

## Research Article

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Sociologiques*, 2000, volume XXXI, 3.

Reviewed by

Alioune Koné, doctoral candidate  
*E.H.E.S.S. (France)*

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**"Le Bouddhisme en Occident: Approches sociologiques et anthropologiques,"** *Recherches Sociologiques*, 2000, volume XXXI, 3.

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Until the mid-1980s very few publications dealt with the presence of Buddhism in contemporary France. Although a few historians and sociologists studied immigrant Buddhism, little analysis of conversions to Buddhism by French or other European nationals was available.

*Recherches sociologiques*, a celebrated Belgian-based publication of Louvain's Catholic University, has been keeping its audience abreast of current developments in (mostly) francophone sociology for more than twenty years. Its 2000 issue reviewed here partially reflects the recent growth of a subfield constituted around the study of the influence of Buddhism in Western countries. (1)

Lionel Obadia (University of Lille, France), one of the prominent new contributors to this field, collects, translates, and introduces this collection. He also presents recent publications to a French-speaking audience. (2)

In the present reviewer's opinion, this collection goes far beyond the stated goal of "presenting to a French-speaking audience current research and authors within Buddhist studies and Religionwissenschaft" (p. 2, my translation). Although the subfield encompasses almost as many approaches as authors, I believe Obadia's

choices for this volume are fertile perspectives and discussions allowing a better understanding of Buddhism in contemporary Western countries.

The title of the collection itself is a strong clue to the volume's orientation. "Le bouddhisme en Occident" (Buddhism in the West) contrasts with "Western Buddhism," which carries advocacy undertones and might better apply to only one component of contemporary Buddhist practice. Obadia points out in his introduction that the majority of Buddhists in "the West" are immigrants, a fact virtually ignored by media, researchers, and advocates focusing solely on efforts to westernize Buddhism (i.e., make it available and understandable to Westerners). Arguably, this focus blends advocacy and description. Obadia's introduction makes it clear that this volume will not be "colluding with the object" and will instead "present the results of patient and cautious research making progress by relying on established standards of rigor and objectivity." (3)

The articles mirror the diversity of Buddhist schools available in Western countries, with a focus on the European situation. Michele Spuler's article on Japanese (and Korean) Zen is the only one that does not focus on European groups. The collection also richly illustrates the variety of approaches in current studies of the phenomenon. Four articles combine to various degrees historical and sociological analysis.

In keeping with the deliberate comparative orientation of the collection, this review will look for differences and similarities in the contributions, using a roughly chronological approach. Martin Baumann (Bremen University, Germany) gives a good comparative standpoint in his finely detailed study of Theravāda Buddhist developments in Europe (p. 7-31). Baumann has researched Buddhism in Europe for more than a decade, using the classical sociohistorical approach of religious studies (*Religionwissenschaft*). His paper presents some of his findings and a helpful breakdown of the history of Buddhism in the Western context. Moreover, he offers a new line of interpretation of Buddhism in the West, suggesting that the often-noted gap between "two Buddhisms" — ethnic and convert Buddhist groups — is best understood as a divide between modernist and traditionalist Buddhisms.

The German researcher outlines three historical periods: a first phase of contacts mainly through Buddhist texts begins in the seventeenth century and ends only in the

early years of the twentieth century. A second stage lasts until the 1950s; Theravāda Buddhism is by then found in academic circles and in a few organizations of converts. Baumann sees this as the beginning of the modernization and globalization of Buddhism. In a third stage starting in the 1960s, Buddhism is one of many options available to spiritual seekers and undergoes a process of pluralization. One can distinguish different types of Theravāda Buddhism, along with other Buddhist schools in Europe, in this context of religious pluralism.

Although this historical partition is clearly intended for Theravāda Buddhism, I will use it as a starting point for comparing the articles, arguing that these stages offer a coherent framework for what I see as the three unifying issues in the collection of articles, beyond the diversity of schools or approaches:

- (1) the diffusion of Buddhism as "texts without context" (i.e., the transformations involved in discovering a religious tradition mainly through scriptures and their translation and interpretation);
- (2) the institutionalization of Buddhism in the West (i.e., the creation of sustainable organizations that define and support the practice of Buddhism outside of Eastern countries);
- (3) Buddhism in an era of religious pluralism (i.e., the changes and adaptations involved in becoming one religious choice among others).

