




Special Focus: Flows and Counterflows of Buddhism ‘South of the West’: Australia, New Zealand and Hawai‘i

Casting Indra’s Net across the Pacific: Robert Aitken and the Growth of the Diamond Sangha as a Trans-Pacific Zen Movement

Helen J. Baroni 

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Robert Baker Aitken and Anne Hopkins Aitken cofounded Diamond Sangha (DS) as a small living room sangha in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, in 1959. By 1993, DS served as the primary hub for an international network of sanghas, extending across the Pacific region. This paper traces DS’s development from its humble beginnings into a major conduit for the flow of trans-Pacific Zen from Hawai‘i to the continental USA, Latin America, Australia, and New Zealand. It argues that DS played a vital role in the rapid growth of Zen throughout the Pacific region by utilizing a horizontal networking style of visiting teachers nurturing local leadership in distant sanghas, creating a lattice of interrelated sanghas across the Pacific. It likewise argues that Aitken’s vision for DS entailed a blending of innovation and tradition, straddling the divide between the imperatives to meet the needs of local contexts and to preserve inherited styles of practice.

Keywords: Buddhism; Zen; Robert Aitken; Diamond Sangha

THE Diamond Sangha (DS),¹ an international network of loosely affiliated Zen sanghas, “descends from both Soto and Rinzai traditions, through the Harada-Yasutani line, and is especially faithful to the teachings of Robert Aitken, Roshi” (Diamond Sangha n.d.). In 1959, Robert (1917–2010) and Anne Aitken² (1911–1994) founded Koko An Zendo (KAZ), the first DS community, as “a living room sangha,” a Zen practice group without a resident teacher that met weekly in their Honolulu home (Baroni 2020: 1). Despite its humble beginnings, KAZ eventually became the founding node of DS within an expansive network stretching across the Pacific region, which Aitken described as “the Net of Indra” (Aitken to Yamada, 18 June 1980). Indra’s Net, originally derived from Vedic religion, refers to a wondrous woven net adorning the deity Indra’s palace: a perfectly reflective gemstone rests at each intersection of the net; every individual jewel reflecting all others, effectively rendering each simultaneously the central node and an interconnected and interdependent part of the whole. Mahayana Buddhists typically employ the image to explicate *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, and the concomitant interconnectedness of all things. Aitken employed it to envision a universal Buddhist *mahāsaṅgha* comprised of interrelated and interconnected local sanghas.

¹ Names for DS are confusing, having been used several different ways over the decades. Since 1992, DS refers to the entire international network of sanghas; the two O‘ahu sanghas, Koko An Zendo (KAZ) and Palolo Zen Center, became known collectively as Honolulu Diamond Sangha. For the first decade of DS history, DS referred to KAZ and the international membership subscribing to *Diamond Sangha*, the first newsletter of the organization, which played a critical role in disseminating information and translations of sermons (*teisho*) and koan commentaries.

² Anne Aitken played a key and foundational role in the development of DS, working in partnership with her husband until her death. While many members informally recognize her as a matriarch of DS, she never accepted or assumed a formal teaching role; nor does she appear on DS lineage charts.

As a designated stopover along international trans-Pacific travel routes throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Hawai'i served as a critical hub for much of the trans-Pacific cultural interaction and exchange throughout the modern period. This paper argues that, much like its island home, DS played a pivotal role as a fulcrum for the rapid spread of Zen throughout the Pacific region in the late 20th century. In its early decades, DS became a leading juncture for Japanese teachers to transmit Zen to the continental United States. Later, after Aitken received permission to teach independently in 1974, DS's place within the development of Zen practice outside East Asia shifted. Aitken promoted the networking style he inherited from his teacher Yamada Kōun (1907–1989),³ the unordained leader of Sanbōkyōdan⁴ after the death of its founder Yasutani Hakuun in 1973, and Aitken himself became a visiting teacher serving isolated sanghas and nurturing local leadership to encourage eventual self-sufficiency and independence.

At first glance, DS appears to fall neatly into the category of Modernist Buddhism as discussed by several scholars, particularly Martin Baumann (2001), since DS stresses lay Buddhist practice of meditative techniques and seeks a democratic form of sangha polity. On closer examination, however, DS likewise displays several traditionalist tendencies. In this way, DS defies simplistic categorization as either modernist or traditionalist, in keeping with Natalie Quli and Scott Mitchell's (2015) analysis of the terms. Unlike his Japanese teachers, for example Aitken sought to enhance the ritualist aspects of DS practice, pushing the issue with his students as well as Yamada Kōun. He expressed his reasoning to Yamada:

... we need more religion in our practice... Otherwise Zen is merely some kind of humanist practice, a kind of self-improvement exercise. I want people to really feel that they are disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha (Aitken to Yamada, 5 September 1981).⁵

In this respect, DS falls within Ann Gleig's understanding of the postmodernist shift in American Buddhism (2019: 4–5), seeking to straddle the divide between innovation to meet local contexts and the imperative to preserve traditions inherited from teachers in the lineage.

Japanese Zen teachers began to introduce Zen teachings to non-Japanese Americans in the decades before the Second World War, and a few established Zen study societies that would later transition into Zen practice centers.⁶ When Aitken founded DS in 1959, only five or six such groups existed. Rapid growth of interest in Zen did not occur until decades later, particularly after 1965, when changes in immigration law made it easier for Japanese teachers to settle in the United States (Baroni 2020: 4–5). DS was thus in the vanguard of Zen practice groups founded in the United States, and one of the first founded by an American born practitioner.

This essay traces the historical development of DS from its inception as a conduit for Japanese Zen teachers to spread their teachings east to the United States into an international Zen network of affiliated groups spread across the Pacific region. While not a member of DS, the author has worked closely with the Honolulu Diamond Sangha (HDS) community since receiving an invitation from Robert Aitken and HDS to serve as the Humanities scholar on two Hawai'i Council for the Humanities grants to prepare the collection for transfer to the university, starting in 2003.

³ Japanese names are rendered in the traditional Japanese style, surname first. Yamada Kōun graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and pursued a career in business, although he practiced Zen from about the age of 40. He never ordained as a Buddhist monk. Yamada practiced with Rinzai teachers in Kamakura, his home, before becoming a student of Yasutani Hakuun in 1953. Yamada was a life-long friend of Nakagawa Sōen, Aitken's second Zen teacher, with whom he attended high school and university.

⁴ Sanbōkyōdan (Three Treasures Association) is the Zen movement founded by Yasutani Hakuun in 1954. It is also referred to as the Harada-Yasutani lineage in some contexts.

⁵ The historical sketch of Aitken's early life and of DS utilizes archival materials preserved in the Robert Baker Aitken Papers (1917–2010), housed as a special collection in Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu. In accordance with general archival referencing conventions, quotations from correspondence found in the archive is cited within the text using (author to recipient: date). All other archival documents are individually cited both in text and in the references.

