

SYLLABUS

RELI 312-01

The Buddhist Tradition

The University of Findlay
Fall 2001
MWF 10
Main 203

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Preliminary Pedagogical Remarks

Institution: Private comprehensive university (last taught at the University of Findlay, Findlay, Ohio)

Course level/type: yr. 2-4/lecture-seminar

Hours of Instruction: 3 hrs/week over a 14 week term

Enrollment/year last taught: 12 students/2001

Reflections:

This particular version of this course (I am planning to offer it again in a revised version) had three goals: (1) to emulate a so-called “Buddhist approach” to the teaching of the tradition, (2) to focus on the roles played by gender, especially femininity, in Buddhist doctrine and practice, and (3) to explore dimensions of the Buddhist experience in North America.

Firstly, the structure of this course takes its cue from Roger Corless, who says in his *The Vision of Buddhism* (adopted as the primary textbook for the course) that he wishes to pursue a non-dualistic, non-linear, and allegedly thoroughly Buddhist approach to teaching about the tradition. Hence, the course does not follow a strict chronological sequence, but rather treats various elements of the Buddhist experience: basic doctrines, basic practices, lay life, monastic life, polemics, psychology, occult practices, etc. Nor does it keep diverse cultural sources of texts separate, but freely mixes Chinese, Indian, Tibetan, Japanese, and other materials in each week's assigned readings.

The difficulties with this approach overcame my initial enthusiasm for it, and I doubt that I will teach this course in quite this way again. Students come away with a fairly solid synthetic sense of Buddhist concepts, but little sense of Buddhist history. They also tend not to have much sense of cultural differences within the vast geographical orbit of Buddhism beyond the very basic Theravada/Mahayana distinction. Thus, it is difficult for them to think about how Buddhist doctrines, practices, and experiences may have changed over time and space, since they tend to embrace a perennialist view of the tradition. In this sense, their understanding of the tradition may mirror the self-

understanding of the tradition, but that does not necessarily justify this pedagogical approach, in my view.

I feel that this version of the course was much more successful in achieving its second goal — spotlighting gender (masculinity and femininity) as an occasion of suffering and an arena of liberation in Buddhist doctrine and practice. Students relished dissecting various primary texts in search of gender bias or its transformation; these kinds of experiences helped to undermine the perennialist assumptions that many formed as a result of the organizational approach described above.

Diana Paul's anthology of primary texts remains indispensable for such efforts; I may use Jose Ignacio Cabezon's *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* as a resource in this course's next incarnation, as well. My sense is that a text like Rita Gross' *Buddhism after Patriarchy* would be less helpful in this connection and more suitable for furthering the third goal of the course (examining Buddhism in North America), and then, only in part, not as a whole.

Finally, I doubt that I will repeat my use of Martha Sherrill's *The Buddha from Brooklyn*, although this has nothing to do with any flaws in Sherrill's work. Her account of the rise and semi-decline of an alleged "incarnate lama" from Brooklyn has its lurid details — rooted in the lurid life of its subject — and students tended to seize upon these, rather than viewing them as elements of a more complex picture. My students' reception of Sherrill's book generated much discussion about new religious movements and Orientalism in America — valuable in itself, to be sure, but not really effective as a means of promoting the third goal of the course. I now view her book as more suitable for a course on new religious movements or Asian cultural influences on North American institutions than for a straightforward introduction to Buddhism such as this course was intended to be.

In its next incarnation, this course will adopt a more conventional, historically- and geographically-oriented approach, and I probably will adopt Ross Reat's *Buddhism: A History* as a basic textbook. The Conze and Lopez anthologies of primary sources are wonderful and wonderfully complementary to one another, so I am likely to continue using them. I do plan to retain the "Buddhism and gender" component, but I may expand it a little, as noted above. Lastly, I probably will make use of wholly different texts for introducing Buddhism in North America — excerpts from *Tricycle* magazine, Rick Field's *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, and perhaps some of Thomas Tweed's work on Asian religions in America.

