Zen Buddhism in Japanese History and Culture

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Course Description

This course introduces Zen philosophy, history, and religious practice, with an emphasis on its historical connections to Kyoto and its survival in today's city. After an introduction to Zen's origins in India and China, we will study its impact on the art and culture of Japan from the twelfth century to today, surveying a number of different art forms. We will make several field trips to temples, museums, theaters and other cultural sites where we will witness and analyze Zen's lasting impact on the aesthetic outlook and artistic production in Japan.

Important Disclaimer

I have been teaching a version of this course at Colby College over the past decade, but I still can't say that I know a lot about Zen and art, because the more I learn the more apparent my ignorance becomes. What is the most important lesson I've learned by teaching this course about art and Zen? That embracing *Not Knowing* is a wonderful practice. Not Knowing provides the space for uncertainty, change, questions, and discovery. Not Knowing assumes that each encounter with a work of art (or a person, place, event, etc.) is a new experience, and I will be changed by that encounter. In other words, Not Knowing opens my mind and allows me to learn. Please join me in Not Knowing!

Learning Objectives, or What You Will Do in this Course

1. You will communicate in writing and speech about the history, philosophy, and practices of Zen Buddhism, and identify commonly-held misconceptions about Zen.

2. You will interpret a variety of Japanese art forms through the lens of Zen concepts and practices.

3. You will recognize and describe how belief systems, social expectations, and daily activities condition people's aesthetic and perceptual responses to the world. You will also be able to reflect on the aesthetic dimensions of your own beliefs and practices, especially in the context of your study-abroad experience.

4. You will integrate Zen practices into your own daily activities as an adjunct to "book learning".

Texts

- *Zen Past and Present*. Eric Cunningham. Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2011.

- Articles, images, and videos, available at our course webpage at Perusall.com. PLEASE NOTE: we do not use Moodle in this course.

Course Requirements and Grading

1. **Class Attendance and Participation (10%)**
   This course follows the rules of attendance outlined in the AKP Student Handbook. Please devote yourself to showing up *consistently* and engaging *intentionally* in building a strong and inclusive learning community; if you do that, you will get an "A" in this component of the course.

2. **Class Preparation, (30%)**
   We will be using the online discussion and annotation platform Perusall.com for our pre-class reading and viewing activities. Assessment will be based on completion: if you do the reading assignment on time and make the required number of comments on Perusall, you get credit. It is possible to get 100% in this component of the grade by consistently completing the out-of-class readings.

   HOWEVER, comments, questions, and reflections posted on Perusall *must be your own words and your own work*. DO NOT USE AI TOOLS to assist you in reading the materials for this class. I know that it's tempting to get a summary, but the result is that you will miss engaging with the voices of ancient Zen teachers, thinkers, and poets which are rich with nuance, wit, and cultural specificity.

3. **Embodied Practice, Reflective Journal, Short Essays (30%)**
   Zen Buddhism claims that mind and body are not separate. We test this idea by learning with our whole bodies – not just our brains – through a series of three projects involving "embodied practice." The practices are not designed for developing spiritual insight or learning how to be a Buddhist; they are rather experiences that allow students to understand the material of the class from a different perspective.

   Weeks 2 - 5: Zazen (Zen meditation), at least five days per week.
   Weeks 6 - 9: Ritualized artistic practice, at least 5 days per week
   Weeks 10 - 13: Activating poetic language in our lives, at least 5 days per week

   You should prepare to **set aside at least 15 minutes per day, for five days in a week**, to give yourself enough time to do the practice and make notes in your journal.

   Assessment of this component will be in three parts:

   1. consistent independent practice (self-assessed and reported weekly)
   2. weekly reflective journal entry, based on a prompt provided by Prof. Weitz

3. three short writing assignments, one for each project, based on specific prompts

4. **Test on Zen Basics (15%)**
   This early assessment will provide a context for you to consolidate your understanding of the terms and concepts we have discussed in class. You'll answer some multiple choice and short answer questions, and write a brief essay. Occurs in Week 4.

5. **Independent Project (15%)**.
   Each student will research a person, place, or object from Kyoto's rich history. Results will be presented orally in class, and through a written or digital/visual product.