⁶ Early missionaries included Sasaki Sokeian (1882–1945), Senzaki Nyogen (1876–1958), Matsuoka Sōyū (1912–1997), and D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966), each of whom founded a Zen study center or practice group.

As Jeff Wilson (2012, 2015) has long argued, descriptions of American Buddhism typically gloss over regional variations. Buddhism in Hawai‘i, a distinctive region in its own right, has thus far been largely excluded from scholarship on American Buddhism. For many aspects of academic analysis, Hawai‘i is at once demographically insignificant, representing just 0.43% of the US population, and prohibitively expensive to include. Moreover, given that Hawai‘i is neither geographically nor culturally North America, and that the history and present reality of Buddhism in Hawai‘i differ significantly from the continent, subsuming Buddhism in Hawai‘i under the umbrella of American (or North American Buddhism) serves to erase the sole region of the United States in which Buddhism is deeply integrated into the social fabric of the community. While surveying the breadth of Buddhism in Hawai‘i far exceeds the scope of the present project, it offers a glimpse into one Hawai‘i-based sangha that has impacted Buddhism across the Pacific region.

First Encounters

DS emerged within a multicultural environment created by the disparate ethnic groups living in Hawai‘i in the mid- to late decades of the twentieth century.⁷ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Hawaiian Islands became home not only for native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, but for Buddhist immigrants from East Asia and their locally born descendants (Char 1974; Nordyke and Matsumoto 1977; Nordyke and Lee 1989), as well as European Americans from the continental US. The history of Buddhism in the islands predates the illegitimate overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom by American operatives, which began in 1893,⁸ and Buddhists have represented a sizable segment of the population since the early twentieth century. The first Buddhists arriving in Hawai‘i were Chinese mariners in the late eighteenth century. The majority of Chinese emigrated as single men in order to work on the sugar plantations; they typically married Hawaiian women and started families. As Chinese immigration grew throughout the 19th century, they founded local associations based on family lineage or region of origin that also functioned as religious sites for Daoist and Buddhist rituals and celebrations. Japanese immigration began later, when representatives of the Hawaiian Kingdom negotiated an agreement with the new Meiji government for contract laborers to work on the sugarcane plantations in 1868.

Japanese immigration increased rapidly after 1885, including both men and women and sometimes entire family groups. Within the growing Japanese community, single men typically wrote home to Japan to arrange for a Japanese bride. Japanese laborers collectively petitioned Buddhist authorities in Japan to provide the services of Buddhist clergy to conduct funerals and other rituals; the first Jōdo Shinshū missionary arrived in 1889, and other Japanese Buddhist denominations soon followed suit. First generation Japanese, known as *issei*, built and maintained numerous Buddhist temples throughout the islands. In 1922, when Aitken arrived at age 5 with his family, Hawai‘i’s population was among the most ethnically and religiously diverse anywhere in the United States, including a relatively high percentage of practicing Buddhists.⁹

Aitken grew up on O‘ahu, after his family relocated to Honolulu in 1922. Aitken displayed little interest in religion in his youth, although he occasionally attended Christian church services with family and visited

⁷ According to the 1960 census, the population in Hawai‘i was 16.2% Native Hawaiian, 32.0% Caucasian, 6.0% Chinese, 10.9% Filipino, 32.2% Japanese, 0.4% Black, and 0.3% Other. The same census reported the overall US population as 88.6% Caucasian, 10.5% African American, 0.5% Asian, and 0.3% Native American. Please note that before 1959, Hawai‘i was a territory and allowed more flexibility in determining ethnic and racial categories, hence the more detailed breakdown in the data for the generic “Asian” category used elsewhere and the inclusion of Native Hawaiian. See Robert Schmitt, “Religious Statistics of Hawaii, 1825–1972” for additional information.

⁸ The history of the overthrow and the concomitant growth of European American hegemony despite the usurpers’ minority status in the Territory of Hawai‘i is far too complex for adequate discussion in this paper. Please see Lori Pierce’s dissertation, *Constructing American Buddhism: Discourses of Race and Religion in Hawai‘i* (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2000).

⁹ Approximately 25% of the state’s population identified as Buddhist in 1909, reported numbers dropping thereafter. Unfortunately, data related to religious affiliation in Hawai‘i is particularly inaccurate. Until 1972, when the University of Hawai‘i Department of Religion first began compiling data, native Hawaiian religion was excluded as a recognized category. Moreover, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, relatively large percentages of Hawai‘i residents declined to identify religious preference. In 1909, for example, 59.1% are listed as unspecified. In 1972, over 30% of residents declined to answer. See Schmitt, “Religious Statistics of Hawaii, 1825–1972”.

Buddhist temples on school outings. He first encountered Zen teachings during the Second World War, while interned as a civilian prisoner of war in Kobe, Japan. By chance, a Japanese police guard loaned him a copy of R. H. Blyth's¹⁰ recently published *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. As Aitken later observed, the book "turned [his life] around" (Email, Aitken to Shoemaker: 24 December 2008) though at that stage, he was mostly attracted to Buddhism by what he regarded as Zen poetry, such as Bashō's Japanese *haiku*, rather than its religious practice.

Aitken reread Blyth's book numerous times, until circumstances brought him face to face with Blyth in May 1944. As a British citizen, Blyth was interned at another civilian prisoner-of-war camp. When Allied bombing raids grew imminent in Spring 1944, the Japanese relocated all foreign civilian detainees to the relative safety of a single internment camp situated in the hills above Kobe. Seizing the opportunity to work with such a highly qualified instructor, Aitken studied Buddhist thought, Japanese language, and Buddhist literature with Blyth for the remainder of the war. By war's end, Aitken pledged to pursue the study of Zen in the future.

After nearly four years of internment, Aitken needed time to readjust to civilian life and complete his undergraduate education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where he majored in English literature, before turning his attention to Zen practice. After graduating in 1947, Aitken moved to California, planning to undertake graduate work in Japanese literature, and met his first Japanese Zen teacher, Sensaki Nyogen (1876–1958).¹¹ Sensaki, a Japanese Rinzai monk, arrived in the United States in 1905, hoping to introduce Zen to Americans. Following his teacher's¹² instructions, Sensaki refrained from teaching for twenty years, eventually founding Mentorgarten Zendo in Los Angeles. Sensaki designed his teaching style specifically for Americans. He instructed them in English, encouraging them to practice zazen sitting upright in Western-style chairs (R. Aitken 1987). Aitken later explained that Sensaki provided the "primary influence" for founding DS, "I was impressed with his modest, yet untiring effort to create a garden from which future teachers might grow, while effacing himself in the process" (Aitken to Yamada: 28 July 1978).

