

# Three Japanese Religions in Brazil: A Psychological Approach

Geraldo José de Paiva\* [gjdpaiva@usp.br]

## Abstract

This paper will present a brief history of Japanese religions in Brazil, the psychological dimension of Brazilians' affiliation with three of these religions, the main results of a psychological investigation into the process of transformation of religious identity, with emphasis on its psycho-social and personal components.

**Keywords:** Japanese Religions in Brazil, psycho-social and religious identity, personal religious identity.

## Resumo

Este artigo apresenta, após uma breve referência a história das religiões japonesas no Brasil, a dimensão psicológica da filiação de brasileiros a três dessas religiões. Serão descritos os principais resultados da investigação psicológica do processo de transformação da identidade religiosa dos sujeitos entrevistados, com ênfase nos componentes pessoais e psicossociais.

**Palavras chave:** Religiões Japonesas no Brasil, identidade religiosa e psicossocial, identidade religiosa pessoal.

---

## 1. Introduction

Japanese immigrants to Brazil in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century were adherents mostly to traditional Buddhism and were sometimes registered in the Brazilian Immigration Office as "pagans". Only from the 1930s onwards did some of the Japanese new religions come to Brazil, aimed at first and second generation Japanese immigrants. Among these new religions were Seicho-no-ie, P.L. Kyodan, Sekai Kyuseikyo and Tenrikyo (Arai, 1974;

---

\* Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade de São Paulo.

Matsuno, 1974; Murakami, 1980). After some efforts directed at the Japanese *issei* and *sansei*, around the 1960s the new religions turned these efforts toward Brazilians of no Japanese ancestry, spreading geographically throughout the country. Today, adherents to Japanese religions number approximately 360,000, of which some 145,000 belong to the new religions, mostly located in the urban axis between the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. According to the Census of 2000, Sekai Kyuseikyo has 109,310 adherents, Seichon-ye has 27,284, P.L.Kyodan, 5,465 and Tenrikyo 3,054 (IBGE, Censo 2000). The Census counts as many as 218,873 adherents to Buddhism, of which 133,528 are converts, that is, people who were not raised as Buddhists. Some researchers have doubts about the significance of the figures, since there are many people who belong to new modalities of Buddhism, not acknowledged as authentic (Gonçalves, 2005), or pick up from Buddhism only a few fashionable elements (Usarski, 2004).

Sociological and anthropological studies of a religious nature conducted among Japanese immigrants and their offspring were the first of their kind in Brazilian academic inquiry. Among these pioneers let us remember Hiroshi Saito (1973), Takashi Maeyama (1973) and Teiiti Suzuki (1969). Religious affiliation used to be considered as a cultural distinctiveness of a large group, before receiving some scholarly attention in its highly personal and interpersonal dimensions. The first studies in sociology and anthropology focused on the impact that the new cultural surrounding exerted upon the religious behavior of the immigrants and their offspring as a whole. Psychological studies, on the other hand, address religious experience acquired on the level of personality and small group relations. The focus of the psychological perspective is the individual, in his or her cognitive, emotional, and active living, largely dependent on history, early experiences, and personal contacts. The psychological perspective therefore adds to the more global view of sociology and anthropology.

Several psychological studies of Japanese religions in Brazil have focused on the conversion process ( Paiva, 1999; 2001; 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2008; Paiva & Nakano, 1987; Paiva, Faria et al., 2000). The subjects of these studies are Catholic Brazilians who change their religious affiliation to a Japanese religion. Psychological research does not generally consider religious conversion of Japanese descendants to Christianity or other religions, although this is a very interesting issue, because many second generation descendants did convert to Catholicism.

Moreover, these studies have been directed primarily toward conversion processes to Japanese new religions and only recently turned their attention to conversion to Buddhism.

Individual conversion is a highly complex concept, and psychological research in Brazil has preferred to view the process of changing religious affiliation as a process of identity transformation. Although identity also is a complex notion, it is possible to agree on some of its theoretical and empirical dimensions. Several studies over the last fifteen years have used two complementary models for exploration of identity: Tajfel's Social Identity Theory and Lacan-inspired Imaginary/Symbolic concepts. These models are said to be complementary because social relationships and personal development are both required to truly understand identity. These theoretical insights have also provided empirical methods with which to assess the actual processes of identity formation. Some results dealing with affiliation to Seicho-no-ie, P.L.Kyodan and Buddhism will be presented, as well as some remarks in relation to group belonging and to the imaginary/symbolic cognitive organization.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1. *Group belonging***

Analysis of the process of religious identity formation is supported by the Theory of Social Identity (Tajfel, 1972, 1978). Social identity theory explains inter-group relations through peoples' awareness of belonging to one group and not belonging to another group, such that identity results from the awareness of belonging or not belonging. Awareness occurs at the level of consciousness through categorization, that is, the conceptual discrimination of groups as own (in-group) and alien (out-group), and locates the subject in his or her own group (in-group). As a motivation for the categorization process, Tajfel (1972) postulates self-esteem, which involves emotion as well as cognition. In order to gain, maintain, or recover self-esteem, one compares between groups, considering one's group to be preferable to another. People tend to affiliate to a given according to its ability to confirm their self-esteem.