Academic Integrity

I value honesty and integrity, and hope to inspire a similar value system in my students. As you will learn in this course, Zen Buddhists believe in "self-action" 自力 （じりき）, working diligently to achieve a goal through individual effort. I encourage all students to have a similar attitude toward their learning! This class will strictly abide with the AKP policy on Academic Honesty:

> All work for classes taken while on AKP must be the student's own. Academic misconduct will result in a grade penalty for any one assignment or the course as a whole, with the maximum penalty for any one instance of academic misconduct being an overall course grade of F.
> Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to: (1) cheating on a quiz, test, or exam; (2) altering your answers after a quiz, test, or exam has been returned; (3) copying work from a classmate; (4) providing answers to a classmate; (5) plagiarism.
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> Use of generative AI for any assignment, including commenting on readings in Perusall, is not permitted in this class. A Zen monk cannot outsource their awakening, and you should not pretend that you can outsource the development of your mind either.

Community Standards

I expect all students to adhere to the AKP Community Standards:

> In order to succeed in its mission, AKP prioritizes an environment of cultural and intellectual exchange in which all participants can successfully pursue both academic and personal growth. As such, all members of the AKP community (including students, faculty, staff, and host families) are expected to uphold a set of community standards, including but not limited to:
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> • Abiding by AKP policies and procedures.
> • Respecting all members of the AKP community, including students, faculty, staff, and host families.

• Respecting the customs, culture, and laws of Kyoto and Japan.
• Respecting the policies and facilities of Doshisha University.
• Respecting the diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, ideas, and opinions of individuals within the AKP community. This includes responsibly exercising one's freedom of expression in a way that respects the well-being of others.
• Respecting and actively looking out for the well-being of others within the AKP community.

Accomodations

This course follows all AKP policies on Disabilities and Accomodations, as described in the handbook. Please contact me early in the course should you need any accommodations for learning differences or other issues. I am eager to work with you and support your learning in this course.

Week One: Introduction

1. Zen is…. (discussion exploring our current understandings of what the word "Zen" means and investigating our cultural expectations; becoming aware of how we view the world as individuals)
    - *Zen Past and Present*, Ch 1.

2. Introduction to Buddhism (lecture/discussion)
    - *Zen Past and Present*, Ch 2.

Week Two: Zen as Buddhist Practice

1. Zazen Training (Meeting with a Zen priest or other seasoned practitioner to learn how to sit)
    - Reading: Changlu Zongze on Meditation

*****Begin Embodied Practice, Part One, Zazen*

2. The Life of Monks and Nuns (lecture/discussion)
    - Reading: Morinaga Sōkō, "My Struggle to Become a Zen Monk"

Field trip: Shokokuji, meet with monk or teacher to learn meditation?

Week Three: History

1. A Brief History of Chinese Chan, part 1 (lecture)
    - *Zen Past and Present*, Chapter 3 and 4
    - Reading: Huineng, "Autobiography," from *The Platform Sutra*

2. Rules for Chan and Zen Monasteries (lecture)
    - Reading: Excerpts from Changlu Zongze's "Rules for Purity"
    - Optional Reading: Alan Cole, "Rules for Purity: Handbooks for Running Chan Monasteries," from *Patriarchs on Paper: A Critical History of Medieval Chan Literature* (2016

Week Four: History

1. Japanese Zen: Introduction to Rinzai and Soto Schools (lecture)
    - *Zen Past and Present*, Chapter 5 & 6
    - Reading: Eisai, "Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the State"
    - Reading: Dogen, "How to Practice Buddhism"

2. Test on Zen Basics

Week Five: Zen Temple Architecture

1. Zen Temple Layout and Architecture of the Rinzai Sect (lecture)
    - Reading: Excerpts from Helmut Brinker, et al., eds. *ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, Artibus Asiae. Supplementum, Vol. 40. Stable link: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1522704

2. Zen Temple Clothing (lecture), and In-class discussion of Embodied Practice (debrief EP1 and get ready for EP2)
    - G. Victor Sogen Hori, "Teaching and Learning in the Rinzai Zen Monastery," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1994), pp. 20-35. http://www.jstor.org/stable/132782

******End of First Embodied Practice, Reflection Essay Due in Class this day; with will discuss it and prepare for second embodied practice during this class session*

Possible Field trip: Tofuku-ji (or other temple) to study architecture, and the physical organization that mapped the social and spiritual practices of the temple bureaucracy and religious practices

Week Six: Relics as Aesthetic Objects: Portraits, Calligraphy, and Painting

1. The Cult of Relics (lecture and brush practice)
    - Reading: Study Images of Zen Portrait Sculptures and Calligraphy

