

Keio University Syllabus and Timetable

BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY ASIA

Subtitle	New Buddhist Influences in Economics, Technology, Ecology, Gender, Human Rights, and Dying
Lecturer(s)	WATTS, JONATHAN S.
Credit(s)	2
Academic Year/Semester	2025 Spring (1st Half)
Day/Period	Tue.3,4
Campus	Mita
Classroom	467
Class Format	Face-to-face classes (conducted mainly in-person)
Registration Number	06116
Faculty/Graduate School	INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Year Level	2, 3, 4
Grade Type	S, A, B, C, D
K-Number	CIN-CO-00143-212-08

▼ Detail

Course Contents/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome

This course will be offered as a companion course to JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL SUFFERING (日本仏教と現代社会) by the same instructor in the second half of the semester. You do not have to take both courses, but it is recommended to do so for a fuller understanding. Buddhism is the largest indigenous religion of Asia and has ancient roots in every country in the region, including majority Muslim ones like Bangladesh and Indonesia. However, in the contemporary age, it is in crisis, principally from the way economic and scientific modernity challenges its worldview and values. Buddhist institutions throughout the region have been responding to this crisis in variety of ways from nationalistic chauvinism, to market and technologically savvy new Buddhist organizations, and also progressive social action movements known as Socially Engaged Buddhism. This course will look at these different responses and attempts by Buddhism to remain relevant in the dynamic social landscape of contemporary Asia, while offering numerous case studies familiar to the instructor’s 25 years of experience throughout the region. THIS COURSE IS LIMITED TO 50 STUDENTS. PLEASE SEE DETAILS BELOW.

Active Learning Methods ⓘ [Description](#)

- Discussions, Debates
- Group work
- Role-playing
- Flipped classroom

Preparatory Study

some reading & reflections on course units

Course Plan

Lesson 1

Unit 1: What Is Religion? & A Brief History of Buddhism

Lesson 2

Unit 1: A Community of Liberation, A Culture of Diversity, An Institution of Power

Lesson 3

Unit 2: 4 Responses to Modernity: Buddhist Nationalism & Socially Engaged Buddhism, Market Buddhism & Buddhist Socialism

Lesson 4

Unit 2: Responses to Modernity: What is authentic Buddhism?

Lesson 5

Unit 3: Buddhism in the Modern Era: The Non-Duality of Self & Social Liberation

Lesson 6

Unit 3: Human Rights: Caste, Class, and the Revival of Buddhism in India

Lesson 7

Unit 3: Gender: Women’s Ordination and Buddhist Perspectives on Gender

Lesson 8

Unit 3: Buddhism & Other Religions: Inter-Religious Conflict between Buddhism & Islam

Lesson 9

Unit 4: Buddhist Economics & Environmentalism: The “Three Poisons” Institutionalized

Lesson 10

Unit 4: A Transformative Approach to the Eco-Crisis using Buddhist Teachings & Practice

Lesson 11

Unit 5: The Science of Dying & Meditation

Lesson 12

Unit 5: Dying & Living in Contemporary Buddhism: The End-of-Life Care and Suicide Prevention Movements

Lesson 13

Concluding Classes: Global Youth Creating New Buddhist Identities & Cultures

Lesson 14

Concluding Classes: Review of course themes

Other

## Conclusion and Reflection

### Method of Evaluation

1. Exam N/A
2. regular participation: attendance, discussion, and participation in class (30%)
3. unit reports (5) (70%)

### Textbooks

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

### Reference Books

Rethinking Karma: The Dharma of Social Justice. Ed. Jonathan S. Watts (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Press, 2009).  
The Buddha's Way to Human Liberation: A Socio-Historical Approach. Swaris, Nalin. (Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Sarasavi Publishers, 2008)  
Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia. Eds. Christopher S. Queen & Sallie B. King (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).  
Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism. Eds. Queen, Prebish, Keown (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003)  
Engaged Buddhism in Japan Vols 1 & 2. Watts, Jonathan S. (Ottawa: Sumeru Press, 2023)

### Lecturer's Comments to Students

This course will be taught as face-to-face only. 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. We will use a wide variety of methods in the classroom, including videos, guest speakers, group work, etc. During lectures, ample time will be given for questions and discussion. A prior knowledge of Buddhism is not necessary. Using Buddhism as a lens, we will investigate a wide variety of social issues in Asia and take time to enjoy interaction with each other. An optional meditation class will also be offered in the evenings.

### Question/Comments

Teacher Profile: Jonathan Watts has lived in Indonesia, Thailand and Japan for the past 30 years involved in NGO/NPO work with Buddhist based organizations, and writing and editing a collaborative volume by Buddhist scholar-activists Rethinking Karma: The Dharma of Social Justice. Ed. Jonathan S. Watts (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Press, 2009). He has also been researching and assisting Japanese Buddhists engaged in a variety of forms of social work. This research was published in two volumes in 2023 (see reference books). He has also published three other volumes: 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).