

2 Soto Zen in Australia

Tradition, challenges and innovations¹

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Establishing Buddhism in a new country is like holding a plant to a stone and waiting for it to take root.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi (Chadwick 1999: 252)

Soto Zen Buddhism came to Japan almost eight centuries ago, when the Buddhist monk, Eihei Dogen, returned from China to teach in his native land. In the late 1990s, in a radically different historical and cultural context, a Zen monk moved permanently to Melbourne and began to develop a Soto Zen teaching program. Soto Zen Buddhist teachers had visited Australia and began Zen groups before² but Ekai Korematsu, known to his students as Ekai-oshō, is the first resident Zen monk to teach purely in the Soto tradition. The Zen community that he founded, Jikishoan,³ has recently celebrated its tenth anniversary and has enjoyed a steady evolution over the years from a handful of dedicated practitioners to a small but thriving community based on spiritual and administrative structures established in thirteenth-century Japan by the Soto School 'founder', Eihei Dogen.⁴

The 10-year development of the Jikishoan Zen Buddhist Community offers fertile ground for the study of the adaptations, challenges and innovations involved in transplanting Buddhist practices and organizational structures to an Australian cultural setting as 'it is an opportunity to study the acculturation of a tradition as it is actually occurring.' (Gregory 2001: 233) For the purposes of this discussion, the organizational and spiritual aims of Jikishoan are especially interesting because Ekai Korematsu's teaching emphasizes traditional ways and adherence to traditional forms, which in the Soto Zen context means attempting to fit a monastic practice to a primarily lay community. This is not always an 'easy fit' but the problems and successes of this 'transplantation' process offer a window into the cultural shifts and clashes that organizations undergo and individuals experience.

This chapter is based on three years of participant observation fieldwork with Jikishoan (and to a lesser degree, other Australian Zen groups),⁵ community (sangha) publications, personal interviews with Ekai Korematsu-oshō and Zen practitioners and Ekai-oshō's talks given both on retreats and to the general public. In this chapter, by way of a case study, I will begin to explore some of the issues that these adaptations and challenges to traditional Zen practice in the Australian context raises with the aim of working towards some understanding

of the development and characteristics of Soto Zen Buddhism in Australia at an organizational and individual level. To get more of a nuanced sense of the cultural shifts and clashes involved, my discussion will include 'the view from the cushion' in the form of experiential data from practitioner interviews and reports.

To this end, the chapter proceeds in three stages:

1. Ekai Korematsu's biography is briefly recounted and the evolution of the Jikishoan community is outlined with emphasis on the implementation of Japanese structures.
2. The challenges of a monastic structure to lay practitioners are investigated through practitioner reports and interviews.
3. Adaptations and innovations in the Australian context are noted.

Where appropriate, aspects of Jikishoan's history and development are compared and contrasted with other western Zen groups, both in Australia and overseas.

The chapter concludes by attempting to isolate some defining characteristics of Soto Zen Buddhism in Australia and questioning if there are, as yet, any significant differences between Zen in Australia and other western branches of Zen.

'Out of nowhere': the evolution of a Soto religious community

Ekai Korematsu (b. 1948) has an interesting 'cross-cultural' background to Zen practice as, although born and raised in Japan, he began Zen practice in the United States at the San Francisco Zen Centre with the intention 'to practise in the United States, in California, to establish some kind of practice community' (personal communication 1999). Having no family temple to inherit, as is the custom for temple priests in Japan, Ekai Korematsu comes to Soto Zen as an 'outsider' in the sense that he has had to build a Zen community without the immediate recognition and financial support of the Soto *Zenshu* in Japan. The necessity of earning an independent living coupled with the need to become officially affiliated with Soto Zen headquarters in Japan impacts on Jikishoan's organizational strategies, in the sense that there is a drive to conform to Soto 'orthodoxy' and, from the students' point of view, there is a sense of obligation to help financially support the teacher and his family (Jikishoan was officially affiliated with the Soto Zen School in Japan in 2001).

