

The Armadillo had lots of good music, but just as important, it had lots of beer, as these cowboys knew.

# Zen made funny in 'Thank You and OK!'



East meets West head on in David Chadwick's first novel.

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What happens when a person studies a discipline for a good chunk of his life, only to find out he has much more to learn?

David Chadwick knows. And fortunately, he shares this experience in his first book, *Thank You and OK!: An American Zen Failure in Japan*.

Chadwick's book is equal parts travelogue, Zen manual and life philosophy. He provides readers and writers alike with an glowing example of what an author's first book should be.

The book chronicles three years of Chadwick's travels in Japan, including his studies at a small Zen temple and his experiences of teaching English to Japanese students.

Chadwick is originally from Texas, and he seems to be the quintessential wanderer. He hooked up with Zen Center in San Francisco in the '60s and has devoted his life to the practice of Zen ever since.

He first went to Japan in 1988 to begin a serious study of Zen under Japanese instruction.

What Chadwick encountered was both the obvious and the unexpected.

In the book, Chadwick meets frustrations he shares with another American Zen monk, Norman, while dealing with strict Japanese Zen practices. He intro-

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duces humorous twists to a Zen monk's life, often with hilarious results.

In one passage, the American monks complain that the temple beams are too low and force Westerners to duck to avoid being clunked on the head. Low beams are a common obstacle many foreigners face in any Japanese building, yet it ticks off Norman that nothing is done about it — one of the reasons for the temple's existence is to train foreign monks.

Chadwick schemes to develop a headband with two antennae attached that the monks could wear to warn them of nearby low beams. Chadwick describes his plan with gusto, saying that the "Beam Alert" is a truly bizarre invention to the Japanese.

For his first book, Chadwick does extraordinarily well in weaving fabrics of his Japanese experience together. Each section of his book is titled with a single verb, such as "Walking" or "Living," to

## book review

### **THANK YOU AND OK!**

Author: David Chadwick

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define the simple things in his life. This could be a reflection of his Zen training, and it makes the work all the more enjoyable to read.

Chadwick describes the island nation through a simple style that erases any pretentious "expertise."

Surprisingly, the only down-side to his book is Chadwick's in-depth description of Zen practices. These sections should be enlightening to those unfamiliar with Zen philosophy, but the passages need to be read a few times before understanding what Chadwick is trying to convey.

Fortunately, Chadwick details Zen rituals and the differences between the various schools of Zen, so the terminology and confusion surrounding the Zen mystery does not bring down the book to a lower level.

*Thank You and OK!* is a must for Japanophiles, and recommended to anyone considering living overseas. Chadwick's insights into the "overseas experience" are eye-opening as well as entertaining.