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Commodifying Zen: Middle-Class Identity Formation and Spatial Practices at the Rochester Zen Center, 1966-1979

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Abstract: This paper examines how the Rochester Zen Center (RZC), during its formative period from 1966 to 1979, functioned as an instrument of middle-class identity formation through specific spatial practices and the commodification of culture. Employing a methodology that combines historical sociology and spatial analysis, this study investigates the Center's strategic establishment within affluent neighborhoods such as Park Avenue, its financial foundations supported by techno-capitalists like Xerox inventor Chester Carlson, as well as its transnational exchanges with Japanese Zen institutions. The findings indicate that the RZC systematically repurposed traditional Zen practices, transforming them into "efficiency tools" tailored for enhancing productivity and personal well-being, a phenomenon called "spiritual capitalism." This process ultimately led to the reduction of contemplative practice to a symbol that legitimized class privilege, thereby decoupling it from its original ethical frameworks rooted in communal interdependence and genuine spiritual liberation.

Keywords: Zen center history; middle-class; spatial practices; cultural capitalization; spiritual capitalism

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1. Introduction

The period spanning the 1960s and 1970s represents an era of profound social and cultural transformation within the United States. During this time, Rochester, New York—a prominent industrial and technological hub in the Northeast—experienced significant reorganizations of its economic structure, social stratification, and urban spatial landscape. Against this backdrop, the establishment of the Rochester Zen Center (RZC) in 1966 provides a key case study for examining the adaptation of Buddhist culture in America. This study draws on historical sociology and spatial theory, utilizing rich archival materials to examine three interconnected dimensions: (1) the rationale behind the Zen center's site-selection and its social foundations; (2) its spatial embeddedness within Rochester's urban fabric; and (3) its dynamic interplay with middle-class cultural reproduction mechanisms. This analysis is crucial for understanding how spiritual institutions served as catalytic forces in reshaping social structures and identities during urban transitions. The paper argues that the Rochester Zen Center was not a passive product of cultural diffusion but a strategic node actively shaped by—and shaping—the spatial practices and spiritual aspirations of the American middle class.

2. Literature Review

This paper employs cultural capital theory, combined with perspectives from Zen history and spatial geography, to analyze the interplay between Zen centers and the middle class. A review of existing literature reveals a central controversy in the capitalization of spiritual industries: the processes by which religious culture becomes detached from traditional systems and subsequently commodified, and then reshapes class identity formation by this commodification.

A seminal work titled Selling Spirituality establishes a critical theoretical proposition: the spiritual industry transforms Eastern religious culture into a form of cultural capital, producing commodified products such as meditation applications and mindfulness courses [1]. The scholarly controversy primarily focuses on whether this capitalization process deconstructs religious integrity while simultaneously neutralizing religion's potential for critical engagement with pressing social issues. This theory provides a crucial analytical framework for understanding the Rochester Zen Center's strategic location in a mainstream urban center—rather than in traditional secluded spaces—as a spatial practice that caters to middle-class countercultural aspirations while selectively accommodating urban elite lifestyles. This analysis reveals an underlying logic of class differentiation, suggesting that middle-class spiritual consumption tends to reinforce class boundaries rather than subvert dominant cultural orders.

At the institutional history level, a case study of the San Francisco Zen Center uncovers a parallel scholarly debate [2]. Through a micro-historical analysis of the institution's evolution from the 1950s to the early 21st century, the study demonstrates how issues of gender, power, and financial scandals surrounding its leader precipitated the collapse of a "Zen Empire" based on the integration of business and spirituality. This methodology informs the present research framework. The investigation focuses on the Rochester Zen Center's historical development, analyzing personnel backgrounds and activities to examine its symbiotic relationship with the middle class. This approach addresses a significant academic question: whether the popularity of Zen Buddhism in America stems from intrinsic religious transmission or from localized expressions of middle-class cultural capital.

Perspectives from spatial geography further complicate this discourse. An ethnography of the Brooklyn Zen Center demonstrates how such centers construct predominantly white, high-income communities through mindfulness programs, where initiatives like anti-gun violence campaigns paradoxically highlight spatialized class contradictions [3]. This finding provokes debate within the field of spatial politics regarding whether the geographical choices of Zen centers become instruments of class reproduction. This paper extends this line of inquiry through an intersectional analysis of countercultural movements, the spatial arrangements of Zen centers, and the occupational backgrounds of their participants, arguing that middle-class actors transform meditation practices into rituals of class identity reinforcement.

In conclusion, the literature involves two interrelated dimensions：From the perspective of cultural capital transformation and the commercialization of spirit, this process appears to weaken the critical nature of religion while strengthening the identity of the middle class. From the perspective of spatial political tension and the geographical choice of the Zen Center, it becomes a symbolic carrier highlighting the inherent contradictions of the middle class.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a methodology grounded in historical sociology and spatial theory, utilizing digital tools to explore the interaction between the Rochester Zen Center and the city's middle class. Primary source materials, including the biographies of founders from the 1960s to the 1970s and diaries of cross-border communication, were collected from the official website of the Rochester Zen Center and its publication, the Zen Bow

newspaper [4,5]. An investigation of the occupations, educational backgrounds, and family information of the members was conducted to construct a social network map, which allows the analysis to focus on demonstrating the dominant position of the middle class in the development of the Zen center.

For digital spatial data analysis, this research relies principally on Kepler.gl for visualization. Geographical coordinates and building distribution data of the Rochester Zen Center and typical middle-class communities were collected [6]. This dataset facilitates the discovery of accessibility and interactivity between the Zen center and these communities in physical space.

A comprehensive approach combining historical document analysis and spatial visualization was employed to reveal the interactive relationship between the Rochester Zen Center and the middle-class community. For example, editions of the Zen Bow from 1960 to 1979 detailed the center's cross-border exchange activities, pilgrimage diaries, and member events, providing an original textual basis for analyzing the class background of participants [7]. Concurrently, community economic data disclosed by the U.S. Census Bureau, such as median household income and occupational distribution, furnished quantitative sources for defining the scope of the middle-class community [8,9].