Aitken returned to Japan in 1950–1951 ostensibly to study Zen literature at the University of Tokyo. Soon abandoning any pretense of academic endeavor, he focused instead on gaining practical Zen experience within the rigorous traditional environment of Zen monasteries. He initially gained admission to Engakuji in Kamakura, where he attended his first formal *sesshin*, an intensive meditation retreat, under the guidance of Asahina Sōgen (1891–1979), a Rinzai Zen teacher. Asahina trained at both Myōshinji and Engakuji, later becoming head (*kanchō*) of the Engakuji branch of Rinzai.¹³ Known for his calligraphy and erudition, he authored several books on Zen and taught at Komazawa University, affiliated with Sōtō Zen. Unaccustomed to working with foreign students, Asahina made no concessions for the visiting American. Aitken found intensive monastic practice so physically debilitating, that he soon relocated to Mishima at the invitation of Sensaki's close friend Nakagawa Sōen (1907–1984). Aitken joined the monks at Ryūtakuji practicing under Yamamoto Genpō (1866–1961), Sōen's teacher. Yamamoto was a Rinzai Zen teacher from the Myōshinji branch, best known for his calligraphy. Partially blind from childhood, Yamamoto lacked formal education. He permitted a few accommodations for Aitken, particularly regarding sitting postures, making conditions more bearable.

Nakagawa Sōen succeeded Yamamoto as abbot during Aitken's residency, thus becoming Aitken's teacher. Nakagawa, a 1931 graduate of Tokyo Imperial University, already enjoyed a reputation as a poet in Japan by

¹⁰ Blyth (1898–1964), a British scholar of Japanese and Chinese literature, first studied Zen with a Japanese Rinzai teacher while living in occupied Korea in the 1930s. He moved to Japan in 1940, where he married a Japanese woman and remained until his death in 1964.

¹¹ Aitken (1987) composed a bibliographical sketch of Sensaki, "Nyogen Sensaki: An American Hotei," published as the forward in Sensaki and McCandless's *Buddhism and Zen* (North Point Press 1987).

¹² Sensaki's teacher was Shaku Sōen (1860–1919), who first introduced Zen to Americans at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions in 1893.

¹³ Much later in his life, Asahina founded Nippon wo Mamoru kai (Association to Protect Japan), a nationalist organization, in 1974.

1951, and he and Aitken wrote and exchanged poetry with one another. Nakagawa later became well known for teaching Zen in the United States. The new *rōshi* treated Aitken as his special protégé, inviting him to serve as his *jisha*, or personal attendant, when making the rounds of prominent Rinzai monasteries in Kyoto after becoming abbot. Nakagawa likewise encouraged Aitken to establish a Zen temple in the United States. As a parting gift, Nakagawa even purchased an image of Bodhidharma for Aitken to enshrine in his future American *zendō*.

Aitken next returned to Japan for Zen training in 1957, shortly after marrying Anne Hopkins, then Assistant Director of Happy Valley School, where Aitken taught high school English. Hopkins was raised in a religiously eclectic household, exposed to “Christian Science, seances with mediums, numerology, automatic writing, Christian mysticism, astrology, graphology, Theosophy, spirit guides, Krishnamurti’s lectures” during her youth (A. H. Aitken n.d.: 7), but knew little about Buddhism before meeting Aitken. The Aitkens honeymooned for two months in Japan, although Aitken’s primary focus was again Zen practice rather than sightseeing or romance. The newlyweds visited Nakagawa Sōen at Ryūtakuji in Mishima for two weeks, where Aitken participated in a seven-day *sesshin*, leaving Hopkins alone. Afterwards, Nakagawa introduced the Aitkens to Yasutani Hakuun (1885–1973), founder of Sanbōkyōdan, a predominantly lay-focused Zen movement that combines elements of both Sōtō and Rinzai styles of practice.¹⁴ Both sat a full *sesshin* in Tokorozawa, outside of Tokyo with Yasutani, Hopkins’s first experience practicing zazen. The encounter provided Aitken with his first taste of the Sanbōkyōdan style, the group with which DS later affiliated.

When the Aitkens founded their small *zazenkai*, or sitting group, in Honolulu with Sōen’s permission, they hoped he would function as the group’s regular visiting teacher. Although Aitken worked with the local Japanese Buddhist community, volunteering at Honpa Hongwanji’s Young Buddhist Association,¹⁵ attending Sunday services with friends and sometimes guest lecturing, he did not seek a Zen teacher in Honolulu. The closest Rinzai temple was the Rinzai Zen Mission in Pā‘ia, Maui, whose priest and founder, Okamoto Nanshin and his wife Shizu, offered DS substantial support throughout the early years.¹⁶ However, like the Sōtō priests serving at the Soto Mission of Hawaii in Honolulu, Okamoto was not a *rōshi*, and did not guide students in zazen. The Aitkens continued to rely on visiting teachers from Japan for decades.

The early membership of KAZ was extremely small, with only four individuals attending the first meeting including the Aitkens. A year later, the first annual financial statement listed 17 contributing members, among whom seven were of Japanese descent (Expenses and Contributions, 15 August 1960).¹⁷ Early membership also included at least one *kupuna*, or elder, from the Hawaiian community, Alice Kauhane (1910–1995), known within the sangha as Tutu, a Hawaiian endearment for grandparent. The DS newsletter reported on Kauhane’s visit with Nakagawa at Ryūtakuji during her tour of East Asia (R. Aitken 1961: 2). No systematic records of members were kept, making it impossible to analyze patterns within DS membership, although turnover was consistently high throughout the first decade.

During Nakagawa’s first visit in 1960, an extended stopover on his way to California, he dubbed the living room *zendō* “Koko An.” In 1961, Sōen led two *sesshin* in Hawai‘i during his American visit. To further support the fledgling sangha, Nakagawa granted permission for his senior student Shimano Eidō (1932–2018), not yet an independent Zen teacher, to assist KAZ. Shimano arrived in Fall 1960, functioning as KAZ’s resident monk until 1964, during which time the community stabilized and grew. The Aitkens recognized the advantages of

¹⁴ See Sharf (1995) for an introduction to the movement.

¹⁵ Aitken volunteered at Young Buddhist Association under the supervision of Rev. Fujitani Yoshiaki (1923–2021), his longtime friend, who later served as bishop of Honpa Hongwanji for 12 years, starting in 1975.

¹⁶ In 1961, for example, Mrs. Okamoto donated a mimeograph machine to allow KAZ to produce the newsletter called *The Diamond Sangha*, which KAZ published for ten years before MZ assumed responsibility.

¹⁷ It is impossible to accurately determine ethnicity from a list of names, particularly in Hawai‘i, where many individuals of Hawaiian or multiethnic descent have European surnames.

having regular guidance from an advanced practitioner serving as sangha leader between annual teacher's visits. They managed to maintain this pattern of leadership for over a decade, until Aitken himself qualified to serve as resident apprentice teacher.

