

Chicago Couple Ordained

By HENRY HARTZENBUSCH
KYOTO, Japan (AP) — The young Buddhist monk did not seem to mind the bitter cold in the austere, unheated monastery.

"You get used to it," he said with a smile.

Sitting cross-legged with his hands clasped in position for meditation, his black robe neatly in place, he tried to explain why he was there and why he chose Zen Buddhism.

"This religion made sense to me," he said quietly, "in living my life more fully, in whatever I do."

At another monastery, in nearby Tsushima City, a young Buddhist nun tried to explain why she was there and why she chose Zen.

"The Zen Buddhists I had met seemed to have strength and gentleness, and lived by what they said. I wanted to emulate them in some way," she said.

Rodo and Zenko have been here only a short while. Back home in the United States, they were known as Ronald and Joyce Browning, a young married couple.

Ronald is 24 and Joyce 23. They look like typical Americans—except, perhaps, for their shaved heads.

Joyce's long brown hair was shaved off soon after her arrival last November.

"I remember the day well," she said. "December 1, 1968." Speaking softly, her blue eyes sparkling, she went on: "I thought of it a long time. But it seemed a small thing to do for the privilege of staying here. I really didn't feel badly at all."

Like her husband, Joyce was born in Chicago, Ill. She was educated at Lake Geneva, Wis., then moved to the University of California at Berkeley. Ronald moved to Dallas, Tex., at the age of 6, then also studied at Berkeley.

Both come from families with average religious background—she, Episcopalian and he, Presbyterian. Joyce's father is a band leader at military bases; Ronald's a physician.

Ronald and Joyce became interested in Zen Buddhism about three years ago when they met Japanese priests at the Zen center in San Francisco. Later, they continued their Zen studies at the Zen Mountain Center in the Los Padres National Forest south of San Francisco.

They were greatly impressed

by Zen master Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, head of the California Zen Center. They were ordained monk and nun by Suzuki Roshi last October, just before they left for Japan.

They are perhaps the only American Zen Buddhist monk and nun couple in Japan. There are only a handful of foreign Zen monks here, even fewer nuns.

In some Buddhist sects, priests marry and raise families in the temples.

Zenko and Rodo are members of the Soto sect, largest of the Zen sects with a follow-

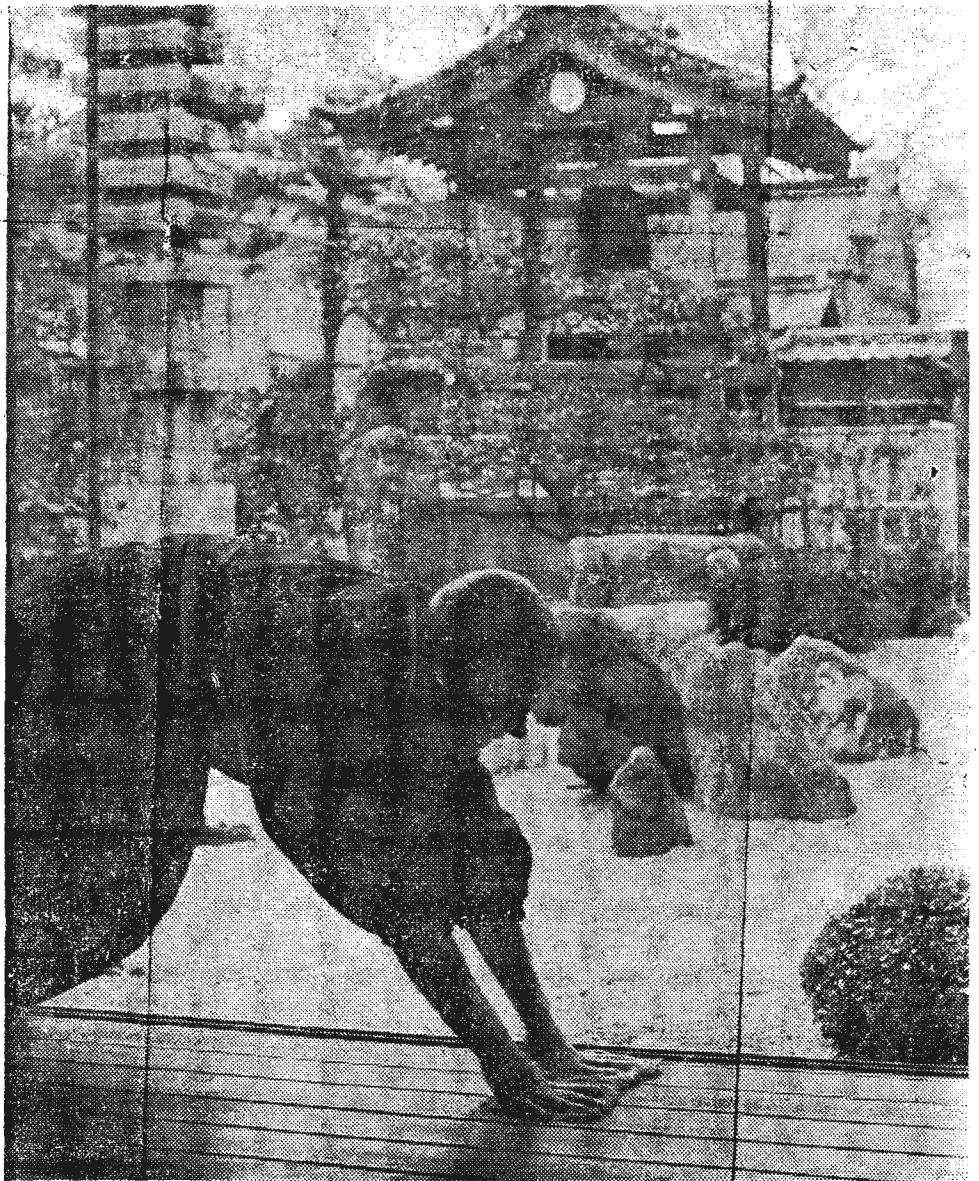
ing of about six million. Zen claims a total of about nine million followers out of a Buddhist population of more than 80 million in Japan.