Furthermore, a group photograph of the founding members, posted by the Rochester Zen Center on social media, played a significant role in the analytical portion of this research. This image enabled an in-depth exploration based on the personal information of the founding members depicted, yielding insights into their professional occupations and educational backgrounds, which provide a direct basis for the subsequent analysis of the Zen center's middle-class attributes.

The analysis is structured in three parts. The first part utilizes Kepler mapping software to present the spatial relationship between the geographical location of the Zen center and the middle-class community through digital visualization. The second part takes a group photograph of the 22 founding members of the Zen center as its entry point, analyzing the middle-class background of the tech elites who funded the center and the educational background of its Zen masters to further identify its middle-class characteristics. The third part shifts its focus overseas, analyzing the communication activities between the middle-class personnel of the Rochester Center and middle-class elites in Japan, based on the cross-border pilgrimage diary materials published by the Zen center. These three sections—examining spatial relationships, internal class composition, and transnational exchanges—collectively argue that the Rochester Zen Center's development was intrinsically linked to the American middle class's commodification of Zen culture, which aimed to enhance their cultural identity rather than perpetuate Zen Buddhism's critical attitude toward society.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Spatial Analysis of the Rochester Zen Center

A spatial analysis using Kepler.gl to trace the geographical distribution of Zen Buddhism across America from the 1960s to the 1970s reveals a significant surge. Before 1962, Zen centers were virtually nonexistent in the United States, with only a few psychology clinics providing Zen-inspired practices. The establishment of the first major Zen center in 1962 marked a turning point, triggering rapid growth in their numbers, as shown in Figures 1 and Figure 2.

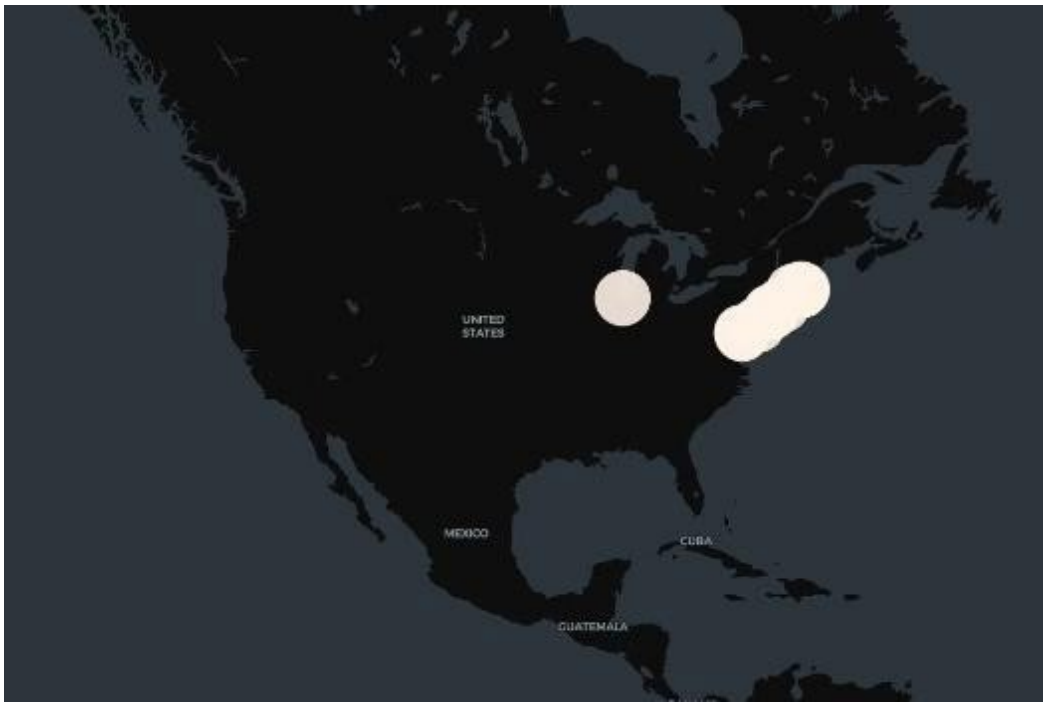


Figure 1. The distribution of Zen centers in the United States before 1960. The white spots indicate center locations (see the appendix).

Figure 2. The distribution of Zen centers established between 1962 and 1979. The orange spots indicate center locations (see the appendix).

The establishment of Zen centers during the 1960s and 1970s was closely related to the countercultural movement in America, often serving as a cultural home for young people from middle-class backgrounds, such as hippies. Figure 3 demonstrates the spatial proximity of Zen centers (white spots) to established middle-class areas (blue spots) in San Francisco. This digital map illustrates that most of these centers were situated merely a few blocks away from such neighborhoods.

