

Eastern religions in Latin America

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The thematic session of the current issue of JLAR throws a light on traditions which are frequently neglected by statistical surveys of the religious fields of Latin American countries. If they are considered at all, they are generally put together under the umbrella of numerical irrelevant “other religions,” a category which mirrors their minority status in Latin American societies dominated by Catholicism and emergent Protestantism.

Among these outnumbered currents, Buddhism has enjoyed a certain degree of attention by a handful of researchers, including the authors whose contributions on related topics have been selected for publication. Carini familiarizes our readers with the history, institutional manifestations, profile of followers, the social impact, and future scenarios of Buddhism in his home-country, Argentina. In addition to Carini’s more general observations, Welsch offers specific background information about the Argentinian branch of Soka Gakkai. According to the author, the neo-Buddhist organization can count on approximately 30.000 adherents which raises the question of what elements make Soka Gakkai the most competitive Buddhist community in Argentina. The research note submitted by Gonçalves and Vilar offers an overview of the evolution of the Brazilian branch of the Shinshu Otani-ha Order, its role for the propagation of Amida-Buddhism in South America, and its efforts to overcome its former ethnic restrictions and to reach out to a wider audience.

From a different geographical context stems the next article on Buddhism. It was submitted by Cherry, Budak, and Ramos and investigates the religious self-concepts of Latin American frequenters of the Lama Meditation Center in Houston, Texas, and the modes and degrees of their conversion to Buddhism.

Mercedes Saizar widens the substantial horizon of this issue through her synopsis of the history of Hinduism in Argentina, covering aspects such as the reception of Vedanta-Philosophy in the early twentieth century, the catalyst-role of Yoga, activities

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of neo-Hindu movements, and the absorption of Hindu elements by the New Age-Spirituality.

Rafael Shoji explores the process of transplantation of Shintoism first brought to Brazil by Japanese immigrants in form of State-Shinto and later modified by subsequent generations already socialized under the conditions of a country whose population is known for its syncretic tendencies.

Ignacio López-Calvo is interested in the repercussions of Eastern religions in the work of authors including Neruda and Borges. In his research note, André Bueno identifies a threefold imaginary of Confucius which has developed in Brazil despite, or better, because of the underdevelopment of academic sinological studies.

Besides these contributions to the reflections to the presence and the impact of Eastern religious traditions in Latin America, two “original papers” were included in this issue. Moreira’s contribution to this rubric thematizes the role of “market-driven aestheticization” and “spectacularization” for the contemporary religious field. The author draws on examples symptomatic for Brazil but emphasizes that the discussed tendencies are not limited to this immediate context. The article submitted by Bigliardi confronts the approach of the Italian author Giovanni Lattanzi to the psychoactive substances Kambo e Iboga with the categories of “dislocation” suggested by Andrew Dawson in the context of his analysis of Santo Daime.

Two interviews, one with the cofounder of the Research Network on Islam in Mexico, the other with representatives of the Pará Association for Scholars of Religion (Brazil), and two book-reviews complete the list of articles included in the present issue of the JLAR.