In the mid-1980s, after training in temples in Japan and two lengthy periods at one of the Soto head temples, Eihei-ji, Ekai-oshō received dharma transmission from his teacher, Ikko Narasaki Roshi. As per his stated intentions, he returned to the United States and was beginning a Zen practice group in Oakland, California, while also practising at the San Francisco Zen Centre. At his teacher's request, he then returned to Japan, to help convert Narasaki Roshi's 'second' temple, Shogoji, into an international training monastery. In all, Ekai Korematsu spent over seven years at Shogoji, three years preparing the monastery and helping to train the first visiting American monk⁶ and then a further four years working to fully establish the training centre.

Ekai-osho reports that he was a little hesitant to return to Japan after beginning to establish a practice community in the United States because with American practitioners he had seen other possibilities of 'opening up the path.' He reports that:

Like a birch tree whose branches go this way and that way, my ideas were fluid and developing so the thought of going back to that rigid training system was difficult! I knew that I had to be prepared to become a Bonsai, [laughing] a Bonsai tree with all my branches cut down and my roots confined to the shape my master wanted.

(Korematsu 2000: 2)

The rigidity of the Zen training structures in Japan and the necessity of catering to the many ritual and social obligations that parishioners (*danka*) bring have prompted similar responses from other Soto monks in the west. The most famous, and arguably the most successful Soto monk to establish a Zen centre in the west, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, founder of the San Francisco Zen Centre, expressed similar views when he began meditation sessions for non-Japanese and was impressed by their 'beginner's mind' – where the possibility of a purer Zen practice lay (Suzuki 1984: 21).⁷ In her study of Zen in Brazil, Rocha reports that Soto monk Daigyo Moriyama Roshi, former abbot of Busshinji in Sao Paulo, was also inspired by the possibilities of a group of practitioners with 'beginner's mind'. In an interview Moriyama Roshi states: 'That is why I put my energy into a foreign country; here [in Brazil] Zen Buddhism can be created again in a purer way' (Rocha 2000: 40).

This is not to say that western practitioners come to Zen practice unencumbered by preconceived notions. In the case of an Asian teacher leading a convert community such as Jikishoan, there were early perceptions among the sangha that the teacher's ethnicity made Jikishoan more 'authentic' with some practitioners saying that they 'couldn't practice with a western teacher' (personal communication 2000). Conversely, some practitioners who had experience with other teachers in the United States or Japan were initially disappointed: 'Yes, he was Japanese, but where was the discipline? Where [was] the severity? He did the chants all wrong' (Bolton 2002: 5). In some cases, this disappointment led people to leave Jikishoan but, as was often noted, Jikishoan was the only Zen centre in Melbourne with a resident teacher, thus, for the most part, the students interested in a long-term commitment stayed on.

In 1998 Ekai Korematsu moved permanently to Melbourne from Japan with his Australian wife. In April 1998 he created the first of the 'garage zendos' a Zen practice place in the garage of his suburban home. Ten years on, in 2009, Jikishoan has 139 members and 50 friends with a mailing list of over 500 names. Aside from the regular teaching programs, Jikishoan holds three seven-day retreats (*sesshin*) per year, and regular one-day meditation workshops. Four lay-ordained students (three women, one man) are now authorized to teach and they conduct the orientation, deepening and workshop programs. Also in 2009 a charter branch (*bun-in*) was incorporated in Canberra. Jikishoan's activities are now carried out in Melbourne, Canberra and rural Ballarat.⁸ Despite having no permanent centre

(indeed Jikishoan conducts its activities at six different venues in two states), the group's activities have continued to attract interest and have developed into a comprehensive Zen teaching program.

