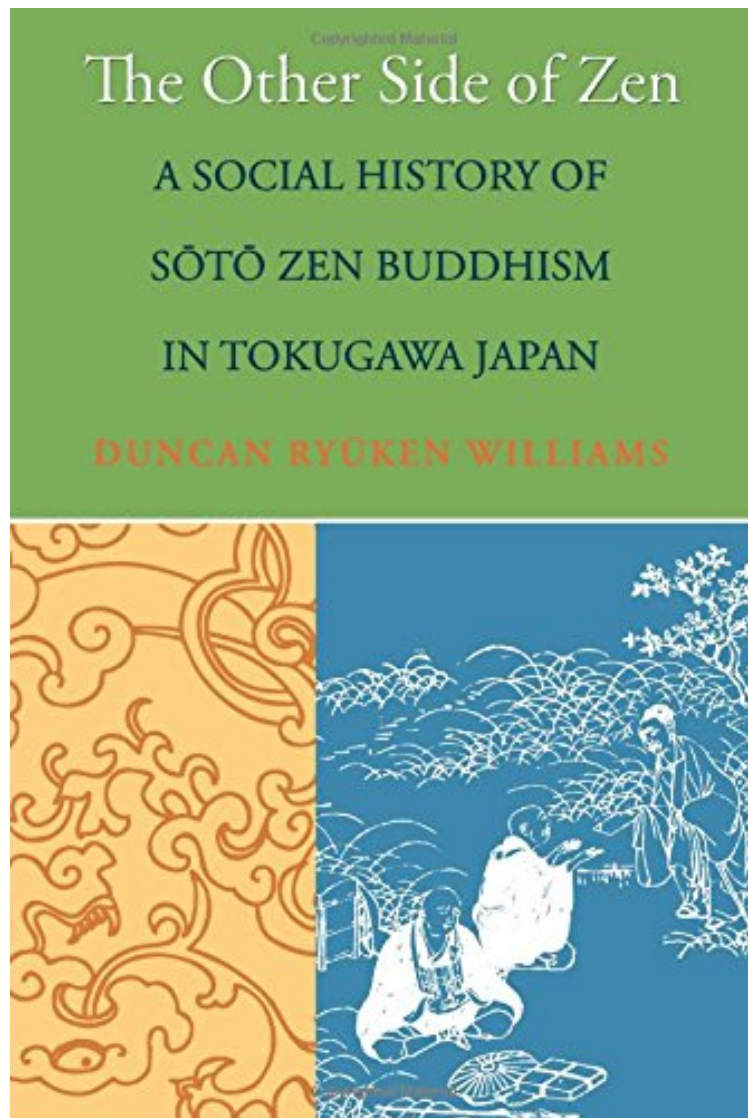


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The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of St Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan (Buddhisms: A Princeton University Press Series)

Duncan Ryken Williams

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Duncan Ryken Williams : The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of St Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan (Buddhisms: A Princeton University Press Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of St Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan (Buddhisms: A Princeton University Press Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Kate PageAccessible and simultaneously critically brilliant.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A standard social historyBy CustomerIt lacked feeling for the religiosity of Japanese Buddhists7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Reality Check for Soto BuddhismBy Crazy FoxThis book was a fine example of scholarship in many ways, especially in the way it brings Soto Zen Buddhism down to earth and helps fill in the gaps in our knowledge of Tokugawa Period Buddhism (usually ignored as "decadent"--an ahistorical slur that sheds no light on the issues). In some ways it reminded me of the fine work Gregory Schopen has done with Indian Buddhism, or with what Bernard Faure might achieve if he would learn to write and stop dropping names of French Postmodernists.Sometimes the author gets a bit too dismissive of the "great Zen masters" style of history. Granted he's trying to make a point and balance the distorted emphasis on the latter, still I don't think one needs to disparage other styles and approaches to do so.I highly recommend this book to anyone going to Japan who is interested in Buddhism, especially Zen. Years ago when I went to Japan I had already avidly read some stuff about Dogen (the founder of Soto Zen) and was really excited that there were several Soto Zen Temples near where I lived. Of course I was immediately thrown for a loop because what was going on at these temples was like 1% related to what I had read. If I had read this book beforehand, I would have had a much better idea what to expect and been able to make more of the experience.

