysis of the special edition on mindfulness of the magazine *Zen Bunka*, I will first briefly explain the magazine *Zen Bunka* and establish its significance. Then, I will analyze the composition of the special edition and the specific arguments and implications of the articles. Through that analysis, I will present two key reasons explaining the welcoming attitude of *Zen Bunka* toward American Mindfulness. The first reason is that, in general, the Japanese Buddhist framework allows for both

considerations of pragmatic concerns and flexibility in adaptation. The second reason is that, in this particular case, the Rinzai Zen Buddhist institution behind *Zen Bunka* acutely feels the pressure of declining religiosity in Japan and is reacting accordingly. Ultimately, I will also attempt to demonstrate these reasons' consistency with the Japanese Buddhist tradition.

*Zen Bunka* is a Zen magazine edited by the Institute for Zen Studies ([zenbunka.or.jp](http://zenbunka.or.jp)). More specifically, it is a magazine concerning Zen cultivation, and its target audience is people interested in Zen in itself and also Zen in relation to daily life, culture, arts and so on. As for the Institute itself, it was founded in 1964 by elders from influential Rinzai Zen temples, and it is still currently supported by a network of Rinzai and Obaku Zen temples. In fact, the Institute leaders have always been abbots of influential Rinzai and Obaku Zen temples. In addition, according to the Institute's article of incorporation, one of its primary goals is to popularize Zen on an international scale. In this regard, the Institute has reportedly had many successes. For example, it has established enough reputation to conduct international academic exchange projects such as the "Touzai Reisei Kouryu" (East-West Spirituality Exchange) conference, and it was also legally recognized by the Japanese government as a corporation in the public interest. As for *Zen Bunka*, the magazine is formally published by the university press of the Rinzai-affiliated Hanazono University, within which the Institute is physically but not legally situated. Therefore, to a certain extent, it can be said that the Institute is a think tank and advocacy group partially representative of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism and that the *Zen Bunka* magazine partially plays the role of an official sect publication. .

In its role as quasi-official sect publication, *Zen Bunka* published an official statement in early 2018 announcing a special edition on mindfulness to complement the regular January issue. This special edition is more succinct and systematic than that of *Daihorin*, and it is only comprised of five articles. In order to comprehensively analyze this special edition, I will first examine the overall composition of the special edition and the general approaches of the articles. Then, I will examine in-depth the two key articles. After examining the specifics of the articles, I will connect the results with the previously established theoretical framework in order to demonstrate the two key reasons behind *Zen Bunka*'s stance toward American Mindfulness. Then, in order to demonstrate the significance of *Zen Bunka*'s attitude toward American Mindfulness, I will present a brief comparison of the attitudes toward mindfulness of the *Zen Bunka* authors with those of influential American Zen Buddhists.

#### *Overall Composition and General Approaches*

The opening article is written by Elder Masamichi of the Daruma-do Enpuku-ji Rinzai Zen temple in Kyoto. His article is a relatively short guide to proper Zazen, delivered through the format of interpreting key passages and sentences from the influential classic *Zazen-gi* by Dōgen. It also comes with many pictures and photos. Notably, the article does not directly mention mindfulness at all (Masamichi 10-12).

The second and third articles, which are also the core articles of this special edition, do directly mention mindfulness. The second article is written by Abbot Kawano

of a Rinzai Zen temple, and he is also a licensed and practicing psychiatrist. His article analyzes mindfulness from a clinical psychological perspective (Kawano 34).

The third article is written by Abbot Sato of a Soto Zen temple. His article compares mindfulness and the practice of Zazen from a Soto Zen perspective (Sato 44). On the whole, both articles are generally positive and optimistic in their conclusion.

The fourth article is a quasi-academic article briefly describing the historical development of mindfulness from the time of the historical Buddha to contemporary Mindfulness in the USA. In general, this article leans toward constructing an easy-to-understand historical narrative, but it does indicate the intention of being comprehensive and neutral (Tachi 53-54). Nevertheless, the article concludes emphatically by emphasizing the shared Buddhist roots of all forms of meditation throughout history despite any differences (63).

