

Selbstopfer in den japanischen Legenden to all those interested in Japanese religions and literature, as well as philological and folklore studies.

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Cristina Rocha
Zen in Brazil: The Quest for Cosmopolitan Modernity.
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, 256 pp.

The cross-cultural diffusion of Japanese religions is a topic that has been attracting considerable scholarly attention over the past two decades. In this anthropological study of Zen in Brazil, Rocha is concerned with the broad issues of how a Japanese Buddhist tradition spreads outside of Japan and how it is transformed in the process. In order to address these concerns, she examines the global carriers of Zen and how these are received, reinterpreted, and reshaped by the local Brazilian context.

The data for this study was drawn from “multi-sited research” conducted between 1997 and 2002, which included extensive fieldwork in Zen temples and centers in Brazil, interviews and archival research in the Sōtō-shū headquarters in Japan, and study of “spatially non-localized sites” (internet, Brazilian Buddhist email lists). The main site of research was the Busshin-ji Temple in Sao Paulo, which contained two “entangled congregations” formed by the Japanese Brazilian community and non-Japanese Brazilian members. Rocha explains that the “multi-sited” research methodology was required “in order to track the flows of Zen from Japan, Europe, and the United States into Brazil.” (p. 6)

Drawing on Arjun Appadurai’s theoretical framework of global scapes (see his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minnesota, 1996), Rocha analyzes the diffusion of Zen through a study of the “flows of people” (immigrants, circulating *kaikyōshi* [missionaries] and intellectuals), the “flows of ideas” (through various media – books, movies), and the “flows of technology” (recent use of the internet, e-mailing lists). The primary carriers of Zen to Brazil have been the Japanese immigrants and the *kaikyōshi* sent by Sōtō-shū headquarters to care for them, and non-Japanese intellectual elites who imported the orientalist vision of modern Buddhism from France and the United States. The author gives considerable attention to the conflict between these two dominant forms of Zen.

For Japanese immigrants and their descendants, Zen is mainly understood in relation to devotional practices, care for the ancestors, and various festivities connected with Japanese cultural traditions. For non-Japanese Brazilian intellectuals, by contrast, Zen is primarily a “symbol of cosmopolitanism and modernity” and centered on *zazen* as a practice for the cultivation of the self. (p. 14) The author explains that the adoption of Zen by upper middle-class and upper-class non-Japanese in Brazil has been facilitated by alienation from the Catholic Church and its traditions and the very nature of modernity – a world in which pluralism and choice

have expanded dramatically. Through her interviews, Rocha discovered that most converts to Zen “had a history of shunning Catholicism and some of being Marxist militants in the 1960s and 1970s.” (p. 91) For these converts, Zen is understood to be a rational and modern alternative to the Catholic Church.

This study also addresses the familiar problems faced by Japanese priests in foreign lands. These include the language difficulties and inability to relate effectively in Portuguese with successive generations of Japanese and non-Japanese, the conflict between the traditional Japanese understanding of priestly authority in temple administration and the “congregational” orientation of religious communities in Brazil, and the very different concerns and expectations of members from the Japanese and non-Japanese sub-group. The Zen temples of the immigrant communities are essentially ethnic institutions, which are conservative and notoriously slow in making adaptations to changes in the social environment. Like ethnic churches in many other cultural contexts, these Japanese temples struggle with the tensions between Japanese members with their foreign-orientation and Brazilian-born generations and non-Japanese members whose orientation and expectations are shaped by the culture of the receiving society.

Rocha devotes a full chapter to the Brazilian religious field, which has historically been dominated by the Roman Catholic Church and deeply shaped by Afro-Brazilian spirituality. This provides the context for understanding how Zen is being understood and reshaped by local religious and cultural concerns. The last section of the book provides examples of “creolized Zen” or the new expressions of Buddhism that are emerging from the encounter with other religious and cultural traditions in Brazil. The author adopts the term “creolization” for her analysis of the indigenization of Zen in this context. Some of the interesting patterns of adaptation highlighted in this study include the mixing of Buddhist and Catholic images and symbols in household or family altars, the adoption of “hyphenated” religious practice (using both Catholic and Buddhist services for funerals and memorials, for example), the provision of Buddhist wedding ceremonies (which is not the norm in Japanese Buddhism), and the development of Buddhist “baptism” rituals for the children of non-Japanese Brazilian converts to Zen.

This is a very interesting and well-written study of Zen in Brazil that is a welcome addition to the literature on the cross-cultural diffusion of religion. While the author’s qualitative analysis has much to commend it, I was disappointed that her observations were not supported by a bit more empirical data about the actual number of active followers of this transplanted religious tradition. There may be a growing openness to Zen and other forms of Buddhism in Brazil – which is reflected in the popular culture (media coverage, films, and books) – but it is unclear if this has translated into a significant shift in religious affiliation.

As Rocha notes in chapter 3, Buddhists in Brazil constitute only 0.15 percent of the population (which comes to 245,871 Buddhists). One must speculate how many actually belong to Zen or if their numbers are actually increasing (I searched in vain for the actual number of Zen followers in Brazil). She does mention that Sōtō-shū is connected to six hundred Japanese families, while Jōdo Shinshū and Shingon-shū

both have congregations based on some five thousand families each. (p. 36) In addition to the participation of Japanese members of some six hundred families, my guess is that there are probably small groups of twenty or thirty non-Japanese practicing *zazen* at one of the four Zen temples in Brazil related to the Sōtō-shū or one of the “numerous Zen Centers across the country that do not belong to Sōtō-shū.” (p. 36). But we are not provided with the most basic statistics on the number of members, their ethnic background (Japanese, non-Japanese), or the actual number of centers across the country.

In the end, the reader is left to surmise that Zen is primarily of interest to a small portion of Brazil’s upper classes and some descendants of Japanese immigrants. No doubt there are many “sympathizers” or “night-stand Buddhists” (to borrow an expression from Thomas Tweed) who may never join an organized form of the religion, but who read books and magazines about Buddhism, practice meditation, and define themselves as Buddhist. This is probably as true in Brazil as in North America, but it is impossible to gauge this on the basis of Rocha’s study alone.

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Ugo Dessì
Ethics and Society in Contemporary Shin Buddhism.
Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007, 265 pages.

In fundamental ways, Buddhism in Asia was always a global, i.e. multiethnic – and multi-territorial, religious tradition; and contemporary research on the dialectic of East and West has made it clear that Buddhism’s modern give-and-take with the non-Asian world dates back long before the nineteenth century (see e.g. J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, Routledge, 1997). Most recently, since the latter half of the twentieth century, it has become apparent that Buddhist traditions have been undergoing a much accelerated process of globalization, in which their interests and discourses are interacting widely in more and more ways with a worldwide intellectual conversation.

One of the important ways this acceleration has been expressed is in new attention among Western scholars to Buddhist ethics, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the case of Japan, this trend started with Zen, but now scholarship is examining the evolution of social ethical thought which has emerged in Japan’s large True Pure Land (Jōdo shinshū) tradition. These Shin developments form the theme of Dessì’s outstandingly useful study. Based on a 2006 Ph.D. dissertation for Marburg University, the study is divided into four major parts.

The first is an overview of doctrinal history, in which Dessì especially aims to extract from the Shin discourse its ideas about social ethics. Starting with Shinran, the review moves from the classic Pure Land sutras through the seven patriarchal expositors (Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Donran, Dōshaku, Zēndō, Genshin, and