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# RELS 216/316

## ZEN BUDDHISM

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*Welcome to this paper on Zen Buddhism. We teach this paper on campus and by distance learning. This coursebook is written with both groups of students in mind, but some sections will apply to only one of the two groups of students. Distance students should make sure to look at the section on "Distance Learning" below and on Blackboard.*

### Course Description

The Zen of Surfing. The Zen of Flamenco Dancing. The Zen of Martial Arts. The Zen of Yoda. Images of Zen Buddhism are everywhere in popular culture, giving the impression of a profound, austere, mystery-filled religion that epitomizes the 'wisdom of the East.' But what is Zen Buddhism really all about? This paper explores Zen Buddhism from two angles. On the one hand, it examines the historical development of Zen, offering students a chance to place Zen Buddhism within a longer trajectory of Buddhist thought in South and East Asia. On the other hand, it examines the ways in which Zen Buddhism is understood and practiced by modern-day adherents. This is done by examining important and surprising themes within Zen, including the nature of Zen meditation, the links between Zen and war, the role of women in Zen, the spread of Zen Buddhism outside Japan and the rise of the 'Zen aesthetic' as a conceit of twentieth-century counterculture in North America and Europe.

The course materials include writings from Zen teachers, academic literature on Zen, pamphlets and websites by Zen practitioners, ethnographies of Zen adherents, popular literature, and film. While investigating Zen Buddhism, students will also consider a set of broader issues pertaining to the study of Asia and religion. These include questions about Orientalism and secondary Orientalism, differences between textual authority and lived religions, Western and Asian imperialism, religious reform, religious violence, asceticism, monastic life, religion and politics, romanticism, myth-making, practices of mental cultivation and others.

### Aims and Learning Outcomes

The aim of this paper is to understand the cultural and historical context of Zen Buddhism and some of the ways in which these teachings are understood and *practiced* in contemporary Japan and the West. Students who successfully complete the paper will be able to demonstrate:

- knowledge of concepts and ideas concerning Zen Buddhism;
- an awareness of the historical development of Ch'an and Zen Buddhism;
- familiarity with important literature in English language concerning Zen Buddhism; and

- familiarity with contemporary insider interpretations of Zen teachings and modern-day lived religious practices of Zen Buddhists.

This paper is also intended to develop:

- the ability to analyse critically the teachings of the religions;
- an awareness of the importance of understanding insider interpretations of religious texts and the practices of lived religions;
- the ability to research topics using academic texts, journals, and other media;
- the ability to defend an argument using a variety of methods in writings; and
- the ability to debate within a peer-group in a constructive, non-confrontational manner.

## Course Structure

The course is divided into four modules; two focusing on the philosophy and historical context of Zen Buddhism and its teachings, and two modules focusing on contemporary Zen practices and beliefs.

The dates listed below are the times when students on campus will meet and they provide a guideline for distance students to plan their reading. Please ensure that you have read through the study unit and the appropriate section from the reader *before* the class meets (campus students) or the online eTutorial (distance students).

### Module 1 – Historical & Cultural Context of Zen Buddhism

Week 1: 1 Mar	Unit 1.1	Orientation to the Study of Zen
Week 2: 8 Mar	Unit 1.2	Buddhism in the China Context
Week 3: 15 Mar	Unit 1.3	Ch’an Buddhism
Week 4: 22 Mar	Unit 1.4	Buddhism in the Japan Context

### Module 2 – Japanese Zen Buddhism

Week 5: 29 Mar	Unit 2.1	Japanese Zen Masters: Eisai & Dōgen
Week 6: 5 Apr	Unit 2.2	Japanese Zen Masters: Hakuin & Harada
Week 7: 12 Apr	Unit 2.3	Zen Buddhism in the West

14-23 Apr            *Mid-Semester Break*

### Module 3 – Living Zen Buddhism

Week 8: 26 Apr	Unit 3.1	Thinking, Not-Thinking, Without-Thinking: Meditation & the Kōan
Week 9: 3 May	Unit 3.2	Struggling to Become a Zen Monk: Zen Monks in War and Peace
Week 10: 10 May	Unit 3.3	Being Woman, Being Zen

### Module 4 – Zen Out of Context

Week 11: 17 May	Unit 4.1	Death in the Japanese World
Week 12: 24 May	Unit 4.2	American Zen
Week 13: 31 May	Unit 4.3	Zen Beyond Religion

# Readings

For each topic you should read the Topic Overview in the coursebook, and the both the **essential** readings and the **insider** reading (if applicable) for each unit prior to attending class. I have chosen the readings very carefully and tried to keep the page-counts minimal so please do your best to keep up.

The articles in the coursebook represent the bare *minimum* of reading required for successful completion of the course. In addition to the *essential* and *insider* readings, I have selected two or three **additional** readings for each unit. These *additional* readings represent a variety of different approaches to the topic discussed in class and students are encouraged to select at least **one** of these readings to complete which suits their own particular interests.

