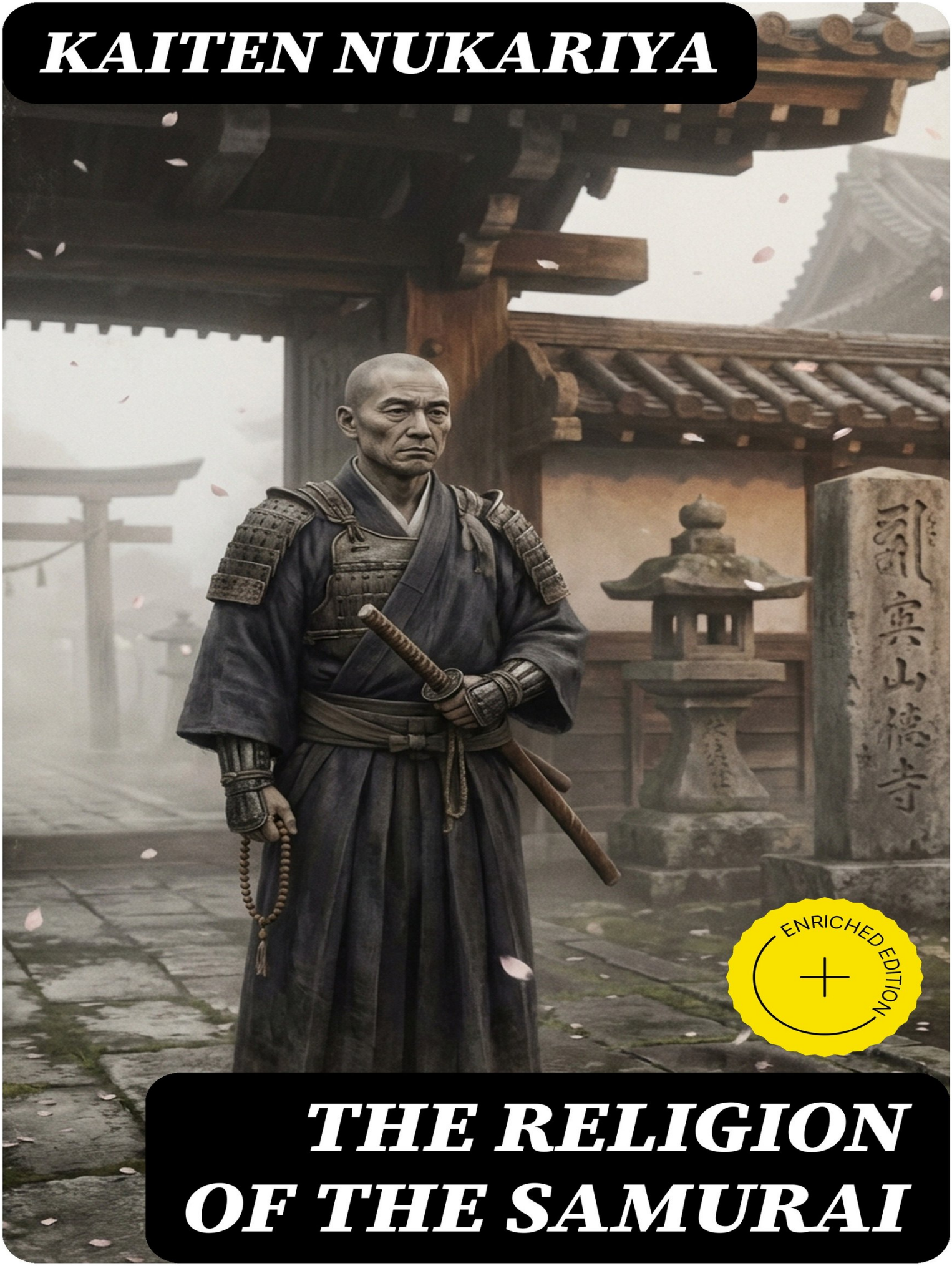
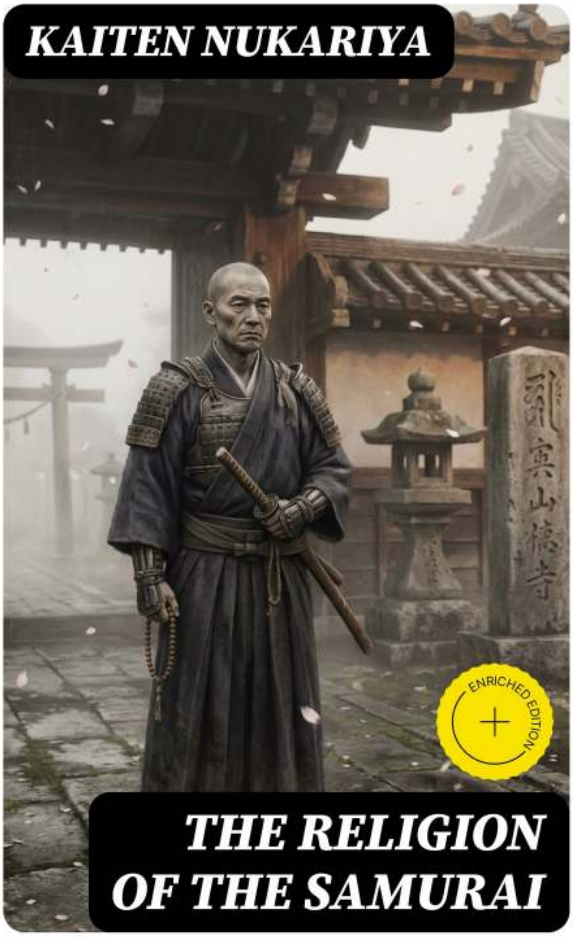
KAITEN NUKARIYA