### *1. Buddhism as texts without context*

Martin Baumann's paper begins with a historical outline of Theravāda Buddhism in Europe, tracing the forgotten (and unsuccessful) efforts by Narai, king of Siam, to send Buddhist emissaries to Portugal in 1686. After this first false start, the progressive discovery of Buddhist texts, fueled by Christian missionary efforts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, led to the conceptualization of Buddhism as a coherent school by Western academics in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the eighteenth century, however, academics relied mainly on Mahāyāna texts from Nepal, Tibet, and China to define "Buddhism."

According to Baumann, 1880 was a turning point. The study of Pāli texts began in earnest, with the creation of the Pāli Text Society (1881) and the publication that year

of Hermann Oldenberg's major study of Buddhism. The focus on a supposedly "original," "pure," and mainly textual Buddhism brought cognitive and doctrinal aspects to the forefront of Western interest in Buddhism. Baumann notes that to a minority of self-professed Buddhists, existential involvement in Buddhism meant entering a monastic career. He reviews pioneers of that conception of being a *European Buddhist*.

Three remarks by Baumann on this first stage can be found in other articles in this collection. First, he notes that a common feature of intellectual and convert interpretations of Buddhism was emphasis on the rational aspect of this religion, seen as relying on individual inquiry and experimentation rather than on dogma and authority. Contrasting Buddhism with Christianity, both intellectuals and converts insisted on the individual's examination of the doctrine and the effort to not merely accept the teachings but verify them for him- or herself.

Second, Baumann underlines that this interpretation of Buddhism as compatible with science is closely related to social and political developments in Asia. He points out the key role of a new class of Asian Buddhists such as Don David Hewavitarne (aka Anagarika Dharmapala), who represented (interpreted) Buddhism at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. Those Asian Buddhists were concerned with the modernization of their religion in the context of colonialism, borrowing from successful Christian features and vocabulary and Western science to reshape their own tradition. In this process, they discarded "superstitious" or "nonessential" aspects of popular Buddhism.

Third, Baumann signals the difficulties encountered by the first converts such as Ananda Metteyya, who undertook to transplant in Europe the lifestyle and practices of Theravāda *bhikkhus* (monks). For example, not only did Metteyya lack the financial resources for his European organizations to thrive — *bhikkhus* are supported by donations from lay believers, which implies a large enough audience — but the misfortune of his efforts in Europe, contrasting with the persisting effects of his endeavors in Asia, suggests that the new context demanded adaptations.

Echoes of these three points can be found throughout the collection. In particular, Michelle Spuler encounters a very comparable pattern in her analysis of the reshaping

of Japanese Zen Buddhism for Westerners. Her paper shows the diversity of Zen Buddhist forms or practices found in Western countries today. These forms actually diverge to the point where, according to the author, the very definition of Zen becomes a new *koan*, one of those enigmatic questions addressed by the master to his disciples to challenge their understanding of the teachings and foster deeper realization (p. 34).

Spuler examines the common definitions of Zen, ranging from its historical and cultural definition to essential characters or practices, including the link to the Buddha or the transmission from master to disciple. The Australian researcher convincingly demonstrates that none of those features has remained unchanged in the adoption of Zen by Westerners, concluding that there are no undisputable criteria of the authenticity of Zen practice.

Baumann's three points on this first stage illuminate Spuler's demonstration. Spuler mentions that the Zen teachers who came to the West were reformers of their tradition in their home countries. Using as an example the Sanbō Kyōdan school of Zen founded by Harada Dai'un Sogaku, the researcher notes that this movement, very influential in the West through the Diamond Sangha and its nonsectarian approach and lay emphasis, was hardly traditional. The Japanese organization departed from its Japanese Sōtō affiliation as early as 1954, criticizing the latter's focus on rituals above the search for realization (*satori*). The idea of a return to the essence of Zen, beyond cultural accretions, is found in different Western Zen circles (Spuler rightly quotes from successors of prominent Western teachers Taisen Deshimaru and Thich Nhat Hanh).

The historical and sociological orientation of the volume suggests two perspectives on the case of Japanese Zen Buddhism in Europe presented by Spuler. I offer these as echoes rather than criticisms of a highly stimulating article.

