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Editors' Introduction

Japanese Religions in Brazil

THE DATE OF the publication of this special issue on “Japanese Religions in Brazil” coincides with the centenary festivities of Japanese immigration to Brazil. On a number of occasions throughout the year, including 18 June—the day of the arrival of the vessel *Kasato Maru* in 1908 in the port of Santos (Federal State of São Paulo) with the first seven hundred and eight-one immigrants on board—the Japanese-Brazilian community will be celebrating the successful integration of its members into Brazilian society. They have contributed to virtually every aspect of life in a country that, at the beginning, was considered only a temporary location, but after World War II became the permanent home for the majority of the immigrants and their descendents.

The centenary is a welcome opportunity for the Japanese religious establishment in Brazil to reflect upon their past and present status. In many cases the retrospective transcends the institutional existence of the groups, but also reflects the appreciation of their “pioneers” who, under precarious material and socio-political circumstances, prepared the ground for the establishment of their respective religious organizations in Brazil. In this sense, adequate light has been shed on the time before World War II, a significance that is often neglected in the face of the wave of the institutionalization of Japanese religions in the 1950s.

This is true even for Shinto, although the heterogeneous composition of the colonies did not foster rituals associated with a local shrine. Instead, collective

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religiosity was principally expressed by the organizationally diffuse veneration of the Japanese emperor. Only two shrines were constructed before World War II, both in the Federal State of São Paulo, one in 1920 by inhabitants of Bugre, the other in 1938 by members of the immigrant “colony” of Bastos (MORI 1992, 568–69). The situation changed slightly only in the 1950s, partly due to the arrival of post-war immigrants who founded a number of small sanctuaries in forested settings in the States of Pará, Amazonas, and Mato Grosso. Nonetheless, even today Shinto activities and organizations are not very common in Brazil (MAEYAMA 1983c, 185) and due to the lack of research, little data is available in terms of the statistical relevance of Shinto in Brazil.

As far as the pre-war history of Buddhism is concerned, all activities were directed to Japanese “colonies” located in the Federal State of São Paulo. The first group that comes to mind is Honmon Butsuryū-shū whose pioneer, Tomojiro Ibaragi, was among the immigrants that arrived on the *Kasato Maru*. Ibaragi also became responsible for the first official institution of his order, the Taiseiji temple in the city of Lins. The temple was founded in 1936 as the outcome of a nucleus of Honmon Butsuryū-shū practitioners initiated by the layman Yoneji Matsubara in 1932. In the same year, the first Shin Buddhist institution was inaugurated in the city of Cafelândia (GONÇALVES 2004). Other activities related to Shin Buddhism were undertaken in the Iguape colony to which Masumo Ikoma had been sent by the Honpa Honganji headquarters in 1928. Six years later, Reverend Shinba introduced Shingon to Brazil (SHOJI 2006, 43).

The years following World War II witnessed an intensified effort by virtually all the traditional Buddhist branches. In the first half of the 1950s, Tendai-shū and the Ōtani branch of Jōdo Shinshū had already inaugurated their first temples, the Honpa branch of Jōdo Shinshū had founded its national headquarters, and the Jōdo, Zen, Nichiren, and Shingon sects announced the official start of their missions in Brazil. Stimulated by the beginning of the internationalization of its then lay-organization Soka Gakkai and the visit of its president, Ikeda Daisaku, to Brazil, Nichiren Shōshū began to publicly articulate itself in 1960. After the split from Nichiren Shōshū, Soka Gakkai has become the only group in the Buddhist spectrum with a considerable growth rate in terms of members. It is estimated that there are some 120,000 Soka Gakkai adherents in the country, more than 50 percent of all Brazilian Buddhists counted in the last national census in 2000.

In a more systematic sense, the efforts of new Japanese religious movements before World War II were undertaken by only Tenrikyō and Seichō-no-ie. Tenrikyō began its work in 1929, either due to the arrival of the first official missionary (LONE 2001, 156) or at least in an informal sense in terms of the engagement of some laypersons. In any case, Tenrikyō’s national organization in Brazil was implanted in 1941 (MORI 1992, 572). After some initial informal activities of Seichō-no-ie adherents in colonies in the Federal State of São Paulo, the movement began to consolidate itself institutionally in the second half of the 1930s.

