

Objects, Art, and Agency: Material Cultures of Modern Zen in Japan and the West

Heidelberg University, 13 Dec 2012 – 14 Dec 2012

Organizers:

Inken Prohl

Tim Graf

The trans-cultural, practical and material sides of ‘Zen’ have shown a stunning ability to combine with different lifestyles, world-views, and consumer cultures that are characteristics of highly industrialized late modern societies. What are the artistic renderings that make products and practices ‘Zen’? And what role do artifacts play within Zen’s ongoing transformation into both an artistic endeavor and an appealing global brand?

Material culture, as seen in responses to anti-Buddhist measures in late 19th century Japan, helped to shape modern concepts of Buddhism from early on. Buddhist monuments in Japan, via their incorporation of ‘Indian’ or ‘Asian’ architecture, shaped emerging notions of ‘nation’, ‘East’ and ‘Asia’ along with notions of Buddhism as a ‘pan-Asian’ phenomenon or ‘world religion’ (Jaffe 2006). A central premise of this discussion is that Buddhist objects do not merely reflect Buddhist doctrine but may also constitute the ways in which Buddhist teachings and social norms are constructed and perceived.

How does a study of material culture further our understanding of Zen Buddhism, and of the ways in which ‘Zen’ was shaped to negotiate modern concepts of religion, spirituality, and individual identity? How has this transformation of Buddhism altered the forms of social and cultural organization? This meeting will explore ideas on material religion en route to understanding the global potentials of Zen Buddhism, as well as the challenges Buddhist institutions are facing in the course of Zen’s shifting role in the religious marketplace.

Program

Thursday, 13 Dec 2012 (venue: Neue Universität, HS 10)

18:00 – 20:00 Jørn Borup (Aarhus University)
Easternization of the East: Is there a Buddhist Spirituality in Japan?
Responding: Hans-Martin Krämer (Heidelberg University)

Friday, 14 Dec 2012 (venue: Karl Jaspers Center, room 212)

10:00 – 11:30 Cristina Rocha (University of Western Sydney)
No Religion and Zen: The Global Circulation of Zen Images and
Objects as 'Spirituality'
Responding: Katja Rakow (Heidelberg University)

12:00 – 13:30 Joshua Irizarry (Bridgewater State University)
Putting a Price on Zen: The Business of Redefining Religion for Global
Consumption
Responding: Maarten Paulusse (Heidelberg University)

15:30 – 17:00 Elisabetta Porcu (Leipzig University)
Fancy Zen: Zen Buddhism and Popular Culture in Contemporary Japan
Responding: Markus Hero (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)

17:30 – 19:00 Tim Graf (Heidelberg University)
Zen Practice and Material Buddhist Culture in Post-3/11 Japan
Responding: Orion Klautau (Ryukoku University)