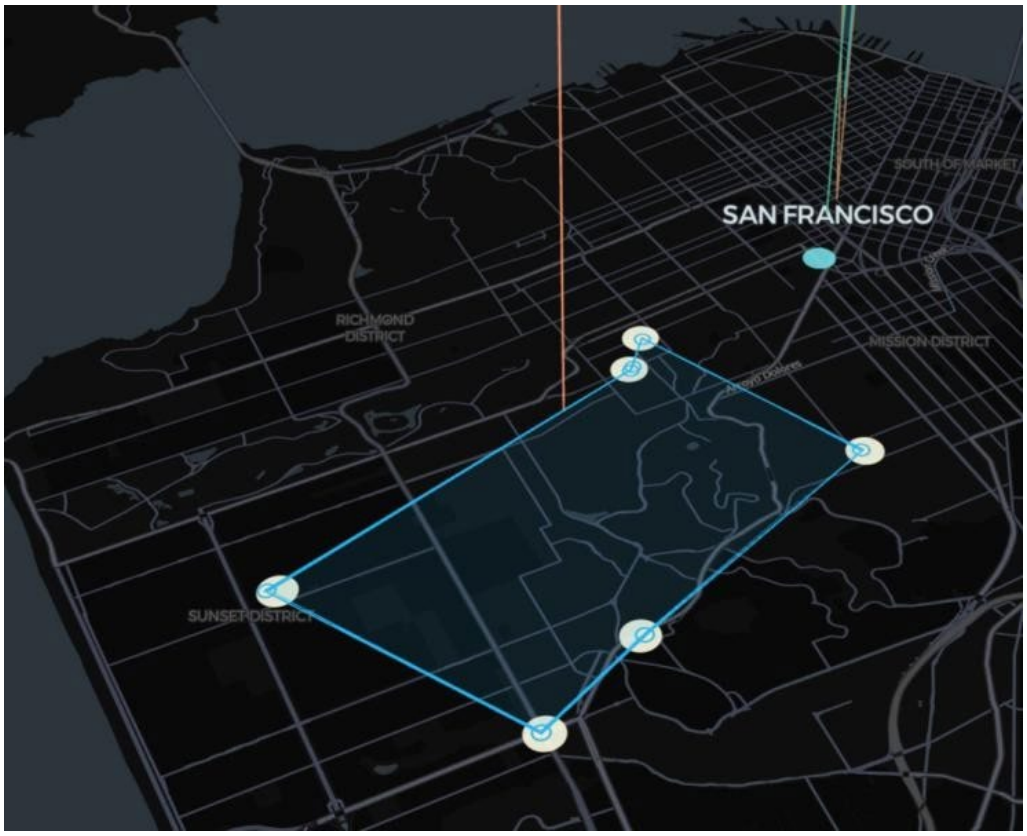


Figure 3. Spatial relationship between the San Francisco Zen Center and surrounding middle-class areas. Source: Google Maps (2025).

During the countercultural movement, many young people, particularly those from the middle class, expressed disenchantment with traditional urban culture and sought to use Zen culture to challenge mainstream societal values. However, instead of relocating to locations far from the urban core, many Zen centers emerged directly within city centers. While some centers, such as Green Gulch Farm, were established in more rural outskirts, appearing to conform to the countercultural ideal, they often instituted high course fees that effectively excluded lower-income groups. The concentration of many American Zen centers in urban cores demonstrates the inherent commercialization of this spiritual movement.

With this context established, this study uses the Rochester Zen Center as a specific object of analysis. The following sections analyze the connection between the RZC and the middle class between the 1960s and 1970s, beginning with its geographical location. A 1971 map of eastern Rochester was used to mark the locations of middle-class areas and the RZC [10]. Historical data was then consulted to identify the prominent middle-class communities in Rochester during this period. As Figure 4 shows, these communities—including urban middle-class enclaves like East Avenue, Park Avenue, and the South Wedge, as well as suburban middle-class areas like Highland Park and Cobbs Hill—all exhibited a significant spatial relationship with the RZC.

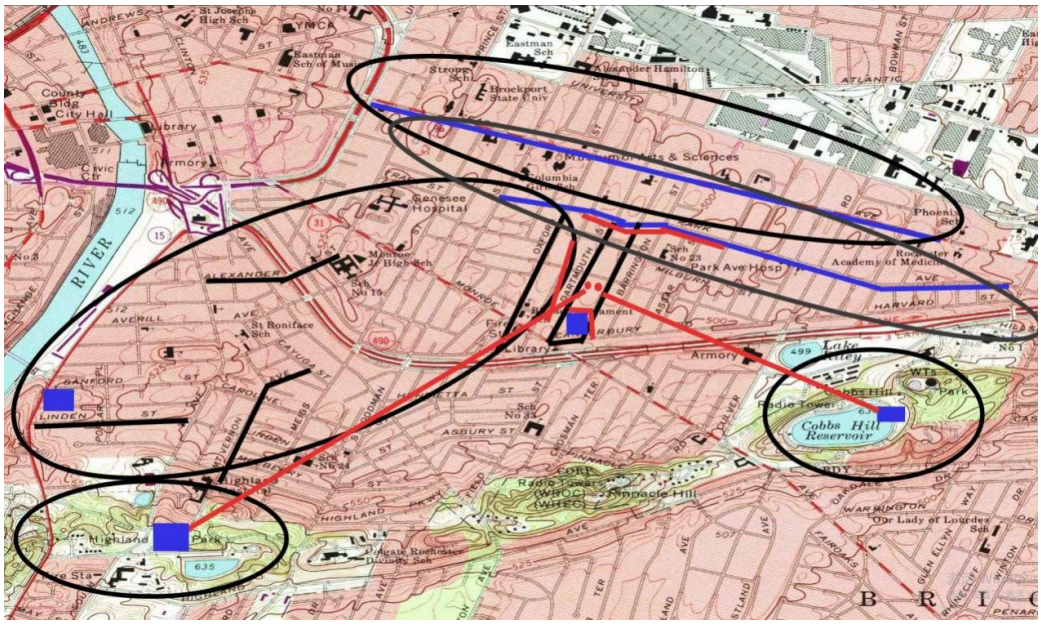
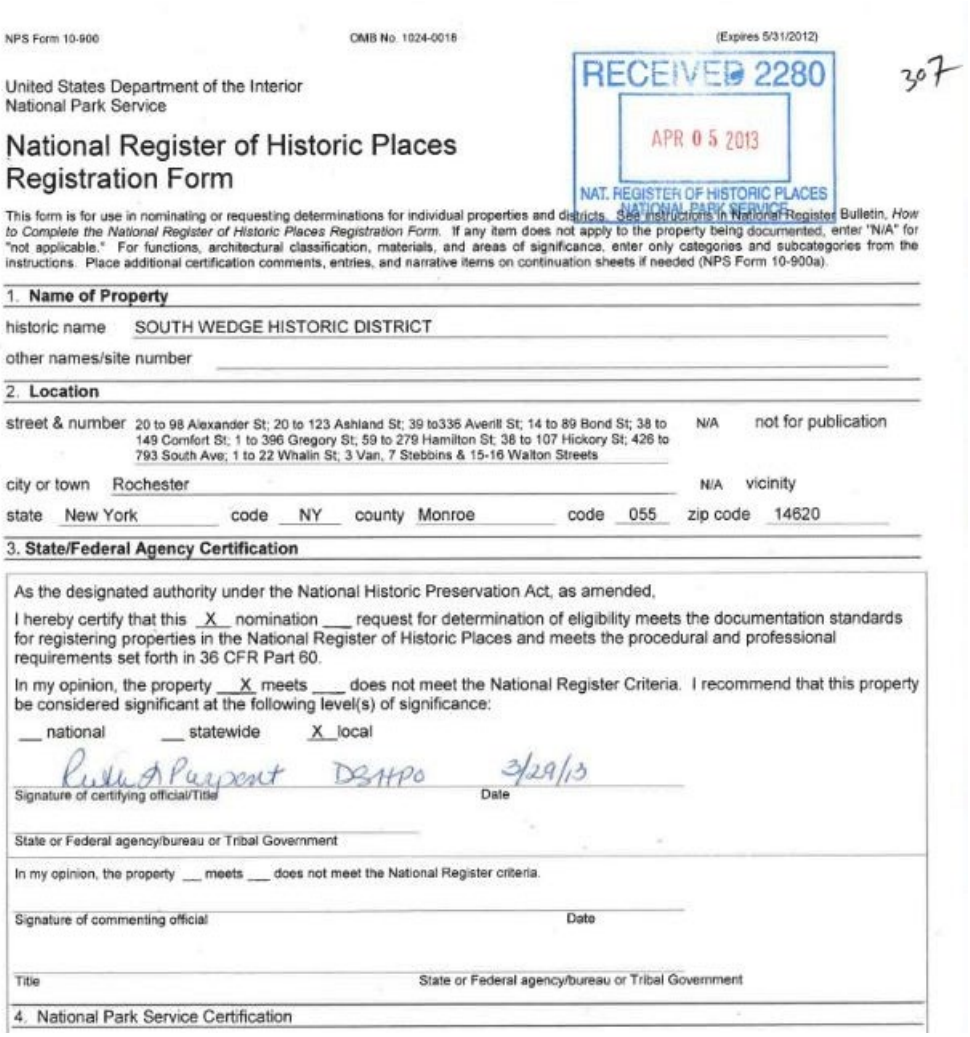