However, a national association was only founded in 1951. In 1955 the World Messianity Church initiated its activities in Brazil, followed by Perfect Liberty two years later. Finally, Risshō Kōseikai, Sūkyō Mahikari, and Reiyūkai made important institutional steps in Brazil in the 1970s. According to the last national census in 2000, the most successful movement among the above-mentioned movements is the World Messianity Church, with some 100,000 adherents. Second is Seicho-no-ie with about 27,000 practitioners, followed by groups that can only be counted in the low thousands such as Perfect Liberty (approx. 5500), Tenrikyō (approx. 3800) and Mahikari (approx. 3000). The statistics provided by the census are, however, often misleading for Japanese religions in Brazil. Seicho-no-ie, for example, claims to have more than 1,000,000 adherents and has its doctrine propagated by nationwide magazines, radio, and even a TV program. It is commonly regarded as a “life philosophy” and not as a religion by Brazilians. Statistics for these groups are only estimates, being highly underestimated in the census figures and inflated in the numbers provided by the group itself.

The historical complexity and factual diversification of Japanese religions and religious movements in Brazil bear no relation to the contemporary status of academic research in the field, and it is symptomatic that some of the few Brazilian researchers engaged in relevant projects were or are associated with foreign universities. At the same time, the contribution of non-Brazilian researchers, although precious in terms of quality, has remained limited, especially as far as the study of Shinto and Buddhism are concerned. Few Japanese scholars have done extensive fieldwork in Brazil, and the perspective for the study of Japanese religions is mostly provided by Japanese immigrants or Japanese missionaries. The situation is more auspicious in the field of research on new religious movements, which confirms the observation of INOUE (1991), who claims a growing interest at the international level in the overseas mission activities of new religious movements in South American countries.

The unsatisfactory status of research on Japanese religions in Brazil is a reflection of historical and epistemological peculiarities of the Brazilian academic field, that from a historical perspective gained momentum only after the foundation of the first university in the country, the University of São Paulo, in 1934 (TRINDADE 2005). Although the latter defined the Faculty of Philosophy, Literature, and Humanities as its intellectual nucleus, a lack of a theoretical foundation in the related areas was obvious and compensated for by employing foreign specialists trained in countries such as France, Italy, or Germany (MELATTI 1990). Ethnologists and anthropologists from abroad concentrated their resources on the investigation of phenomena considered authentic for Brazil, and especially anything associated with indigenous people (PEIRANO 1999). The focus on genuine Brazilian phenomenon coincided with the simultaneous but broader debate among Brazilian intellectuals over the cultural identity of their country, whose uniqueness was seen in the fusion of

Lusitanian, African, and Native Indian components. This tendency of bounding up in itself is also characteristic for the non-theological study of religions in Brazil. This is understandable when one takes the richness of Brazil's religious landscape into account (ENGLER 2006), but it is contentious with the disciplines' commitment to the historically and geographically universal study of religion. The study of issues related to the Asian continent and more specifically to Japan is, in the great majority of cases, motivated by the solution of contemporary problems predominantly in the areas of international relations or economics (OLIVEIRA and MASIERO 2005). Historical, cultural and explicitly religious issues are systematically neglected or play only a secondary role.

All this means that, although "no other ethnic group from Asia received as much attention in research as the Japanese" (PEREIRA 1999a, 4), the study of Japanese religions in Brazil did not benefit satisfactorily from these efforts. Consequently, research on relevant issues remains in many aspects incomplete and, due to the lack of institutional support, progress in the field will continue to depend on the initiative of individual researchers challenged by the demands of overcoming the fragmentation of relevant academic knowledge.

References for future studies can be summarized according to a threefold typology. The first type consists of reflections on religious issues in the context of more general considerations of the history and current situation of Japanese immigrants and their descendents. Relevant articles (BALDUS and WILLEMS 1941; WILLEMS and SAITO 1947; SMITH 1979) and books (FUJII and SMITH 1959; LESSER 1999; LONE 2001; CARVALHO 2003) have contributed to the research in calling attention to the interdependence of religious elements and the overall conditions of a formerly ethnically-defined minority and their efforts at acculturation. The second category of relevant literature contains overviews of the spectrum of Japanese religions at the national level (GONÇALVES 1971; MAEYAMA 1983a and 1997; NAKAMAKI 1986; OZAKI 1990; PEREIRA 1992; PEREIRA and MATSUOKA 2007) or in a geographically or demographically more specific sense (MAEYAMA 1972, 1983c, 1997).