### **2.2. *The imaginary and the symbolic***

These concepts belong to the conceptual triad proposed by J. Lacan (Kaufmann, 1993; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1995), and are the subjective manner of appropriating the unknowable

(real) of reality. The imaginary and the symbolic are cognitive structures that delimit subjective apprehension of reality by the human subject. According to this perspective, in its very first months the child recognizes itself in the other, without conferring unto this other the property of otherness. This phase is commanded by the imaginary through an assimilation principle, in which diverse perceptual elements are assimilated to the perceiver. It is a characteristic of the imaginary to reduce the different to the same, the strange to the familiar, the whole to the part, and the part to the whole. In the course of life, this process may be expressed in such phenomena as exemplifications, isomorphisms, homologies, metonymies, generalizations, stereotypes, and prejudices.

Complementary to the function of the imaginary, Lacan (Kaufmann, 1993; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1995) proposed the symbolic function. This is a function that emerges later in the child's development, since it supposes a de-centering from the "me" towards the other. This function also participates in ordering chaotic, disparate stimuli and sensations. The order conferred onto the stimuli, however, is an arrangement of similarities and differences around an axis of significance. The symbolic relates to the interdependent construction of meaning, according to which every signifier, namely sounds and words, acquires its function upon entering an order exterior to itself, in such a manner that, although they can remain the same as elements, they acquire their specific meaning according to the chain of significance into which they are inserted. This modality of operation is omnipresent throughout an individual's life, discriminating between concepts, constructing prototypes, producing metaphors, and generating new meaning.

### **3. Identity transformation among Brazilians affiliated with Japanese New Religions and Buddhism**

#### ***3.1. Methodological reflections***

The studies reported below are not of an empirical-quantitative nature. Because the phenomenon of affiliation to Japanese religions among Brazilians is rather new, it was first necessary to take a qualitative approach of a conceptual and descriptive nature. Therefore, the data were collected according to the general literature on the conversion process and were interwoven with conceptual and theoretical threads. The rationale for this research

procedure was expressed adequately by Mucchielli (1991), according to whom a coherent interpretation of the data, shared by other researchers and by the subjects themselves, permitting a global understanding of the phenomenon, is sufficient for establishing the significance of qualitative data.

Subjects: Subjects are male and female adult Brazilians with no Japanese ancestry, generally Catholic, who declared to be adherent to Seicho-no-ie, P.L.Kyodan or Buddhism.

The instrument has been a semi-directed interview, with the following script: What is your religion? What was your prior religion? What lacked in your prior religion? What did you find special in your new religion? Which points do you consider important in your practice of worship? Which are the most important teachings in your religion? Which are the words most frequently used to talk about your religion? Whom, in your religion, do you consider to be role-models, be they living or dead? What do you maintain of your original religion? What changes did you observe in your life, after entering your current religion? (Paiva & Collabs., 2000, p.153s.).

Procedure: Interviews were conducted by pairs of research assistants, then tape-recorded and transcribed. Qualitative analysis of interviews considered them at face-value, and consisted in exploring the imaginary and symbolic cognitive organization of converts, various degrees of group belonging, and their interrelatedness.

The choice of Seicho-no-ie and P.L. Kyodan was determined by the accessibility to adherents of these religions, and the apparent doctrinal and ritual distance between Christianity and P.L. Kyodan and Seicho-no-ie. Adherence to Buddhism was selected because of the traditional roots of Buddhism in Japanese culture, more ancient and pervasive than the influence of Japanese new religions. Data for Seicho-no-ie and P.L.Kyodan were collected in 2001 and 2002; data for Buddhism, in 2003 and 2004.

In order to demonstrate how people organize their religious affiliation according to the imaginary or the symbolic, and how people concomitantly vary in their degree of group belonging and personal identity construction, several reports are presented which deal with affiliation to Japanese new religions and to Buddhism

### **3.2. Reports of individuals affiliated with Japanese New Religions**

S1, a housewife, is a Catholic and also goes regularly to Seicho-no-ie. She says that Seicho-no-ie is not a religion but “a philosophy [that] teaches our Catholic religion, and states we are children of God and brothers of Jesus”. She talked to her parish priest, who said “it is ok to go to Seicho-no-ie; he never said it was wrong”. She knows also a catechist whom the priest told: “you may continue going to Seicho-no-ie: there is nothing wrong with it”. S1 has led many people to Seicho-no-ie, “who continue to be Catholic, to go to Mass.” What calls her attention in Seicho-no-ie is “God, our *Jisso*”. She learned “the novelty of Seicho-no-ie,” namely praying with concentration: “in our [Catholic] religion, we don’t really have the whole thing of praying; in Seicho-no-ie even in very large gatherings, no one looks side to side”. When she comes back to the Catholic worship, she is more attentive: “Seicho-no-ie urges the Catholics to remain Catholic, because Seicho-no-ie is a philosophy, where one learns about the Catholic religion”. She learned in Seicho-no-ie “not to shout, to give alms, to thank the person who asks for money”. Therefore, is there no important difference between Seicho-no-ie and Catholicism? “Our *Jisso* is the true God. Christ, in the Catholic Church, is God and in Seicho-no-ie he is *Jisso*: that is the same”. In the first sutra there are several references to Christ, whom Seicho-no-ie orders its followers to revere. The song of Great Harmony, in Japanese, awakes in her the same emotion she felt while listening to the ancient chants in the Latin mass. Master Taniguchi “is the second person of God”, and “a man beloved by God”. His books and the Bible are “equal revelations”, and “after entering Seicho-no-ie, I can understand the Bible better, because in the Catholic Church there is no guidance, no one who knows how to explain”. The first sutra states that “there is no sin”. In Catholicism, sin is acknowledged. Seicho-no-ie explains that sin does not exist “because man is a part of God and does not become sick or die as a result”. “Nowadays, sin doesn’t exist anymore, because evolution changed everything. Everything used to be a sin; but now no one talks about it anymore, it disappeared. This is a good thing: the burden on conscience is over. Pregnancy outside marriage, for example...” In spite of Seicho-no-ie granting a better knowledge of Catholicism, “it is probable that a Catholic might abandon Catholicism, as evangelicals, spiritualists and adherents to Umbanda<sup>1</sup> have done.”