Figure 4. Proximity of middle-class areas to the Rochester Zen Center in 1971. Black circles denote middle-class neighborhoods, and red lines indicate geographical proximity.

The Rochester Zen Center chose to locate near Park Avenue (43.1530° N, 77.5930° W) in 1966 [11]. Data from the 1960s and 1970s indicate that Park Avenue featured Victorian architecture and a community culture representative of classic middle-class aesthetics [12]. The area, which rose to prominence in 1875, initially served as a service street for the affluent residents of nearby East Avenue. Over time, it developed a distinctive community atmosphere and, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, became a representative historic district in the southeastern part of the city. During the 1960s, the neighborhood became highly desirable among college students, leading real estate agents to purchase and rent out single-family homes, thereby increasing housing prices. The establishment of the Park Avenue Neighborhood Association in 1969 marked the beginning of community preservation efforts, gradually restoring its image as a traditional middle-class neighborhood.

Around the same time, East Avenue (43.1548° N, 77.5897° W) solidified its status as a premier middle-class community. From the late 19th century onward, it had become a gathering place for Rochester's elite, with executives from major enterprises like Kodak and Bausch & Lomb building luxury homes there. The mansion of George Eastman, founder of Eastman Kodak Company, is a notable example. The proximity of East Avenue to the University of Rochester further enhanced its cultural atmosphere and real estate value, attracting well-educated and affluent middle-class families. Despite population shifts in Rochester during the 1960s, East Avenue maintained high property values and a stable resident composition, reflecting its continuity as an elite community.

The South Wedge neighborhood (43.1433° N, 77.6035° W) was also dominated by a stable white middle-class population, with residential structures consisting mainly of single-family detached houses. The 1960s saw an influx of young professionals, contributing to a process of gentrification characterized by rising house prices and changes in community structure. Although the area experienced some “White Flight” to the suburbs, a core group of middle-class residents remained and established the “South Wedge Planning Committee” to promote community revival. The 1971 National Register of Historic Places Registration Form corroborates the middle-class nature of the South Wedge, noting its development in the 19th century as a residential area for wage earners and the middle class, with vernacular-style homes and a robust network of public and private schools (Figure 5).



NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018 (Expires 5/31/2012)

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

307

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name SOUTH WEDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 20 to 98 Alexander St; 20 to 123 Ashland St; 39 to336 Averill St; 14 to 89 Bond St; 38 to 149 Comfort St; 1 to 396 Gregory St; 59 to 279 Hamilton St; 38 to 107 Hickory St; 426 to 793 South Ave; 1 to 22 Whalin St; 3 Van, 7 Stebbins & 15-16 Walton Streets N/A not for publication

city or town Rochester N/A vicinity

state New York code NY county Monroe code 055 zip code 14620

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title DSHPO Date 3/29/13

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

Figure 5. The cover of National Register of Historic Places Registration Form of the City of Rochester in 1971.

While downtown communities were favored for their urban resources, many middle-class families in the post-war period also moved to suburban areas. These suburban communities became another core of support for the RZC. Highland Park (43.1286° N, 77.5942° W) and Cobbs Hill (43.1339° N, 77.5761° W) were typical of this trend. Such suburban districts became magnets for the postwar middle class due to their commitment to superior school systems. Cobbs Hill, in particular, attracted professionals such as teachers and doctors in the 1960s and was known for its active community politics (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