THE RELIGION OF THE SAMURAI


KAITEN NUKARIYA
ENRICHED EDITION
THE RELIGION
OF THE SAMURAI

Kaiten Nukariya

The Religion of the Samurai

Enriched edition. A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Jared Black

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Introduction

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This book explores how inner stillness disciplines outward action, revealing the reciprocal shaping of Zen insight and the samurai way. The Religion of the Samurai by Kaiten Nukariya is a work of religious philosophy that introduces Zen Buddhism through the historical experiences of warriors in Japan and the broader East Asian tradition. Written for an early twentieth-century audience, it offers a structured explanation of doctrines, practices, and ethical ideals without assuming prior expertise. Nukariya situates Zen within a lineage that spans China and Japan, tracing how meditation, discipline, and insight supported a distinctive code of conduct.

As a work of non-fiction, it blends historical survey with philosophical argument to show how a religious discipline informs a social ethos. The organization moves from foundational orientation to subtler reflections on mind, morality, and training, offering signposts rather than technical hurdles. Composed in a formal yet accessible style, the prose addresses readers unfamiliar with monastic terminology while retaining precision where context requires it. Nukariya writes from within Buddhist tradition and speaks to the concerns of early twentieth-century inquiry, aiming to clarify rather than mystify. Descriptions of practice appear as disciplined habits that shape perception, courage, and conduct, so the book reads as both guide and interpretation.

At its core, the book explains what Zen is, how it conceives mind and reality, and why its training proved compelling to a class of professional warriors. Readers encounter sketches of historical development, expositions of key ideas such as meditation and direct experience, and careful distinctions from other schools. Nukariya emphasizes practical realization over speculation, presenting religious life as a way to act with clarity amid risk. The voice is steady, didactic, and persuasive, avoiding sensationalism while making room for illustrative stories and comparisons. The cumulative effect is a guided tour that clarifies without closing inquiry, encouraging readers to test insights in life rather than in abstraction.

Thematically, the book advances a vision of self-mastery grounded in attention, non-attachment, and moral courage. Meditative discipline trains perception to meet uncertainty without panic, so that action arises from clarity rather than impulse. Ethics is treated not as an abstract code but as the outgrowth of insight into change and interdependence. Nukariya links this spiritual poise to the warrior’s craft, arguing that freedom from fixation enables decisiveness, humility, and responsibility. He also underscores the limits of mere speculation, insisting that truth must be realized in living practice. Taken together, these themes frame religion as a path that unites contemplation, character, and effective action.