Following Ekai-osho's intention to develop an organization founded on community practice, the first Jikishoan committee was formed in 1999 consisting of eight members with administrative and practice responsibilities: president/*docho* (teacher); vice-president/*ino* (practice coordinator); treasurer (*fusu*); secretary (*jikoku*); *tenzo* (head cook); *shissui* (building manager); *kansu* (Ballarat coordinator); and *koho* (publications). The committee positions were based on the traditional Soto monastic organizational structures and, as more students became members, these positions developed into the *ryo* groups.⁹

The *ryo* structure is closely connected with Dogen's 'model for engaging the way' (*bendoho*). This approach is outlined by Dogen in his *Eihei-shingi* (Pure Standards for Eiheiji Monastery), a collection of six essays that gives detailed instructions for the daily conduct and attitude of monks living a disciplined monastic spiritual life.¹⁰ In 2009 Jikishoan has 11 *ryo* groups – referred to as 'the body of Zen practice' – that are responsible for running and maintaining every aspect of the groups' spiritual and administrative functions.¹¹ Each *ryo* leader is responsible for keeping detailed records of the groups' activities and assets and gives regular reports to the committee. In the spirit of community practice, members are encouraged to join *ryo* groups as 'becoming involved in the day to day practicalities of *ryo* practice gives rise to a special kind of intimacy, with the community, with the teachings and ultimately with your self' (Jikishoan 2009).

In Jikishoan's development, as the *ryo* organizational structures have become more stable, the teaching has increasingly emphasized a monastic orientation with a core group of lay-ordained practitioners at the centre of the sangha. The wearing of robes – given by the teacher – has also become standard for more senior members. A hierarchical leadership structure has been developed where, for example, access to the teacher is no longer direct but takes place through a *ryo* group leader.

Emphasis on *ryo* practice in a lay context is a defining feature of Jikishoan's organizational structures. Its singularity hinging on two interrelated organizational issues: the problem of no permanent base and the need to be affiliated with the Soto School in Japan. Having no permanent practice/residential location requires clear and precise organizational strategies and structures and *ryo* practice provides this, while the need for official recognition necessitates an adherence to orthodoxy and the implementation of *ryo* monastic structures demonstrates this.

The weight of the robe: challenges of a monastic practice structure to lay practitioners

Ekai Korematsu emphasizes that the basic form of Soto practice should be well established before any adaptations are made – the practice foundation needs to be solid: 'Cultural differences are so great and if the practice forms are adapted to other cultures too quickly, without being properly digested then those adaptations

won't work and practice doesn't shift in appropriate ways' (Korematsu 2000). Here Ekai-osho's organic metaphor is analogous to the analysis of anthropologist, Milton Singer, in which a host culture ingests foreign cultural bodies, segregates them, breaks them down into useable forms and eventually builds them into 'cultural protoplasm' (Bell, 2000: 3). In effect, Ekai-osho is asking his students to 'swallow the system whole' (Bell 2000: 4) and then, once it is 'properly digested' appropriate adaptations and innovations will evolve. In this he is in agreement with Soto teacher Shohaku Okumura, who stresses the importance of establishing the foundational forms before any adaptations can be made: 'to create some American forms for American people practicing Soto Zen, Japanese forms are the only foundation on which American forms can be developed' (Okumura 1999).

In Soto Zen practice, both in Australia and the United States, the forum for establishing a solid practice foundation are retreats (*sesshin*) or the longer 'practice periods' where zazen is practiced intensely and the application of a monastic structure needs very little adaptation – indeed, according to Ekai Korematsu: '[R]etreat is the forum in which monastic qualities are translated into the lay context. Anyone who participates in a retreat gets a feel for it just by being there. There isn't anything you have to do.' In this context, he goes on to say that community practice needs to be established 'slowly' and that the 'essential practice anchor' is zazen (Korematsu 2006: 5).

In an example of how these 'effects' are 'translated' into the day-to-day running of the retreat and, by extension, the day-to-day administration of the community via *ryo* practice, a founding member observes that, in a retreat context, the *ryo* organizational arrangements with their 'attention to detail and the focus on doing a task with care and humility' provides a 'perfect example of how to construct a truly effective organizational structure' and goes on to add that, 'in all my 30 plus years of work in large and "well run" organizations, nothing ever came close to the beauty of the *ryo* arrangements when they were working well' (personal communication 2009).