Zenko is at Kaizenji Temple, about an hour's express train ride from her husband. The 98-year-old temple, a small, wooden building in a quiet neighbor-

hood in Tsushima near Nagoya City, is one of the few nuns' monasteries in Japan. Besides Zenko, there are five nuns and a chief nun. Zenko is the only American.

Joyce was given the name Zenko—"sun rays or light"—when she was ordained. She wears the black Zen Buddhist

(Editor's Note—This young American couple was introduced to Zen Buddhism in San Francisco. They were impressed, and inquisitive, and studied the ancient religion there, finally being ordained as monk and nun. Now, the former Ronald and Joyce Browning—Rodo and Zenko—live in monasteries in Japan and love it.)



AT TEMPLE — "Strength and gentleness" were qualities possessed by Zen Buddhists which Chicago - born Mrs. Joyce Browning wished to emulate. With her

husband, Ronald Browning, she studied Zen in California; both were ordained and now live, separately, nun and monk, in monasteries in

Japan. Known as Zenko, she is the only American at her monastery, Kaizenji Temple. Her daily life includes cleaning, as well as prayer, meditation and study.

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In Ancient Zen Buddhism

robes most of the day, except when she cleans and mops the floors. For these work chores, she switches to a more informal costume without long sleeves.

Zenko spends most of her time in the "sodo," or meditation hall. She meditates here, listens to lectures, receives training in the ways of Zen, has her three meals and sleeps here during training weeks.

Zenko speaks in halting Japanese to her fellow nuns. She took up Japanese since coming here, and in the brief time has done well.

Zen, which means meditation, was brought to Japan in the late 12th and early 13th centuries by Japanese monks returning from study in China. Somewhat anti-scholastic, it emphasizes meditation rather than the Scriptures in achieving what it calls "harmony with the cosmos and oneness with nature."

At Antaiji, a typical wooden temple with gray tiled roof, Rodo shares his 9-by-12-foot tatami mat room with Ippai-san, a 20-year-old youth from the southern island of Kyushu. Ippai-san speaks English well and coaches Rodo in Japanese. Besides Ippai-san, there are three other young monks here.

Rodo—"straight way and flexible"—is studying the history of Japanese Buddhism.

Zenko and Rodo want to remain nun and monk, even after they leave their monasteries. They see each other from time to time and have agreed they would like to stay here at least another year.

"I want to learn more about Zen," said Zenko. "I want to

Rodo echoes his wife's views. "No other form of Buddhism has had such a lasting influence on the life and culture of the Japanese," he said. "Its spirit has become the essence of the finest Japanese culture." And he added: "Zen helps a person find himself. It's a worthwhile pursuit."