For contemporary readers, the book matters because it articulates how inner training can sustain ethical clarity under pressure—a concern that spans workplaces, civic life, and personal crises. Its account of attention and non-

attachment speaks to an age of distraction, while its emphasis on responsibility resists the caricature of mindfulness as withdrawal. Leaders may find a language for courage that avoids bravado; students of religion gain a case study in how practice shapes character. The cross-cultural frame encourages humility about inherited assumptions, making room for dialogue rather than dominance. Above all, it argues that steadiness is learned, not given, and that such learning can serve the common good.

Reading today also involves recognizing the text as a product of its era, with terminology and comparisons shaped by early twentieth-century debates. Some formulations may feel sweeping or dated, and the focus on warriors can appear narrow by contemporary standards. Approached critically, these features become part of the learning: they reveal how religious ideas were translated for a global audience and how ideals travel across cultures. Using the book alongside other perspectives can deepen understanding of Zen’s diversity and its non-martial expressions. Such contextual awareness need not diminish the book’s value; it clarifies what is historical framing and what remains broadly instructive.

Ultimately, The Religion of the Samurai offers a clear window on a tradition that fuses meditative clarity with purposeful action, and it does so without theatrics. Nukariya presents Zen as a lived discipline capable of tempering fear and vanity, illuminating why a demanding path appealed to those entrusted with decisive choices. The book endures because it treats religion as training for life rather than

escape from it. Approached with patience and curiosity, it yields concepts and practices that can be tested in ordinary circumstances. In that sense, its promise is modest and profound: cultivate attention, act responsibly, and allow insight to shape the world you touch.

Synopsis

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The Religion of the Samurai, by Kaiten Nukariya, is an early twentieth-century English-language study that introduces Zen Buddhism as the formative spiritual discipline of Japan’s warrior class. Nukariya outlines his purpose: to clarify Zen’s history, principles, and training so that readers may understand its practical character rather than regard it as mysticism or mere philosophy. He situates his discussion within broader Mahayana Buddhism and promises to show how Zen shaped Japanese character and institutions. The work proceeds methodically, combining historical survey, doctrinal exposition, and sketches of practice, with an emphasis on the lived experience of enlightenment and the rigorous discipline that supports it.

After a concise review of Buddhism’s origins, the book distinguishes early schools from the expansive vision of Mahayana, preparing the ground for Zen’s entry. Nukariya highlights ideas such as universal Buddha-nature and the bodhisattva ideal to show why Mahayana emphasizes direct realization alongside compassion. He presents Zen as a discipline that inherits Mahayana’s insight while focusing on immediate awakening through personal effort. The narrative introduces Bodhidharma’s role as the transmitter of a contemplative lineage, not to advance legend but to situate Zen historically. Throughout, doctrine is treated in service of practice, and metaphysics is subordinated to transformative insight.

Turning to China, the study traces the maturation of Chan, describing how monastic communities refined meditation, teacher–student transmission, and skilful means for jolting the mind from habitual patterns. It notes the influence of Chinese culture—particularly the simplicity and naturalness prized by Daoist thought—without conflating traditions. Methods such as seated meditation and paradoxical dialogues are sketched as pedagogical tools used to precipitate awakening. The account emphasizes disciplined training and moral grounding, correcting misconceptions that Zen rejects scripture or ethics. These chapters set the template of a school that privileges realization verified in practice over speculative system-building.

Nukariya then follows Zen’s transmission to Japan, outlining its establishment by figures associated with the Rinzai and Soto lineages and the role of monasteries in shaping national life. He notes how warrior elites patronized Zen for its austerity and psychological training, while the tradition retained a broader religious horizon beyond the battlefield. Distinct approaches are summarized: Rinzai’s use of challenging exercises to catalyze insight and Soto’s emphasis on silent illumination. The narrative underscores institutional discipline, ethical precepts, and ritual life as integral supports, portraying Japanese Zen as both a spiritual path and a formative social force.