Moreover, according to this practitioner, the monastic *ryo* practices are 'predicated upon top-down lines of authority and control supported by detailed documentation on policies, procedures and practices' (personal communication 2009). A system like that assumes that the required numbers of workers (i.e., monks) are available. In a lay setting with a dispersed sangha, this places a lot of pressure on a small number of students. All *ryo* tasks have to be coordinated between the *ryo* leader and its members. If members are not available, the 'top-down lines of authority' means that the task falls on the *ryo* leader. This has led to some practitioners having large *ryo* workloads and has placed them under considerable pressure as they are also juggling work and family demands.

Jikishoan members report that *ryo* work 'could be anything from a few hours a week to as much as a day per week' (personal communication 2009). This amount of time in addition to regular *sanzenkai*, practice meetings, committee meetings and retreats has often led to tensions between the student and their families and/or partners. These personal tensions are particularly difficult to overcome if the student's partner does not share an interest in spiritual practice. In some cases, the

tensions have resulted in temporary or complete separations. The type of commitments that belonging to a spiritual organization engenders and demands are often difficult for 'outsiders' to understand as 'monks in a monastery are obligated to undertake *ryo* work tasks whereas Jikishoan members work on a volunteer basis motivated by personal commitment to their spiritual practice or their personal commitment to supporting the teacher' (personal communication 2009).

In lay spiritual practice, accepting the policies, procedures and practices of a monastic structure also implies submission to authority: not only the authority of the teacher but also of the *ryo* leaders. A long-term Jikishoan practitioner reports that this authority was sometimes abused and there were 'instances of bullying in the *ryo* groups' (personal communication 2009) but for the most part challenges and problems centred around the fact that the volunteer nature of the work meant that if it became too much practitioners could discontinue their involvement. In this context, a *ryo* leader observes that: 'unlike monks in a monastery, the *ryo* members were not necessarily prepared to accept prescriptive tasks and top-down requirements' and further comments that 'the Australian character, being sceptical of authoritarian rule, meant that it was hard to find members who were fully committed to the meticulous record keeping and detailed practice' (personal communication 2009).

Two common western perceptions of Zen practice are that it is anti-authoritarian – 'outside of words and scriptures' – and solely based on meditation practice – 'a direct pointing'.¹² However, Soto Zen practice, at least in an environment that aims to adhere to traditional ways, is structured on hierarchical authoritarian principles and, although meditation (zazen) is the heart of the practice, being a practising Buddhist cannot be reduced to simply being a 'meditator'. These preconceptions are thrown into sharp relief in Jikishoan's case for two main reasons. First, they are trying to establish a temple with all the accompanying infrastructure 'from the ground up' and practitioners are required to submit to a 'top-down' structure of authority and to contribute time, skills and labour to this effort; and, second, there is the Soto emphasis on the 'practice attitude' or 'zazen-mind' that should infuse all daily activities in a monastery and, by extension, every aspect of lay life.

This emphasis is specifically tailored to a monastic setting where there are no outside 'distractions.' The idea that every action and activity constitutes spiritual practice is not so easily maintained in a lay setting and it is perhaps one of the biggest 'sticking points' that this group of practitioners have experienced. In his study of Rinzai Zen in America, Hori notes that American Zen students also have difficulty in 'conceptualizing their everyday activities and social relations as applications of the central teachings' (1998: 63) as the intensity and structures of retreat practice are not carried over to daily life and they cannot easily extend their ideas of practice into more 'mundane' activities (Hori 1998: 64–5). In Jikishoan's case, the main difficulties centre around the volunteer nature of the work and what students perceive as a blurring of meditation practice and administrative work in which administrative work is almost given preference. Put simply, emotional tensions arise when students feel that they are putting more time into administration and not 'practising' i.e., meditating enough. Students describe this feeling

as 'distressing' and on being told by the teacher that this 'was not a problem' since 'it was the time commitment that was most important' report feeling 'confused' (personal communication 2009).