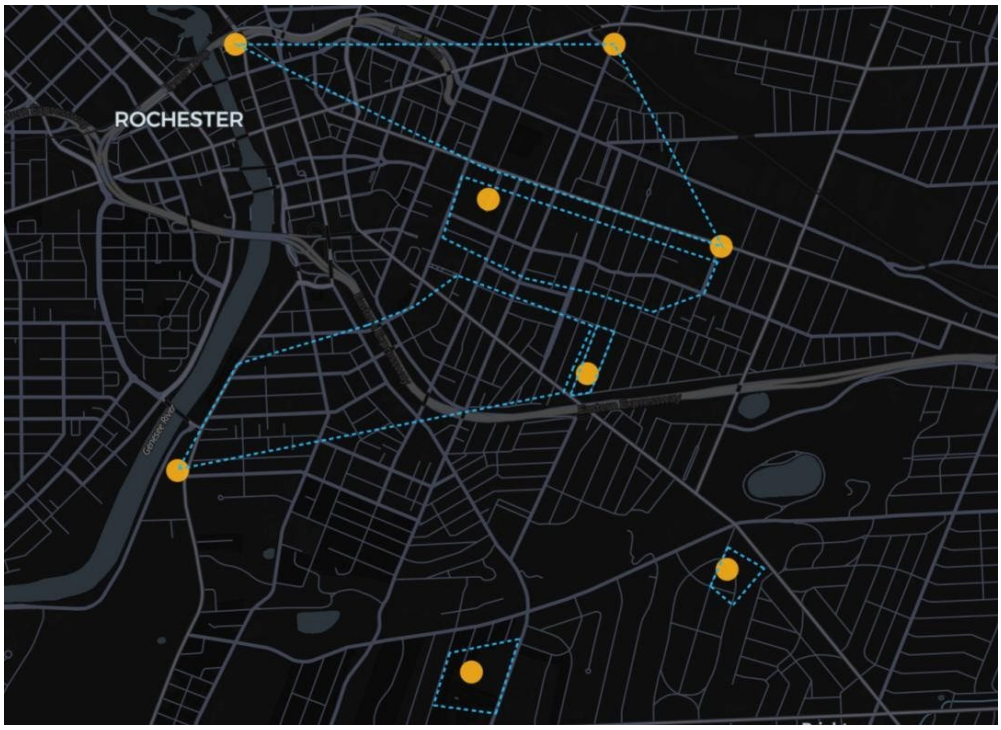


Figure 6. Middle-class area of the Rochester Zen Center (see the appendix).

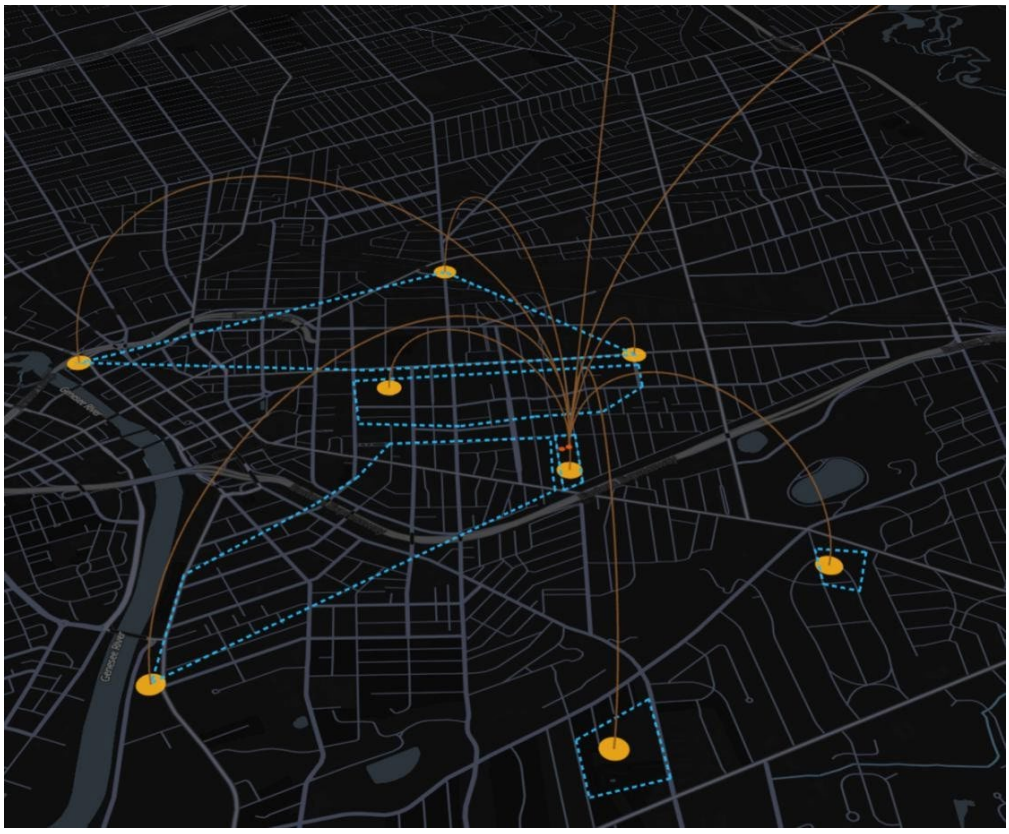


Figure 7. Middle-class area of the Rochester Zen Center (red spot: Rochester Zen Center, orange spot: middle-class area) (see the appendix).

The strategic location of the Rochester Zen Center reveals a deep spatial interaction with the city's middle-class neighborhoods. By positioning itself within these affluent spaces and imposing high membership fees and strict participation thresholds, the center

engaged in a spatial practice of converting economic capital into cultural capital, effectively limiting social mobility and reinforcing class boundaries. This, in turn, helped to consolidate the cultural identity and social status of its middle-class participants. The proximity of major corporations like Kodak headquarters further illustrates its connection to professional groups, fostering the aggregation of middle-class professionals and the formation of elite cultural networks. The RZC not only embodied this spatial logic but also transformed Buddhist practice into a symbol of middle-class status, a form of cultural consumption that exacerbated class exclusivity and marginalized lower-income groups.

4.2. Class Composition of the Center's Membership and Leadership

A deeper exploration of the sponsors and staff at the Rochester Zen Center further reveals its profound middle-class connections. In the post-war era, Rochester was known as the "World Imaging Center," with technology companies like Kodak, Bausch & Lomb, and Xerox reaching their peak in the 1960s. The personnel and management from these enterprises constituted the core of a new technological middle class, many of whom were instrumental in the development of the RZC.

