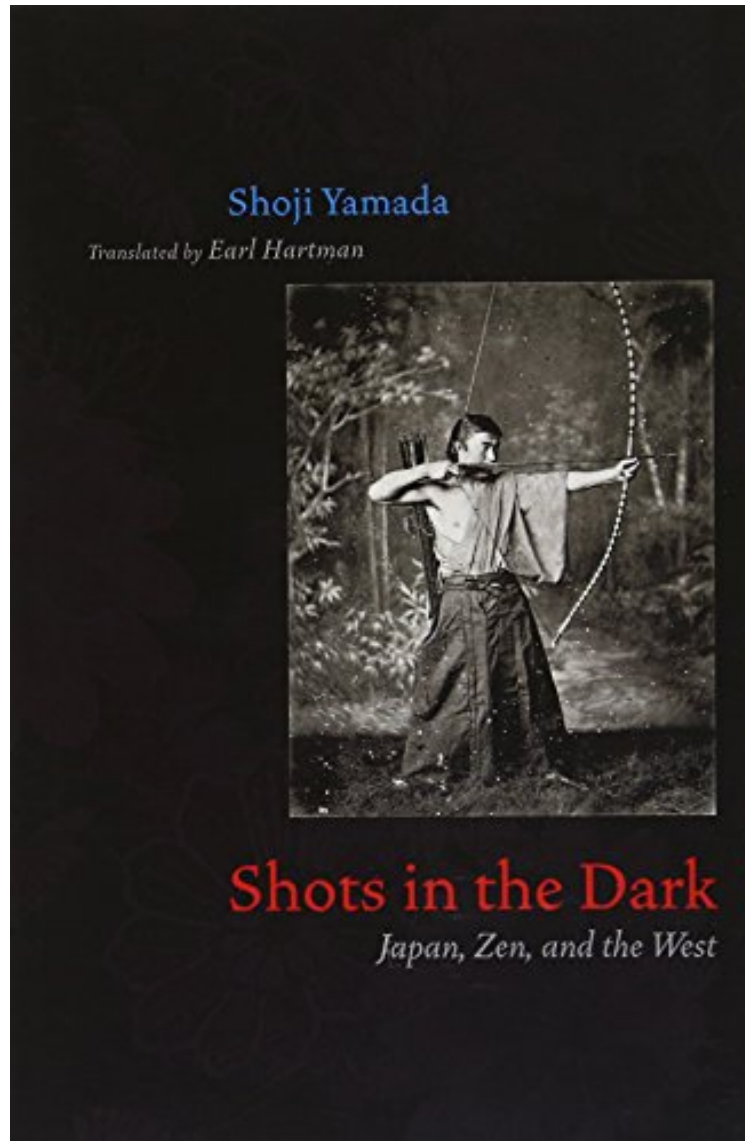


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## Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West (Buddhism and Modernity)

*Shoji Yamada*

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**Shoji Yamada : Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West (Buddhism and Modernity)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West (Buddhism and Modernity):

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Seeing Japan as we want to see it, not as it isBy AlchemistGeorgeProfessor Yamada's well written and easy to read book deals with two "icons" of Japanese culture -