Feelings of confusion over 'what Zen practice actually was' coupled with the demands of large *ryo* workloads led to some 'people feeling overworked and underpracticed' (personal communication 2000). These 'widespread feelings of overwork and resentment' (personal communication 2009) were compounded by such problems being described as 'a personal practice issue' (personal communication 2009). This blurring of the boundaries between meditation practice and work practice is 'in line' with practice and daily life being 'one' but it served to place the responsibility for resolving difficult practical organizational problems back on the shoulders of the student: 'What did it mean to have a practice issue? The student was left with a sense of inadequacy. What was the solution? To practise even more!' (personal communication 2009). One student describes this as a 'catch-22 situation' that led to feeling 'constant pressure to be doing even more practice, i.e., more *ryo* work' (personal communication 2009).

The 'catch-22' dilemma is triggered by a perception of meditation as 'real' practice and administrative work as a supportive kind of practice, but ultimately secondary. In her study of Diamond Sangha Zen groups in Australia, Spuler notes a similar perception among students. Diamond Sangha groups have a two-tiered structure consisting of an administrative council or board and a dharma group to support the teacher and deal with practice matters. Spuler observes that 'the difference between administration and practice is difficult to define' and quotes one student referring to tensions that arose between those two groups, 'because one group was doing all the organization and the other group was doing all the teaching. It got to be a bit like those of the spiritual people up there and these are the mundane people down here' (Spuler 2003: 68).

In Jikishoan's case, the spiritual/mundane dilemma¹³ has led to the development of a system whereby 'volunteer hours' and 'practice hours' are separately tallied to give students the opportunity to 'strike a balance'. To my knowledge, this is an original move, all the more interesting because it acknowledges that volunteer/administrative work and meditation are spiritually different – perhaps if only in degree. Also it is an important 'policy' change in direct response to student difficulties. This innovative move is now described in more detail.

Taking root in different soil: adaptations and innovations

In Jikishoan's 10-year history, practice and administrative structures have steadily evolved, for the most part without too many striking adaptations. In an organizational sense, the Soto *ryo* structure adapts very well to western committee structures and, in a practice sense, Ekai Korematsu generally adheres to traditional forms and procedures, albeit with some tolerance and patience for his 'young' lay sangha. (It should be noted that he is also a 'newcomer' to Australia and is personally adapting to Australian culture.) However, attention can be drawn to some relevant issues in Jikishoan's particular case and in the broader Australian context.

The lack of a permanent base means that Jikishoan often needs to use facilities belonging to other organizations and thus needs to interact with other Buddhist and community groups. Indeed, the plurality of Buddhist traditions in Australia that places different Buddhist groups in reasonable proximity to one another means that Buddhists of various traditions have become neighbours (a feature common to western settings but a rarity in Asia – Baumann 2001: 2) and this has benefited Jikishoan. Over the years, the community has forged connections with other organizations including 'two Tibetan Buddhists groups; a Vietnamese Buddhist group; a shiatsu training college and a yoga centre' (Hutchison 2004: 28). These links have opened up teaching possibilities for Ekai Korematsu and have brought new members to the group.

In common with many Zen groups in the west, Jikishoan has taken steps to promote a more socially engaged Buddhism via an outreach Buddhist chaplaincy program in prisons and through Ekai-oshō teaching Zen meditation in a drug rehabilitation centre in Melbourne. These initiatives are still in the early stages and are inspired by the various outreach programs of Zen centres in the United States and Australia such as the San Francisco Zen Center's programs in prisons and for the homeless (San Francisco Zen Center 2009) New York-based Tetsugen Bernard Glassman's socially engaged Zen Peacemaker Order (Zen Peacemakers 2009) and Diamond Sangha Buddhist Peace Fellowship initiatives (Sydney Zen Centre 2009) Jikishoan students generally see such work as the natural extension of Buddhist ideas of compassion, service and the Mahayana Bodhisattva ideal.