Practice patterns at KAZ shifted after Nakagawa's visit from meeting once a week for meditation to two meetings each week on Sundays and Wednesday evenings; both meetings included a period of meditation as well as sutra chanting that Nakagawa introduced. When the group had a resident Japanese monk or practice advisor, they typically gave a weekly talk on Sunday. The Wednesday evening meetings varied quite a bit; sometimes the program included lectures on Zen history or literature by visiting scholars, sometimes discussions of *haiku* poetry led by Aitken, and later monthly orientation sessions on Zen meditation and teachings for interested newcomers.

Diamond Sangha as a Waystation of Zen Transmission

When founding KAZ, the Aitkens hoped to invite fully qualified Japanese Zen teachers to lead *sesshin* there, while continuing to avail themselves of extended periods of intensive practice in Japan as time and finances allowed. In its first decade, KAZ functioned simultaneously as a local sangha and as a conduit for the transmission of Zen to the continental US, with several Japanese teachers stopping over in Hawai'i on their way east. As Aitken later reflected: "In the early days Koko An was the seat for the teaching [of Zen] in the West ... It has served as a practice center for the Zen Buddhist community in Hawai'i, and also for a growing stream of Zen students from the US mainland and across the world" (Aitken to Thanh and Xuan Huynh: 2 April 1993).

At this early stage, practitioners rarely came to Hawai'i to join *sesshin* at KAZ, although a few individuals such as Richard Baker briefly visited on their way to or from Japan. Throughout the first decade, the Aitkens actively facilitated the flow of Zen transmission from Japan to the continental US by undertaking several practical tasks: handling visa applications, officially sponsoring teachers and their respective attendants/translators for extended visas with the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, planning and coordinating *sesshin* schedules in consultation with mainland Zen friends, and helping to finance the nearly annual teacher's visits along a network that extended from O'ahu to California and New York.

Looking back from the remove of five decades, KAZ's beginning seems to have progressed without serious problems, and its early transition from local sitting group to critical node within the nascent American Zen network appears smooth. Closer analysis, however, reveals the tenuous nature of this networking pattern for far-flung sanghas relying on visiting teachers. Nakagawa caused a minor disruption in 1962 when he stepped back from teaching, mourning the death of his teacher Yamamoto Genpō in 1961 and his mother in 1962. Fortunately, he entrusted KAZ to Yasutani Hakuun, who began visiting DS on his way to the continental US in 1962, continuing until 1969. A second, more damaging disruption occurred in late 1964, when Shimano Eidō departed suddenly from O'ahu, leaving KAZ divided and in the lurch.

The Shimano affair¹⁸ remained shrouded in mystery for many decades, although Aitken privately shared his version of events with a few Zen friends and DS students. In Spring 1964, two female members of KAZ suffered serious emotional breakdowns, both requiring hospitalization. When Aitken volunteered at the local hospital where the women were treated, he discovered that Shimano had sexually preyed upon them, contributing directly to their illness. Shocked by Shimano's gross sexual misconduct but afraid to confront him directly, Aitken flew to Japan, seeking help and advice from his and Shimano's teachers, Nakagawa and Yasutani. According to Aitken, the Japanese teachers failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation, "both of them

¹⁸ A full analysis of Aitken's handling of Shimano's misconduct is far too complex to incorporate within the confines of a short article. The author plans to discuss it at greater length in a future publication.

were inclined to regard Shimano as a rascal rather than as a rogue, and to blame the victims” (Email, Aitken to Stuart Lachs: 15 February 1998). When Aitken returned to Honolulu, Shimano was furious with him for consulting his superiors and prepared for immediate departure for New York, where he had contacts from translating for Yasutani.

The Shimano situation revealed to the Aitkens the fragility of their reliance on distant teachers. Yasutani made clear that his ties to Shimano, an ordained Japanese disciple with potential to become his Dharma heir, far outweighed his commitment to a group of ordinary American practitioners (Translated letter,¹⁹ Yasutani to Aitken: November 1964). The Aitkens maintained their tenuous relationship with their Japanese teachers at the cost of their silence, which simultaneously protected the female victims from further harm and DS from possible ostracization by the Japanese Zen community if Aitken publicly denounced Shimano.²⁰ Unable to adequately explain Shimano’s sudden departure to fellow KAZ members, divisions arose and the sangha lost membership, including deeply committed individuals then serving in administrative leadership positions.

KAZ struggled without Japanese leadership until Aitken invited Sekida Katsuki (1893–1987), a lay practitioner from Ryūtakuji, to serve as resident practice advisor. Sekida, a retired high school English teacher, arrived in June 1965, just in time to serve as Yasutani’s interpreter during *sesshin* that year. Sekida settled into life at KAZ, writing, working on Zen translation projects and leading the group during weekly meetings. Under Sekida’s guidance, KAZ undertook all-day *zazenkai* (meditation meetings) one Sunday each month. On other Sundays they held workdays to complete communal projects such as sewing and filling new *zafu*, or meditation cushions, and repair work on Sekida’s cottage. The community grew once again due to Sekida’s quiet, steady presence, but the continual turnover in membership remained a concern. In a letter, Aitken estimated that they lost 25% to 50% of their members each year: “Sōen Roshi used to say, pay no attention to coming and going at Koko An, but after seven years there are no roots at all. We will celebrate our tenth birthday by expiring” (Aitken to Mitchell: 24 January 1967).

Aitken underestimated the tenacity of the KAZ sangha, which ultimately survived even Aitken and Sekida’s move to Maui in 1969. In preparation for Aitken’s impending retirement from the University of Hawai‘i, where he had worked in various administrative positions since 1962, the Aitkens purchased a house with land on Maui. Initially envisioned as “a weekend retreat for our KAZ members,” their Maui plans soon shifted toward establishing a fully functioning residential Zen center; the new facility, called Maui Zendo (MZ) provided outreach to a community of disaffected youth living off the land in Maui’s Ha’ikū district on the northeast coast. The Aitkens and Sekida moved to Maui in summer 1969; when Yasutani came to Hawai‘i later that year for his final visit, he conducted *sesshin* on O‘ahu and Maui.

Once again facing the future without a regular visiting teacher, DS’s problems were seriously compounded by Sekida’s decision to take an extended leave of absence from Hawai‘i in late 1970 to complete his book manuscript, during which time he returned to Japan, later teaching at the London Zen Society. In Aitken’s view, without a resident teacher, MZ would merely serve as a “stepping stone” for other Zen centers in Japan or the continental US. When Nakagawa’s poor health definitively precluded further visits, Aitken opened correspondence with Yamada Kōun, a fellow Sanbōkyōdan practitioner and Yasutani’s primary Dharma heir.

¹⁹ The letter indicates that it is a translation, without indicating the identity of the the translator. Other letters make clear that Suzuki Itsuko, a Japanese member of DS, translated the letter from Japanese at the Aitkens’ request.

