



Zen Culture

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“Highly recommended”

The Center for Asian Studies

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Zen values experiencing things over analyzing them. Perhaps if we can take the power of direct perception, sharpened by the devices of Zen art, back to everyday activities, we will find a beauty in common objects that we previously ignored.

Selected Reviews

The notoriously grumpy Kirkus Reviews said, “Thomas Hoover has a considerable gift for expressing his appreciation and understanding of various arts associated with Zen. . . . These are deftly treated, with a concise synopsis of the historical development of each; and together Hoover’s discussions provide an excellent introduction to the aesthetics of Japanese culture.”

Library Journal said, “Hoover covers the ground in an easy and informative way, describing the origins of Zen itself and the Zen roots of swordsmanship, architecture, food, poetry, drama, ceramics, and many other areas of Japanese life. The book is packed with facts, the bibliography is excellent, the illustrations few but most appropriate, and the style clear and smooth. A most useful book for all collections.”

Asian Studies declared, “Highly recommended. ZEN CULTURE moves easily from the political climate that gave rise to Zen to the cultural areas – art, architecture, theatre, literature, flower arrangement, design, archery, swordsmanship – where Zen has manifested itself.”

As for the influence of the Zen aesthetic, the Houston Chronicle said, “Hoover suggests we need only look around. Modern furniture is clean, simple lines in unstained, unadorned woods. And that old fad became a habit, houseplants. These are all expressions of ideas born with Zen: understatement, asymmetry, intuitive perception, nature worship, disciplined reserve.”

“Highly recommended,” said The Center for Asian Studies.

“Western intellectuals have tried to represent the height of Buddhist mysticism within the pages of mere books, reducing an ineffable experience into a written report. Predictably such attempts have failed miserably. ZEN CULTURE by Thomas Hoover comes the closest to succeeding,” said Hark Publishing

“ZEN CULTURE, concerned as it is with the process of perception as much as with actual works of art, can open our sense so that we experience anew the arts of both East and West, ancient and modern.” declared the Asian Mail.

And to go multi-media, NYC-FM in New York said, “Hoover takes us on a grand tour of Zen archery and swordsmanship, flower arranging, drama, food, gardening, painting, poetry, architecture. His book is essentially one by a connoisseur.”

Tags: Zen History, Haiku, Zen, Ceramics, Archery, Landscape Garden, Stone Garden, Ink Landscape, Zen Architecture, Sword, Katana, No Theater, Noh Theater, Japanese Tea Ceremony, Flower arranging, Ikebana, Zen Ceramic Art, Raku, Shino, Ryoanji-ji

Zen Culture Details

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From Reader Review Zen Culture for online ebook

Al Bità says

This is a perfect book for anyone interested in the history and influence of Zen Culture. On page vii Hoover introduces his work with a quotation from Sohaku Ogata's "Zen for the West" which explains: *"Throughout the entire Far East of China, Korea, and Japan, we see the system of a unique culture which originated in the sixth century, reached its meridian in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and began to decline in the seventeenth century, but which is still kept up in Japan even in this day of materialism and mechanisation. It is called Zen culture."*

Hoover's work is extensive and expansive, covering the whole trajectory of this culture through the ages, presenting his findings in clear, lucid writing. Written in the late 1970s, when Western civilisations were "rediscovering" Zen, the work clearly sets out how the ideas of Zen originated from the original Buddhism and then Chinese Ch'an version which ultimately became Zen in Japan. There it developed the special qualities characteristic of Zen through its application to Japanese life and living, influencing many if not all those things we in the West might call quintessentially "Japanese".

The book is written in chronological order, and is presented in three parts: part I (from prehistory to 1333 CE) includes its rise, chronicles, and influence in such things as Archery and Swordsmanship; part II (from 1333 to 1575 CE) deals with landscape gardens and the Stone Gardens of Zen, Ink landscapes, the aesthetics of Japanese architecture, and the achievements of Nō Theatre; and the final part III (from 1573 to the present) deals with the rise of popular Zen culture, with particular attention to the Tea ceremony, ceramic art, Haiku, and Flowers and Food. As can be seen, a wide and influential array of cultural pursuits are covered; and as Hoover constantly points out, the "philosophy" (for want of a better word) behind all of them tends to transcend any specific, particular culture, and instead has proved to be relevant on a much wider, more universal, global scale.