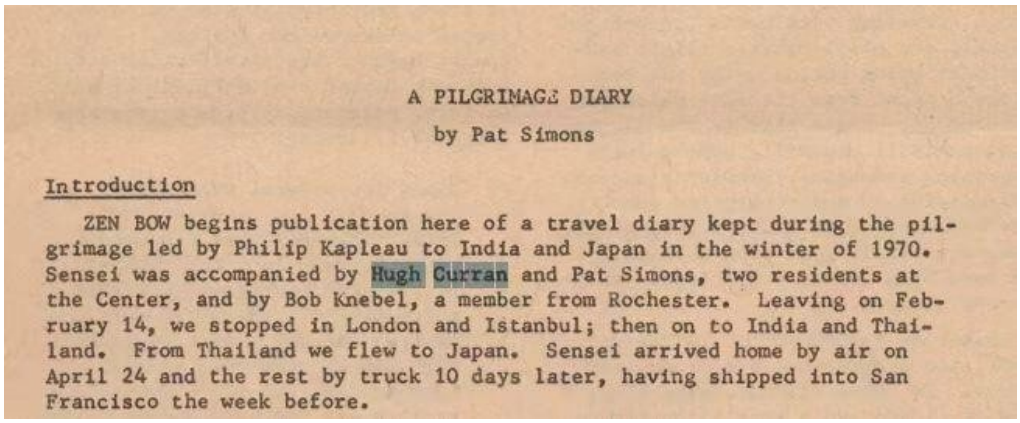
The Center was initiated by Chester Carlson, the inventor of xerography and a founder of Xerox, and his wife, Dorris. Carlson, who held a degree in physics from Caltech and a law degree from New York Law School, demonstrated a strong interest in spiritual practice and provided crucial financial support to promote meditation among tech elites. After the Carlsons read Philip Kapleau's book The Three Pillars of Zen, they invited Kapleau to their meditation group. In June 1966, with funding from Kapleau and Dorris Carlson, the Rochester Zen Center was launched with an initial group of 22 members.

An analysis of other founding members, as depicted in Figure 8, further demonstrates the middle-class backgrounds of the Center's core group. Ralph Chapin (circled in red) was a founder of Chapin Manufacturing Company, a long-standing family-owned business in the region. His family's wealth and real estate holdings, such as Chapin Mill, were later donated to the RZC to serve as a retreat center. Tai-san (later Eido-roshi, circled in white) was an early teacher at the center who was trained in an orthodox Zen lineage in Japan and pursued further studies at the University of Hawaii. During his time in the United States, he resided in a typical middle-class community on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and later co-founded another Zen center in New York, expanding his influence.

Figure 8. A photograph of the 22 founding members of the Rochester Zen Center. Dorris Carlson is circled in blue; Chester Carlson is circled in green; Ralph Chapin is circled in red; Yasutani-roshi is circled in black; Tai-san is circled in white. Photo source: rochester_zen_center, Instagram, June 24, 2023.

The professional and intellectual backgrounds of the Zen masters who taught at the RZC also reflected a distinct middle-class identity. Bodhin Kjolhede, who would later become Kapleau's successor, graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in Psychology before joining the RZC in 1970. John Pulleyn joined the staff after graduating from Oberlin College in 1968. He later became a pediatric nurse with a degree from SUNY Brockport, working at Strong Memorial Hospital, which is located in a middle-class community near the RZC. Sensei Donna Kowal, another Zen master, was born in the middle-class community of Staten Island, New York. Sunyana Graef studied religion and philosophy at Bard College in the 1960s before becoming a disciple of Kapleau and eventually founding the Vermont Zen Center.

Many members possessed a dual identity as academics and Zen practitioners, which was instrumental in framing Zen within a Western intellectual context. Hugh Curran, abbot of the RZC from 1967 to 1972, was also a professor at the University of Maine. University teaching positions were the hallmark of the American middle class, providing the economic stability and social prestige necessary for activities like his pilgrimage to India and Japan in 1970 (Figure 9).



A PILGRIMAGE DIARY

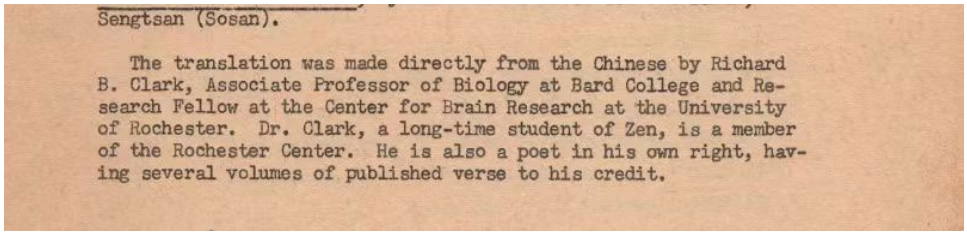
by Pat Simons

Introduction

ZEN BOW begins publication here of a travel diary kept during the pilgrimage led by Philip Kapleau to India and Japan in the winter of 1970. Sensei was accompanied by Hugh Curran and Pat Simons, two residents at the Center, and by Bob Knebel, a member from Rochester. Leaving on February 14, we stopped in London and Istanbul; then on to India and Thailand. From Thailand we flew to Japan. Sensei arrived home by air on April 24 and the rest by truck 10 days later, having shipped into San Francisco the week before.

Figure 9. A pilgrimage diary entry from the Zen Bow newspaper, documenting Hugh Curran's travels.

Similarly, Richard B. Clark, an associate professor of Biology at Bard College and a Zen center member, embodied the integration of religious practice into an academic framework (Figure 10). He reframed practices like chanting the Great Compassion Mantra as exercises in "gratitude" and "personal healing," which aligned with middle-class preferences for psychological well-being over social critique. Laurence Mills, another early founder, transformed his Buddhist practice into academic research, publishing numerous books and establishing a center in Australia that operated more like a cultural club for the middle class, structured around fee-based courses and a membership system.



Sengtsan (Sosan).

The translation was made directly from the Chinese by Richard B. Clark, Associate Professor of Biology at Bard College and Research Fellow at the Center for Brain Research at the University of Rochester. Dr. Clark, a long-time student of Zen, is a member of the Rochester Center. He is also a poet in his own right, having several volumes of published verse to his credit.

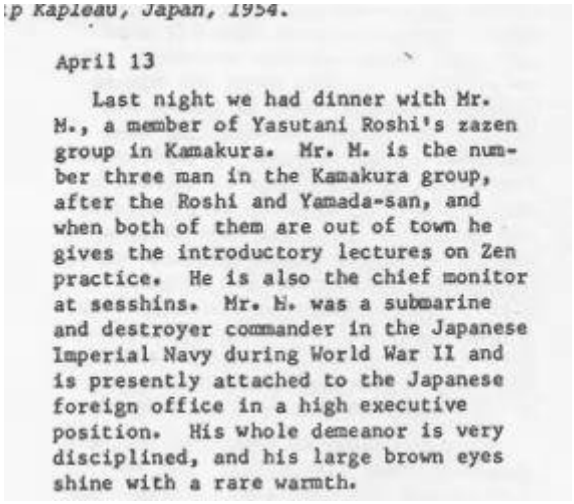
Figure 10. An entry from the Zen Bow newspaper illustrating the reframing of Zen practices for a Western audience.

