

---

JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL SUFFERING 2 credits  
(Spring)

日本仏教と現代社会 2単位(春学期)

JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL SUFFERING 2 credits  
(Fall)

日本仏教と現代社会 2単位(秋学期)

Priests and Temples Reviving Human Relationship and Civil Society

WATTS, JONATHAN S.

ワッツ, ジョナサン S.

---

**Course Description:**

This course is offered as a companion course to Buddhism and Social Change in Contemporary Asia 仏教と現代アジアの社会変化 by the same instructor in the first half of the semester. You do not have to take both courses, but it is recommended to do so for a fuller understanding. This course will look at Buddhism in Japan in a very different way - through the actions of Buddhist priests and followers to confront the real life problems and suffering of people in Japan today. We will look at such issues as:

1) human relationships in terms of: a) dying and grieving, and b) alienation and suicide;

2) economic development in terms of: a) social and economic gaps, aging society, community breakdown and depopulation of the countryside, b) alternatives to globalization and Buddhist economics, and c) alternative energy and the environment;

3) politics in terms of: a) nuclear power and peace, and b) Buddhist complicity with war and work for peace.

The creative solutions some individual Buddhists are developing in response to these problems mark an attempt to revive Japanese Buddhism, which has been primarily associated with funerals and tourism. These efforts are trying to remake the temple as a center of community in an increasingly alienated society.

There will be a variety of teaching methods from homework, readings, group processes, in-class videos, guest speakers, and field trips. This course will attempt to be as interactive as possible, so students should be ready to reflect on the issues personally as they experience them as residents of Japan, and to express these reflections not only intellectually but emotionally as well.

THIS COURSE IS LIMITED TO 50 STUDENTS. PLEASE SEE DETAILS BELOW.

**Textbooks:**

None; all readings, homework assignments, and other class details will be available on the class homepage: <https://ogigaya.wordpress.com/>

**Reference Books:**

Covell, Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation (University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

Nakamura, Hajime. Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples (University of Hawaii Press, 1964)

Watts. Lotus in the Nuclear Sea: Fukushima and the Promise of Buddhism in the Nuclear Age (Yokohama: International Buddhist Exchange Center, 2013).

Watts. This Precious Life: Buddhist Tsunami Relief and Anti-Nuclear Activism in Post 3/11 Japan (Yokohama: International Buddhist Exchange Center, 2012).

Watts & Tomatsu, Buddhist Care for the Dying and Bereaved: Global Perspectives (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012)

**Course Plan:**

- 1 Introduction & A Brief History of Japanese Buddhism
- 2 The civilizational culture of Buddhism meets Japan's particular cultural identity
- 3 Buddhist Social Analysis & The Present Crisis in Japanese Society
- 4 Japan: The Disconnected Society 無縁社会
- 5 The Present Crisis in Japanese Buddhism
- 6 Human Relationships I: Dying and Grieving in an Aging Society
- 7 Human Relationships II: The Suicide Prevention Priests of Japan
- 8 Development I: Community Development with the Suicide Prevention Priests
- 9 Development II: The Homeless & Workers in the Nuclear Industry
- 10 Development III: Nuclear Energy & the Eco-Temple

11 Politics I: War and Japanese Buddhism

12 Politics II: Peace and Japanese Buddhism

13 Buddhism and the Future of Japan

14 Review of course themes & Preparation for final report

Other Conclusion and Reflection

**Lecturer's Comments to Students:**

The number of students in the course is capped at 50. Attendance at the first session is mandatory. If the number of students exceeds the limit, selection will be made by lottery in the first session. All the students wishing to register for this course must attend the first class and obtain permission from the instructor. Registration without permission will be deleted.

この授業は英語で行われますが、日本語の教材やビデオを使用することがあります。また、フィールド・トリップでは日本語で会話をする機会もあります。しかし最後のレポートは必ず英語で書かなければなりません。日本語・英語、その他の言語でこの授業を楽しみましょう！ While this class is conducted in English, there will be a broad use of Japanese language source texts and videos, and Japanese may be used at times in class and on field trips. However, all main texts are in English. Translation will be provided during field trips, and the final written report must be done in English. Whether it be Japanese, English or one of the many languages of our international students, let's enjoy communicating together!

**Method of Evaluation:**

There will be two important aspects to evaluation:

1) regular participation: attendance, homework reading, discussion, and participation in class.

2) group project:

choose one of the main themes in the class →

attend a field trip related to that theme →

together in a group help facilitate class discussion during one class →

submit a final written and/or multi-media report at the end of the semester by each individual student

**Questions/Comments:**

Teacher Profile: Jonathan Watts has lived in Indonesia, Thailand and Japan for the past 20 years involved in NGO/NPO work with Buddhist based organizations. He is also conducting research on Japanese Buddhism and has recently finished writing three books: Lotus in the Nuclear Sea: Fukushima and the Promise of Buddhism in the Nuclear Age (2013) and This Precious Life: Buddhist Tsunami Relief and Anti-Nuclear Activism in Post 3/11 Japan (2012) Yokohama: International Buddhist Exchange Center; and Buddhist Care for the Dying and Bereaved: Global Perspectives (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012). Students will have the opportunity to learn from and meet the many Buddhist priests and social activists in Japan and elsewhere whom he has come to know over the years.