

Despite these reservations and the overly narrative style, Seager does take up accusations against the Sōka Gakkai, apparently changing his attitude from initial scepticism, doubts and critical thoughts to a better understanding of the movement. It is interesting to follow him and to see how he pursues his studies, arranges his ideas and impressions, and draws conclusions out of them. *Encountering the Dharma* is not only enjoyable to read, but engaging, informative, and revealing. The book introduces one of the most influential new religious movements in Japan, which is also known as an international Buddhist movement, and provides a good overall view of the development of the Sōka Gakkai.

*Zen in Brazil: The Quest for Cosmopolitan Modernity.* Cristina Rocha. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006. xii + 256 pages. \$37.00 cloth, ISBN 0-8248-2976-X.

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The book under review, written by the Brazilian anthropologist Cristina Rocha, explores the way Zen Buddhism has been perceived and adapted in Brazil, focusing on “upper- and upper-middle class urban Brazilians” (p. 4). A considerable part of it is dedicated to the results of Rocha’s fieldwork and her monitoring internet resources, in particular, the e-mail list Buddhismo-L. The book is divided into five chapters, an introduction and a brief conclusion.

Chapter One focuses first on a historical overview of Japanese immigration to Brazil and the way it has developed in a religious context. In particular, it explores the history of the Sōtō school mission in Brazil and the establishment of Busshin-ji temple in São Paulo from the 1950s. A great deal of space is dedicated to the case of the non-Japanese-Brazilian nun, Coen-sensei, abbess of this temple from 1995 to 2001, who after her dismissal opened a new one, Tenzui Zen Dōjō, in the same city. This is, according to the author, “a good example of how Zen has become creolized in Brazil,” since various activities linked to both Zen Buddhist and Catholic practices are performed there (p. 54). In this part of the book, as well as in other chapters, Rocha’s analysis of the adaptation of Zen Buddhism which has occurred in Brazil is interesting. She succeeds in depicting the way Zen Buddhism, and other traditions like Tibetan Buddhism for example, have been “creolized”—to use the author’s word—namely, their adaptation to and interaction with other, pre-existing religious practices. Closely linked to this issue is the role Zen Buddhism, or better still, a construction of it which appealed to Euro-American countries, has played in this ‘adapted’ form for its success in Brazil among the white, upper-middle urban class.

This is further analysed in Chapter Two, entitled “Non-Japanese Brazilians and the Orientalist Shaping of Zen,” which, as the title suggests, focuses on the influence orientalism has had in shaping the “Brazilian cultural elite’s perception of Japan, Buddhism in general, and Zen” (p. 63). In this regard, Rocha asserts that Brazilian artists and intellectuals, as well as the general public, have been deeply influenced “by ideas of Orientalism originating from cultural centers in the West, such as France, England, and the United States,” or “directly through assumptions about the ‘authenticity’ of Japan itself” (p. 63). These are two of the reasons why Zen Buddhism has reached the elite culture in Brazil, going beyond the Sōtō temples themselves. Rocha further claims that Japanese immigrants were not considered by the Brazilian cultural elite as depositaries of “authentic” Japanese culture basically for two reasons: they came from a “‘modern’ and degraded Japan” and they were lacking in cultural refinement, due to “their status as peasants, at the time of their arrival in Brazil” (p. 63). In short, they did not meet the elite culture’s image of Zen and Japan, which was considered as a symbol of prestige for non-Japanese-Brazilian intellectuals. The role of the latter in helping shape Zen Buddhism in Brazil is investigated in this chapter, as well as the appeal Zen has had because of its ‘constructed’ status as a philosophical and aesthetic system rather than a religious one. Also due to the activity of its intellectuals, Brazil was connected with the Buddhist trend which developed in Euro-American countries, even though Buddhism in the former area found its peak about twenty years later, from the late 1990s on (pp. 78–80).

Chapter Three enters more deeply into the multifaceted Brazilian religious context and the way Zen Buddhism (and other traditions, mainly Tibetan Buddhism) has found its place within it. It explores how Buddhism was adopted by the Brazilian cultural elite as a reaction to “backward” Catholicism (p. 91) and how the presence of other religious practices, such as Spiritism and Umbanda, offered fertile ground for the spread of Zen Buddhism. The author also highlights the fact that followers of both Spiritism and a lineage of Umbanda, which traces its origins back to the “Orient” (mainly India), belong to the same strata of society as those of Zen Buddhism (p. 96), arguing that “The gap between Brazilian culture and Zen Buddhism has been bridged through the creolization of Zen Buddhist ideas of karma, rebirth, and the individual’s responsibility for his/her own enlightenment (*jiriki*) with Spiritist concepts” (p. 97). Also in the case of Umbanda, which reinterpreted ideas taken from Theosophy, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the “theory of karma and reincarnation as a way of returning to earth to evolve spiritually” is of fundamental importance (p. 98). Interestingly, in a lineage of Umbanda called “Line of the East/Orient” or “Esoteric Umbanda,” among the other gods, we find that Hotei, one of the *Shichifukujin* (the seven gods of fortune), occupies an important place and is also present on the Umbanda altar (pp. 98–100). These are good examples of “creolization” of Buddhism in Brazil as provided in this book.