This analysis demonstrates that the members and masters of the Rochester Zen Center were predominantly from typical middle-class backgrounds. They utilized their dual

identities as Zen practitioners and middle-class intellectuals to promote the dissemination and capitalization of Zen culture in the United States.

4.3. Transnational Networks and Cultural Capitalization

In alignment with the middle-class backgrounds of its members and staff, the transnational exchanges and cross-border activities of the Rochester Zen Center also exhibited a distinct class character. Under the leadership of Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede, the Center consciously "Americanized" Zen culture. During the Center's 50th anniversary, he reflected on this process: "One of those changes I saw early on was to make the center less Japanese. Roshi Kapleau was always clear that we had to Americanize Zen just as the Japanese had Japanized it... when it came to those cultures". This Americanization was not merely a cultural translation but a strategic adaptation to suit a Western middle-class identity. The Center's practice and dissemination were a microcosm of the American middle class's cultural reconstruction through localized Buddhism, as well as their pursuit of class identity through exchanges with transnational middle-class elites [4]. This is evident in the diaries published in the Zen Bow Newspaper (Figure 11).


p Kapleau, Japan, 1954.

April 13

Last night we had dinner with Mr. M., a member of Yasutani Roshi's zazen group in Kamakura. Mr. M. is the number three man in the Kamakura group, after the Roshi and Yamada-san, and when both of them are out of town he gives the introductory lectures on Zen practice. He is also the chief monitor at sesshins. Mr. M. was a submarine and destroyer commander in the Japanese Imperial Navy during World War II and is presently attached to the Japanese foreign office in a high executive position. His whole demeanor is very disciplined, and his large brown eyes shine with a rare warmth.

Figure 11. A diary entry from the Zen Bow detailing exchanges with Japanese elites.

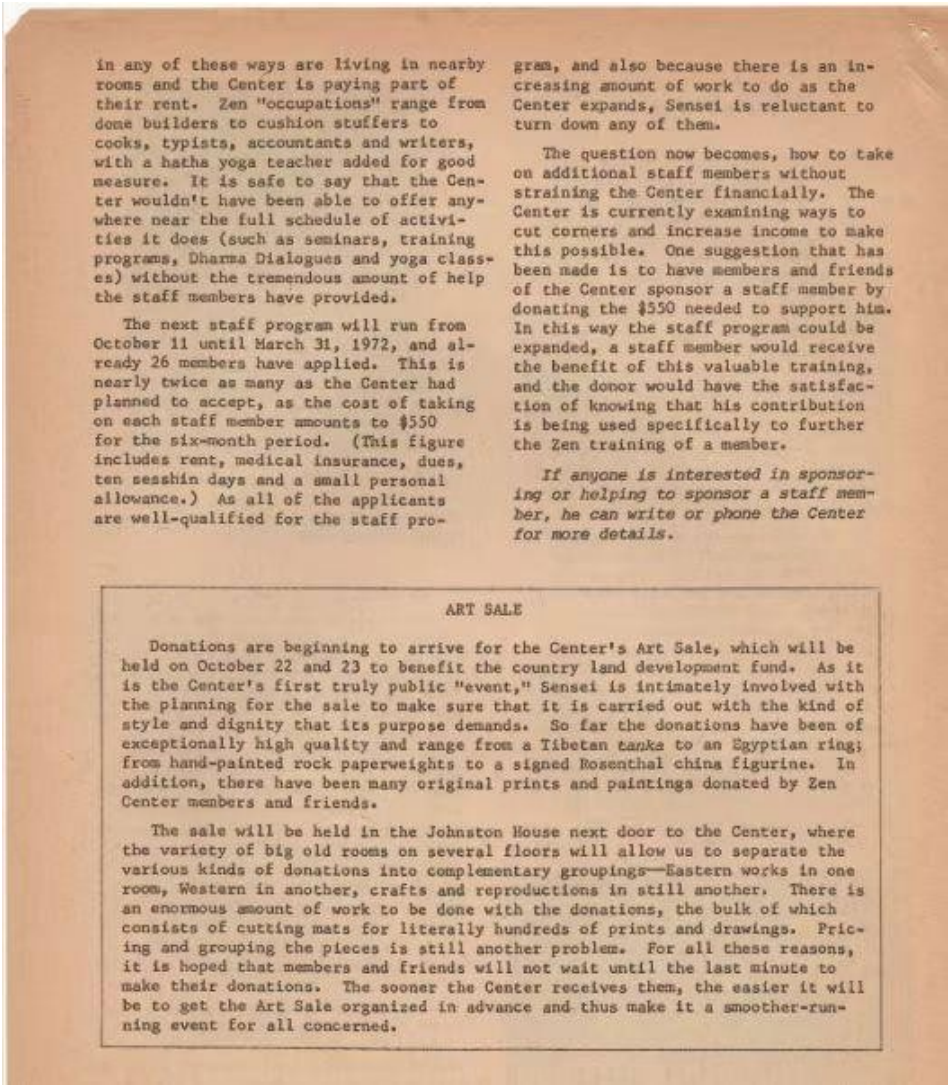
The Zen Bow documented meetings between American members and figures like "Mr. M," a Japanese government official and member of a Japanese meditation group who had formerly been a submarine commander and later a senior executive at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This career trajectory illustrates the rise of Japan's new middle class during its post-war economic boom. Mr. M's elite status formed a class equivalence with the American Center members. This is evident in their cross-border dialogues: when discussing topics like "hallucinogenic drugs and enlightenment," the discourse was framed around depoliticized concepts such as "psychological training" and "strengthening willpower," effectively reconstructing Zen to avoid the societal critiques present in its original cultural context.