The special edition ends with an informal essay by Headmaster Haga of the Hanazono Zen-juku, an important educational institution for the professional training of Zen monks affiliated with the Hanazono University. The article starts out with a brief description of a day in the life of Zen monks-in-training at the Hanazono Zen-juku, with emphasis on their strict and rigorous routines (Haga 64-65). But it quickly moves into a discussion of the popularity of a more spontaneous “Zazen experience”, then into a discussion of “chair Zazen”, and then finally into the Headmaster’s recent project of conducting informal Zazen-kai retreat at coffee houses (67-69). He also explains the Headmaster’s reasons for doing so, which are primarily to provide a time and place for a certain kind of Zazen in order to meet the needs and demands of average laypeople (71).

### *The Two Principal Articles*

The first of the two principal articles, written by Kawano Yasuchika, a Rinzai Zen priest and practicing psychiatrist, offers an analysis of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) from a clinical psychiatric perspective. In practice, Kawano briefly introduces mindfulness, sets up the background framework from three standpoints, and then finally assesses the role of mindfulness in clinical psychiatry based on that framework.

In the introduction, Kawano very briefly introduces mindfulness in a general sense (34-35). He also relates his personal experience with mindfulness as a psychiatrist. In particular, from his experience, he reaches two conclusions. Firstly, from the ease of instructing his patients on mindfulness practice, he praises the simplicity of mindfulness. Secondly, from the success of mindfulness classes at the clinic, he concludes that mindfulness is comparable to a form of “self-help psychotherapy”.

Kawano then addresses the question of whether mindfulness is a departure or deviation from the essence of Zen. The issue, as Kawano presents it, is thus: mindfulness is commonly praised for its efficacy, which is also “backed up by scientific data”. However, the opinion of many people from various Buddhist sects is that the very idea of meditation for benefit already deviates from the essence of Zen. In reply, Kawano actually goes so far as to question the very definition of the term “religion” itself. In particular, he wishes to question the definition of “religion” vis-à-vis the importance of putting into practice Zen traditions as well as the transmission of Zen to later generations. Here he brings up two examples. The first is that of young people dealing with stress. The point here is that these people need Zen, but what they need is the gentle teaching of Zen

near-at-hand that they can rely on as necessary. Here Kawano explicitly states his opinion that he does not think that only the kind of Zen practiced in Zendo is truly Zen.

The second example is of the incidental Buddhist value of mindfulness. Specifically, Kawano notices that his patients who were taught mindfulness, here rendered in katakana as “maindofurunesu” and defined as a form of supplemental psychotherapy, were then “naturally” inclined to introduce mindfulness to other people. From his point of view, this act of extending a hand even though one is suffering is precisely the very essence of Buddhism. As he continues to briefly introduce the story of the historical Buddha, Kawano brings into discussion the concept of “expedient means”, and he reaffirms that the very essence of Buddhism is to teach others what one has gained from training but it is only appropriate to offer the teaching in different forms so as to fit the circumstances of the audiences (36-37).

Through these two examples, Kawano argues that even if mindfulness is a “thinking method” modified by Western culture, it could be “customized” into a form “easy for the Japanese” to put into practice and also to teach others. Furthermore, in the long term, since Zen is the origin of mindfulness, mindfulness would lead to more people wanting to seriously study Zen in depth.

After establishing the potential of mindfulness, Kawano then discusses its origin (38-39). First, he describes the lineage from the teaching of the historical Buddha, to the translation of “sati” as mindfulness, to the teaching of the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and then to the works of Jon Kabat-Zinn. He then discusses the significance of Kabat-Zinn’s works. In Kawano’s estimation, by removing religious themes from (Buddhist) mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn came to a “lucid” definition of mindfulness that

“gets straight to the spirit of Zen”. Kawano then argues that that is precisely the reason for the “mindfulness boom” in the West, which then eventually led to mindfulness “returning” to Japan.

Before he explains his conclusion, Kawano first clarifies that his conclusion is different from that of other experts. Specifically, his conclusion is that now that this Westernized mindfulness has returned to and come into contact with “Zen”, this will, in fact, lead to “many more people than ever before in the world” coming into contact with Zen through mindfulness. Furthermore, this is important because at the present time the world at large is greatly in need of a change in perspective, which is to say “Eastern thoughts”.

