

JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL SUFFERING 2 credits
(Spring)

日本仏教と現代社会 2単位(春学期)

Priests and Temples Reviving Human Relationship and Civil Society

WATTS, JONATHAN S.

ワッツ, ジョナサン S.

Course Description/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome:

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, in-class videos, and guest speakers. 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.

Reminder: This is an intensive course that has been consolidated from 14 weeks into 7 weeks, so each week is a double class, 3 hours instead of 1.5 hours of class time. Therefore, lectures, readings, and homeworks reflect a more intensive approach with more weekly work than a usual 14 week full semester course.

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: Rural Decline, Migrant Laborers, Poverty & Homelessness
- 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

Other Review of course themes & Preparation for final report

Method of Evaluation:

Due to the COVID Pandemic and the shifting of classes on-line, these will be the main methods of evaluation:

- 1) Unit Reflections (5)(80%)
- 2) Attendance, Participation, and personal interaction with instructor (20%) I will hold an open Zoom session for students only for 90 minutes once a week at a time convenient for all to ask questions about the lectures, readings, and course materials and for all of us to get to know each other a little.

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)

Lecturer's Comments to Students:

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!

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.