Another figure, Yamada-san, a senior Japanese enterprise executive and Zen mentor, further highlights the instrumental nature of Zen within this transnational elite network. He combined Zen practice with business management, advocating for the elimination of "self-centered thinking through meditation" to become a "responsible citizen." This rhetoric not only catered to the middle class's pursuit of "efficiency" and "self-discipline" but also repositioned Zen as a "productivity tool" for capitalist society.

The economic operations of the RZC were also targeted toward a middle-class demographic. An "Employee Funding Program" required participants to pay $500—a sum that was class-exclusive at the time—and noted that most applicants were middle-class white individuals with higher education. The inclusion of medical insurance and personal

allowances further indicates that the target audience was the economically secure middle class which is focused on "self-investment".

Furthermore, the Center engaged in cosmopolitan cultural activities that reinforced its class identity. In 1970, the RZC raised funds through an art auction featuring items such as "Tibetan Buddha statues, Egyptian rings, Rosenthal porcelain statues." Through such events, the Zen center transformed Zen Buddhism into a cross-cultural "luxury." Participants showcased their economic strength and cultural taste, thereby consolidating their identity within their class (Figure 12).



in any of these ways are living in nearby rooms and the Center is paying part of their rent. Zen "occupations" range from dome builders to cushion stuffers to cooks, typists, accountants and writers, with a hatha yoga teacher added for good measure. It is safe to say that the Center wouldn't have been able to offer anywhere near the full schedule of activities it does (such as seminars, training programs, Dharma Dialogues and yoga classes) without the tremendous amount of help the staff members have provided.

The next staff program will run from October 11 until March 31, 1972, and already 26 members have applied. This is nearly twice as many as the Center had planned to accept, as the cost of taking on each staff member amounts to $550 for the six-month period. (This figure includes rent, medical insurance, dues, ten sesshin days and a small personal allowance.) As all of the applicants are well-qualified for the staff program, and also because there is an increasing amount of work to do as the Center expands, Sensei is reluctant to turn down any of them.

The question now becomes, how to take on additional staff members without straining the Center financially. The Center is currently examining ways to cut corners and increase income to make this possible. One suggestion that has been made is to have members and friends of the Center sponsor a staff member by donating the $550 needed to support him. In this way the staff program could be expanded, a staff member would receive the benefit of this valuable training, and the donor would have the satisfaction of knowing that his contribution is being used specifically to further the Zen training of a member.

If anyone is interested in sponsoring or helping to sponsor a staff member, he can write or phone the Center for more details.

ART SALE

Donations are beginning to arrive for the Center's Art Sale, which will be held on October 22 and 23 to benefit the country land development fund. As it is the Center's first truly public "event," Sensei is intimately involved with the planning for the sale to make sure that it is carried out with the kind of style and dignity that its purpose demands. So far the donations have been of exceptionally high quality and range from a Tibetan *tanka* to an Egyptian ring; from hand-painted rock paperweights to a signed Rosenthal china figurine. In addition, there have been many original prints and paintings donated by Zen Center members and friends.

The sale will be held in the Johnston House next door to the Center, where the variety of big old rooms on several floors will allow us to separate the various kinds of donations into complementary groupings—Eastern works in one room, Western in another, crafts and reproductions in still another. There is an enormous amount of work to be done with the donations, the bulk of which consists of cutting mats for literally hundreds of prints and drawings. Pricing and grouping the pieces is still another problem. For all these reasons, it is hoped that members and friends will not wait until the last minute to make their donations. The sooner the Center receives them, the easier it will be to get the Art Sale organized in advance and thus make it a smoother-running event for all concerned.

Figure 12. An entry from the Zen Bow detailing a fundraising art auction.

In summary, the transnational links of the Rochester Zen Center reflect its intrinsic middle-class character. The Center consciously Americanized Zen to better align with Western cultural identity, serving as a hub for cultural reconstruction and class identity formation through exchanges with transnational elites. These interactions consistently focused on depoliticized themes of psychological training and self-discipline, aligning Zen practice with middle-class values of efficiency and productivity.

5. Conclusion

The development of the Rochester Zen Center from the 1960s to the 1970s provides a compelling case study at the intersection of American social history, class dynamics, and the commodification of spirituality. Situated within the context of postwar urban change

and countercultural movements, the Center emerged as a significant cultural site where Rochester's burgeoning middle class negotiated and reinforced its identity through the practice of Zen Buddhism.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that the strategic choice of the Zen Center's location in affluent areas such as Park Avenue was a deliberate spatial practice. It reflected the broader middle-class trends of suburbanization and gentrification, which created a space of exclusivity and convenience that was intrinsically closed within class boundaries. Practically, the Center's founders and members, largely comprising the technocratic and middle classes, leveraged their economic and cultural capital to institutionalize Zen culture. Through mechanisms such as high membership fees, curated art auctions, and strategic transnational exchanges with international middle-class elites, they transformed Zen culture into a "cultural luxury," which changed spirituality into a commodity in the market. This process exemplifies the core principles of "spiritual capitalism".

Appendix

Figure 1:
https://kepler.gl/demo/map?mapUrl=https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/scl/fi/i6lmnxu
vb69a5pgvhmp5q/keplergl_3ypd51.json?rlkey=5yfh2v3yvkaxtg0k3qajzrff7&dl=0
Figure 2:
https://kepler.gl/demo/map?mapUrl=https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/scl/fi/i6lmnxu
vb69a5pgvhmp5q/keplergl_3ypd51.json?rlkey=5yfh2v3yvkaxtg0k3qajzrff7&dl=0
Figure 3:
https://kepler.gl/demo/map?mapUrl=https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/scl/fi/vdid0r4f
3tco9sdaqaaff/keplergl_qmv7mo.json?rlkey=2p2ojmwgbsky6s90dy6bcbtw7&dl=0
Figure 7:
https://kepler.gl/demo/map?mapUrl=https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/scl/fi/i6lmnxu
vb69a5pgvhmp5q/keplergl_3ypd51.json?rlkey=5yfh2v3yvkaxtg0k3qajzrff7&dl=0
Figure 8:
https://kepler.gl/demo/map?mapUrl=https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/scl/fi/i6lmnxu
vb69a5pgvhmp5q/keplergl_3ypd51.json?rlkey=5yfh2v3yvkaxtg0k3qajzrff7&dl=0

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