Thirdly, Kawano discusses the scientific basis of mindfulness. In this section, he attempts to demonstrate the efficacy of mindfulness through scientific examples. Notably, before bringing in the examples he first explains that “the nature of modern medicine is evidence-based medicine”, and that Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction program is recognized as a legitimate psychotherapy program because it is verified by other researchers. His examples then only follow this framework: that academic articles positive toward mindfulness are published in “extremely credible” journals such as Lancet, or that “sophisticated fMRI technologies have proved that mindfulness has the effect of physically changing the brain”.

With the interpretive framework set up, Kawano then discusses the role of mindfulness in psychotherapy (41-43). Although this section is perhaps the most technical, its theme is clear. He first argues that the increasing popularity of mindfulness is partly due to the mental structure of modern people. In the specific case of the



Japanese, in particular, the younger generations are greatly pressured socially and psychologically. Their consequent breakdown then is partly due to the fact they do not have a properly developed mental world because of the lack of religious, philosophical, or ethical training in Japan. He then refers directly to scientific articles in academic journals which are supportive of the efficacy of mindfulness, and also of Buddhist meditation in general. His conclusion then is that what is happening is simply that the value of the teaching of the Buddha, even after 2500 years, is now being recognized anew by modern science.

The second of the two principal articles of this special edition is written by Satō Ryōjō, the deputy chief priest of a Soto Zen temple. To the extent that this article mostly adheres to the format of comparison between Soto Zen and mindfulness, it might seem comparatively more neutral. However, in practice arguably this article goes as far with regards to its advocacy for American Mindfulness, albeit in a slightly different direction.

In the first place, the tone of this article is also clearly evident from the introduction. Satō first argues that the mindfulness boom in Japan is inseparable from its various “scientifically proven” health benefits (44). However, he argues, it is necessary to note that this “mindfulness has as its roots in Buddhist meditation, and particularly Zazen”. In fact, it can even be said that the Zazen that was exported is now being imported back into Japan “under a new name”. Therefore, the stated goal of this article is to determine whether or not “Zazen” and mindfulness are the same or if they differ significantly.

Satō then briefly discusses Zazen and mindfulness in order. In the case of Zazen, he explains important Buddhist concepts such as *shikantaza* and *mu* (45). In the case of

mindfulness, he mainly explains the history of mindfulness from a linguistic standpoint, i.e. the historical development that led from the Sanskrit “sati” to the Japanese “mindfulness.”

Ultimately, the crux of this article is Satō’s evaluation of mindfulness. However, it is telling that instead of moving right into doing so, he first takes a slight detour to discuss the legend of the historical Buddha (49-50). Specifically, he succinctly retells the parable of the first arrow and the second arrow, which is one of the most famous Buddhist parables teaching the importance of having the right view. This tactic is evidently comparable to that of the Rinzai priest’s use of “expedient means” in the first article, and the conclusion is fairly predictable. Namely, it is that to the extent that both mindfulness and “Zazen” have as their roots the meditation taught by the historical Buddha, it can be said that they are “effectively the same”.

However, one major difference between this article and the first article is that Satō goes arguably as far but in a different direction. Instead of bringing in ample scientific evidence to support mindfulness, he offers his arguably radical interpretation of the fundamental issue of comparison between mindfulness and Zazen (51-52). In brief, his arguments are as follows. First, he affirms that “mindfulness is Zazen but with religious elements removed”. Then, he reiterates that mindfulness and “Zazen” are the same, except that their goals are different. In particular, the goal of mindfulness is practical applicability in real life. However, because their goals are different one cannot judge the relative merits of mindfulness and “Zazen”. More specifically, one cannot hold the two practices to the same set of standards as that would result in biases. His vivid example is that to judge the relative merits of mindfulness and “Zazen” is the same as to judge the

relative merits of soccer and baseball. The point of this example then is that mindfulness and “Zazen” are as incommensurable as soccer and baseball. Furthermore, even with all these differences, mindfulness is still close to Zazen, and one notable piece of evidence for this is that even when one only practices Zazen one often can reap benefits associated with mindfulness. Ultimately, according to Satō, it is obvious that it would be difficult to clearly distinguish between the two practices because they both have as their roots the Buddha’s teaching.