With the historical frame in place, the book presents Zen’s central doctrines and methods with clarity and restraint. It explains enlightenment as an experiential breakthrough that affirms inherent Buddha-nature while

transforming conduct here and now. Zazen, attentive mindfulness in daily tasks, and, in some schools, koan investigation are analyzed as means to unsettle egocentric fixation. Moral discipline, self-control, and compassion are treated as natural expressions of insight rather than external commandments. Nukariya stresses the necessity of competent guidance and sustained effort, arguing that Zen is neither quietism nor license but a rigorous path uniting wisdom and character.

Beyond doctrine, Nukariya surveys Zen's cultural imprint in Japan. He links its love of simplicity, immediacy, and restraint to developments in poetry, ink painting, the tea ceremony, garden design, and artisanal crafts, while warning against reducing Zen to aesthetics. The psychological training that fosters presence of mind and fearlessness is related to education and public life. Comparative passages address Western philosophy and religion, emphasizing points of convergence and divergence without forcing equivalence. Case examples and maxims illustrate attitudes cultivated by practice, but the text consistently returns to the primacy of realization over speculation or ornamental appreciation.

The closing chapters consider life, death, and social ethics through a Zen lens, arguing for a way that meets ordinary responsibilities while maintaining inward freedom. Without sensational claims or finality, Nukariya offers a measured appraisal of Zen's capacity to stabilize minds and refine character amid modern upheaval. The book's broader significance lies in its role as a systematic, accessible presentation of Zen by a Japanese scholar for an

international readership. It remains notable for linking spiritual training, cultural expression, and moral purpose, inviting readers to test the tradition’s insights in practice rather than accept them on authority.

Historical Context

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Published in 1913, Kaiten Nukariya's The Religion of the Samurai appeared in early Taishō Japan, a nation transformed by rapid modernization since the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Japan had recently asserted itself through victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), heightening foreign interest in its culture. Buddhism, having weathered the anti-Buddhist haibutsu kishaku of the early 1870s, was undergoing institutional reform and scholarly renewal. Against this backdrop, Japanese Buddhist thinkers addressed international audiences in English, presenting Mahayana and Zen as rational, ethical traditions. Nukariya's study belongs to this transnational conversation and aims to situate Zen within Japan's historical experience.

Zen's deeper background lies in Chinese Chan, which emerged during the Tang dynasty and developed influential lineages under figures such as Huineng and Linji. From Song China, Zen entered Japan through monk-envoys. Eisai (1141–1215) introduced Rinzai practices after travels to China and founded temples including Kennin-ji. Dōgen (1200–1253) studied under the Caodong master Rujing and established Sōtō Zen, founding Eihei-ji in 1244. Zen took root during the Kamakura shogunate, when warrior leaders patronized new Buddhist movements. These transmissions, institutions, and texts furnished the historical framework

that Nukariya surveys when explaining doctrine, training, and lineage to readers unfamiliar with East Asian Buddhism.

Under Kamakura and Muromachi rule, Zen intersected with samurai governance and elite culture. Rinzai monasteries occupied prominent places in the Five Mountains (Gozan) system, supported by shogunal and Ashikaga patronage. Sōtō communities, expanded by teachers such as Keizan Jōkin (1268–1325), spread through provincial networks. Zen ideals influenced arts associated with the warrior class and courtly elites, including ink painting, garden design, and the tea culture later epitomized by Sen no Rikyū. While samurai religion drew on Confucian and Shintō currents as well as Buddhism, Zen's disciplined practice and institutional presence made it a visible component of medieval Japanese life.

Early modern transformations under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867) further structured religious life. The state required household registration with Buddhist temples (the danka or terauke system) to monitor communities and suppress Christianity, entrenching temple networks in administration. Zen schools diversified with the arrival of the Ōbaku lineage from Ming China in the seventeenth century. Monasteries served as sites of education, printing, and cultural exchange, while Confucian learning informed samurai ethics and governance. These institutions and textual traditions shaped the sources and histories available to modern scholars, providing material that Nukariya systematized for an audience seeking clear accounts of Zen doctrine and practice.