²⁰ Aitken initially planned to denounce Shimano to immigration officials, but Anne counseled against this step. As Aitken explained to Lachs, that Anne and he “were seeing the two women frequently” and had grave concerns for them. One of them lived with the Aitkens between hospitalizations. He wrote that “Anne particularly was concerned that a public declaration of Shimano would be very harmful for them. Thus we did not proceed with my plan to denounce Shimano to the immigration authorities, and we were completely silent in the Koko An Sangha about his departure. Toward the end of her life, Anne expressed regret that she had persuaded me not to go to immigration with my story. At the time, however, being discreet seemed to be the most judicious thing and compassionate way” (Email, Aitken to Stuart Lachs: 15 February 1998). Aitken likewise regretted their decision until he died, and this motivated him to release a sealed portion of his archive in 2008 for publication online in the Shimano Archive website, <https://www.shimanoarchive.com/index.html>.

Aitken invited Yamada to visit the two DS centers and to consider a long-term relationship with them as visiting teacher. Yamada accepted, beginning a 15-year period of annual visits to Hawai'i that continued until Aitken received full Dharma transmission as Yamada's heir in 1985.

Diamond Sangha as a Sanbōkyōdan Affiliate Center

Yamada's first *sesshin* in 1971 marked a turning point for both Aitken and DS. Working with Yamada, Aitken finally felt that his personal "dark night" came to an end and that he and DS had found their "true teacher" (R. Aitken 1982: 130–31). As Aitken wrote to Yamada,

I felt that you trusted us to eventually become a true fellowship of the Buddha, not merely a holding operation for occasional visits. I personally felt that I was being treated seriously as a Zen student, and that you did not look upon any of us as *gaijin* [foreigners] (Aitken to Yamada: 28 July 1978).

Between 1972 and 1974, Robert and Anne Aitken made lengthy annual practice visits to Japan, during which Aitken rapidly progressed through the Sanbōkyōdan koan curriculum under Yamada's guidance.

Yamada treated Aitken differently than either Sōen or Yasutani had, taking him seriously both as a Zen student and as the *de facto* leader of DS, which Yamada regarded as a well-established Zen sangha. He firmly placed Aitken on a fast track to becoming an independent teacher, expressing confidence in his abilities, even though Aitken continued to doubt himself. During the Aitkens' 1972 visit to Kamakura, Yamada provisionally authorized him to begin offering "informal interviews" when he returned to Hawai'i. Throughout the Aitkens' training visits, Yamada prioritized working with Aitken, typically providing *dokusan* twice a day. As Aitken explained to DS members, Yamada expected Aitken to become the teacher of Diamond Sangha, although he thought of himself "only as one who would make the way straight for someone else" (Aitken to DS, 23 April 1972).

Yamada likewise treated the DS community as a viable and vibrant Zen community, recognizing its place within the larger Sanbōkyōdan *mahāsangha*, most probably based upon his firsthand experience leading *sesshin* in Hawai'i as well as the group's membership numbers and its longevity. In 1972, after accepting DS's invitation to serve as their teacher, Yamada requested that DS formally affiliate with Sanbōkyōdan (Aitken to Kubota Jiun: 1 March 1994). DS readily complied, making it and all subsequent DS affiliated groups part of Sanbōkyōdan's international network. This relationship remained strong throughout the rest of Yamada's life, and Aitken eventually became an important figure within the Sanbōkyōdan *mahāsangha* as Yamada's first non-Japanese Dharma heir.

In May 1974, after just three years of intensive work together, Yamada wrote to DS members, confirming Aitken's new status, "I am happy to inform you that your director, Robert Aitken, completed his koan training in the room during our recent May *sesshin*. He will return to Hawaii an independent master of Zen" (Yamada to DS: 15 May 1974). Yamada added that he planned to hold a Hasansai Ceremony²¹ to celebrate this milestone on Aitken's path as a Zen teacher during his next visit, but in the interim, Aitken "may conduct *sesshin* with full authority and with full ritual, as a *roshi*" (Yamada to DS: 15 May 1974).²² Yamada's letter and the Hasansai Ceremony effectively marked a transition for Aitken as a Zen teacher and DS as a fully functioning Zen practice center.

²¹ Within Sanbōkyōdan, the *hasansai* ritual marked a student's completion of formal Zen training, during which they receive a teaching name and a certificate of their status as a Zen teacher. See Sharf 1995, 432.

²² According to Michael Kieran, subsequent DS procedures would classify a teacher at Aitken's level as an Apprentice Teacher, working under the guidance of a fully designated teacher. In fact, Yamada did continue to oversee Aitken's teaching until he granted him full transmission in 1985.

Aitken's Transition to Independent Status

DS grew steadily during Aitken's transitional period teaching under Yamada's guidance, based in part on the needs of Hawai'i's residents on the neighbor islands. While wealthier individuals flew to O'ahu or Maui to participate in monthly *zazenkai* (DS's term for day-long meditation meetings) or longer *sesshin*, interisland travel was prohibitively expensive for the majority of Hawai'i residents; island geography necessitated DS's shift toward an intrastate network of smaller local sanghas. The interisland DS network expanded to include a third practice community on Kaua'i, Buddha Mountain Zendo (BMZ), in 1972, the year Yamada allowed Aitken to assume provisional teaching duties. A small group of former MZ members residing in Taylor Camp, a communal village on Kaua'i's north shore, requesting Aitken lead monthly *zazenkai* for them, including public Zen talks for the larger Taylor Camp community. Aitken agreed, visiting BMZ monthly for two years.

During their annual three-month training visits to Japan, the Aitkens communicated with the three DS communities by a combination of airmail letters and recorded messages on cassette tapes. Typically sent first to MZ, Aitken's messages were reproduced and circulated to KAZ and BMZ. Aitken's typical salutation read "Dear Diamond Sangha Family," encouraging members to regard themselves as part of an extended and interconnected Zen community. This style of communal correspondence became the basis of the "Tape Circuit," a distinctive DS system of network communication undertaken later. Shortly after Yamada announced Aitken's appointment as an independent teacher, Aitken closed a lengthy tape recording with the observation, "I'm gradually evolving in my mind the possibility of a tape circuit and a circuit for printed materials to our friends scattered from Japan and Australia to England" (Transcribed tape "Jukai Marriage Ceremony, Kyoto Jaunt," 4 June 1974). In this way, Aitken began to cast the Dharma net with his own words as a vehicle for further Dharma transmission.

Decades before technology supported instantaneous networking, Aitken sustained the growing DS network by means of the "Tape Circuit." DS centers dispersed tapes of Aitken's Dharma talks (*teishō*), "Orientation Talks" for beginners, and various DS print publications to members living in Hawai'i, as well as others living further east, west or south across the Pacific. Aitken expanded the network on an individual level by initiating a "ministry by mail," offering "corresponding membership" for individuals who could not readily travel to Hawai'i to practice (Baroni 2012). Gradually Aitken extended his public outreach beyond the Tape Circuit through book-length publications, starting with *Taking the Path of Zen* in 1982, based on the "Orientation Talks."

