

## REVIEWS



**Ronan Alves Pereira and Hideaki Matsuoka,**  
*Japanese Religions in and beyond the Japanese Diaspora*

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THIS BOOK contains academic papers based on an international conference that was also titled “Japanese Religions in and beyond the Japanese Diaspora.” The conference was held at the University of California, Berkeley, on 21 September 2001. As mentioned in the foreword, the meeting occurred in the aftermath of the attacks of September 2001, confronting the participants with the urgent need to understand the nature of religious conflict, religious mobilization, and identity in the transnational world. This book is a rich anthology of articles representing a reference for scholars and students who are interested in the diffusion of Japanese religions in the West. It deals with a varied range of questions—the socio-political and cultural context of receiving societies, and the process of adaptation and negotiation in a new environment; issues on ethnic identity; and reasons and motivations to become a member of an alien faith. Moreover, the articles in this book emphasize the intrinsic characteristics of Japanese new religions, which may or may not facilitate diffusion abroad.

In recent decades many academic essays on Japanese religion overseas have been published for English readers (see MULLINS and YOUNG 1991, CLARKE 2000). The unique contribution of this volume is its focus on the international expansion of Japanese religions in and beyond Japanese ethnic communities while emphasizing the role of Brazil in this process. As the editors stress in the introduction, Brazil has about 1.5 million ethnic Japanese and is the country with the largest number of missionary branches of Japanese religions outside Japan. Despite this fact, the existing publications on this topic have not yet reflected on the importance of Brazil in the process of the globalization of Japanese religions. In addition, this book presents some valuable comments and insights about this topic, provided by Andrew Barshay in the foreword, and by Robert Bellah in the afterward.

The articles in the first section deal with the diffusion of Japanese religious groups in different countries. Chapter one is an updated version of an article published by SHIMAZONO Susumu (1991) in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. Shimazono discusses the expansion of Japanese new religions overseas, with an emphasis

on the postwar period. As in the previous version, Shimazono points out socio-political factors, practical ethics, and the systematic statements that facilitated this expansion. Additionally, in this new version, Shimazono considers the place of Japan's new religions in the history of religions of the world, proposing a more multidirectional way (not only from Western traditions) to evaluate the transmission of religions. At the end, the author adds his reflections on how the Sarin gas attack has negatively affected the image of Japanese new religions abroad, and how Japanese new religious groups are becoming independent abroad and facing competition with other local new religions.

Both chapters two and three seem to be the development of a work that the authors have previously published (BOUMA, SMITH, and VASI 2000). In chapter two, Bouma presents Zen, in a more detailed way, as part of a growing and vital spirituality in multicultural Australia. He discusses the transformation of the Australian religious landscape since World War II, examining the recent rise of Buddhism and the motivations for Australians to become followers of Zen. The Buddhist boom in Australia is a result of the presence of South Asian boat people and Asian migrants. Zen groups, however, came from the US and Japan, and their followers are Caucasians who are in search of an alternative type of spirituality. Buddhism in Australia is depicted as being a high culture, spiritual element of Asia; in this context, Zen Buddhism offers a genuine spiritual alternative, appearing low in hierarchy, quietly welcoming, and less demanding compared to other (such as Christian) groups. In chapter three, Smith describes the peculiar way in which Sūkyō Mahikari is spreading in multi-ethnic societies such as Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia, dealing with issues of ethnic identity and organizational culture. This Japanese religious group has established centers in the major cities of these countries and its diffusion does not depend on the presence of a large Japanese immigrant community. The author presents a brief introduction about the group—its principles and rituals, the organizational structure, and member recruitment and motivation, examining how the group preserved its values and adapted to these societies. Finally, the author discusses how the group achieved a significant modification of its members' original ethnic identities; they no longer identify themselves in terms of ethnicity but as members of a global religious group.

Metraux (chapter four) presents, in an interesting way, the unsuccessful attempt of Aum Shinrikyō, the same group that discharged sarin gas into the subway stations in 1995, in establishing its bases in Russia. He analyzes Aum Shinrikyō's Russian adventure from two perspectives—first from the attempt to recruit people in Russian, and second from the groups efforts to acquire Russian weapons and the know-how to produce them. Asahara and other Aum leaders were initially well received by various Russian leaders; the speeches of the group's leader were broadcast in the Russian media. It seems that after the collapse of the Soviet system, Aum may have appeared to be a lifeline to survival for many of its recruits, especially students. According to the author, however, every successful new religion must cultivate some degree of accommodation and compromise in the society in which it

operates. Aum failed because they ignored this fact, engaging in antisocial behavior (preventing their members from having any kind of social contact) and employing violence against them. These attitudes infuriated the authorities and members families, and led to official retaliation and the subsequent annihilation of the movement in Russia.

In chapter five, Graburn describes an extraordinary case of the trans-Pacific installation of the following two traditional Shinto shrines: Tsubaki Grand Shrine in California and Tsubaki Kannagara in the state of Washington. The spread of Japanese religions overseas usually accompanied Japanese military expansion or civilian migration. Many Japanese shrines were established abroad as part of an assimilationist policy in the formal Japanese colonies, or to attend exclusively to the needs of the Japanese communities in the Americas. The transplantation of these two shrines is an exception—they were built outside the limits of a Japanese congregation and directed primarily to non-Japanese. The author focuses his analysis on the travel of a Shinto shrine and its negotiation into new kinds of external relationships. He suggests that this recent dislocation of gods and the discovery of non-Japanese gods abroad, which are part of the Japanese “internationalization” movement, subverts the *uchi/soto* (inside/outside) logic when it offers the essentialist kind of Shinto teachings to Americans in America. This attempt, however, was not fully successful; in addition, due to some financial trouble, Tsubaki America closed its doors.