#### *Zen Bunka's Acceptance and Accommodation of American Mindfulness*

By interpreting the details of the special edition on Mindfulness through the previously established theoretical lenses, I will demonstrate the significance behind *Zen Bunka's* stance toward American Mindfulness in the special edition. Overall, the decision of the Rinzai Zen institution behind *Zen Bunka* is to accept and accommodate American Mindfulness. I would suggest that there are two primary reasons for this decision, namely the intrinsic flexibility afforded to Japanese religious traditions and the contemporary pressure of declining religiosity. However, in addition, this decision is also significant because of its multifaceted nature. On one hand, although it might be contentious, the decision of *Zen Bunka* does legitimately follow from the core themes of Japanese Buddhist/religious framework as previously established. On the other hand, *Zen Bunka's* embrace of American Mindfulness also comes with several important qualifications, the most important being the unequivocal assertion that American Mindfulness has its roots in Zen and that therefore ultimately Japanese Zen practices are superior. These two key themes of *Zen Bunka's* overall argumentative framework are closely interwoven and can

be seen through both the general composition and the specific arguments of the two principal articles.

In general, with regards to the overall composition, I will argue that the composition was carefully chosen to maximize the image of legitimacy and the persuasiveness of the special edition. On one hand, the special edition includes one overview article to chronicle the historical development of mindfulness in general, and more importantly the historical roots of American Mindfulness in Buddhism. Furthermore, the two principal articles of the special edition are each written by a prominent Zen priest, with one of them belonging to the Rinzai sect of Zen and the other to the Soto sect of Zen. Both have a generally positive attitude toward American Mindfulness. On the other hand, the special edition begins with an elementary but technical discussion of the classic of Zen meditation – Dogen’s *Zazen-gi*. It also ends with a casual essay by the Headmaster of an influential Zen seminary, in which he primarily discusses not American Mindfulness but rather his effort in adapting the austere practice of *Zazen* to a larger audience. In general, the overarching stance of accommodation and superiority of the special edition is clear from this composition. More concretely, it is also visible through the specific arguments of the two principal articles.

With regards to the two principal articles, I will argue that ultimately the two articles complement each other in illustrating *Zen Bunka's* overarching position. Specifically, with the flexibility afforded them by the conducive Japanese environment for American Mindfulness, *Zen Bunka* charts a "middle path": accepting and accommodating American Mindfulness for their own internally consistent reasons.

In the first place, the two articles are not merely counterparts: one article straightforwardly compares mindfulness with the Soto practice of Zazen, while the other analyzes the application of mindfulness to clinical psychology. However, the basic structure of the arguments is very much similar: first mindfulness is compared to Zen or Zazen, then it is implicitly judged wanting, and finally, the overall conclusion is that ultimately mindfulness is still both rooted in Buddhism but also more applicable in the contemporary world.

Furthermore, the two articles share several relevant themes, which are also reminiscent of themes already present in the special edition on mindfulness by *Daihorin*. First, although both articles assert the ultimately Buddhist or even specifically Zen root of mindfulness, this assertion only contributes to the formulation of a Japan versus the West framework. According to this framework, “American” or “Western” mindfulness is compared and contrasted with “Japanese” Zen as two related yet separate categories. Secondly, both articles heavily emphasize the scientific basis of mindfulness, and in particular the scientifically proven positive effects of mindfulness. In fact, the article from the Rinzai Zen perspective devotes one entire section to discuss the scientific basis of mindfulness. Thirdly, both articles also go to great length to justify their withholding of value judgment on Westernized mindfulness. It is also significant that instead of ignoring or glossing over the issue, both articles make parallel claims to the effect that mindfulness and Zen are incommensurable, in the sense that they cannot be compared using the same standards. One specific example is that comparing the relative merits of mindfulness and Zen would be just like comparing the relative merits of soccer and baseball.