Casting the Dharma Net through Outreach

After Aitken attained independent status in 1974, DS's place within the larger schema of the transpacific transmission of Zen changed significantly. Hawai'i ceased to function merely as a conduit for Japanese teachers, but became a creative force in the development of what was then dubbed Western Zen. Liberated by Yamada's confidence in him as a teacher and bolstered by Yamada's recognition of DS as a viable Zen organization, Aitken began, tentatively at first with gradually increasing confidence, to establish distinctive DS patterns of network development and maintenance based on his vision for the sangha, preserving much of the Sanbōkyōdan style that Yamada was simultaneously forging.

DS retained several patterns that typified Sanbōkyōdan workings under Yamada's leadership, including: Yamada's strong commitment to serving the needs of distant affiliate groups while fostering local leadership; training future teachers through a mentorship process that distinguished apprentice teachers from fully independent teachers; and his system of ongoing teachers' training, called simply Training Group, which evolved into DS's Teachers' Circle. Starting in 1989, DS teachers convened Teachers' Circle by turns, hosting it at their home center and taking responsibility to organize it. Aitken envisioned these meetings as an opportunity to coordinate among themselves issues related to DS teaching and practice, areas falling directly

under the teachers' authority. Individual sanghas designated a board of directors to make other types of decisions in a democratic fashion. Within these underlying continuities, Aitken struggled to learn from Yamada's missteps, adjusting DS processes accordingly, particularly related to what Aitken saw as rushing teacher training.

Aitken's dealings with Australian groups in the late 1970s through the 1980s provide some of the clearest evidence of Aitken adhering to Yamada's guidance when undertaking network growth. In 1978, four Australian Zen practitioners, including John Tarrant, came to Maui to participate in the intensive summer training period. Aitken duly reported this to Yamada, indicating that they broached the subject of Aitken visiting Australia to lead *sesshin*. Aitken sought Yamada's council in the matter. Yamada replied promptly that an Australian practitioner had recently approached him in Kamakura with a similar request, which he promised to take under advisement. Yamada admitted to Aitken that he had "absolutely no time in [his] schedule to go" to Australia himself, "so it would certainly be wonderful if [Aitken] could assume that leadership" (Yamada to Aitken: 19 July 1978).

Yamada then conveyed two critical guidelines for this undertaking: to identify a central person on site capable of eventually leading the group and to resolve himself to meet all the group's needs until that person could assume the role of teacher. Yamada warned, "If it is going to be a half-baked response, it would be better not to do it at all. Since it is a matter of transplanting the tree of Zen into new soil it is very important to watch over things very carefully until the roots take hold" (Yamada to Aitken: 19 July 1978). In this context, Yamada revealed to Aitken his private conviction that Nakagawa Sōen and Yasutani Hakuun failed to fulfill their responsibility toward Aitken and DS.

Aitken took Yamada's instructions to heart. He guided the Sydney Zen Center and later the Zen Group of Western Australia in Perth along with emerging groups in New Zealand,²³ visiting annually basis for a decade. Aitken continued to confer with Yamada regarding his interactions with Australian and New Zealand groups, now affiliated with Yamada and Sanbōkyōdan through DS. Aitken retained primary responsibility until he had fully qualified replacements. He shifted responsibility for distant affiliated groups to his Dharma heirs starting in 1988 (Aitken to Esther Moore: 3 February 1988).²⁴ In consultation with his heirs, Aitken established standard DS procedures for training Apprentice Teachers. While Yamada granted Aitken freedom to "conduct *sesshin* with full authority and with full ritual, as a roshi" (Yamada: 15 May 1974) almost immediately, Aitken preferred a slower pace for apprentices, focusing not only on koan study, but what he called "character work," to prevent potential teachers from misusing their training "for self-centered purposes" (Aitken to Alexandra Weiss: 25 June 1990). Earlier experience with Shimano Eidō underlay this attitude.

Defining the role of DS Apprentice Teachers was precipitated by two back-to-back crises that deeply impacted the DS community in the early 1990s. In 1991, Manfred Steger publicly rejected Dharma Transmission as "empty ritual" within months of becoming an apprentice, maintaining that completing formal koan study alone conferred authority to teach Zen (Memorandum: Aitken to Steger, 23 May 1991). Aitken rejected Steger's argument as untenable in DS, which followed "the tradition of the Harada-Yasutani line," requiring "approval by the old teacher, and ... approval by the Sangha of the would-be teacher" (Memorandum, Aitken to Steger: 23 May 1991). Aitken thus affirmed Sanbōkyōdan tradition inherited from Yamada. Steger resigned, and Aitken warned that he could never claim to teach within the DS lineage.

²³ Aitken received his first invitation to teach in New Zealand in 1984 and became a visiting teacher. His Dharma Heir Ross Bolleter from Perth, Australia, has served as teacher for the DS groups in New Zealand since 1993.

²⁴ In Aitken's letter to Moore, a member of the Zen Desert Sangha in Arizona, he indicates that he planned to have Nelson Foster assume responsibility for both Zen Desert Sangha and Ring of Bone Zendo in California, while John Tarrant would "substitute for me [in Australia] and eventually become the regular teacher" there.

The second crisis arose at the 1992 DS Teachers' Circle, after John Tarrant allowed his new Australian apprentices to employ terms normally reserved for independent teachers. Other DS teachers objected to this as contrary to agreed-upon DS procedure, forbidding apprentices to don the "ritual cloak of roshi" (Aitken to Barzagli: 15 December 1992). They could not use the terms *teishō* or *dokusan*, nor employ ritual accoutrements including bows, bells, and cushions during interviews. Attempts to enforce uniformly observed guidelines ultimately failed, because Aitken refused to make a unilateral decision in the face of divisions within the Teachers' Circle. Aitken faced the reality that neither he nor the Teachers' Circle could control an independent Zen teacher.

Aitken's Vision for Diamond Sangha

Aitken expressed his nascent vision for DS as a unified network of sanghas when reporting to Yamada Kōun on the formal merger of KAZ and MZ under the newly-formed Diamond Sangha umbrella organization:

Our sangha, our Diamond Sangha (a name I coined) is an intimate family, and it is through zazen, samu [physical work to upkeep the *zendō*] and other time together that we realize this intimacy. My responsibility is to cultivate at least one good successor, and it is only possible to do this from the garden of our harmonious dharma community. Moreover, it is the Buddha Sangha—in our case the Diamond Sangha, which gives rise to the Net of Indra, the universal sangha (Aitken to Yamada, 18 June 1980).

While Aitken saw each sangha as unique and precious for its particularity within its local nexus, he believed local communities nonetheless reflected all other sanghas within the DS network and the broader Buddhist community. By this time, more distant sanghas that Aitken regularly visited in Australia and California were requesting affiliation with DS. The affiliation process proceeded in an ad hoc manner for over a decade before Aitken sought to formalize it. Moreover, DS faced more immediate challenges adapting Zen practice to local realities.