1 Umbanda: an urban Brazilian religion with components from African traditions, Christianity and Spiritualism.



S2, a female youth, used to be a coordinator of young people in the Catholic Church. But she went astray, religiously speaking: she used to go to Mass, but she had only negative feelings. In the Catholic Church she saw “only disharmony, gossip, differences of class and race.” In Seicho-no-ie she found harmony, a great inner strength, the reverence to the other as a perfect child of God. She has to “to revere the Catholic Church that had prepared her to enter Seicho-no-ie.” Currently, she no longer goes to the [Catholic] church. She says: “Jesus is the Son of God, and he is universal, because in Japan too, Christianity exists”. Master Taniguchi is “a messenger of God, just like Jesus, Buddha, and St. Francis of Assisi. He came in order to explain the Bible, for example the Our Father. And he speaks so well of God and of Christ!” She sees no difference between the Christ and Taniguchi: “Christ had a mission: he was crucified for our liberation. The Master came in order to explain that Christ died in cross but not because we are sinners; he says we are not sinners”.

S3, a married woman, is angry because Catholics say Seicho-no-ie is “anti-Christian”. “How is it anti-Christian? Its emblem has the cross of Christ. The truth, the philosophy of Seicho-no-ie is fully Christian. People think that Seicho-no-ie has nothing to do with Christ because it is an eastern philosophy: but it has everything to do with Christ! Master Taniguchi’s philosophy is fully Christian. If they lived Seicho-no-ie, many Catholics would become more Christian”. S3 is a Catholic and “always attends mass”, which she prefers in Portuguese. In Seicho-no-ie, she prefers the prayers in Japanese, because they have more power that way. Before she encountered Seicho-no-ie, S3 attended spiritualist centers and evangelical churches, but could not solve her problems of health and money. Now, she says, everything has changed as a result of practicing gratitude. Her husband, a business man, “takes the philosophy of Seicho-no-ie to his subordinates, because he sees the proof at home”.

PL1, a former Catholic nun, reveres Oshieoyasama, “one with God and having an easy access to God, in order to answer, through mioshie, to consultations from all over the world”. She is ready “to go everywhere on the order of Oshieoyasama”, since in P.L. “we accept everything coming from Oshieoyasama as a divine work”, and “obedience to Oshieoyasama is similar to Jesuit obedience: an intellectual obedience”. She summarizes the relationship between PL and Oshieoyasama: “P.L. is Oshieoyasama”. God, with whom Oshieoyasama is one, is the Power of the Universe: “nothing about one in three, or three in one; nothing about

God becoming man; nothing about anathema, excommunication, or condemnation”. And also “no dogma of infallibility”, because “the Laws of the Universe themselves are infallible: *mioshie* corresponds to their violation pointed out by *mishirasse*, and this is why it is infallible”. “There is no mystery. Life is mystery”. P.L. is always updated: “the new Oshieoyasama has suggested that some modification in the body of the doctrine can occur”. The simple adherent “can maintain her religion, as a form of self-expression. But as a Master Assistant she ought to opt for P.L.” Even so, there is always the danger of syncretism, and for that reason, permission for saying oyashikiri was restrained. Oyashikiri is indeed a “strong prayer [that] contributed to solve problems of hail, caterpillars, and foot-and-mouth disease”, but some people began to use the beads of macumba<sup>2</sup> in order to accompany the prayer of oyashikiri”.

PL2 is the president of a church of P.L. He was a Catholic for 40 years, before becoming a P.L. follower. “It is difficult to free oneself. And besides, God is only one: the difference is elsewhere, not in the faith”. According to his experience, the teachings of P.L. produce “a more direct contact with God, through the little things, where I find myself and God”. Over his bed, he has the omitama and the crucifix: “without any disrespect to Christ, the crucifix has become just an ornament, it is respected but does not represent what it used to represent”. Formerly, he prayed the Our Father after the prayers of P.L. “These confrontations and collisions are present”. “I do not despise 40 years of Catholicism: I was an altar boy, I studied in a religious school, I used to confess and receive communion, but I met God only through the teachings of P.L.”. P. L. is a modern religion because “some principles of some religions do not work any more, given the evolution of technique and of humanity. The principle remains the same, but its transmission must to be updated. The meaning of sin, for example, cannot be the triviality of past centuries. The Church itself is revising taboos about sex and procreation. About abortion, the principle remains but the reason is another: we cannot talk of sin, offense to God. We cannot continue to talk of sin, nonsense, and P.L. does not talk in this way”. Among his activities in P.L., he officiates in marriages, as “Saint Anthony, the matchmaker”. He also does “what parents call baptism, though P.L. does not have baptism, but rather a thanksgiving to God for the child”. The parents, indeed, mostly from a Catholic origin, “carry with them many remainders of the Catholic Church”. PL. is “almost the religion

<sup>2</sup> Macumba: a generic name for Afro-Brazilian religions, sometimes with a pejorative connotation.



of people desperate for salvation, an instant miracle, grace. The prayer of *oyashikiri* is very powerful. People tend to understand it as a sort of witchcraft which is why P.L. does not publicize it. The word *oyashikiri* has an extraordinary power. Through it, 99.99% of the P.L. adherents have been delivered from severe problems and achieved an immediate contact with God”.

