



Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West (Buddhism and Modernity)

Shoji Yamada

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In the years after World War II, Westerners and Japanese alike elevated Zen to the quintessence of spirituality in Japan. Pursuing the sources of Zen as a Japanese ideal, Shoji Yamada uncovers the surprising role of two cultural touchstones: Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* and the Ryoanji dry-landscape rock garden. Yamada shows how both became facile conduits for exporting and importing Japanese culture.

First published in German in 1948 and translated into Japanese in 1956, Herrigel's book popularized ideas of Zen both in the West and in Japan. Yamada traces the prewar history of Japanese archery, reveals how Herrigel mistakenly came to understand it as a traditional practice, and explains why the Japanese themselves embraced his interpretation as spiritual discipline. Turning to Ryoanji, Yamada argues that this epitome of Zen in fact bears little relation to Buddhism and is best understood in relation to Chinese myth. For much of its modern history, Ryoanji was a weedy, neglected plot; only after its allegorical role in a 1949 Ozu film was it popularly linked to Zen. Westerners have had a part in redefining Ryoanji, but as in the case of archery, Yamada's interest is primarily in how the Japanese themselves have invested this cultural site with new value through a spurious association with Zen.

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