One important difference between the two articles is that in comparison to the Soto Zen article, the Rinzai Zen article makes three additional arguments concerning the rationalization and justification of mindfulness in relation to Japanese Zen Buddhism. In brief, they are as follows. First, the author acknowledges the criticism that meditation expressly for the sake of gaining concrete benefit is not proper Zen. However, in response, he rhetorically questions the very nature of “religion”, and at the same time brings up and emphasizes the importance of the practice of Zen in daily lives and the transmission of Zen to later generations. Second, the author acknowledges that the imported mindfulness should not be accepted uncritically. However, ultimately his argument is that mindfulness should still be accepted, but it could and should be customized to better align with the needs of the Japanese, especially modern Japanese with very specific modern psychological issues. Here we can clearly see the clinical psychological perspective. And third, as far as the interaction between mindfulness and Zen is concerned, the author is quite optimistic. In essence, his argument is that as the two related but distinct entities that are mindfulness and Zen meet in Japan, this will eventually help more people over the world come into contact with Zen. Notably, the author does make it clear in this argument that what he ultimately hopes for is that mindfulness could become the first point of contact that will eventually lead some people to sincerely study Zen in-depth.

In brief, the arguments of the two articles slightly overlap but also complement each other with the general aim of improving the popularity and applicability of Zen meditation practices through association with the already popular and eminently applicable American Mindfulness. Furthermore, I would suggest that the specific

arguments of the two articles are also significant in and of themselves, to the extent that they offer additional information into the overall rhetorical strategy of the Rinzai Zen institution behind *Zen Bunka*.

First, instead of obscuring the Buddhist origins of mindfulness, *Zen Bunka* has affirmed a direct connection between Buddhism and mindfulness. Specifically, although there is a quasi-academic article briefly explaining the historical development and the complicated categories of meditation, both the articles that directly mention mindfulness very straightforwardly assert that American Mindfulness has its root in Japanese Zen in general or the practice of Zazen in particular. This is not an uncontroversial matter; as a point of reference, Wilson argued that mindfulness, as it is known in America, originated from a Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhist context.

That is not the case with *Zen Bunka*. Although it is apparent that Japanese Zen is still set up to be superior to American Mindfulness, the articles are not merely disguised advertisements for Zen. In particular, in the Rinzai Zen article written by a licensed psychiatrist, there is one dedicated section for the scientific basis of mindfulness, and another dedicated section for the role of mindfulness in clinical psychology. When Zen is discussed specifically, it is always either as independent from mindfulness or more as a part of the background context. And as for the final conclusion, the Soto Zen article concludes that in practice it would be difficult to precisely distinguish Soto Zazen from mindfulness because ultimately both have as their roots the Buddha's teaching. Meanwhile, the Rinzai Zen article is perhaps franker in concluding that the popularity of American Mindfulness is a sign of the 2500-year-old teaching of the Buddha being recognized anew by science. Therefore, I argue that although both main articles of *Zen*

*Bunka* include much appeal to science, their apparent goal seems modest. Of course, *Zen Bunka* has no need to prove the scientific and secular nature of mindfulness, but they are also not quite attempting to prove the scientific and secular nature of Zen or Zazen. Rather, they are arguably simply aiming to acknowledge the already well-supported American Mindfulness, then relate Japanese Zen with American Mindfulness as much as possible and in so doing elevate Zen by association.

Secondly, in the course of their argument, *Zen Bunka* clearly aims to establish a consistent conception of mindfulness that accounts for both American Mindfulness and traditional Japanese Zen/mindfulness meditation practices. In addition, as representative of a traditional Japanese Buddhist institution, they also have to do all this while staying within the boundaries of certain time-honored religious frameworks. As such, given all these constraints, *Zen Bunka's* effort to essentially negotiate a satisficing conception of mindfulness might seem to be unproductive. On one hand, they heavily emphasize the Japanese Zen root of mindfulness, and also spend much effort in defending the religious credentials of mindfulness through invoking the very user-friendly Buddhist concept of expedient means. On the other hand, they also spend much effort in praising mindfulness's scientific backing and practical applications, while subtly equating certain aspects of the American Mindfulness with certain aspects of the Japanese Zen or Zazen. One interpretation that could make sense of *Zen Bunka's* effort, within the broader context, is that *Zen Bunka* was trying to have it both ways. Specifically, they were attempting to simultaneously appeal to both religiously-minded audience and secularly-minded audience.