After 1868, the Meiji state reorganized religion alongside broader social reforms. Buddhist establishments suffered from the haibutsu kishaku movement but recovered through consolidation, education, and public outreach. The 1889 Constitution proclaimed limited religious freedom, and Buddhist leaders engaged Western scholarship and global forums. Soyen Shaku addressed the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and his student D. T. Suzuki began publishing in English in the early twentieth century. Japanese authors framed Mahayana thought as compatible with science and ethics. Nukariya's decision to write in English in 1913 reflects this effort to explain Zen to an international readership.

By the 1890s and 1900s, debates about national character crystallized around bushidō, the ethical code attributed to the samurai. Works such as Nitobe Inazō's Bushido: The Soul of Japan (1899) popularized an idealized warrior morality for foreign and domestic audiences. Educators invoked the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education to emphasize loyalty and filial piety. In this intellectual climate, narratives linking Zen training with samurai discipline circulated widely, though samurai ethics historically drew on multiple traditions. Nukariya's title participates in this discourse, presenting Zen as a formative influence on martial ethos while situating it within broader Mahayana philosophy and monastic practice.

Nukariya writes as a Zen priest and scholar for readers new to Buddhist sources, organizing material on history, doctrine, meditation, and the lives of eminent masters. He situates kōan practice, zazen, and moral discipline within

the Chan-Sōtō-Rinzai heritage, while addressing critiques common in early twentieth-century exchanges with Christian missionaries and Western philosophers. Drawing on canonical texts and traditional biographies, he also adopts contemporary terminology to explain intuition, will, and enlightenment. The book’s accessible English prose aligns with a broader Japanese Buddhist effort to codify and present Zen systematically to global audiences amid growing academic study of religion.

The Religion of the Samurai thus reflects an era of reinterpretation, when Buddhist leaders defended tradition while recasting it through history, ethics, and comparative philosophy. Emerging from Japan’s modern universities and temple networks, the book articulates Zen as both a spiritual discipline and a foundation for cultural identity, echoing contemporary discussions of bushidō and national character. At the same time, its historical surveys and attention to primary sources aim to correct misconceptions and reduce exoticism. In doing so, Nukariya’s work exemplifies early twentieth-century Buddhist modernism and offers a self-conscious critique of shallow stereotypes about Japan and Mahayana Buddhism.

The Religion of the Samurai

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ORIGIN OF MAN

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Buddha-nature and the universal life attributed to the Tathagata.

22 An influential Confucian philosopher (commonly dated c. 372–282 BCE) whose collected sayings form the work called the Mencius and who argued that human nature is fundamentally good.

23 A Japanese Confucian scholar who died in 1649, credited here as the founder of the 'Wang School of Confucianism' in Japan and called the Sage of Omi; he is associated with introducing or promoting the Wang Yangming (Yongjia/Wang) philosophical tradition in Japan.

24 A figure cited in Chan/Zen anecdotes (rendered Ban-zan in Japanese) whose sudden awakening on encountering ordinary speech is used in Zen literature to illustrate instantaneous Enlightenment; precise historic details about the individual vary across sources.

25 The Sanskrit title of the Lotus Sūtra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra), a central Mahayana text that emphasizes the universality of Buddhahood; it is widely cited and translated in East Asian Buddhist traditions.

26 A standard Buddhist term for the root defilements that fuel suffering—here glossed in the footnote as 'Lust, anger, and folly'—often also rendered as greed (raja), hatred (dvesha), and delusion (moha).

27 In Buddhist tradition, Maitreya is the bodhisattva prophesied to become the future Buddha who will appear in a remote age to renew the Dharma; some sutras give traditional cosmological timetables for that coming.

28 The title Sho-bo-gen-zo (often romanized Shōbōgenzō) refers to a major collection of writings by the

Japanese Zen master Dōgen, foundational in Sōtō Zen and frequently cited on doctrinal matters in East Asian Zen literature.

