Zen in Japanese Culture

Gavin Blair
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The beeping, flashing, vibrating distractions of technology; densely populated city centers; brash displays of wealth and power among the elites; and societal inequality: such is life in the twenty-first century. Whether modern developments amount to improvements over previous centuries is debatable, but it's straightforward to imagine how similar stressors in Japanese society a millennium ago led to the emergence of a religion-like philosophy based on self-control, taming the ego, accepting impermanence, minimalism, and austerity. Yes, that would be Zen Buddhism.

Even as Zen has been embraced in other parts of the world, its heart continues to beat strongest in the island country of its birth. *Zen in Japanese Culture* offers a beautifully detailed and illustrated historical tally of the myriad ways Zen has influenced Japan's art, architecture, cuisine, design, emotional well-being, weaponry, and martial arts. In the exquisite opening essays to each chapter, Gavin Blair explores the Japanese approach to life through Zen's inextricability, and he leaves no doubt that civilized society may have reached its penultimate expression in the land of the rising sun.

MATT SUTHERLAND (November / December 2019)

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