Popular understanding of Zen Buddhism typically involves a stereotyped image of isolated individuals in meditation, contemplating nothingness. This book presents the "other side of Zen," by examining the movement's explosive growth during the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) in Japan and by shedding light on the broader Japanese religious landscape during the era. Using newly-discovered manuscripts, Duncan Ryuken Williams argues that the success of Soto Zen was due neither to what is most often associated with the sect, Zen meditation, nor to the teachings of its medieval founder Dogen, but rather to the social benefits it conveyed.Zen Buddhism promised followers many tangible and attractive rewards, including the bestowal of such perquisites as healing, rain-making, and fire protection, as well as "funerary Zen" rites that assured salvation in the next world. Zen temples also provided for the orderly registration of the entire Japanese populace, as ordered by the Tokugawa government, which led to stable parish membership.Williams investigates both the sect's distinctive religious and ritual practices and its nonsectarian participation in broader currents of Japanese life. While much previous work on the subject has consisted of passages on great medieval Zen masters and their thoughts strung together and then published as "the history of Zen," Williams' work is based on careful examination of archival sources including temple logbooks, prayer and funerary manuals, death registries, miracle tales of popular Buddhist deities, secret initiation papers, villagers' diaries, and fund-raising donor lists.

"This book is required reading for any student of Zen Buddhism or Japanese religion and will remain a standard reference for years to come."--David E. Riggs, *Monumenta Nipponica*[This book] presents so much new information in such an insightful and accessible manner. By doing so, *The Other Side of Zen* helps us to begin to realize just how much we do not know and do not understand. Williams shows us several previously unexplored landscapes and gives us a tour of a few of their notable features. One can only hope that the terra incognita he reveals will attract future scholars to map in more detail its ways and byways."--William M. Bodiford, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*"The Other Side of Zen offers a rich, ground-breaking contribution to the history of the Soto Zen sect and of Tokugawa Japan."--Cristina Rocha, *Philosophy East West*From the Inside Flap"The Other Side of Zen brings to light the vital but little studied social dimension of early modern Japanese Zen. Drawing on a wealth of hitherto untapped sources, Williams offers insightful analyses of how Soto Zen temples won and maintained broad lay support by providing rites for healing and protection in this world and salvation in the next. This fascinating study will be essential reading for students and scholars of Buddhism and Japanese religion and has much to offer anyone interested in the social roles of religion."--Jacqueline Stone, Princeton University "This is the first significant contribution in a Western language on Soto Zen of this period. The author's approach is innovative. His use of recently discovered sources, well synthesized, has helped the author succeed in demythologizing the Soto tradition. The book reflects the best of Japanese scholarship."--Michel Mohr, independent scholar "This book--well argued, well documented and filled with fascinating material--demonstrates the strengths of a social history approach to the study of Buddhist life and contributes to the field of Zen studies in a dramatic way."--Charles Hallisey, University of Wisconsin, Madison.From the Back Cover"The Other Side of Zen brings to light the vital but little studied social dimension of early modern Japanese Zen. Drawing on a wealth of hitherto untapped sources, Williams offers insightful analyses of how Soto Zen temples won and maintained broad lay support by providing rites for healing and protection in this world and salvation in the next. This fascinating study will be essential reading for students and scholars of Buddhism and Japanese religion and has much to offer anyone interested in the social roles of religion."--Jacqueline Stone, Princeton University"This is the first significant contribution in a Western language on Soto Zen of this period. The author's approach is innovative. His use of recently discovered sources, well synthesized, has helped the author succeed in demythologizing the Soto tradition. The book reflects the best of Japanese scholarship."--Michel Mohr, independent

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