On a simplistic level, it can be argued that Zen Culture is anti-rational, anti-scholastic and anti materialistic. These are traits which it incidentally shares with the Daoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu (what I all the earlier "philosophical" approach of Daoism rather than its later "religious" approach). Its positive side is that it is pro-simplicity, more ascetic (finding sufficiency in restraint); more meditative in approach, and pro the intuitive and the instinctive in humanity, emphasising suggestion rather than anything else. The intention is to emphasise detachment and objectivity in dealing with the world, with the purpose of achieving some kind of transience and enlightenment. As such, it is a way of life that would appeal to the artist, poet, philosopher, and mystic in all of us.

I will end with quoting the last paragraph of this work: *"Zen culture's primary lesson is that we should start trying to experience art and the world around us rather than analysing them. When we do this, we find that everything suddenly comes alive. If we can take this power of direct perception, sharpened by the devices of Zen art, back to everyday activities we will find a beauty in common objects that we previously ignored. Flowers — indeed individual petals — become objects of the most intense loveliness. When we see the world with a Zen-honed awareness our sense of the beauty in objects supplants our desire to possess them. If we allow the ancient creators of Zen culture to touch our lives, we open wider the doors of perception."*

Hoover's work is a painless and illuminating entry into this fascinating and stimulating world.

Lawrence says

FALSE

Mazen Alloujami says

Very interesting book about the influence of Zen on Japanese art and culture, giving also a good idea about Buddhism zen in general.

I recommend it especially for those interested in art, architecture and zen.

Velvetink says

Many Books

Cait says

Very interesting book but struggled as I'm not familiar with Japanese words or history so there was a lot to take in.

Dealing with a very visual subject but very few photos (and those that were included were very small), could've done with pictures in the text and diagrams of things like the gardens.

Silviu says

Totally worth reading.

Lysergius says

Anyone who examines the Zen arts is immediately struck by how modern they seem. The ceramics of 16th-century Zen artists could be interchanged with the rugged pots of our own contemporary crafts movement; ancient calligraphies suggest the monochromes of Franz Kline or Willem de Kooning; the apparent nonsense and illogic of Zen parables (and No theater and Haiku poetry) established the limitations of language long before the theater of the absurd; 400-year-old Zen architecture seems to be a copy of modern design ideas such as modular space and a California marriage of house and garden.

Zen values experiencing things over analyzing them. Perhaps if we can take the power of direct perception, sharpened by the devices of Zen art, back to everyday activities, we will find a beauty in common objects that we previously ignored.

Sanntint says

THIS IS A VERY INFORMATIVE AND SKILLFUL WRITTEN BOOKS ABOUT ZEN CULTURE AND AFTER READING IT , I FEEL MORE INFORMED ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JAPANESE AND THEIR CULTURE !

Mercedes Reichmann says

Divine when you have The ability to Fall in Love with gardens, flowers and The General virtues of Zen Discipline and Simplicity in The Same way your passions can be Fired Up in The Concept of Romantic Love.

Those who can see beauty in the simplicities of everyday day to day, will always hold the the pure joy of simple pleasure's in their hearts.

While this book is so intensely in its descriptions it's a pure delight for every zen lover. ♥?

Vikas Datta says

Perceptive account of this vital culture...

Mark says

I enjoyed this book, it's a good overview of the philosophy of zen and its impact on various art forms including pottery, gardening, plus archery, etc.

Barbara says

I did not go out of my way to find this book, I was just flicking through my kindle store looking for something different to read and I saw this I was intrigued so I downloaded it not really knowing what to expect, unsure if I was going to enjoy it. Sometimes we just have to pick up a book that we wouldn't normally look at and it turns out that I enjoyed it.

Quicksilver Quill says

Just a great little book about zen--where it came from, how it evolved, who the major players were, etc. . . . seasoned generously with poems, photos, and paintings throughout. For a novice like myself, I came away

from Mr. Hoover's work with a greater understanding and appreciation of zen culture. Highly recommended for anyone interested in learning more about zen.

Duncan says

A fascinating introduction to how Zen ideas influenced Japanese culture over the centuries. The book is accessible, broad in scope, and demonstrates genuine respect and understanding of the topics being discussed. Having lived in Japan and been fascinated by aspects of the culture like ceramics and the tea ceremony for a number of years, I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book.

Mad Giles (Giles A. Madding) says

A comprehensive and accessible read on what I find to be a thoroughly intriguing subject. This book examines the way that Zen found a fertile home in the mind and hearts of the Japanese people. And how those very same people helped to bring new form and thought to the religion itself.

I found it to be a fascinating read, which was hard to pull away from until the very last page. The chapter on the tea ceremony was a personal favorite.

Though no one book could truly cover every facet of this subject, this does give a good base for someone just starting to explore an interest. As well as it would be a welcome addition to any library of someone who is well versed in the material.