The problem of blurring meditation practice and administrative work and the difficulties that students have experienced with this has brought about perhaps the most interesting innovation to Jikishoan's operating structure. At the eleventh AGM in 2009, the secretary (*shoji ryo*) reported that a system had been put in place for members to separately record volunteer hours versus practice hours 'to encourage members to maintain a "healthy" balance between time spent in volunteer activities and time spent in practice' (*Jikishoan Annual Report* 2009: 13). As mentioned earlier, this is an original innovation prompted by genuine distress in the sangha. It is particularly interesting in the Soto context as it separates meditation practice and 'work' practice – a separation that Soto Zen aims to negate (both in philosophical and experiential terms). In effect, this innovation is a direct response to 'where the sangha is at' and, in terms of Jikishoan's development, it points to a certain confidence that foundational practice forms have been established enough to be able to implement adaptations. This move is a good illustration of Baumann's categorization of a group making an 'innovative self-development in response to challenges from the host culture' (Baumann 1994: 37).

As this is a relatively new move, the impact on students and the logistical success(es) are yet to be seen but, for the purposes of this discussion it circles back to the issues that instigated the move in the first place and serves to restate the fundamental Zen question: 'What is practice?' Does practice only take place on a cushion in the zendo? For example, would activities such as the outreach programs in prisons or working on Zen texts for publication in the newsletter be considered 'practice' hours or 'volunteer' hours? Or can time spent in a committee meeting be

clearly designated as volunteer hours given the dual practice/administration status of all the offices? Exactly how this innovation will evolve and impact on the group is an interesting aspect of a further study.

A final issue to consider is adaptations to Ekai Korematsu's teaching. Ekai-osho's teaching style is friendly and direct. In his discourse, he strives to stress that Zen is not so exotic but 'very concrete' and expresses Buddhist concepts and ideas in the Australian idiom: referring to the Bodhi tree as the 'no-worries'¹⁴ tree and that Zen is not just a 'she'll be right'¹⁵ attitude (Korematsu 2001). In retreat dharma talks (*teisho*), he tells students that 'on the first and second days of retreat you may not feel so good with what I call retreat jet-lag' (Korematsu 1999) or alternatively, that 'the first three days of retreat are like a detox period' (Korematsu 2008: 6). At the end of retreats he asks each individual practitioner for a personal 'weather report' to gauge how they have responded to the practice (Korematsu 2001). These 'borrowings' from the specific host culture (Australian) and the broader host culture (western) illustrate Ekai-osho's attempts to frame teachings in terms that Australian students will readily understand and are also part of his personal acclimatization to Australian culture.

Although Ekai-osho will use Australian idiom to make a point, he generally adheres to the traditional Soto teaching strategy of offering commentary on teaching stories and dialogues (koan), but not advising students to work on them in meditation. This is in line with the Soto emphasis on *shikantaza* (just sitting) a physically precise yet objectiveless meditation practice made paradigmatic for the Soto School by Dogen. This approach is in marked contrast to Soto teacher, Hogen Yamahata, whose Open Way Zen in New South Wales is the only other Australian temple affiliated with Soto headquarters in Japan. Hogen-san (as he is known to his students) not only works on koan with students, but he also sometimes extends the parameters of traditional koan definition from the canonical cases of the masters to include elements taken from daily life. A common thread that runs through Hogen-san's formulating of koan is the idea of 'one's deepest life-question' and the instruction that student's should 'put [their] most important question into the sitting position' (Yamahata, 1998: 180). Buddhist scholar, Griffith Foulk, notes that this type of instruction is a feature of many western expressions of Zen:

[T]he idea that 'anything can serve as a koan' is prominent in Western expressions of Zen (i.e., anything that becomes the sustained focus of an existential problem or 'life crisis' can be used as an 'insight riddle' or koan) [and is] a modern development [for which] there is scarcely any precedent for in the classical literature.