PL3, a young male university student, puts the difference between P.L. and other religions on a philosophical level. According to him, in P.L. “the person is an agent, not a patient of the facts. People have the capacity of controlling the facts through their effort”. Through *mishirasse*, which interprets the events, and *mioshie*, which indicates what to do, people correct their position in light of the facts; this is the fundamental difference from other churches”. In this context, “P.L. does not speak of transcendence”; God is “the entirety of all things, the Universal Law; it is not anthropomorphic, but rather impersonal, having no feelings; it is the reflection of the core of people”. This concept of God “gives people a more definite position”. Paying no to transcendence, to the “eternal rest” and similar concepts, P.L. teaches that “if [transcendence] exists, the best way to behave is the same as if it did not exist”. He himself was a faithful Catholic until age 12. He stopped attending worship because of the sermons: “the priest did not permit an interpretation, a search for a meaning *for me*. There exists heaven, hell, sin, pardon, but please don’t extrapolate!” Catholicism is “corrective, not preventive”. “During the week, nobody practices. People confess, receive penance, are on their way to heaven... as in the time of the sale of indulgences”. “In P.L. there is not the fanaticism of only asking for forgiveness, and then saying ‘Ok, I can do whatever I want as long as I ask for forgiveness.’ P.L. is common sense”. “Other [he nearly said *our*] religions use ancient, biblical texts and do not go further; P.L. does not address ancient texts and perennial things”, but “teaches the philosophical, and religious-spiritual meaning in the attitudes of everyday life”. That is why P.L. “provides something acceptable for young, skeptical university students”.

### **3.3. Japanese New Religions: analysis and discussion of the reports according to group belonging and to the imaginary/symbolic**

S1 and S3 can be said to organize their religious affiliation to Seicho-no-ie according to the imaginary. S1 holds firmly to the Catholic symbolic system: we are children of God and

brothers of Jesus, who is God. The authority of the priest and the example of the catechist give her the assurance that Seicho-no-ie is a philosophy and not a religion. Seicho-no-ie brought her the confirmation of *her* religion, a better understanding of the Scriptures, in addition to a new vocabulary (the word *Jisso*, for example). References to Taniguchi and his writings are embedded into the lexicon and semantics of Catholic language: he is “a man beloved by God”, the second person of God, but he is *not Jisso/God*, as Jesus is, and his writings clarify the Bible. If S1 maintains Catholicism as her symbolic nucleus, the concepts and words she adds to it amplify and conform this nucleus according to the criterion of similitude, that is, of the imaginary. Hers is not a case of conversion of a Catholic to Seicho-no-ie, but of a Catholic syncretism, in which new peripheral references are amalgamated with the ancient core. S1 will not abandon her Catholic origin, although she knows that some people did it after entering Seicho-no-ie. S3 refers to Seicho-no-ie only as a philosophy and eloquently argues in defense of its fully Christian character. According to S3, who sees herself as a devout Catholic, living Seicho-no-ie allows her to be a better Catholic. S3 seems to maintain the Christian and Catholic symbolic system, to which Seicho-no-ie adds some emphasis.

S2, PL1, PL2, and PL3 seem to organize their new religious affiliation according to the symbolic. S2 refers to Seicho-no-ie as a religion and puts her Catholic tradition under this more inclusive umbrella. The Catholic Church served her as a “preparation”, for which she is grateful, but which she currently does without. She does not reject Christ, “who is Son of God” and “universal”, but she sees no difference between Christ and Taniguchi, “a messenger of God, as Jesus, as Buddha, as St. Francis of Assisi”. The Master was sent to explain the Bible, the Our Father, and especially the meaning of Christ’s mission and death on the cross: to liberate us, but not from sin, because we are not sinners. S2 seems to be actually converted to Seicho-no-ie because she has a new symbolic system, into which her ancient religious content is absorbed. PL1 organizes her religious references around PL: Oshieoyasama, the Teaching, the infallible Laws of the Universe. This is why one should avoid double belonging and syncretism. PL1 explicitly rejects the essence of her ancient faith: the Trinity and the Incarnation. It can be said that a religious conversion did occur, yet while maintaining certain elements of the prior religion: Jesuit-style obedience, papal infallibility, the

idea of mystery. PL2 did abandon the Catholic symbolic system: he sees the crucifix only as a decoration, he no longer prays the Our Father, and he does not consider sin to be offense to God, calling it nonsense. According to PL2, the oyashikiri prayer is of utmost importance. PL2 can be said to be guided in his religious references by a single symbolic system, different from the system into which he was born and lived. Elements of his prior system are assimilated into his new identity and become parts of his imaginary which now gravitates around a different symbolic core. PL3 refrains from the idea of transcendence and afterlife, and considers God to be impersonal, unemotional, the Universal Law, the entirety of all things, and the reflection of the person. He does not refer, unless disparagingly, to ancient texts such as the Bible, or to perennial things. PL3 takes a philosophical and pragmatic stance, which he finds acceptable for skeptical university students. It is at the philosophical level that he finds the fundamental difference between PL and his early Catholicism. It seems that PL did in fact abandon the symbolic nucleus of Catholicism, because he currently does not accept God's transcendent and personal character, the distinction between God and Nature, the founding function of the Scriptures, and the afterlife. Again, from the psychological point of view, there is a new religious symbolic arrangement. Finally, PL3 did not appear to transport into his new symbolic system fragments of his prior system which could conceivably be assimilated into it.