Aitken once observed, "In coming to the West, Zen Buddhism is changing from a monastic religion to a lay religion, and is moving from a hierarchical society to one that is more egalitarian." His vision for adapting Zen to suit the new environment entailed: 1) democratic governance, "with the teacher content to teach within a framework of decision-making by the Sangha;" 2) koan study framed as meaningful for daily life; 3) frequent classes on Buddhist teachings and translation projects; 4) autonomous sanghas of relatively small size, "networking horizontally with other centers as closely as possible, but with each teacher independent;" and 5) attention "to [folding] the practice into everyday life" such that students could balance it with family and career (Aitken to Yamada, 3 August 1986). Aitken came to these conclusions through personal experience serving multiple geographic regions in the Pacific, each with distinctive cultural tendencies, in a manner typical of postmodernist Buddhist movements that value diversity often at the expense of rigid traditionalism.

Aitken's vision for democratic leadership within DS took shape over time: teachers would make decisions "in matters relating to practice," but would exercise no veto power in business matters, where the sangha "should operate by consensus" (Aitken to Geoff Dawson: 6 October 1982). Decision making by consensus emerged in 1979, when MZ adopted the National Training Laboratories (NTL) procedures, in which several members were already skilled (Aitken to Dana Naone: 2 September 1980). Aitken believed that the NTL model derived from Quaker meetings,²⁵ and he often maintained that, "In Diamond Sangha centers, for the most

²⁵ Although Aitken maintained that NTL methods derived from Quaker meeting procedures, the author has found no documentation supporting his assumption. Aitken first became interested in Quaker organizational methods in 1954, when living with Quaker friends while recuperating from a serious illness. He began attending Quaker meetings and joined the American Friends Service Committee.

part, Quaker modes of decision making are followed, with all members, not just senior people, having a voice” (Questionnaire, Aitken to John Schultz: 24 April 2001).

Aitken encouraged the adoption of consensus decision making at all affiliated DS centers, and this is arguably one of the most distinctive innovations Aitken and DS implemented. Aitken rejected the inherited authoritarian Sanbōkyōdan style of leadership as incompatible with what he referred to as Western Zen. In practice, however, decision making by consensus often proved difficult to fully implement. At local Hawai'i DS meetings, for example, Aitken's preferences generally carried more weight, as students often conceded to his wishes when the process veered toward an alternative outcome.²⁶

A review of the copious correspondence between Aitken and his students in Australia, Latin America, Europe, and the continental US, confirms that Aitken regarded fostering local leadership within distant DS sanghas as one of his primary goals. By training apprentices to become independent teachers, distant DS sanghas became autonomous, freed from reliance on teachers visiting them annually, much as DS in Hawai'i gained independent status within the Sanbōkyōdan network. Indeed, even Aitken's decision to encourage John Tarrant, born and raised in Australia, to substitute for him in Australia was a step toward appointing local leadership, who better grasped local culture, wherever possible. From early on, Aitken indicated that his respect for differences in regional and local culture motivated his actions.

Aitken's awareness of the distinctive cultural needs of local sanghas began at home with KAZ and MZ. In 1984, writing to an old friend from Zen Center of Los Angeles (ZCLA), a closely related Zen community by lineage, Aitken reflected on his plans to forge new patterns more suitable for the Hawai'i communities:

I want to begin a series of sharing meetings at Koko An and at [MZ] to establish where we go from here, in light of the failure of Japanese forms, and in light of Yamada's inability to guide us in social matters. I have no idea where such discussions will lead. I want to strengthen the traditional modes which are fundamental, such as Jukai [lay ritual for receiving the precepts], and add on forms that will guide us by the best ideals of our own culture, “grandmother wisdom”²⁷ of decency, proportion and consideration. I think it will take time to establish this new way (Aitken to Betty Cole: 20 January 1984).

While Aitken deeply respected the Japanese Zen traditions he inherited, he recognized the limits of transplanting Zen wholesale without allowing room for local variations. This resulted not only in creative alterations in the broad strokes of DS practice and organizational procedures but respect for regional and local distinctions across DS sanghas.

Early on, Aitken began the process of fostering local leadership within the Hawai'i sanghas, preferring “to cultivate a self-motivated Sangha like we have in nucleus at KAZ,” which would ultimately be better prepared to survive the inevitable loss of a more charismatic teacher, rather than “a teacher-centered Sangha” (Aitken to Bill Barger: 12 August 1985). When the Aitken decided to equalize his time between MZ and KAZ during the annual training periods in 1979, he encouraged MZ members to use “this reduction of my time here as a chance for Sangha building;” senior students led orientation sessions and read aloud selected texts “in lieu of teisho” in his absence (Aitken to Testugen Glassman: 1 February 1979). Sharing leadership responsibilities within individual sanghas strengthened their resilience in the primary teacher's absence or death, and nurtured

²⁶ Telephone interview with Nelson Foster, 18 February 2021.

²⁷ Aitken's reference to “grandmother wisdom” does not derive from the Zen tradition, but may refer to either indigenous Hawaiian culture or Native American culture, in which female elders played key roles in governance for their communities. Nelson Foster, one of Aitken's Dharma heirs, thought that it might have likewise referred to developing feminist traditions within DS during the 1980s, that Aitken gave “a nod to feminist thought, which was a lively factor (think *Kahawai* [the HDS journal addressing issues of women and Zen, published from 1979 to 1989]) in the DS at the time” (Foster to Author, Email: 9 June 2020). DS published *Kahawai Journal of Women and Zen* from 1979 to 1988.

the growth of future teachers, making each sangha a “mentorgarten,” the term Senzaki Nyogen, Aitken’s first Zen teacher, used for his sangha (R. Aitken 1987: ix).

Aitken’s vision for DS can be seen as presaging some of the “turns” that Gleig identified in her exploration of American Buddhist communities in the early twenty-first century, “critical, collective, and contextual” (Gleig 2019: 278). Although Aitken strove for DS to meet the needs of American sensibilities by being less hierarchical and more gender-egalitarian in governance and community building, he remained critical of modernist tendencies that rejected the ritual practices inherited from Japanese teachers. He recognized that nurturing “the garden of our harmonious dharma community” was as critical for Zen practice as the more individualized focus on meditation (Aitken to Yamada, 18 June 1980), and that leadership and ritual innovation could only be effective if they met the localized cultural concerns of far-flung DS affiliate groups spread across the Pacific region.