On one hand, *Zen Bunka* has taken seriously the criticisms for religious reasons of American Mindfulness, and thus their own conception of mindfulness. Both Kawano and Satō, but especially Kawano, make significant efforts to defend American Mindfulness against charges from the traditional religious quarters, and they even commit to the extent of effectively claiming that American Mindfulness and Japanese Zen are incommensurable. On the other hand, one fact that cannot be ignored is that in general, the need to make American Mindfulness, as it is imported, appealing to a nonreligious audience is nowhere near as vital as it is in America. It would be possible even to argue, as Kawano does, that the “American Mindfulness” package that is imported into Japan is already inherently appealing to the nonreligious audience. As one example, in his article, Kawano briefly describes his experience teaching the relatively unmodified imported mindfulness to his patients at his clinic, and he notes both the convenience and overall success of this endeavor. In particular, he notes how in general his patients are receptive of American Mindfulness, but many become defensive whenever he attempts to explain its Buddhist or Zen roots. Therefore, I argue that although on the surface both articles from the Rinzai and Soto perspectives compare the imported American Mindfulness to the native Zen and find Zen superior, the ulterior motivation behind that line of argument might be to essentially take advantage of mindfulness. The strategy of simultaneously emphasizing and defending the Buddhist aspect of mindfulness and giving praises to its scientifically backed positive effects would then make more sense, within the context that ultimately the aim of *Zen Bunka* is to make their version of mindfulness more appealing to as broad an audience as possible. And the hope, as is mentioned in the Rinzai Zen

article, is that if Zen can be tied to American Mindfulness and if American Mindfulness continues to grow in popularity, then perhaps Zen itself might be rejuvenated.

In conclusion, through the analysis of the two special editions on mindfulness of the magazines *Daihorin* and *Zen Bunka*, it is clear that *Zen Bunka's* general position with regards to American Mindfulness is distinctive within the broader context of contentious Japanese Buddhist discourses of American Mindfulness. In brief, *Zen Bunka's* position is that because American Mindfulness descends from Japanese Zen, it would be completely acceptable to incorporate American Mindfulness into the Japanese Zen framework. Importantly, this position also represents not merely an unconditional acceptance of American Mindfulness but rather a careful adaptation strategy with Japanese Zen as the foundation.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this study, I have conducted a preliminary examination of Japanese Buddhist reactions to the import of American Mindfulness into Japan. In successive stages, I have analyzed the broader Japanese cultural environment conducive to American Mindfulness, the affinity between the popular Japanese traditions “spiritual” alternative medicine (*daitai iryou*) and American Mindfulness, and the specific arguments and rhetorical strategies employed by prominent Japanese Buddhists in their writings on American Mindfulness. In particular, the focus of this study was the uncommon interpretation of American Mindfulness by an influential Rinzai Zen Buddhist institution. Through these analyses, my aim was to demonstrate how the institution’s specific arguments supporting the incorporation of American Mindfulness into Zen are carefully chosen to be consistent with their conceptualization of the broader Japanese Zen Buddhist framework.

This study is a first step toward understanding a larger, relatively understudied phenomenon. As a result, there are many potential future directions for this line of research, particularly as American Mindfulness might continue to branch out and grow internationally. In order to close this exploratory study, I will point out a few potentially fruitful research directions.

First, this study was limited to the reactions of influential Japanese Buddhists and Buddhist institutions as represented by sect-affiliated journals. We would benefit from studies of the concrete changes in policies or the lack thereof by Japanese Buddhist

institution, as well as ethnographic work on the less visible reactions toward American Mindfulness by average Japanese Buddhist practitioners.

Second, we need to examine in greater details the similarities and differences between the paradigms of American Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism. In particular, one potential avenue of research is the possible conflict between American Zen Buddhists and Japanese Zen Buddhists. In 2016, a collection of essays titled *What's Wrong with Mindfulness (And What Isn't)* on mindfulness in American by prominent American Zen Buddhist was published. The general tone in that volume is consistently critical of mindfulness as a practice, which stands in contrast with the general tone of the reception of American Mindfulness in Japan (Rosenbaum 1-3). As such, there is a need for further consideration of different Buddhist paradigms in relation to mindfulness-based practices.

Finally, we need complementary studies on the varied adaptations of “mindfulness” in countries which have historical experiences with traditional Buddhism. The case of the adaptations of mindfulness in Japan is only one link within a larger interconnected web, so we would benefit from more studies on the mindfulness phenomena in China, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, and elsewhere.

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