### **3.4. Reports of individuals affiliated with Buddhism**

Interview with **B1**, 40, male, psychologist.

B1 says he used to be Catholic but is currently a Buddhist, of the Nishiren Daishonin branch. He adds that he belongs to the Sakka Gakkai International (SGI). As a Catholic, he struggled against feeling constantly humiliated before God, before the priest, and before his religious community because of his homosexuality. Accordingly, he used to value suffering, hoping for happiness only in the next life. Instead, in his "new religion" he came to understand the law of cause and effect, of karma, of the consciousness of his own life, and of the ten states of life. "In Buddhism we do not talk about God, about Jesus, or about Our Lady. Our only objective practice is the recitation of the Lotus Sutra and the reading of Buddha's gosho (teachings)". As a Buddhist he does not consider himself a sinner or guilty, and is conscious of being able to transform his destiny in this precise moment. What fascinates him in Buddhism is self-

sufficiency: “reciting Nam-myoho-rengue-kyo gives people illumination, that is, a quiet and wise mind in accordance with the universe, uniting one’s microcosm to the macrocosm, in order to live a fulfilled, conscious life”. Two points he stresses in Buddhism are the friendly supportive group of fellow believers and the union of faith and practice, which leads him to help other people to reach fulfillment as well. B1 calls attention to the general disposition of people, to perceive the “lower levels of life”, namely, anger, sadness, and hate. In Buddhism he learned to perceive solidarity, compassion, love, Buddha’s illumination, and the creative potential of people. He is responsibly engaged in working with groups of people, inviting them to participate in Buddhism and teaching them mantras and prayers, showing them that they are capable of achieving in their lives what might seem impossible. B1 stresses the importance of Human Revolution for Buddhahood: people can change the destiny of the universe beginning with themselves. He is conscious of having become less nervous, less depressive, more dynamic, lively, and helpful after he entered Buddhism. Since then, he also learned to pay more attention to the five senses, to emotional changes in himself and in the others, and says that his practice of Buddhism helped him in his psychotherapy and in reestablishing harmony with his family. He is proud of his belonging to Sokka Gakkai International, “which has many international universities, and is established in 185 countries all over the world”. According to B1, Buddhists do not discriminate against people because of their religion, but the decision to become or not become a Buddhist is up to each person. Asked about what he maintained of Catholicism, B1 says that he lost even the habit of praying the Our Father. He acknowledges that, after visiting his relatives, he resumes for a time the habit of saying “God bless”, “Go with God”, “May Our Lady accompany you”. He adds: “Now I think I should consider my own values more carefully. I have always been a very mystical person. I did not lose many habits, I have always been a very eclectic person, but I was baptized in my religion, all my acquaintances were Catholic, and my family too. I think I am the only Buddhist in my family”.

**B2**, 44, male, pharmaceutical chemist, Buddhist monk.

B2 says he was born and raised Catholic but is currently a Buddhist, of the Pure Land branch founded in Japan by Shinran Shonin in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. He explains that “Pure Land” does not mean a kind of paradise after this life; instead, it describes the person who transcends

earthly passions in his or her life in this world. He thinks that many people search for another religion when they are frustrated with their own religion, for example when homosexuals are rejected or when they hear about failures such as pedophilia in their Church. B2 feels that in Buddhism, unlike Catholicism, God is not outside people: the savior and the saved are the same, the human being in his or her dignity. Some of the factors, among others, which attracted him to Buddhism were self-knowledge and inner contemplation, replacing the concept of God. What lacked in Catholicism was attention to the human being: human sacredness, human suffering, and human passions, such as attachment, selfishness, and ignorance. Buddhism gave him not the intellectual wisdom, but rather the spiritual wisdom which allows him to understand and to accept life as it is, especially the idea of death. As a monk, he serves in the temple and presides at many ceremonies, such funerals and marriages. He says that the ceremonies are held in Japanese while religious instruction is given in Portuguese. The most important teaching is about transience. This is especially important in Brazil, where people are very afraid of loss and death. The reason for the attachment to life, to the family, and so on, is selfishness or desire. B2 loves to talk about the wisdom of self-knowledge, although his family does not like to hear him talking about Buddhism. His mother once asked him: "what kind of religion is this, that has no God? For me that's not a religion!" He remarks that people are sometimes so fanatically attached to God that they do not accept a religion that does not use the word "God." B2 says that the only example in Buddhism to be imitated is Buddha himself, a man like us, who transcended the earthly passions of attachment, selfishness, ignorance, envy, greed and hate in his own life. Asked whether people of other religions can belong to Buddhism, B2 answers that the temple in which he serves receives all kind of people: Catholics, Spiritists, followers of Candomblé. No person is prohibited from participating in the ceremonies or in the lectures. He himself maintains very little from his previous religion: only a bilingual copy of the Bible, in Japanese and Italian, which he received as a gift from his Italian teacher of Comparative Religion, during his studies in Kyoto. B2 says his mind has been significantly enriched since he became a Buddhist. His interaction with Japanese culture: the food, spoken and written language, habits, etc. has also been very beneficial to him. He also points out the transformation that Buddhism has brought to his everyday life: less violence toward people,

more help to his parents, less attachment to his family yet more interest in them, and less selfishness, which causes less suffering to other people.