First, it could be argued that the changes, adaptations, and reinterpretations described by Spuler should be traced back to the modernization of Japanese Buddhism in the Meiji era, along the lines of a reaction to Western domination. This could explain the paradox recently pointed out by Brian Victoria, noting that the most active Zen lineages in the West were also deeply involved in the making of a nationalistic view

of Zen Buddhism. The Japanese Buddhist lineages that spearheaded the establishment of networks of practitioners outside Japan are best seen as part of a broader movement of modernization of Buddhism in Asia prompted by colonization and cultural contacts with the West. Making their practices and lineages available to Westerners was part of a broader goal of renovating Buddhism. Nationalism and missionary efforts would then appear as manifestations of Japanese Zen's struggle to adapt to a new era.

Similarly, the periods distinguished by Baumann for Theravāda Buddhism could be applied to Zen in Europe. Distinguishing periods and means of dissemination of Zen practice could shed light on the contexts that led to the diversity of Zen practices and tenets that Spuler superbly documents. In the first stage (from the first contacts with Zen texts to the 1920s), contacts and diffusion were almost exclusively textual and direct experience of Buddhist practices was confined to travelers, scholars, or clerics. As interest in various Asian meditation practices and rituals grew in the late 1950s, a larger public of Westerners was drawn to Zen by advocates of Buddhism such as D. T. Suzuki, Eugen Herrigel, and Alan Watts. These writers inspired members of the baby-boom generation to take on the actual practices and rituals of Japanese Zen.

This second stage was facilitated by the arrival in Europe of trained Zen teachers. The influx came to be known as the "Zen boom," a blooming of centers dedicated to formal Zen practice. In the process of creating viable institutions to sustain and provide Zen practice, the issue arose of the need — or lack thereof — to adapt some of the features of Japanese Zen. The relationship between lay followers and a monastic clergy, the role of women in religious matters, and the relevance and adaptability of Asian hierarchical structures were some of the issues that led practitioners to question the Japanese model in newly established Zen centers and groups.

During the third stage (from the late 1980s to the present), Zen Buddhists have had to establish themselves as part of a diversified Buddhist presence. Two additional challenges appear: ensuring an official recognition and appreciation of Buddhism, which implies the development of representative organizations and authorities, and maintaining balance between the various schools and lineages.

Refining the rough chronology proposed here could help our understanding of the

social processes at work in the (re)creation of Zen Buddhist lineages, schools, and organizations by allowing us to differentiate stages and social dynamics in the diffusion of Zen in the West.

Similarly, Obadia distinguishes different stages in the presence of Buddhism in Europe. He underlines (pp. 73-74) that in the first phase of diffusion of Buddhist ideas as texts, the adaptation of Buddhist tenets by Westerners took place without "any form of control by monastic Asian authorities" (p. 74). He notes that the resultant weak institutions led unnamed "French researchers" to assimilate Buddhism into New Religious Movements and to describe its adoption as an eclectic assemblage of religious aspects drawn from various traditions ("bricolage"). Obadia challenges this position, arguing instead for the importance of institutions in the diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism outside its birth country. This constitutes the second theme found throughout the collection.

In the second stage outlined by Baumann for Theravāda Buddhism in Europe, the tradition underwent institutionalization and adaptation. Wherever a leader could mobilize individuals and resources, stable European organizations were founded to support Buddhist practice in the early 1920s. In the case studied by Baumann, and arguably in others, the creation of institutions and publications to support and define Buddhist organizations was concomitant with significant changes and adaptations in doctrine. Different backgrounds led to different doctrinal interpretations, which in turn contributed to the birth of different strands of "Western" Buddhism. Christmas Humphreys's Buddhism, for example, is heavily influenced by theosophical sources. In Germany, Paul Dahlke and Georg Grimm provided diverging interpretations of Buddhist tenets leading to a small schism in German Buddhism.

## *2 Institutionalization and adaptations*

Adaptation to a new context and the importance of institutions are key to comparing the findings presented by Elke Hahlbohm-Helmus and Obadia, who researched Tibetan Buddhism in Germany and France, respectively. The former uses systems theory and the relationship between function and performance as an analytic device to explore the importance of Tibetan institutions. The latter provides a sociological analysis of the role of these institutions and claims that this institutional aspect has been ignored by recent French sociological analysis.