The third rubric embraces studies on manifestations in the three sub-areas of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Japanese Religious Movements. The most demanding subject is Shinto, until now academically represented only in terms of basic information about the history and the general character of certain local temples and organizations (MAEYAMA 1983c; MORI 1992).

Japanese Buddhism has been far better investigated. The bibliography contains general information on Japanese Buddhists in Brazil compared to its parallel manifestation in the United States (NAKAMAKI 2003, 101–115) and reflections on Japanese branches in the context of an overall discussion of Buddhism in Brazil (GONÇALVES 1990; SHOJI 2004; USARSKI 2002a, 2004, 2006a). Furthermore, relevant studies refer to the relation between ethnicity, Japanese Buddhism and the dynamics of conversion (SHOJI 2002a, 2002b) as well as to

specific Japanese Buddhist currents, namely Zen (ROCHA 2000; 2004a; 2004b; 2006; 2007; USARSKI 2006b), Shin (MATSUE 1998, GONZAGA 2006), Shingon (SHOJI 2003; 2006), Soka Gakkai (MARANHÃO 1999; PEREIRA 2001 and 2007) and Honmon Butsuryu-shū (NAKAMAKI 2002 and 2003, 143–67).

Research on Japanese new religions can be classified according to the degree of specification of the investigated subject. Among the more general publications, one finds analysis of the international progress of Japanese new religious groups that have also affected Brazil (SHIMAZONO 1991, CLARKE 2000b), a systematic overview of the relevant field in Brazil (CLARKE 1994; NAKAMAKI 1990; WATANABE 2001) and consideration of how the dynamics of universalization of the movements evolved (CLARKE 1999; WATANABE 2001). The next level consists of studies dedicated to the comparison between two or three movements established in Brazil. Relevant publications refer to Seicho-no-ie, Perfect Liberty and Tenrikyō (YAMADA 2003), Seicho-no-ie and Perfect Liberty (PAIVA 2002), and to the Church of World Messianity and Perfect Liberty (TOMITA 2003, 2004).

Finally, there are articles and books that focus on only one particular Japanese religious movement. For example, on Ōmoto (FERNANDES 1941; MAEYAMA 1983b), on Seicho-no-ie (MAEYAMA 1967, 1983c; MARRACH 1978; CARPENTER and ROOF 1995; DINIZ 2006; ALBUQUERQUE 2007), on the Church of World Messianity (ORO 2000; CLARKE 2000a and 2002; MATSUE 2002; GONÇALVES, 2003; MATSUOKA 2001, 2007a, and 2007b) and on Perfect Liberty (NAKAMAKI 1991; 2003, 168–95; FUJIKURA 1992; SILVA 2000).

This special issue takes up the discussion summarized above on “Japanese Religions in Brazil.” The seven articles selected are representative of the complexity of the matter, and each of them offers an insight into a specific facet of the overall topic. First, Rafael Shoji deals with the former role of State Shinto in the life of Japanese immigrants and reviews the historical process of its substitution by nominal Catholicism. Four articles are dedicated to the reflection of particular aspects of Buddhism. Frank Usarski is especially interested in the evolution of Japanese immigrant Buddhism and the causes for its continuous statistical decline. Eduardo Albuquerque’s essay gives an overview of the different sources that had familiarized Brazilian intellectuals with Eastern spirituality, Buddhist philosophy and—in certain cases—with the practice of zazen. This then leads to Cristina Rocha’s article on the Soto Zen temple Busshinji in the city of São Paulo and the importance of this institution for the “pioneers” of conversion Buddhism in Brazil. Ronan Alves Pereira calls attention to the expansion of Soka Gakkai in Brazil, and associates its success with organizational and historical features characteristic to the Brazilian branch of the movement. Soka Gakkai makes another appearance in Watanabe Masako’s article, which questions to what degree new Japanese religious movements have incorporated principles such as individualism and autonomy in order to attract a Brazilian audience beyond the ethnic milieu, and to maintain the converts within their ranks.

Finally, the article by Nakamaki Hirochika is the result of a comparative analysis of calendars edited by different Japanese religious groups and their particular symbolic meanings. We are also pleased to present reviews of three recent books on topics related to Japanese religions in Brazil.

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