

Zen Buddhism

Section 1

Instructor/Title	Elizabeth Kenney
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【Course Outline / Description】

This course presents an overview of Zen Buddhism, with a focus on fundamental existential and religious questions. Buddhism, like any religion, provides answers to the “big questions” of human existence: How did human life first occur? Why do tragedies happen? What happens after death? How should we lead our daily lives?

Zen also asks its own questions: Is ordinary life in some way incomplete? Can a dog become a Buddha? What is the point of meditation?

The first part of the course covers the basic principles of Buddhist thought. In other words, we start from zero, so that any student, including a student with no knowledge of Buddhism, can benefit from the course. In addition, by studying pre-Zen Buddhism, we can see more clearly how Zen differs from other forms of Buddhism, even to the extent of contradicting (in some people’s eyes) the teachings of the Buddha.

The second part of this course is a “great books” survey of the development of Zen thought in China and Japan. We read and discuss some of the major works of Zen literature: Linji, koans, Dōgen, Ikkyū, Hakuin.

Zen in Japan is divided into two schools: Rinzai and Soto. The differing ideologies and practices of these two schools are a continuing theme in the second part of the class. There is also a third school of Zen, Obaku. We discuss how the Obaku School is a surprising combination of Rinzai and Pure Land.

The class also looks at contemporary Zen. We read two essays by a living and very influential Zen teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. He is from Vietnam, thus not bound by the Japanese division between Rinzai and Soto. Furthermore, Thich Nhat Hanh speaks to a contemporary audience, and we can see how his approach matches the concerns of his present-day readers.

Students have the option of making a presentation. Usually, one or two students each semester choose to make a presentation. For example, a student with a background in art history made a presentation on the dragon paintings on the ceilings of several Rinzai temples in Kyoto. She explained the significance of the dragon and analyzed the differences among the paintings.

Section 2

【Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes】

Students will acquire a good understanding of the history of Zen thought in China and Japan. Contemporary Korean Zen practice is also discussed.

Students will analyze the writings of at least one contemporary Western Zen teacher. Students will reflect on Zen institutions and individuals during the Japanese wartime period.

After taking this class, students will:

be able to discuss knowledgeably the major figures in Zen Buddhist history;

be capable of enlightening others about the fundamental principles of Buddhism;

have an impressive understanding of the phenomenally important but shamefully little-known school of Japanese Zen, Obaku;

be ready to argue with anyone about "What is Buddhism?";

answer some koans of their own.

Section 3

【Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials】

Sept. 5 (W) Introductory meeting.

Part 1. Buddhism Before Zen

- Sept. 7 (F) Life of the Buddha. Slides: Iconography of the Buddha's biography.
Readings: p. 67, "The Birth of Buddhism," *An Introduction to Buddhist Thought*, A.L. Herman; pp. 68-73, "Buddha," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, pp. 74-77, "The Bodhisattva and the Hungry Tigress," *Buddhist Scriptures*, trans. E. Conze.
- Sept. 12 (W) Read and discuss: "Suffering is Not Enough" & "Feelings and Perceptions" by Thich Nhat Hanh, pp. 44-55.
- Sept. 14 (F) Read and discuss: "Instructions for the Zen Cook" by Dōgen, pp. 56-66.
- Sept. 19 (W) Basic Teachings of Buddhism: Suffering, the Four Noble Truths.
- Sept. 21 (F) Buddhist Cosmology. Samsara.
Readings: pp. 78-92, "Buddhist visions of the human predicament and its resolution," Peter Harvey; pp. 93-100, "Buddhism as a Unified System of Beliefs and Practices," Robert C. Lester; pp. 101-105, "The Torments of the Hells," *Buddhist Scriptures*, trans. E. Conze.
- Sept. 26 (W) Karma and merit.
- Sept. 28 (F) Basic Buddhist Philosophy: Impermanence, No-self.
Reading: pp. 106-108, "The Questions of King Milinda," *Buddhist Scriptures*.

Oct. 3 (W) Mahayana Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra*. The Parable of the Burning House,
Bodhisattvas, Upaya.
Reading: pp. 109-112, excerpt from *The Lotus Sutra*.