**B3**, 52, female, pediatrician.

B3 has been an adherent to the branch of Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin since she was 36. Before this, she traveled from Catholicism, through Kardecism to Umbanda. She says her previous religion was Catholicism, which lacked a sense of reality and of responsibility, because according to it, there is a Supreme Being responsible for everything. She found in Buddhism a sense of responsibility, of activity, and of transformation of reality. She talks about the evolution of Buddhism, namely, the First Days of the Law in India, the Second Days in China, and the Third Days in Japan, with Nichiren Daishonin. She says Buddhism is a religion, that does not believe “in an anthropomorphic god” but in Forces of Nature, which are “protectors of life” and “functions of the Universe”. “[One] can refer to Buddhist Gods”, but these are simply the forces protecting life. The core insight of Buddhism is the law of cause and effect, which ties the whole universe together. According to this law, people themselves shape their destiny, or karma. Unlike Kardecism, Buddhism does not say we have several lives, but rather several states or existences, which people can responsibly improve with their thoughts, words, and deeds, until they achieve the state of Bodisattva or Buddha. B3 stresses that she found in Buddhism the acknowledgement of the person being a cause, a principle of transformation of reality, who can create the karma of joy or the karma of suffering. She goes to the temple to pray and to the religious meetings, but according to her, putting the teachings into practice is essential. She recites the mantra *Nam-myoho-rengue-kyo*, which contains “[the] vital energy of the Universe”. But she joins worship with practice, known as Human Revolution, *Ninguen kakumei*, in Japanese. She gives an example: as a pediatrician she, along with her colleagues, would not take care of adults, because adults are outside of her specialty. As a Buddhist, however, she feels responsible for helping people, and she cares for adults who come for emergency care in her hospital. She says that Buddhism helped her to become a better professional. She presents Daisaku Ikeda as an example of the attitude of Human Revolution. She does not think, however, that it is possible for a person to be a Catholic and a Buddhist at the same time.



**B4**, around 60, female, a former journalist, ordained monk.

B4 belongs to Soto Zen Buddhism, a 13<sup>th</sup> century tradition. She was raised as a Catholic, but at age 13 she stopped going to church and began to question her religion and God's existence. For many years she thought of herself as an atheist. In her thirties she lived in England, where she was introduced to meditation, following the example of the Beatles. She also lived in Sweden and in the United States. In the US she decided to become a Buddhist monk, after listening to a monk's answer to a reporter's question about alpha waves present equally in meditation and in the clinic: "why enter through a window if you can enter through the door?" She understood the door to be Zen. The way to a Japanese monastery was not easy: she was advised to continue in her Catholic tradition; her mother asked her why she did not become a Catholic nun; her father resisted her through indirect jokes; and she thought she was betraying Jesus. Finally she had a dream in which Jesus and Buddha sat together, talking amiably with each other. For her, this was the sign of her inner peace and, after being approved by her mother, she was received into a monastery at Nagoya, where she spent eight years under the guidance of a famous abbess and was ordained as a monk. She returned to Brazil, where she leads a Zen Buddhist temple in São Paulo. According to B4, meditation is the basis of her religion. Meditation is a process of knowing oneself and a way of discovering, in consequence, the inner light that exists in every being. Far from being a merely psychological process, meditation goes beyond logic into intuition or mysticism. Logic is always necessary, but never sufficient, because logical sequence finishes in questions that logic itself cannot answer. This is "[the] leap into the precipice of void, after climbing the peak of the mountain". What is important is to have the same experience of the Buddha, "not your experience. What made a Buddha of Shakyamuni? What did he discover?" The illumination or awakening occurs when one perceives that "everything is the sacredness manifested". This perception makes one see that his or her true enemies are not other people, but rather ignorance, anger, and greed. B4 says that today she is prepared to understand the Christian prayer along with the several ways of meditation which in Catholicism. She also sees compassion as a very strong link between Buddhism and Christianity. She became aware that changes in human affairs is a matter of changing human hearts rather than changing social structures, as she thought when she was a young journalist working in a Marxist

environment. She referred to several very important spiritual principles in Buddhism: the law of cause and effect, people's responsibility for their positive or negative karma, and the transience of all things. She indicated Master Doguen, the Dalai-lama, and her abbess as her Buddhist role-models. B4 also clarified the difference between Soto Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism (which she sees as closer to Christianity): unlike Zen, Pure Land Buddhism is a Buddhism of faith in a Savior, Amithaba, who introduces those who invoke his name into the Pure Land. Finally, B4 says she has great respect for Catholicism, which paved her way to Buddhism, especially due to its educational work in Brazil. She says that people of any religious affiliation can share the practice of meditation with Buddhists. She believes that contact between religions is being sought most promisingly through inter-religious dialogue, in which she is very active, especially with Catholicism.