Conclusion

Zen networks derive from the most basic relationship in Zen practice, that between teacher and student. Zen lineage charts trace individual relationships between a founding teacher and subsequent generations of Dharma heirs, much as a family tree depicts bloodline descent. Studying growth patterns of contemporary Zen lineages outside of East Asia, one finds that successful lineages likewise generate networks of affiliated sanghas based upon student-teacher relationships. Using the spread of the DS network to illustrate this, one finds two basic methods for network development aside from a missionary teacher establishing a practice center in a distant place: an established group, practicing without a resident teacher inspired by some contact with Buddhism such as reading Buddhist texts, contacts a distant teacher to establish a relationship; a senior Zen student, already permitted to teach, founds a community elsewhere. The Aitkens started DS according to the former pattern, and later became associated with several distant Zen communities that invited Aitken to serve as their visiting teacher; such affiliates include Ring of Bone Zendo and Zen Desert Sangha in the western United States, Sydney Zen Centre and the Zen Group of Western Australia in Australia, and Vimalakirti Sangha²⁸ in Argentina. Other DS affiliates fit the second pattern: When John Tarrant, then a DS apprentice teacher, moved to Santa Rosa, California in 1986, he established the group known then as California Diamond Sangha (CDS).²⁹

Under Aitken’s leadership, DS created a horizontal networking style between local sanghas, operating within the vertical structure of Zen lineage based on transmission from teacher to student. Aitken aspired for DS to maintain the creative tension between horizontal elements and vertical preservation of tradition. Each individual sangha on the DS network retained independence to foster local variations that suited the particulars of their immediate environment. He nevertheless trusted his immediate Dharma heirs and future generations of DS teachers to preserve core elements of his teaching style, just as he strove to preserve the Sanbōkyōdan traditions he inherited from Yamada Kōun. In his vision of the Diamond Sangha, each jewel on the network could preserve its unique beauty, while simultaneously reflecting the shared DS tradition.

In 1992, in consultation with his growing Dharma family of heirs, apprentice teachers and students, Aitken attempted to formalize DS as “an international network of independent, affiliated groups” (Diamond Sangha 2009: 20), to effectively extend the local umbrella structure of Hawai’i sanghas to the growing international

²⁸ Augusto Alcalde, a Zen practitioner from Cordoba, Argentina, wrote to Diamond Sangha in 1982, seeking information regarding Zen practice for his small meditation group, the Vimalakirti Sangha. Aitken responded personally, thus beginning a correspondence that developed into a teacher-student relationship. The Latin American affiliate groups developed out of this relationship. Intermitant violence in Argentina precluded Aitken from visiting regularly, and Alcalde instead spent several training periods in Hawai’i starting in 1985. Aitken authorized him as a DS apprentice teacher in 1986, and as his Dharma Heir in 1990. Alcalde stepped back from teaching in 1993 and later resigned.

²⁹ CDS formally broke from DS in 1999, becoming Pacific Zen Institute.

DS *mahāsaṅgha*. The O'ahu group, comprised of both KAZ and the newly constructed Palolo Zen Center, adopted the name Honolulu Diamond Sangha³⁰ to distinguish it from DS, which thereafter referred to the international network. DS at that time included eighteen Zen groups: the two HDS centers on O'ahu, eleven formally affiliated sanghas,³¹ whose application for affiliation had been accepted by the DS Board of Directors, and five more loosely associated groups.³² These DS centers were spread across the Pacific region, including five in Hawai'i, five in the western region of the continental United States, five in Australia, and three in Latin America. While HDS can be viewed as the central, founding node on the network, the language and spirit of the "Agreements on the Structure and Function of the Diamond Sangha," suggest that the formulators envisioned something akin to Aitken's original vision of Indra's jeweled net cast across the Pacific: a network of interrelated yet independent sanghas, each one a functioning Zen community in its own right, each reflecting the shared values of the DS *mahāsaṅgha*. While the 1992 draft agreement specified and affirmed shared and unifying elements of "common ground," it recognized each local sangha's freedom to "evolve as appropriate to its cultural milieu" (Diamond Sangha n.d.). Examples of this variation included women's *sesshin* in the Australian DS (Spuler 2013: 40, 43–46) and Mountains and Rivers *sesshin* at Ring of Bone, in the US, the latter now practiced at many DS centers.

Aitken's dream of establishing the DS network with a formally adopted statement of shared core elements was never fully realized. Although the Agreements document circulated for years, DS never collectively finalized and adopted it.³³ Disparate DS groups needed to strike their own balance between inherited tradition and local culture, making a unified agreement based on consensus unwieldy. Aitken believed that successfully transplanting Zen outside Japan required time and patience. He initially argued for relatively strict adherence to Sanbōkyōdan ritual tradition, resisting calls for overly hasty accommodation for American preferences. As he wrote in 1977,

If Zen Buddhism is not transplanted intact, pretty much, it cannot take root. It will accommodate itself in time. The lilac is a bush in New Zealand and a small tree in Hawaii, but if you start chopping it in the process of transplanting, it will just up and die. Don't be in such a blasted hurry" (Aitken to Kilby: 12 October 1977).

Nonetheless, as DS continued to prosper and spread, he later advised flexibility in altering Zen practice to meet the needs of local sanghas, trusting that "Worthy traditions will be established in a hundred years, and unworthy ones will have died out" (Aitken to Yamada: 3 August 1986).

Aitken's attempt to straddle the gap between traditionalist and modernist tendencies across the DS network of sanghas exemplifies the postmodernist pattern that celebrates "difference, diversity and hybridity" (Gleig 2019: 289). Unity within the DS *mahāsaṅgha* was ultimately preserved not by successfully delineating "common ground," but by allowing local sanghas to evolve while affirming their shared lineage back to Aitken as founding teacher. The organization that began as a conduit for the transmission of Japanese Zen blossomed into a network connecting Zen centers across the Pacific.

³⁰ HDS closed KAZ in 2002; HDS now refers to Palolo Zen Center.

³¹ The formally affiliated groups included: **Argentina:** Grupo Zen de Buenos Aires; Vimalakirti Sangha in Cordoba. **Australia:** Kuan-Yin Zen Centre in Lismore Heights; Sydney Zen Centre in Annandale; Zen Group of Western Australia in Perth. **Chile:** Centro Zen de Santiago de Chile in Santiago. **United States:** California Diamond Sangha in Santa Rosa, CA; Zen Desert Sangha in Tuscon, AZ; Empty Sky in Amarillo, TX; Harbor Sangha in San Francisco, CA; Ring of Bone Zendo in North San Juan, CA.

³² The unofficially affiliated groups included: Garden Sangha in Kapa'a, Kaua'i; Hilo Zen Group on Hawai'i Island; Maui Zendo in Pukalani, Maui in the Hawaiian islands; and Melbourne Zen Group and Zen Centre of Adelaide in Australia.

³³ Email to author from Nelson Foster, 18 January 2021.

Author details

Helen J. Baroni is a Professor of Religion at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, specializing in the religions of Japan, Buddhism in North America, and New Religious Movements. Her current research focuses on Zen in Hawai'i, especially the development of Honolulu Diamond Sangha. She authored *Love, Rōshi: Correspondence between Robert Baker Aitken and his Distant Correspondents* (SUNY 2012), *Iron Eyes: The Life and Teachings of the Obaku Zen Master Tetsugen Dōkō* (SUNY 2006) and *Obaku Zen: The Emergence of a Third Sect of Zen in Tokugawa Japan* (University of Hawaii 2000).

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