Oct. 5 (F) Bodhisattvas.

Part 2. Zen in China

- Oct. 10 (W) Bodhidharma, the Legendary Founder of Zen.
Reading: pp. 113-132, "Bloodstream Sutra," *The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*.
- Oct. 12 (F) *Platform Sutra*.
Reading: pp. 133-138, excerpt from *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, trans. by Philip Yampolsky.
- Oct. 14 (Sun.) Field trip to Tenryū-ji for zazen meditation. tentative.
- Oct. 17 (W) Sudden/Gradual: Further Perspectives.
- Oct. 19 (F) Review for midterm.
- Oct. 24 (W) Mid-term exam.
- Oct. 26 (F) No class. Gaidai festival.
- Oct. 31 (W) Linji (Rinzai, 臨濟). Be prepared to discuss the reading.
Reading: pp. 139-184, "The Recorded Sayings of Ch'an Master Lin-chi Hui-chao of Chen Prefecture," trans. Ruth Fuller Sasaki.
- Nov. 2 (F) Linji redux.
- Nov. 7 (W) Koans 公案. Be prepared to discuss the reading.

Readings: pp. 1-41, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*; pp. 185-189, “Riddles of the Gateless Way,” *The Buddhist Experience*, trans. Stephan Beyer; pp. 190-198, “Zen Koans,” by E.T. Shimano, from *Zen: Tradition and Transformation*, ed. by K. Kraft.

Optional readings: pp. 277-282, “Rohatsu, week of weeks” by J. van de Wetering, *The Empty Mirror*; pp. 283-294, excerpt from *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau.

Part 3. Zen in Japan

Nov. 9 (F) Dōgen 道元 and Sōtō 曹洞 Zen.

Readings: pp. 199-207, “The Incomparable Philosopher: Dōgen on How to Read the *Shōbōgenzō*,” by T. Kasulis; pp. 208-220, “Genjō Kōan,” comments on and trans. F. Cook; pp. 221-224, “The Issue at Hand: Genjō Kōan,” trans. T. Cleary.

Nov. 14 (W) Dōgen: Discussion.

Hand-out: excerpt from “The Mountains and Rivers Scripture.”

Nov. 16 (F) To be decided. Student presentation or “Souls of Zen” documentary.

Nov. 21 (W) Pure Land Buddhism and Zen: Compatibility?

Reading: pp. 225-240, “Tannisho,” by Shinran, trans. by Dennis Hirota.

Nov. 23 (F) Zen in the Muromachi Period: 1. Five Mountains 五山, the Zen Establishment; 2. Ikkyū 一休, Iconoclast even by Zen Standards.

Readings: pp. 241-248, “Skeletons,” by Ikkyū, trans. James Sanford; pp. 249-259, on monastic codes, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan*, by M. Collcutt.

Nov. 28 (W) Zen in the Tokugawa Period: 1. Obaku, the Third School of Zen; 2. Suzuki Shōzan.

Reading: pp. 260-263, excerpt from essay by Suzuki Shōzan, “The Farmer’s Work Can be Buddhist Practice.”

Nov. 30 (F) Hakuin, the Dominant Figure in Later Japanese Rinzai Zen.

Reading: pp. 264-276, “Oretagama Zokushu,” by Hakuin, from *The Zen Master Hakuin*, by P. Yampolsky.

Part 4. Zen Today: Korea, the West

Dec. 5 (W) Zen practice in Today’s Korea.

Reading: hand-out. “Gradual Experiences of Sudden Enlightenment: The Varieties of Ganhwa Soen Teachings in Contemporary Korea.”

Dec. 7 (F) Student presentation or other topic. Paper due!

Dec. 12 (W) *Hardcore Zen* or other contemporary Western Zen teacher.

Reading: to be assigned.

Dec. 14 (F) Student presentation or other topic.

【Textbooks/Reading Materials】

Readings will be provided.

Section 4

【Learning Assessments/Grading Rubric】

25%	mid-term, October 24
50%	7-page paper, due Dec. 7
15%	final exam
<u>10%</u>	Regular class attendance and participation in discussions
100%	

Section 5

【Additional Information】

It is important to do the reading.