### ***3.5. Buddhism: analysis and discussion of the reports, according to group belonging and the imaginary/symbolic***

It appears that in the reports of affiliation to Buddhism, group belonging and personal elaboration run parallel to and converge with each other. The four reports present a strong sense of belonging to a Buddhist group and a strong presence of the Buddhist symbolic. Other studies, conducted with people affiliated with Tibetan Buddhism (Paiva, 2006), discovered more variety among the processes of affiliation. Many people not only maintained imaginarily some elements of their previous religion, gravitating around the Buddhist axis of significance, but some of them, not so strictly linked to actual Buddhist groups, seemed to hesitate between a Christian and a Buddhist symbolic. In the reports examined here, on the contrary, it appears that almost no remembrance of Catholicism or other religious reference remained which could be assimilated to the imaginary. The only references to a previous religion are made in the sense of denying their value in the present life of the interviewees. All the interviewees appear to have completely changed their axis of religious significance. B2 and B4 are monks, living and working in a specifically Buddhist environment with specifically Buddhist requirements; B1 and B3 are profoundly engaged in the Human Revolution process. All of them state clearly and convincingly the essentials of Buddhism. It seems that little room is left for other religious reminiscences that could be assimilated into their current spiritual structure, let alone threaten it. In this line, it is interesting to consider that the question of a

double belonging, to Buddhism and to Catholicism, was misinterpreted (B1, B2 and B4) or received a negative answer (B3). In a study about the religious identity of Brazilian followers of Japanese new religions (Paiva, 2004), four types of processes of religious identity transformation were found: (1) complete change of group belonging and of the symbolic; (2) change in course of group belonging and of the symbolic; (3) belonging to more than one group and addition of another symbolic; and (4) indetermination of group belonging and of the symbolic. These types reflected each of the subjects' personal religious option. The four types were not found, however, in the reports of people affiliated with Japanese Buddhism, because all of them demonstrated a fulfilled psycho-social and personal transformation of religious identity, according to the first type of process.

### **Final considerations**

In one of the first studies on this subject, Paiva and Nakano (1987) examined the xenophilia hypothesis, according to which Brazilians affiliated with a Japanese new religion would be admirers of the Japanese economy and sympathetic to Japanese culture. The xenophilia hypothesis was not confirmed, since people adherent to a Japanese religion largely ignored the Japan's flourishing economy and rich culture. Instead, the reason they give for their religious choice was a sense of liberation from the burden of sin, fulfillment of their economic, affective, and familiar needs, and a broadening of their religious interests.

The reports of change in religious affiliation presented here can be discussed in terms of group belonging and personal cognitive organization. Group belonging is not an all-or-nothing process. It can be seen that sometimes people establish steady, solid relationships with their Seicho-no-ie, P.L.Kyodan or Buddhist group, as when people frequent a real, not merely virtual, religious group for a long time, committing themselves to group tasks and abandoning previous worship. At other times, people adhere to another religious group concomitantly with their own, dividing themselves in the worship acts and places, or trying to affiliate with the new group not precisely as a religion but as a social, cultural, or psychological support group. So it was possible to distinguish among the subjects four types of changes in group belonging: complete change, change in course, change to a group of another kind, and ambiguous change. All of these types relate to the psycho-social dimension of religious identity, which will be acknowledged as consummate, in progress, adding to a former identity,

or indefinite/inexistent. Group belonging, however, is not sufficient to fully understand the process of identity formation because people who adhere to groups have a personal history that influences their cognitions and feelings, not least those related to the criterion that distinguishes between in-group and out-group. Therefore, not only are psycho-social identities personally constructed (Cassidy & Trew, 1998; Frable, 1997), but the personal construction of identity also deserves an inquiry in and of itself. The Lacan-inspired concepts of the imaginary and the symbolic are intended to do this. In the reports of adhesion to Japanese religions it is possible to recognize diverse manners of relating the new religious cognitions, feelings, and actions to the former ones. Some people adopted the contents of their new religious adhesion in such a way as to dispel from their memory, sentiment, and practice every reference to their former religion. What remained from that religion (and something always remains!) had been assimilated into the contents of their new affiliation. When this happens, we refer to change in the symbolic, because it is the symbolic that gives a definite meaning and significance to a disparate set of elements. In this case, possible elements retained from the former religion are imaginarily assimilated into multiple elements of the new religion linked through the symbolic. Of course, the symbolic is not always installed immediately. This is why one must allow for varying degrees and modalities in the constitution of the symbolic. One such degree and modality is the consummate symbolic, while another is the symbolic in progress. Some studies (Paiva, 1990a, 1990b, 2004; Negrão, in press) revealed that the probability of changing the symbolic is also a function of the objective structure of the religious contents. P.L.Kyodan and Buddhism, for example, are further from Christianity than Seicho-no-ie. The historical sources of P.L.Kyodan and Buddhism do not include references to Christ, Christian prayers like the Our Father, or the notion of redemption/liberation, as Seicho-no-ie explicitly does. One can suppose that if someone adopts P.L.Kyodan or Buddhist symbolic, they will adopt it fully, without leaving much room for Christian elements even imaginarily. Adherents to Seicho-no-ie, on the contrary, will frequently maintain their Christian symbolic, to which they will imaginarily assimilate Seicho-no-ie elements. It is therefore probable that adding of another symbolic to the religious one, or having an ambiguous, indefinite, or inexistent symbolic is more likely to occur to Seicho-no-ie followers rather than to P.L.Kyodan or Buddhism followers.