29 A Sanskrit term for an ideal universal ruler or 'wheel-turning' monarch in Indian religious and political thought, often depicted as possessing a wheel symbolizing sovereign authority.

30 Nichiren (1222–1282) was a Japanese Buddhist priest who founded the Nichiren school, a movement that centers on devotion to the Lotus Sutra; historical accounts record his teachings and his exile in the 13th century.

31 A Buddhist meditation (dhyāna) sutra associated with the bodhisattva Samantabhadra and cited in Mahayana literature; titles and contents vary among traditions and translations, so references may point to different related texts.

32 A historical Zen figure (To Sotsu) cited here for posing the famous three difficult questions; the footnote in the text records he died in 1091 and is associated with the Three Gates (San Kwan) tradition.

33 Sanskrit term for meditative absorption widely used in early Buddhist texts; in Mahayana/Zen contexts it denotes concentrated meditation or the meditative practice leading to enlightenment.

34 Keizan Jōkin (Kei-zan) was a major Japanese Zen master (founder associated with the Sō-ji-ji temple) who lived in the Kamakura–Muromachi era and promoted Soto Zen practices; the footnote dates his death to 1325.

35 Title of a traditional manual on Zazen attributed to Kei-zan (Keizan Jōkin); it sets out rules and practical

guidance for seated Zen meditation.

36 Named here as a sutra dealing with meditation (dhyāna); it is presented in the text as a classical Buddhist meditation scripture referenced by Zen authors.

37 A rendering of the name Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom in Mahayana Buddhism, venerated in East Asian Buddhist traditions and often invoked in devotional or narrative contexts.

38 Lin Tsi (Linji Yixuan), known in Japanese as Rin-zai, was an influential 9th-century Chinese Chan (Zen) master and the eponymous founder of the Linji/Rinzai school of Zen.

39 A named Zen practitioner mentioned in the book as a reputedly famous teacher who habitually answered queries with the injunction 'Let go of your idle thoughts'; the exact historical identity is given in the source tradition but may appear in variant romanizations.

40 A traditional series of ten illustrative pictures (and accompanying verses) used in Chinese and Japanese Zen to represent successive stages in the student's progress toward awakening; the set is attributed here to Kwoh Ngan (Kaku-an).

41 A Japanese Zen master (E-myō or Ryōan) noted in the footnote as the founder of the Sai-jo-ji monastery near Odawara, with the death date given as 1411.

42 A Japanese name for the Avatamsaka (Flower Garland) school of Mahayana Buddhism, focused on the Avatamsaka-sutra and influential in East Asia; it was systematized from Indian sources and became prominent in China and Japan from the early medieval period.

43 An English rendering of the Taoist concept Hu Wu Ta Tao (the Way or Great Path of Emptiness) from the Tao Teh King, denoting an absolute, primordial principle in Taoist metaphysics; interpretations and translations of the term vary among scholars.

44 A Yogacara (Mahayana) technical term often translated as ‘storehouse consciousness’ or ‘receptacle-knowledge,’ describing a foundational mental substrate that stores karmic ‘seeds’ and conditions later conscious experience.

45 A Sanskrit term for an enormously long cosmological period or age used in Buddhist and Hindu literature to describe cycles of world-formation, existence, destruction, and emptiness; the duration is not fixed in ordinary human time but is meant to be vast.

46 In Buddhist and Hindu cosmology, Sumeru (Mount Meru) is the central, often mythic, mountain or cosmic axis around which continents and heavens are arranged; it functions as a structuring feature of classical cosmological maps rather than a historical geographic peak.

47 In early Buddhist traditions (commonly associated with the Hinayana or Theravada), an Arhat is one who has realized Nirvana by extinguishing passions and thus is liberated from the cycle of rebirth; meanings and emphasis vary across Buddhist schools.

48 A Mahayana Buddhist term literally meaning the ‘womb’ or ‘embryo’ of the Tathagata, commonly translated ‘Buddha-nature’; it denotes the idea that all sentient beings possess an innate potential for awakening and appears in