

## ZEN PAST AND PRESENT

BY ERIC CUNNINGHAM — KEY ISSUES IN ASIAN STUDIES BOOK SERIES

### SUGGESTED COURSES:

- History - East Asia
- Religion
- Pop Culture

### KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS:

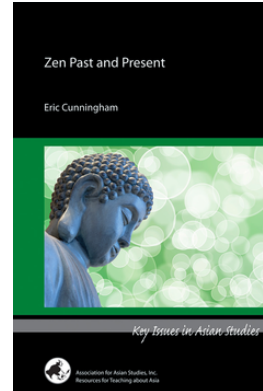
- Zen Buddhism
- Prajnaparamita
- Shaku Soen
- D.T. Suzuki
- "Dharma Bum"

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do Zen Buddhists believe their form of Buddhism is the highest and best mode of Buddhist practice?
2. Why is the concept of emptiness so important to Zen Buddhists?
3. Explain the process by which Buddhism spread to China and Japan. Why is Zen a critical feature of this process?
4. Explain the primary differences between the Rinzai and Soto Schools of Zen?
5. Why did the warrior class (samurai) gravitate toward Zen practice during the Middle Ages in Japan?
6. Why is Zen credited with helping cross-cultural relations between Japan and the West after the Meiji Restoration?
7. How did Zen help Japanese thinkers define their nation's cultural superiority?
8. Discuss the role of Zen Buddhism in Japanese militarism during the Second World War?
9. How did D.T. Suzuki use Zen to build bridges between America and Japan in the 1950s?
10. Describe the various ways in which Zen has helped people in the West find a new kind of spirituality in the post-World War II world.

### EXTERNAL LINKS & RESOURCES:

- <https://alanwatts.org/>
- <https://zenstudies.org/>
- <https://zenstudiespodcast.com/>



Paperback (\$17.00):  
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98 pages

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<https://cup.columbia.edu/for-instructors>

**Purchase copies at:**  
<https://www.asianstudies.org/store/cunningham/>

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7. ZEN'S CHALLENGE TO THE MODERN WORLD
8. FROM DHARMA BUMS TO PUNK ZEN

*"This booklet of less than eighty pages is miraculously a comprehensive coverage of key aspects of Zen Buddhism from its origin in India to Japan and the West. Nothing crucial for the understanding and appreciation of Zen tradition is omitted, including history, doctrine and practice, and texts and figures. Eric Cunningham even finds space to highlight the impact of indigenous culture on the development of Zen as an East Asian form of Buddhism that in turn was accepted into the Western culture. Zen Past and Present will serve as a useful launching pad to inform students and readers and to stimulate further readings and discussions on contextual factors and scholarships."*

– **KYOKO TOKUNO**, University of Washington

*"The golden carp is out of the net! This clear and confidently written overview of the development and dissemination of a key element of the Buddha's practice—meditation leading to self-knowledge and insight—is a welcome contribution. While not shying away from the paradox and play of Zen, including its often controversial worldly involvement, Professor Cunningham avoids attachment to numbing pedantry, and thoughtfully presents highlights of the understandings and explanations of Zen as they arose in varied historical and cultural contexts. We are offered a multi-colored string, continuous but not identical, and come to appreciate Zen as a trajectory of appropriation, shaping, imprinting, legacy, and ongoing transmission. Share the coolness!"*

– **ANDREW EDMUND GOBLE**, University of Oregon

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