The articles in the second part introduce detailed information about the process of diffusion of some notorious Japanese religions in Brazil. Matsuoka and Pereira, in chapter six, provide an overview of the activities of Japanese religious groups in Brazil. The groups are classified into the following four categories in terms of their historical and doctrinal backgrounds: traditional Buddhism, traditional Shinto, new religions, and miscellaneous groups. In the beginning, the propagation and settlement of these groups depended heavily on the Japanese immigrant communities. Nonetheless, after World War II some Japanese new religious groups such as Seichō-no-Ie, Sōka Gakkai, and World Messianity, among others, crossed ethnic barriers and became successful among non-Japanese (representing ninety percent of their membership). Some intrinsic characteristics of these new movements, discussed by Shimazono in chapter one, and many other social-structural factors, made these groups successful in Brazil.

Rocha, in chapter seven, explores the imaginative ways Brazilians create their own world of Zen Buddhism influenced by contemporary global images of Zen disseminated by the international and local media. Utilizing the concept of “scapes” borrowed from Appadurai, the author stresses the role of media (mediascapes) and the internet (cyberscapes) as effective ways to disseminate information about Buddhism and connect Buddhist supporters. In the past, Zen in Brazil was associated with the devotional practices of the Japanese community; nowadays, however, it has become a symbol of urban cosmopolitanism and stylish high culture associated with the exotic West. These symbols are strongly valued by Brazilian vanguard intellectuals and the high middle class; they have become their marker of social distinction

from the “backward” Catholic lower classes. In this way, Zen in Brazil is synonymous with a fashionable lifestyle in consonance with its global movement toward inner peace, harmony, ecology, and non-violence. It also represents an antidote to the violence and stressful life of Brazilian cities.

In chapter eight, Albuquerque depicts the way *Seichō-no-Ie*—a religion which in its initial stages of diffusion in Brazil, had the function of preserving the ethnic and cultural heritage of the Japanese migrants—it crossed the borders of the Japanese communities and opened itself up to conversion of non-Japanese Brazilians. According to the author, due to the doctrinal nature of this religious group being essentially syncretic and conciliatory, it became the most successful Japanese new religious group in Brazil. The group reinterpreted Christian notions of guilt and sin with a more optimistic perspective. Furthermore, its notion of Buddhist reincarnation meets the Brazilian Kardecist idea of reincarnation. In addition, the group allows double religious affiliation, representing an alternative spirituality to urban Brazilians who were discontented with traditional Catholicism.

Chapter nine originally appeared as a chapter in the author’s previous book. Matsuoka points out that the acceptance of a religious group in a new environment depends on several interwoven socio-economic, political, and religious factors. In this article he concentrates his analyses on the religious factors and doctrinal aspects of the Church of World Messianity in an attempt to understand the success of this group in Brazil. As with Albuquerque, Matsuoka also stresses the importance of a syncretic nature for the diffusion of this group’s ideas in Brazil. He shows some continuity between Catholic and Messianity doctrines: to highlight this continuity, the group incorporated a Portuguese version of the Lord’s Prayer that is almost the same as the one used in Catholicism. Matsuoka also indicates similarities between Messianity and Kardecist practices: the rituals of both groups constitute the transference of positive energy from one person to another by hand. As such, these similarities and continuities facilitate the understanding and acceptance of Messianity among middle class Brazilians who are searching for this-worldly benefit practices.

Pereira depicts how *Sōka Gakkai* entered Brazil and became one of the most prominent Japanese religions among non-Japanese. He starts chapter ten by asking, “How can we explain the success of a religion that comes from the heterodox and fundamentalist tradition of Nichiren Buddhism in the largest Catholic nation in the world?” To answer this question, the author gives a historical outline of the group in Japan and Brazil. He then describes how *Sōka Gakkai* crossed the borders of the Japanese communities and overcame the negative images disseminated by the media in the 1960s, explaining the strategies utilized by the group to spread its teachings, to gain legitimacy, and be appealing to Brazilians. In the quest for acceptance among Brazilians, the group, who have an exclusivist philosophy, softened their practices and sometimes incorporated elements of Brazilian religiosity, such as taking the mystical law of the Lotus Sutra as a metaphor for the notion of God. Despite a few incorporations, the group’s organizational structure and orientation in Brazil

is aligned with Tokyo, and ethnic Japanese still maintain the top positions in the organization.

Finally, I must point out that this is the kind of work whose assortment and excellence stretches the mind of this reviewer to find fault. I believe that this book is very useful for students and for those, like me, who do research on Japanese religions among diasporas. This book contains an interesting overview of the diffusion of these groups outside of Japanese communities; and, in addition to a proper analysis, each chapter gives a short but handy introduction to the history and precepts of the group being analyzed. The chapters are kept to an appropriate length and can be easily finished in one session. I should mention, however, that the articles in this volume concentrate mainly on the diffusion of Japanese religions beyond the Japanese ethnic communities, and studies related to the current situation of Japanese traditional religious groups within the Japanese communities are not covered.

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