(Foulk, 2000: 26)

Conclusion

In the 10-year development of Jikishoan, the community has successfully established and maintained a Soto religious identity with well-defined teaching programs and traditional organizational structures. The Australian environment

has proved fertile ground for Ekai Korematsu's teaching style and spiritual aims. He has enjoyed support from experienced practitioners and attracted new students to the tradition of Soto Zen. The gradual implementation of orthodox practices and organizational structures has mirrored the growing commitment and maturity of the core members of the sangha. Adaptations to the Australian cultural setting have been instigated primarily by the need to address problems of shortage of labour, the volunteer nature of the work and practitioner disquiet concerning the need to balance meditation practice with volunteer or work practice.

Spuler notes that 'most of the Buddhist lineages found in Australia are also represented in America and Europe [and] indeed many Australian lineages have their headquarters in other Western countries [hence] it seems likely that the majority of characteristics would be shared by Australian Buddhism' (Spuler 2000: 39). Jikishoan has generally developed along similar lines and made similar adaptations as Zen in other western countries. In keeping with other Zen centres in the west, Jikishoan has diverged from traditional Japanese orientations by beginning to have women in teaching positions, by forging ecumenical links with other Buddhist and religious organizations¹⁶ and by social engagement such as outreach programs in prisons and teaching in a drug rehabilitation centre, all of which have been mirrored in the transplantation and development of Zen in the United States and Europe.¹⁷

What is particular to the Australian situation are the demographics. Australia is a large country with a relatively small population hence, in comparison with the United States, there is a smaller pool of resources – in terms of student numbers and financial support – to draw from. For example, after 10 years the San Francisco Zen had established a Zen monastery at Tassajara and a city centre in San Francisco through student donations and corporate fundraising (Chadwick 1999: 266, 351). Jikishoan has a small building fund and after 10 years is still some time away from affording a permanent base. The demographics also have ramifications for students as, due to the fact of smaller student numbers, some challenges of developing a community practice are felt more intensely because of greater workloads on fewer people. Less opportunity for financial sponsorship also places more obligation on the sangha to contribute to the financial well-being of the teacher and the organization.

Baumann has identified the influence of German 'Protestant' values in the early transplantation of Buddhism in Germany (1994; 1997). In the culture contact between Japanese Buddhism and Australia perhaps there are some emerging signs of Australian values and character shaping the transplantation of Buddhism. A Jikishoan practitioner advances the idea that 'Australians are generally suspicious of authoritarian rule and prefer informal modes of social conduct and communication.' (It is perhaps too early to clearly identify what impact such 'values' might have, but as Australian students begin to teach such qualities and worldviews should have an impact.) All in all, the relationship between religion and culture is a complex dynamic that configures and reconfigures aspects of traditional religious forms into expressions that match local needs and interpretations. In Jikishoan's first 10 years there have been subtle indications of this living dynamic in action.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Ekai Korematsu-osho and the Jikishoan Zen Buddhist Community for their contribution to my research.
- 2 Most notably, Hogen Yamahata, founder of Open Way Zen. It must be mentioned here that the Soto *Zenshu* in Japan officially recognizes two Soto temples in Australia: Jikishoan in Melbourne and Hogen Yamahata's Dochu-An: Open Way Australia in Byron Bay, New South Wales. However Hogen-san spends only part of each year in Australia and the practice and administrative structure of Open Way is not as focused on traditional Soto monastic structures. For more information see Open Way Zen 2009.
- 3 Jikishoan translates as direct (*jiki*) realization (*sho*) hut (*an*).
- 4 The Soto School claims two founding patriarchs: Dogen Zenji (1200–1253) and the fourth ancestor in Dogen's line, Keizan-Zenji (1268–1325). Consequently, there are two head temples Eihei-ji, and Keizan-Zenji's Sojiji.
- 5 Over a three-year period I attended retreats, lectures and workshops and conducted interviews with teachers and members of Open Way Zen, the Clifton Hill Zendo and the Melbourne Zen Group.
- 6 The American monk, Nonin Chowaney, a student of Dainin Katagiri Roshi, was the first foreign monk to undertake training at Sogoji. He is now Abbot of the Nebraska Zen Centre.
- 7 'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few' (Suzuki 1984: 21).
- 8 Ekai-osho also occasionally conducts one-day workshops with a small group of students at a zendo on the Mornington Peninsula approximately 85 km from Melbourne.
- 9 The term *ryo* refers to work spaces for various office holders and their staff. It can also refer to the staff of a certain position. Thus the term *tenzo ryo* refers to the kitchen workers. Since Jikishoan has no permanent base, *ryo* always has the latter meaning.
- 10 See Leighton and Okumura 1996.
- 11 The Jikishoan *ryo* groups range from the *fusu ryo* that is headed by the treasurer, to the *tenzo ryo* that coordinates all meals at community functions. For a full list of the 11 *ryos*, see Jikishoan 2009.
- 12 'Outside of words and letters' and 'a direct pointing' are Zen slogans attributed to the semi-legendary Bodhidharma. For examples of western perceptions of Zen, see Kapleau 1980: 222–3; Chadwick 1999: 171–2. In my experience with Jikishoan, a number of people did not return because they 'couldn't see the need for all the ritual' or felt that 'there was too much administration work'.
- 13 There is a classic Zen story that 'answers' the spiritual/mundane dichotomy:

In the Kuan-yin Monastery the dharma ensign was once broken down by the wind. A monk came to [master] Chao-chou and asked, 'What will this magic ensign turn into, a divine or a mundane thing?' The Master answered, 'Neither mundane, nor divine.' The monk further pressed, 'What will it ultimately be?' The Master said, 'Well, it has just dropped to the ground.'

(Chang 1969: 167)
- 14 'No worries' is a common Australian expression that usually means there are no difficulties involved in a certain task. It can also mean 'It's no trouble at all' or 'you're welcome'.
- 15 'She'll be right' is another common Australian expression that usually means 'everything will be ok'. It can also have a sarcastic or ironic meaning as a response to someone making a mistake or not caring about the result of an action.
- 16 See Chadwick 1999; Spuler 2003.
- 17 For examples of scholarly work on these adaptations, see Prebish 1999; Bell 2000; Kone 2001.

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3 Green Tara in Australia

Reassessing the relationship between gender, religion and power relations¹

Ruth Fitzpatrick

This chapter focuses on what Green Tara means to a group of Australian women involved in Tibetan Buddhist practice. The research is based on data generated in four focus groups, involving 13 Australian women who regularly participated in Green Tara rituals. In conducting the focus groups, I aimed to understand what meanings the women attributed to Tara and how relevant gender and feminist concerns were in their relationship to her.

According to Tibetan Buddhist mythic history, Green Tara, the most popular female deity of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, made a vow to always incarnate in a female form, despite the prevailing assumption that being in a female body was an obstacle to gaining enlightenment: 'Since so many desire enlightenment in a man's body', Tara pronounced, 'until all suffering is ended, in all worlds, for all beings, in all universes, I shall work for the benefit of sentient beings in a woman's body.' Tara qualified her decision by saying: '[H]ere there is no woman, no man, no individual consciousness. Labelling male or female has no essence. Rather these are categories created by the confusion of worldly minds' (Taranatha 1981: 11–12).² This reflected the Tibetan Buddhist philosophical understanding that gender is ultimately an illusion, a product of dualistic thinking and, hence, only a relative truth. Though written thousands of years ago, in a geographic and cultural landscape far from Australia, Tara's story continues to have meaning and relevance in the lives of Australians in the twenty-first century.

Green Tara's story came to life for me in 1998, when I was first introduced to the practice of Tara while staying in Pemayangtse, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Sikkim. Following the instructions given to me, I began visualizing myself as Tara, majestically hovering above the snow-capped peaks of Kachenjunga, the view from my room beside the monastery. I found compelling Tara's active and dynamic disposition, articulated in her iconographic form, with her right leg outstretched ready for action and her left leg drawn inward symbolizing meditative concentration. That Tara was both compassionately and energetically engaged in the world, while deeply meditative, articulated a way of being for my own life that harmonized what I had sometimes experienced as conflicting motivations: engagement with social change versus inward spiritual development. While Tara's activity and dynamism and her compassion and wisdom made her a highly