Hahlbohm-Helmus imaginatively applies the systems theory concepts of performance and function to Tibetan Buddhism. By function the German researcher designates the training of a body of religious experts, whereas by performance she means "the use of religion to problems generated in other aspects of social life." In this case resisting political oppression is what Tibetan Buddhism is used for.

Hahlbohm-Helmus demonstrates that the reestablishment of a political process in India and the career of Tibetan Buddhism in "the West" are "interconnected like the sides of the same coin in the pursuit of an era called cold war" [I have no idea what this means!] (p. 51). The article points out a striking juxtaposition by contrasting the birth of Buddhist groups in the West and political events in Tibet and India. To illustrate the potential fecundity of her approach, this review will only underscore three turning points in the phases reconstructed by this article.

The Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 is often mentioned as the beginning of exile. Hahlbohm-Helmus argues that the real turning point in the establishment of Tibetan Buddhist institutions in the West comes later, prompted by China's more aggressive stand on the cold war in the early 1960s (in 1964 China began atomic weapons tests, officially annexed the Autonomous Region of Tibet the following year, and by 1966 began "the Cultural Revolution").

Tibetans were then forced to prepare for a prolonged exile and founded, from 1965 to 1969, centers for studies of their respective schools in India as well as in "the West." Thus the reestablishment of Tibetan Buddhism in the West is best understood in the light of the cold war.

Halbohm-Helmus highlights another important turning point: 1976, the year in which Westerners also began to teach the Tibetan tradition. In 1976 Chögyam Trungpa solemnly designated one of his Western disciples as his heir. That same year the Dalai Lama announced the abolition of the Shugden cult, thus illustrating that the reestablishment of the tradition in exile implied a selection in the tradition rather than a mere transposition of all its facets. The polemics that followed and reached the West only decades later constitute a striking example of the resistance to rapid modernization of a religious tradition.

According to Halbohm-Helmus, the mid-1980s mark a third turning point in the

diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism. The cold war lost momentum, and the rhetoric of urgency to preserve a culture endangered by communism became less prevalent. Environmental and pacifist interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism came to the fore, and the increasing number of *kalachakra* rituals devoted to peace after 1985 signaled a new emphasis on global issues in Tibetan Buddhism.

The historical and political approach of Halbohm-Helmus's article is complemented by Lionel Obadia's sociological approach (pp. 67-88). Arguing in favor of an institutional take on the making of Western Tibetan Buddhism, Obadia champions a deconstruction of the historical biases that lead Westerners to view Buddhism as a nonmissionary religion. This point (also argued by Obadia in volume two of this journal) is that we cannot understand the spread of Buddhism in "the West" and the birth of its organizations without acknowledging the active support and involvement of religious authorities aiming at a wide diffusion of their traditions.

In the light of the performance/function opposition made by Halbohm-Helmus and her chronological approach, Obadia's point seems all the more convincing. However, the researcher from Lille University is on shakier ground when arguing that a paradigm within French sociology of religion prevented earlier researchers from noticing this institutional involvement.

To reduce the entire French sociology of religion to one single paradigmatic "allégeance" (p. 74) is, at best, inaccurate. The alleged domination of this paradigm would make studies on specific organizations undertaken by French sociologists such as Louis Hourmant (or the present reviewer) little more than exceptions in a field supposedly prevented from studying religious institutions. (4) Second, what Obadia labels as French modernist sociology of religion seems to be solely the research by Danièle Hervieu-Léger. Recent publications by Hervieu-Léger are the only ones mentioned when Obadia claims that sociologists of religion went from the study of the laicization to observing the return of religious institutions (p. 84). This prompts Obadia to declare a need to "rethink" the importance of institutions in modern times.

Obadia seems to rely on a somewhat arguable reading of the publications mentioned. (5) My own experience as a researcher seeking to make sense of data collected on one particular organization is that Hervieu-Léger's works do not suggest an inevitable

downfall of religious institutions, nor do they disregard the importance of religious organizations. Rather, conceptual proposals such as the inscription in a "lineage of believers" (*lignée croyante*) indicate that this process is increasingly seen as *voluntary*.