the rock garden at Ryoanji and Japanese Archery (Kyudo) as described in Eugen Herrigel's "Zen in the Art of Archery". It discusses their relationship with Zen Buddhism, and ultimately discusses how we perceive Japan, and how Japan perceives itself. As a martial artist and Japanophile I found this book fascinating and could barely put it down. Like so many I was enchanted by "Zen in the Art of Archery" which I read at university (circa 1977). During the 80s I lived in Japan for three years during which I studied Japanese martial arts (Jodo and Jojutsu), a practice I continued for another 8 years. I've visited Ryoanji six or seven times. For me, Herrigel's book seemed a definitive account of zen development thru martial arts training. But is it? Herrigel's teacher, Awa-sensei, was not a teacher, practitioner, nor adherent of zen buddhism, nor was he part of mainstream kyudo / kyujutsu tradition, and the "great doctrine" of which he speaks is not zen, its daishadokyo, a religion invented by Awa. Herrigel only spoke limited Japanese, and his translator admitted he often could not understand and translate what Awa-sensei was saying to Herrigel. How then did this book become so influential that it has changed even the Japanese perception of Kyudo and become part and parcel of Japanese discussions of "Japaneseness"? I found this to be fascinating. Just as Herrigel's book has become an archetype, so has the rock garden at Ryoanji. The author shows that its status as an icon of Japanese culture and in fact its identity with Zen are both very recent - dating from the 1950s - this of a garden that might have been constructed in the 1500s. Interesting it appears that in this case too, the opinion of foreigners carried great weight in the process of Japan coming to so highly value this particular garden. [I was astonished to read that the garden \*has\* changed - the raking of the gravel is post world war two, and that there was \*at least\* one tree in the garden - a weeping cherry that Toyotomi Hideyoshi admired.] The book is well laid out, and the research appears to be very methodical and complete. The author was a student of Kyudo, the translator is a licensed Kyudo instructor who trained in Japan. The author went to Germany to read Herrigel's papers, and do the necessary background research. The only criticism I have of the book is that I thought the section on Ryoanji over long - I thought some of it could be in the appendices along with the document Herrigel wrote to defend himself (somewhat unsuccessfully) regarding his 8 years as a Nazi. I'd love to know what the reactions were in Japan to this book - my Japanese isn't that good. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellently researched, a great find. By Adam "...I eventually came to the inevitable conclusion: Herrigel had simply gotten it wrong..." - This quote actually comes from the translator Earl Hartman, but it could act as a primer for 2/3 (~) of this wonderfully researched book. While only recently a practitioner in kyudo, I've been involved in martial arts for a bit. As an avid reader, I see MA books as being part of 3 categories: 1) The woefully inept: the dreamers, the charlatans, the McDojo's w/ publishing backing, the very basic of basic martial arts books. Unfortunately, this is the vast majority of publications. (2) The pragmatic - specialized technical details on special fields...great on technical detail, lacking much else. (3) The historical - pure history, little culture, little in the way of opinionated arguments. For me though, there is a 4th kind - the one's that are largely historical, but asks and expounds upon the bigger questions - 'Yes this happened...but how, and what does it mean, how is it to be remembered, what are the perspectives' - these books are the most enjoyable, and unfortunately the hardest to find. This book, enjoyably, belongs in that category. The author has certainly done his research, and the book is well presented in an academic manner. It is roughly divided into 3 parts but all asking a central question: how and why has Zen become so inundated as the preeminent cultural trait of Japan. The first part is about Herrigel and kyudo, the 2nd about the rock garden at Ryoanji, and the 3rd a general wrap up of how these views were presented and re-accepted in modern context both abroad and back to Japan. The only reason I gave this 4 instead of 5 stars is b/c I thought the 2nd part about Ryoanji was slightly discombobulated vs the straightforward approach of part 1 and 3, and frankly I could have done without it (but then again, I care about martial arts, not rock gardens). Aside from that this book should be on any serious martial artist or Japanese cultural critics bookshelf. Buy it, read it, think about it, and then read it again...and repeat - you won't be disappointed. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not good. By Customer. In the author's postscript he confides, "I hope that one day I will be able to tackle such profound issues as Zen and kyudo head on, but I doubt if I will ever be able to handle it." That doubt seems justified. This is a remarkably plodding book. Its most astonishing feature -- the best example of the unsynthesized research that fills its pages -- is a chart of each mention of the Ryoanji rock garden in Japanese textbooks that goes on for 14 pages. The book has an interesting idea at its core, but the payoff is not remotely worth the work.

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.

"A very enjoyable meditation on the curious thing called "Zen" --not the Japanese religious tradition but rather the Western cliché of Zen that is embraced in advertising, self-help books, and much more. . . . Yamada, who is both a scholar of Buddhism and a student of archery, offers refreshing insight into Western stereotypes of Japan and Japanese culture, and how these are received in Japan."--Alexander Gardner, "Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly"--  
Alexander Gardner "Buddhadharma" About the Author Shoji Yamada is associate professor at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. Earl Hartman is a professional translator and technical writer based in California.