Will psycho-social and personal approaches to identity run randomly or in parallel? Surprisingly, what was found in the reports was rather a strict correspondence between these approaches. Every time there has been a group belonging, there has been a change in the symbolic, while every time there has been no change or a dubious change in the symbolic, there has been no group belonging, or a dubious one. Therefore, the psycho-social and personal dimensions of identity do not occur at random, but regularly. Moreover, these dimensions are not only parallel but surely complementary to one other, because it is only too (psycho)logical that personal cognition, feelings and inclination to action in religious matters are an integral part in social insertion in a religious group, and vice-versa.

## References

- ARAI, K. 1974. New Religious Movements. In I. Hori, F. Ikado, T. Wakimoto & K. Yanagawa (Eds). *Japanese Religion. A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs*. Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International, pp. 89-104.
- CASSIDY, C. & TREW, K. 1998. Identities in Northern Ireland: A multidimensional approach. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54 (4), pp. 725-740.
- Frale, D.E.S. 1997. Gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, and class identities. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48, pp. 139-162.
- GONÇALVES, R. M. 2005. As flores do *dharma* desabrocham sob o Cruzeiro do Sul: aspectos dos vários “budismos” no Brasil. *Revista USP*, nº 67, pp. 198-207.
- KAUFMANN, P. 1993. Entries to “imaginaire”, “reel”, “significant”, “symbolique”. *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de psychanalyse. Le legs de Freud et Lacan*. Paris: Bordas.
- LAPLANCHE, J. & PONTALIS, J.-B. 1995. *Vocabulário de psicanálise*. (P. Tamen, translator). São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1982).
- MATSUNO, J. 1974. Other Religious Organizations. In I. Hori, F. Ikado, T. Wakimoto & K. Yanagawa (Eds). *Japanese Religion. A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs*. Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International, pp. 225-232.
- MUCCHIELLI, R. 1991. *Les méthodes qualitatives*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- MURAKAMI, S. 1980. *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century* (H.Byron Earhart, translator). Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press (1968).

- NEGRÃO, L. N. (Org) (in press). *Trajetórias do sagrado – Refazendo antigas e urdindo novas tramas*. São Paulo: Edusp/Fapesp.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 1990a. Seicho-no-ie. In L. Landim (Ed). *Sinais dos Tempos. Diversidade Religiosa no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ISER, pp. 181-186.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 1990b. Instituição Religiosa Perfeita Liberdade. In L. Landim (Ed). *Sinais dos Tempos. Diversidade Religiosa no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ISER, pp. 198-193.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 1999. Imaginário, Simbólico e Sincretico: Aspectos psicológicos da filiação a novas religiões japonesas. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*, 12 (20) pp. 521-535.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 2001. Pluralism and Identity: the psycho-social and personal religious identity of Brazilians affiliated with Japanese 'new religions'. In M. Aletti & G. Rossi (Eds). *L'illusione religiosa: rive e derive*. Torino (Italy): Centro Scientifico Editore, pp. 289-296.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 2004. Identidade e Pluralismo: Identidade religiosa em adeptos brasileiros de novas religiões japonesas. *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa*, 20 (1) pp. 21-29.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 2005a. Novas religiões japonesas e sua inserção no Brasil: discussões a partir da psicologia. *Revista USP*, n.67, pp. 208-217.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 2005b. Sincretismo e Pós-modernidade na construção imaginária e simbólica da identidade religiosa no encontro entre cristianismo e budismo. *Relatório Técnico ao CNPq*.
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 2006. When Christianity and Buddhism meet: group-belonging, the imaginary and the symbolic, syncretism and post-modernity. Paper presented at the *Conference of the International Association for Psychology of Religion*. Leuven (Belgium).
- PAIVA, G. J. de. 2008. Contra-intuições e sentimentos na adesão religiosa: contribuições da psicologia cognitiva à psicologia social dos processos de constituição simbólica da identidade religiosa em cristãos convertidos ao budismo. *Relatório Técnico ao CNPq*.
- PAIVA, G. J. de & NAKANO, F. . 1987. Aspectos psicológicos da filiação a um grupo religioso oriental. *Boletim de Psicologia*, XXXVII, n.86, pp. 51-57.
- PAIVA, G. J. de, FARIA, D.G., GOMES, D.M., Gómez, M.L.T., LOPES, R., NUNES, L.C., VERDADE, M.M. & ZANGARI, W. 2000. *Processos psicológicos da conversão*



*religiosa: Imaginário e Simbólico, Categorização e Prototipicalidade. Psicologia Clínica (PUC-RJ)*, 12 (2), pp. 151-169.

SAITO, H. & Maeyama, T. 1973. *Assimilação e integração dos japoneses no Brasil*. Petrópolis/São Paulo: Vozes/Edusp.

SUZUKI, T. 1969. *The Japanese Immigrant in Brazil. Narrative Part*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

TAJFEL, H. 1972. La catégorisation sociale. In S.Moscovici (Ed). *Introduction à la Psychologie Sociale*. Paris: Larousse. Vol. 1, pp. 272-300.

TAJFEL, H. 1978. *Differentiation between social groups. Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relation*. London: Academic Press.

USARSKI, F. 2004. O Dharma Verde-amarelo Mal-sucedido – um Esboço da Acanhada Situação do Budismo. *Estudos Avançados*, São Paulo: IEA-USP, nº 52, pp. 303-320.

**Recebido: 05/02/2008**

**Aceite final: 17/04/2008**