******Begin Embodied Practice, Part Two (ritual)*

2. Landscape Painting (lecture and brush practice)
    - Reading: Study Images of Landscape Paintings

Week Seven: Zen Painting and Poetry

1. Painting: Gods and Patriarchs (lecture)
    - Reading: Study Images of Paintings and Inscriptions

2. Japanese Haiku, Haiga, and Zenga (lecture and hands-on activity)
    - Reading: Stephen Addiss, "Introduction" (pages 1-14) *The Art of Haiku: Its History through Poems and Paintings by Japanese Masters*. 2012.
    - Reading: Study Zenga Images and their Inscriptions

Week Eight: MA: Space and Time in Zen Gardens

1. Muso Soseki and the Development of Zen Gardens (lecture)
    - Review: *Zen Past and Present*, Ch. 6.
    - Reading: Muso Soseki, "Selected Poems"
    - Reading: Study Images of Byodo-in, Saiho-ji, and Tenryu-ji

2. Zen Philosophy and the Garden: What is "Ma"? (lecture and MAYBE viewing of Arita Isozaki's film, "Ma: Space and Time in the Garden at Ryoan-ji")
    - Reading: Study Images of Daisen-in and Ryoan-ji
    - Optional Reading: Joseph D. Parker, "Buddhist Illusion and the Landscape Arts," Chapter 5 in *Zen Buddhist Landscape Arts of Early Muromachi Japan (1336-1573)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Field trip ideas: Visit to a Zen garden. Daisen-in and Ryoan-ji would be wonderful. Or Maybe we can reserve a Saiho-ji tour.

Week Nine: WABI/SABI in the Art of Tea (Chanoyu)

1. Chanoyu: History, Aesthetics, and Practice (lecture) and In-class debriefing on EP2 and intro to EP3 (discussion)
    - Reading: Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 55, No. 4 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 377-385. http://www.jstor.org/stable/430925

****** End of Embodied Practice, Part Two, Essay / Reflection due on ___*

2. Tea Ceremony Utensils
    - Reading: Study images of tea utensils

****** Begin Embodied Practice, Part Three (Poetry in Action)*

Field Trip idea: Urasenke Konnichi-an and/or Omotesenke Fushin-an, with a tour of the grounds and/or hands-on training
Field Trip idea: Kyoto National Museum to see featured exhibition on tea wares (Layered Histories: Renowned Tea Utensils and their Boxes" (includes the Kizaemon teabowl!)

Week Ten: YUGEN: The Dream-like World of Noh

1. Noh History, Theory, and Practice (lecture)
    - Reading: Excerpts from Zeami Motokiyo on Noh
    - Reading: Selected essays and videos from the webpage JPARC (Japanese Performing Arts)

2. Noh Plays: Texts to Performance (lecture and hands-on activity)

- Reading: *Izutsu* (The Well Cradle) (or if we can arrange a field trip, we can read the play text for the work we will see)

Field Trip idea: Noh performance?

NOTE: For weeks 11 -13, the goal is for students to think more deeply about how traditional Japanese religion, art, and culture has been deployed in the modernist agenda. In Kyoto, students will be challenged to think about Zen and Japanese nationalism, the politics of traditional culture, etc.

Week Eleven: Zen in the Modern World

1. Zen's Modern History, Meiji (lecture)
   - Reading: *Zen Past and Present*, Chapter 7

2. Zen, Nationalism, and Militarism (lecture)
   - Reading*: Something by Brian Victoria (or his critics) about the Zen Institution's participation in WWII.*

Week Twelve: Zen in Contemporary Japanese Art

1. Postwar Art Movements: Gutai and Monono ha Zen's Modern History, Meiji (lecture)
   - Reading: Excerpts from Doryun Chong, *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde.* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012.

2. Contemporary Artists and Zen (lecture)
   - Reading: Visit webpages of assigned artists: Kengo Kito, Moriko Mori, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Yayoi Kusama, and others.

Field trip idea: Artist studio or a museum exhibition, depending on availability and suitability.

Week Thirteen: Student Presentations of Independent Projects

1. Student Presentations

2. Student Presentations and Debrief on Embodied Practice 3

*****End of Embodied Practice Three (Poetry in Action)*
*****Essay / Reflection on Embodied Practice Three is due in class*