

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

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**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, group processes, 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. Regular field trips for this course have been cancelled due to COVID since 2020, but it is hoped that they can be resumed on a limited basis for this course. As such, THIS COURSE IS LIMITED TO 30 STUDENTS. PLEASE SEE DETAILS BELOW.

**Course Plan:**

- 1 A Brief History of Japanese Buddhism
- 2 The Civilizational Culture of Buddhism meets Japan's Particular Cultural Identity
- 3 Unit 1: Understanding Japanese Society through a Buddhist Lens & Buddhist Social Analysis
- 4 Unit 1: The Present Crisis in Japanese Society: The Disconnected Society 無縁社会
- 5 Unit 2: The Present Crisis in Japanese Buddhism
- 6 Unit 2: Reforming Funeral Buddhism through End-of-Life Care
- 7 Unit 2: The Suicide Prevention Priests of Japan Part I
- 8 Unit 2: The Suicide Prevention Priests of Japan Part II
- 9 Unit 3: Buddhist Kaihotsu 開発 Development to Confront Rural Decline, Migrant Laborers, Poverty & Homelessness
- 10 Unit 3: Nuclear Energy & the Eco-Temple
- 11 Unit 4: Imperial-Way Buddhism 皇道仏教 in the Pre-War Era
- 12 Unit 4: Japanese Buddhist Peace Activism in the Post-War Era
- 13 Unit 5: A Buddhist Vision for Japan: From Social Dukkha to Social Nirvana
- 14 Unit 5: Reviving the Spirit of Kamakura Buddhism for 21st Century Japan

Other Concluding session

**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:**

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:**

This course will be taught as in-person (hybrid). Zoom link will be provided on the Canvas LMS before the 1st session. The number of students in the course is capped at 30. Attendance at the first session is mandatory. If the number of students exceeds the limit, selection will be made by lottery. 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、日本語で会話をすることもできます。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. 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:**

Jonathan Watts has lived in Indonesia, Thailand and Japan for the past 30 years involved in NGO/NPO work with Buddhist based organizations. He has been researching and assisting Japanese Buddhists engaged in a variety of forms of social work. This research forms the basis of this course and will be published in a large comprehensive volume in 2022. He has also written and edited three other books on related issues: Lotus in the Nuclear Sea: Fukushima and the Promise of Buddhism in the Nuclear Age (Yokohama: International Buddhist Exchange Center, 2013), Buddhist Care for the Dying and Bereaved: Global Perspectives (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012) and This Precious Life: Buddhist Tsunami Relief and Anti-Nuclear Activism in Post 3/11 Japan (Yokohama: International Buddhist Exchange Center, 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.