

## Keio University Syllabus and Timetable

# BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY ASIA

<b>Subtitle</b>	New Buddhist Influences in Economics, Technology, Ecology, Gender, Human Rights, and Dying
<b>Lecturer(s)</b>	WATTS, JONATHAN S.
<b>Credit(s)</b>	2
<b>Academic Year/Semester</b>	2026 Spring (1st Half)
<b>Day/Period</b>	Wed.3,4
<b>Campus</b>	Mita
<b>Classroom</b>	457
<b>Class Format</b>	Face-to-face classes (conducted mainly in-person)
<b>Registration Number</b>	12707
<b>Faculty/Graduate School</b>	INTERNATIONAL CENTER
<b>Year Level</b>	2, 3, 4
<b>Grade Type</b>	S, A, B, C, D
<b>Course Description</b>	A course to aim to learn the new Buddhist influences in economics by looking at different responses and attempts by Buddhism to remain relevant in the dynamic social landscape of contemporary Asia.
<b>K-Number</b>	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.

### Course Taught by Faculty Member with Professional Experience

Applicable

Jonathan S. Watts has lived in Indonesia, Thailand and Japan for the past 35 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 as *Engaged Buddhism in Japan*. He has also published three other volumes based on his social work in various communities: *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* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).

## Active Learning Methods [Description](#)

Discussions, Debates  
Group work  
Role-playing  
Flipped classroom

## Preparatory Study

At the end of each of the 5 class units, I will ask you to submit a 1-2 page reflection single spaced typed and sent by e-mail about the themes OR a group report based on class work. (2-3 hours)

## 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

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

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### Lesson 11

Unit 5: The Science of Dying & Meditation

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### Lesson 12

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

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### Lesson 13

Concluding Classes: Global Youth Creating New Buddhist Identities & Cultures

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### Lesson 14

Concluding Classes: Review of course themes

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### 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%)

### Generative AI Policy for Classes

In this course, emphasis is placed on students' own thinking and expressive abilities. Therefore, the use of generative AI is, in principle, prohibited. I enjoy hearing students' own voices. Many non-native English speakers have creative and insightful ways of expressing themselves. If you use AI even to correct English grammar issues, you may lose your distinctive voice. A student who hands in assignments that have lost their voice and use a sterilized AI voice will be graded down and in certain cases asked to meet with me separately to clarify their ideas. This course is not an English course and you will not be evaluated on your English level at all. If you are unsure about what is permitted, please consult the lecturer in advance.

### Textbooks

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