Chapter Four explores the creation of a Zen Buddhist, or a more general Buddhist, imaginary through the media in order to attract the upper-middle strata of Brazilian society. Such representative strategies, in which Zen conveys the idea of inner peace, tranquillity, simplicity, harmony, and meditation, as occurring in Europe and the United States, have brought to create a Brazilian vocabulary in which the term “Zen” has been used in various contexts since the 1960s, such as “Zen gymnastic” (“classes that integrate body and mind, such as the ‘prajna ball’ and ‘chi ball’” p. 131), and “Zen person,” which means a calm and peaceful person. Besides, the term was once used in 2002 by a famous Brazilian politician, who spoke of a “Zen phase” of his presidential campaign (p. 131). Rocha further observes that the appeal to values such as non-violence, compassion, inner peace, and harmony, all of which are closely linked with the imaginary of Buddhism, has found fertile ground in Brazil also because of its historical, economic and social development. She shows that while the upper-middle strata of society, which “have financial security and so can wait for the benefits of meditation and Buddhist teachings,” were fascinated by Buddhism, the lower (and poorer) strata shifted their interest from Catholicism to Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, and Neo-Pentecostalism “in search of immediate material results in the last decades” (p. 142). In this chapter, the fashionable side of Zen (see, for instance, the role played by TV celebrities) has been highlighted, as well as the characteristics of cosmopolitanism and cultural superiority which adherents to Buddhism claim.

In the fifth and last chapter, Rocha draws attention to the “creolization” of Buddhist practices in Brazil, where they have been either transformed or newly created (like “baptism”), and this is also due to the usual Catholic background of Buddhist followers. In a section entitled “Non-Japanese Brazilians: Born Catholic, Die Buddhist,” she observes, providing some examples, that “it is not unusual for non-Japanese members of the *zazenkai* to turn to Buddhism at the time of death” (p. 173); or again that weddings and “baptism” (during which the *rōshi* sprinkles water over the baby with a twig, pp. 181, 183) are usually performed for non-Japanese adherents. Conversely, it is quite common for Japanese-Brazilians to baptize their babies in the Catholic church, as they were converted to Catholicism after their arrival in Brazil, while it seems a common practice to have their funeral rites at Buddhist temples, as one interviewee noted (p. 182). On the one hand, the author concludes, non-Japanese-Brazilians have “creolized” the way of doing Zen; on the other, some Japanese-Brazilians, most of them Catholics, have “converted” to Zen Buddhism also in order “to recuperate their Japanese identity,” while others have turned to Tibetan Buddhism since they felt Zen was too institutionalized and had “too little ‘spirituality’” (pp. 191–192).

While the book under review is quite interesting in depicting the interactions of different religious systems and their adaptations in Brazil in a modern and

contemporary light, which can be also applied on a more general level, some points of criticism have to be made. The book reveals sometimes a quite loose usage of Buddhist terminology, such as “Jōdo Shinshū monk” (pp. 166, 178, 182), which is inadequate due to the non-monastic character of this tradition; and sometimes while analysing the phenomenon of the Buddhist reception in Brazil, the differences among the various Buddhist traditions are not completely clear. As regards the explanations of Buddhist concepts, Rocha relies too much (actually, her only given source) on the *Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, which is not particularly accurate and proposes a biased vision of Buddhism (starting from its introductory guide in which Zen is opposed to the overall Buddhist tradition due to its particular—“own independent”—development). In a book which, among other things, deals with orientalist interpretations and the construction of Zen Buddhist imaginaries, one would expect to find more reliable references. Considering this, among other examples in the text, the explanation of *jiriki* (pp. 217–218 n. 13), for instance, does not take into account the various implications of the concepts of *jiriki* and *tari-ki* in Japanese Buddhism, confusing their level of interpretations in different Japanese Buddhist traditions, and reducing this complex matter in the simplification *jiriki* = *zazen* and *tari-ki* = Amida Buddha. (See also p. 221 n. 58 on the term *rakusu*, in which the use of the too general expression “*Mahāyāna* Buddhism” is misleading.)

*Zen in Brazil*, as mentioned previously, is written from an anthropological perspective. However, Rocha does not take into consideration, or worse, seems even to diminish other disciplines, as when she incorrectly asserts that “While sociologists and religious scholars who address Buddhism in the West have been useful in constructing typologies and attempting to chart the number of followers, Buddhism in Asia has received scholarly attention mostly from anthropologists,” providing also some names to support her idea (p. 190. Here she mentions Reader, presumably Ian Reader who teaches Religious Studies at Lancaster University, England). Unfortunately, she does not seem quite aware of the many studies conducted on Buddhism in Asia, for instance, by scholars of the study of religions.

Overall, apart from these remarks and from the fact that sometimes the book does not completely fulfil its initial assumptions, *Zen in Brazil* provides valuable new information about the development of Buddhism, and Sōtō Zen Buddhism in particular, in the Brazilian context.