Although rightly pointing out the existence and efficiency of Buddhist institutions, Obadia is not indicating data that falsify a paradigm. Further, his remarks simply do not explain a finding on which most researchers agree: the high turnover of practitioners in European Buddhist centers. If religious institutions, Buddhist or otherwise, were always successful in controlling and spreading their messages, this should not happen. If the notion of paradigm is to be taken seriously in Obadia's paper, we would expect uncovering of data that did not make sense in the old paradigm but that are explained by the new one. Obadia's contribution is remarkable and points to interesting information, but it cannot be considered a paradigm shift.

If indeed more attention should be paid to organizations defining and spreading the Buddhist message, we must wonder what makes some organizations thrive and others barely maintain a limited membership. This constitutes the third underlying theme of the collection.

### *3 Buddhism and religious pluralism*

Determining which organizations thrive calls for closer scrutiny of a double phenomenon of pluralization. On one hand, Buddhism becomes one of many religious options available to individuals who feel free to switch from one lineage of believers to another or to combine the tenets and practices of various traditions. In this sense, Buddhism is one religious option in an increasingly competitive market of religious offerings. On the other hand, the number of Buddhist schools from China, Tibet, and South Asia represented in Europe has grown rapidly in the past two decades, bringing those traditions into potentially closer contact than in their respective homelands. As a consequence, diversity within Buddhism has become more obvious than ever before. How shall we make sense of this diversity in a context of religious pluralism?

Again, Martin Baumann provides a useful typology that can easily be transferred to other traditions. Baumann outlines four types of groups. The first is composed of immigrants or Europeans of Asian descent. According to his estimates (p. 20), they

represent the majority of Buddhists in all but four Western European countries in the late 1990s. The colonial links between France and some of the East Asian countries explain the particularly high percentage of refugees from Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos in France. These immigrants and the second (and sometimes third) generations have established centers and places of worship that replicate the Asian hierarchy between lay people and religious specialists. The latter direct the performance of rituals and the maintenance of the group's cultural and religious identity in a challenging, and often discriminatory context. The former, through their donations and worship, support the body of religious specialists.

A second type is constituted, according to Baumann, of "parallel congregations" (Numrich 1996). In such places as the Dhammapala Monastery in Switzerland and the Chithurst Forest Monastery in Great Britain, groups of converts focus on meditation and lay study of highly specialized, esoteric teachings, whereas Asian worshipers participate mainly in rituals and accumulate merits through services performed by religious specialists.

A third group consists of converts focusing on the cognitive aspect of Buddhism, with an emphasis on reading and intellectual debate. The fourth group is made up of practitioners of the Theravādan meditation ( *Vipassana*, *Samatha*, or *Satipatthana*) led by disciples of Mahasi Sayadaw, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and Satya Narayan Goenka.

Such a typology allows us to revisit the "two Buddhisms." Baumann claims that the opposition here is not so much between ethnic and convert Theravāda as between two movements founded in twentieth-century Buddhism; a traditionalist Theravāda and a modernist Theravāda.

Applying this heuristic distinction to the study of other Buddhist schools in Europe and documenting the changes, shifts, and new interpretations brought by the new contexts could open up new directions of research and help refine our understanding of the creation of various Western strands of Buddhism.

The paper presented by Norbert Chelli and Louis Hourmant is an original step in that direction. Chelli and Hourmant (IRESCO, France) offer a psychosociological analysis of members of Soka Gakkai (pp. 89-102). The authors mention that this group is probably the most studied Buddhist movement. Its rejection of the idea of alternative

paths to enlightenment and its lay organization (emphasized since the break between Soka Gakkai and its clerical parent organization) set this movement apart from other Buddhist groups. Those groups, by contrast, share to some degree recognition of the validity of other groups or religions and some distinctions between religious specialists and lay practitioners.

Factorial analysis of a questionnaire completed by fifty-six Soka Gakkai members provides an innovative way to distinguish Buddhist organizations: paying attention to the declarations of the rank-and-file membership rather than relying solely on the views of authorized members. Chelli and Hourmant were able to map group values, detail changes in personality that members attribute to their conversion, and make comparisons with the general French population. Thus they can describe the values that distinguish Soka Gakkai members from the rest of the host society.

This approach might be helpful in providing contrasts with other different Buddhist groups, which would give us a finer picture of the diversity of Buddhist traditions in Europe, going beyond a sole focus on official discourse or selected, exemplary members.

