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RLST 354.01: Topics in East Asian Religion - Approaches to the Study of Zen

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TOPICS IN EAST ASIAN RELIGION: APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ZEN

RLST 354

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:10-3:30

LA 336

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LA 158 (ext. 2837)

Office Hours: TR 3:45-6:00

Over the course of the last century, the West has displayed a particular fascination with the philosophy and practice of Zen Buddhist traditions coming from East Asia. Those endeavoring to transmit and “translate” Chan or Zen to the West have engaged in an intriguing variety of approaches to understanding these traditions. Each of these approaches has found new insights into Zen traditions, but has also encountered their own interpretive problems and limitations. This course will examine some of the most influential approaches to understanding Zen, beginning in the first half of the semester with investigations of primary Zen texts which have raised particularly difficult hermeneutic issues, such as the transmission of Zen teachings (the story of Bodhidharma), meditation (*The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*), “extra-rational” dialogues (koan collections of the 12th and 13th centuries), and artistic presentations of spiritual realization (Haiku poetry, landscape painting, calligraphy, tea ceremony, etc.). In the second half of the semester, we will focus more on seminal works of figures who were instrumental in bringing Zen into practice and the popular imagination in the West, such as D.T. Suzuki, Thomas Merton, Eugene Herrigel, Alan Watts, and several of poets from the Beat movement. Here we will look as well at some of the most innovative contemporary scholarship in Zen Studies, as produced by such thinkers as John McRae, Bernard Fauré, Steven Heine, and Robert Scharf.

Readings: (All books are available for purchase at the bookstore).

Heine, Steven. *Opening a Mountain: Koans of Zen Masters*.

Herrigel, Eugene. *Zen in the Art of Archery*.

Kapleau, Roshi Philip. *The Three Pillars of Zen*

McRae, John. *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*.

Merton, Thomas. *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*.

Snyder, Gary. *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries*.

Watts, Alan. *The Spirit of Zen*.

Yampolsky, Philip (transl.). *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*.

Requirements:

- 1) Class participation. As much as is possible, this course will be conducted in discussion/seminar format. Therefore, it is essential that all class members regularly attend AND be prepared to participate. More than two unexcused

- absences will begin to adversely affect your participation grade. (30% of the final grade.
- 2) Mid-Term Take-Home Exam (30% of the final grade)
 - 3) A 15-20 page research paper. A list of possible topics will be distributed, but the choice of topic is ultimately up to you, with the professor's approval (40% of the final grade).

Class Meetings and Assignments:

Tues. 1/28	Introduction to the Course
Thurs. 1/30	Major Themes in the Study of Zen -Kraft (handout): Introduction, and chapter 5.
Tues. 2/4	Major Themes in the Study of Zen (continued) -Kraft (handout): Chapters 1 and 3.
Thurs. 2/6	Zen in East Asian History: An Overview -Kraft (handout): Chapters 7, 8, and 9.
Tues. 2/11	Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case I: The Foundations of Zen: Bodhidharma & the Early Patriarchs -McRae: Chapter 2, "Beginnings: Differentiating/Connecting Bodhidharma and the East Mountain Teaching.
Thurs. 2/13	Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case II: Meditation and <i>The Platform Sutra and the Sixth Patriarch</i> . -Kraft (handout): Chapter 2 Yampolsky: Preface, 111-121, and sections 1-37.
Tues. 2/18	Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case II (continued) -McRae: Chapter 3, "Metropolitan Chan"
Thurs. 2/20	Problems in the Interpretation Of Zen, Case III: The Koan -Kraft: Chapter 4 -Watts: "The Technique of Zen" Suzuki: "Illogical Zen" and "The Reason of Unreason: The Koan Exercise.
Tues. 2/25	Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case III (continued) -Heine: Preface, Introduction and pages 37-38, case 3, case 6, case 15, pages 73-75, case 16, case 25, pages 101-103, Case 27, case 28, and case 38.
Thurs. 2/27	Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case III (continued)

-Heine: pages 141-143, case 43, case 45, case 46, case 49, pages 169-171, case 51, case 53, case 57, and case 59.

Tues. 3/4 Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case III (continued)
-McRae: Chapter 4, "The Riddle of the Encounter Dialogue: Who, What, When and Where?"

Thurs 3/6 Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case IV: Zen and the Arts
-Hisamatsu (handout): selections from *Zen and the Fine Arts*.
-Suzuki (handout): "Painting, Swordsmanship, Tea Ceremony."

Tues 3/11 Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case IV (continued)
Merton: "Zen in Japanese Art"
Watts: "Zen and the Civilization of the Far East"

Thurs. 3/13 Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case IV (continued)
Herrigel: Introduction (by Suzuki) and pages 3-32.

****Mon. 3/17: Mid-Term Take-Home Essays Due by 4:30 PM****

Tues. 3/18 Problems in the Interpretation of Zen, Case IV (continued)
Herrigel: Pages 33-81.

Thurs 3/20 "Zen for the West," Part I: Zen Experience and the Study of Zen
-William Barrett (handout): "Zen for the West".
-D.T. Suzuki (handout): "Satori, or Enlightenment" and "An Interpretation of Zen Experience."

****Mon. 3/21: Research Paper Proposal and Bibliography Due****

Tues. 3/25 "Zen for the West," Part I (continued)
-Scharf (handout): "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" and "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience".

Thurs. 3/27 "Zen for the West," Part I (continued)
-Fauré (handout): "The Rise of Zen Orientalism" and "Chan and Language: Fair and Unfair Games"

Tues. 4/8 "Zen for the West," Part II: Zen and the Beats
-Watts (handout): "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen"
-Snyder: Selections from *Earth House Hold*.

Thurs. 4/10 "Zen for the West," Part II: Zen and the Beats (continued)

-selections from the prose and poetry of Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, Lew Welch, Kenneth Rexroth, and Diane DiPrima.

- Tues. 4/15 "Zen for the West," Part II: Zen and the Beats (continued)
-further selections from the Beat writers.
- Thurs. 4/17 Zen for the West," Part III: Zen Practice in the West
-Watts: "Life in a Zen Community".
-Suzuki (handout): "The Mediation Hall and the Monk's Life".
- Tues. 4/22 Zen for the West," Part III: Zen Practice in the West (continued)
-Kraft (handout): Chapter 10 and Epilogue.
-Tworkov (handout): Introduction and Afterword to *Zen in America*.
-Shimano Roshi (handout): "20th Century Buddha-nature"
- Thurs. 4/24 Zen for the West," Part III: Zen Practice in the West (continued)
-Kapleau: Foreward, Prefaces, and Chapter 1.
- Tues. 4/29 Zen for the West," Part III: Zen Practice in the West (continued)
-Kapleau: Chapter 3.
- Thurs. 5/1 Zen for the West," Part III: Zen Practice in the West (continued)
Kapleau: Chapter 5.
- **Mon. 5/5 Research Papers Due at 4:00 PM.**
- Tues. 5/6 Zen for the West," Part III: Zen Practice in the West (continued)
Kapleau: Chapter 9.
- Thurs. 5/8 Final Reflections