A prior knowledge of Buddhism is not required for this paper, as we will be covering some of the basics in the first week of class and other ideas and concepts will be introduced in the course notes and readings. However, it can be helpful to be able to place these ideas within their wider religious context. Therefore, if you have not studied Buddhism before, I strongly recommend reading Damien Keown's *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. This book is a very short read and is available both in the library and on Amazon Kindle.

## Lecturer

Keziah Wallis is a final year PhD Candidate in both the Theology & Religion Department and the Department of Anthropology & Archaeology at Otago University. Her thesis, based upon fieldwork in Myanmar, examines the interaction between “official” religion endorsed by the state and the “unofficial” religious beliefs and rituals which constitute part of the field of lived religious practices of many Burmese. Her wider research interests focus on the changing nature of the relationships between religion, culture, and modernity in the wake of colonialism and the current push for modernisation of both religion and society. Keziah teaches on a variety of subjects relating to Asian Media and Popular Culture, Asian Religions, and the Anthropology of Asian Cultures.

Keziah's office is located on the ground floor of the Religious Studies Building at 97 Albany St. She can best be contacted by email on [keziah.wallis@otago.ac.nz](mailto:keziah.wallis@otago.ac.nz).

## Course Assessment

There are three components in the assessment for both RELS216 and RELS316 students, although the nature of these assessments differs slightly.

### RELS216 Assessment

There are three components in the assessment for RELS216 students:

- an essay outline (10%)
- a 3,000 word essay (40%)
- a two-hour exam (50%)

### RELS216 Essay Outline (10%)

RELS216 students should for their first assignment choose one of the questions below as the title for an essay. The outline should be no longer than two pages (max 500 words) and include:

- a short paragraph (3-4 sentences) explaining what you plan to research
- a list of headings and subheadings, to show what topics you plan to cover
- a bibliography that includes *at least three academic* sources (beyond those used in the course)

The outline is intended to assist you in the process of writing a good essay. It gives me a chance to make sure you are on the right path with your essay. Your final essay need not be identical with what you present in your outline, if you suggest (or choose) another approach to the topic.

The deadline for the essay outline is 5pm Monday the **10<sup>th</sup> of April**.

### RELS216 Essay (40%)

The second component of assessment for this course is a research essay that should demonstrate sustained engagement with one of the questions listed below. The word-limit for this essay is 3,000 words.

Please note, these essay topics are indicative and not the final questions

- Bodhidharma in history, myth, and iconography
- The history behind the Platform Sutra
- The role of women in Zen Buddhism
- Dōgen and his writings
- The influence of Zen on “Beat” culture in America
- The differences between text and practice in one aspect of Zen
- The role of kōan and/or meditation in Zen Buddhism

The deadline for the submission of the essays for RELS216 students is Monday the **8<sup>th</sup> of May**.

### RELS216 Exam (50%)

There is a two-hour examination for RELS216. In the examination you will be required to write a series of short responses and two longer essays. The short answer section will assess whether you’ve listened to the lectures, done the readings, and reviewed the key concepts discussed in the course. The essays, in contrast, will assess that you have gained a deeper understanding of at least two of the units’ key themes.

The date for the examination will be sent to you as soon as it has been set by the Registry.

### RELS316 Assessment

There are three components in the assessment for RELS316 students:

- a regular reading journal (10%)
- an essay of 3,500 words (40%)
- a two-hour exam (50%)

### RELS316 Reading Journal (10%)

Each week RELS316 students will be expected to write two short reflective journal entries to their Blackboard journals. For each journal entry, students should include a one-paragraph summary of the reading and a second paragraph reflecting on the reading. At least **one** of these journal entries should relate to an **additional** reading chosen from the list of *additional* readings. There

will be no grades for this exercise, but submission of regular journal entries will earn students the full 10%.

### **RELS316 Essay (40%)**

The second component of assessment for this course is a research essay that should demonstrate sustained engagement with one of the questions listed below. The word limit for this essay is **3,500** words.

Please note, these essay topics are indicative and not the final questions

- Discuss the role of patriarchal lineage in Ch'an Buddhism
- Recent scholarship shows that the Platform Sutra was repeatedly rewritten to conform to the political agendas of successive Ch'an groups in Chinese history. Discuss the role of the text in the history of Ch'an Buddhism.
- Zen is misogynistic. Argue for or against this claim.
- Analyse one of Dōgen's or Eisai's writings and situate it in history, included recognition of modern interpretations by Zen Buddhists
- [...] Zen can be seen as a typical example of "secondary orientalism", a stereotype concocted as much by the Japanese themselves as by Westerners. (Bernard Faure). Discuss.
- Zen is a singular tradition that endures over time. Argue for or against this proposition with reference to the traditions of contemporary Zen Buddhists.

The deadline for submission of RELS316 essays is 5pm Monday 24<sup>th</sup> of April

### **RELS316 Exam (50%)**

There is a two-hour examination for RELS316 students. In the examination you will be required to write two essays, each from a different module of the course. These essays will assess your deeper understandings of the lectures and readings for the course.

The date for the examination will be sent to you as soon as it has been set by the Registry.