*Conclusion: Issues in the study of an "elite" religion*

Eric Rommeluère, the only self-professed Buddhist among the authors, offers the most technical paper. He presents a methodological scrutiny of the works published by Frédéric Lenoir (Lenoir 1999) on the sociology and history of Buddhism in France. Unfortunately, Lenoir was not invited to defend his views, which creates a one-sided argument. (6) In this conclusion, I will emphasize the sociological aspects of Rommeluère's critique rather than its actual content, arguing that his paper helps us to sketch the work that remains in this field.

The objects of their studies rarely confront sociologists. As pointed out recently by Beatrice Le Wita, the study of a society by an elite social scientist places that individual in the unusual position of encountering subjects familiar with his or her discipline, its methods, and its publications. (7) Moreover, Le Wita describes how familiarity with social science concepts allows the objects of a study to challenge their researcher's understanding of the group. Rommeluère's critical reading of Lenoir's sociology of Buddhism in France raises important questions from an insider's

perspective, much in the manner described by Le Wita.

Rommeluère raises several questions. What are the proper criteria to account for the number of Buddhists in France? (8) Is the population homogeneous enough to allow generalizations based on Lenoir's survey of a few organizations? To what extent is the discourse of practitioners shaped by the groups to which they belong, thus making it unreliable as a sole source to understand the phenomenon from a sociological perspective? What criteria allow excluding Soka Gakkai from a study on Buddhism in France? To what extent does the success of Buddhism represent the failure of Christian churches to meet the spiritual needs of newer, more secularized generations? How are we to understand these conversions — or attraction without actual conversion — to Buddhism? To what extent can one accept the idea of affinity between Buddhism and modernity proposed by Lenoir, among other commentators?

These questions are crucial to our understanding of Buddhist groups in the West. Although Rommeluère challenges Lenoir's approach on each point, however, he does not provide answers to his own questions. In my opinion, his arguments call for further research rather than a negative assessment of Lenoir's methodology. However, the scope and range of the questions raised by Rommeluère about Lenoir's efforts suggest the work yet to be done and the need for a more sophisticated understanding of Buddhism in Europe. More time for debate among researchers is needed before satisfying answers can emerge, drawing from all the data and research available. This volume not only opens an exciting new field in Buddhist studies but is also highly applicable to our understanding of contemporary religious development in general.

*Notes:*

1. R-P Droit (1997), B. Etienne and R. Liogier (1997), F. Lenoir (1999a ), F. Lenoir (1999b), P. Lequeau (1998), and L. Obadia (1998) have presented new research on the image of Buddhism in Europe and contemporary conversions to Buddhism, with a focus on French developments. It should be mentioned that, apart from parts of L. Obadia's book, most of these publications do not really take into account publications from Buddhist studies.

2. The publications reviewed are M. Clasquin and J. S. Kruger (1999); M. Goldstein and K. Kapstein, eds. (1998); P. Hammond and D. Machacek (1999); D. Lopez

(1998); C. Prebish and K. Tanaka (1998); and D. Williams and C. Queen (1999).

3. "faire l'état de l'avancée de la recherche telle qu'elle se fraye patiemment et prudemment son chemin selon les principes éprouvés de rigueur et d'objectivité" L. Obadia, presentation, p. 1, my translation.

4. For nearly a decade Louis Hourmant has conducted a sociological analysis of the Soka Gakkai movement. Under the supervision of Danièle Hervieu-Léger, I have conducted doctoral research on the making of one "Zen mission" in Europe. None of these studies fits the so-called paradigm that ignores institutions.

5. Danièle Hervieu-Léger's detailed account of her research can be found in "Religion, objet perdu et reconstruit. Un parcours de Recherches" in *Religiologiques*, 9, spring 1994. Available on-line at <http://www.unites.uqam.ca/religiologiques/no9/>.

6. Interested readers will find in the following volume of *Recherches Sociologiques* a response by Frédéric Lenoir with a foreword by the journal's editors.

7. Beatrice Le Wita (1989). *Ni vue ni connue. Approche ethnographique de la culture bourgeoise*. Paris: Editions Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

8. Incidentally, this could be seen as an implicit endorsement of the views of the French Buddhist umbrella organization Union Bouddhiste de France, U.B.F. To the present day the UBF denies Sokka Gakkai admission as a genuine Buddhist tradition. Soka Gakkai is often perceived in France as a cult ("secte"). See Hourmant (1999).

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