Course Description

This course is an intermediate-level survey of the history and diversity of the Buddhist tradition, from the lifetime of the Buddha in fifth-century BCE India to contemporary Buddhist communities in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and North America.

Since Shakyamuni Gautama Siddartha, the historical Buddha, sat beneath a tree to meditate around 500 BCE, much has changed in the world (including Buddhism itself). Nonetheless, certain features of human existence remain painfully constant: birth, illness, hardship, old age, and death. As long as there is human suffering, there will be those for whom the Buddha's message signifies liberation. We will study the many permutations of that message and how it has been interpreted by Buddhists in many places and times since that fateful meditative session so long ago. We also will focus on gender (masculinity and femininity) as an occasion of suffering and an arena of liberation.

Most of this course will consist of reading, interpreting, and discussing excerpts from the primary texts (original writings) of Buddhist cultures. Classroom lectures, textbook overviews, and glimpses into these religious worlds through music and video will guide and enrich our conversations about the Buddhist tradition. This combination of intensive reading and discussion along with lectures and multimedia presentations will enable us to discover for ourselves what Buddhists have valued most throughout the ages. This, in turn, is an excellent way of determining what we ourselves are going to value in the present and in the future.

Successful completion of this course (offered every other year) satisfies the University's general education requirement in religious studies or philosophy (3 credit hours), as well as elective credit toward the Women's Studies minor. Previous completion of ENGL 106 with a grade of C or better is a prerequisite for enrollment. Previous completion of RELI 101, 200, or 201 is highly recommended.

Course Goals

Successful completion of this course will provide you with:

- A basic appreciation of the interactions between cumulative tradition and personal faith
- An intermediate-level knowledge of the key themes, concerns, and practices of Buddhism
- An advanced competence in reading primary texts of religious cultures and interpreting them for yourself

Course Materials (for sale at University Bookstore / on reserve at Shafer Library; estimated cost)

- Edward Conze, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures* (Penguin Classics, 1959; \$12.95)
- Roger J. Corless, *The Vision of Buddhism* (Paragon House, 1990; \$16.95)
- Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Buddhism in Practice* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1995; \$21.95)
- Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism* (Univ. of California Press, 1985; \$19.95)
- Martha Sherrill, *The Buddha from Brooklyn* (Knopf, 2000; \$25.95)

ALWAYS BRING THE ASSIGNED TEXTS TO CLASS WITH YOU!

Course Requirements

- **Adherence to the *Student Rights and Responsibilities Statement*** found in the current University catalog, which forbids plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty. The instructor reserves the right to assign any plagiarized assignment a grade of F (0).
- **Regular, on-time attendance and informed participation in class discussions.** No more than five absences will be allowed without the risk of penalty to your grade. The instructor reserves the right to reduce your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence in excess of the maximum five. Being on time for class is important; the instructor reserves the right to reduce your final grade by 1 point for each late arrival to class. "Informed participation" consists of preparing for class by reading the assigned texts thoughtfully, preparing questions and comments to share in class, and responding to

questions and comments from the instructor and fellow students in a respectful and cooperative fashion.

- **Regular, in-class, closed-book pop quizzes** on key terms introduced in lectures and readings. Quizzes cannot be made up at a later date. Missed quizzes will result in a quiz average with fewer scores, which may impact your final grade negatively.
- **Three analytical papers (each 7-10 pages in length)**, due on the dates indicated by the Course Calendar. Paper topics will be circulated at least one week before each paper is due. Grades of late papers will be reduced by 1/3 of a grade for each day late. Papers must be typed in clear standard English prose, double-spaced, and free of mechanical errors.

Grading

Class participation.....	20% of final grade
Pop quizzes.....	20% of final grade
Analytical papers.....	60% of final grade (20% each)

A + = 100	B+ = 90	C+ = 80	D+ = 70	F = 60 or below
A = 95	B = 85	C = 75	D = 65	
A- = 91	B- = 81	C- = 71	D- = 61	

If you are a student with a disability, it is your responsibility to inform your instructor and register with the Office of Disability Services at least one week prior to a needed service so that reasonable accommodations can be made.

Course Calendar

Assignments and dates may be subject to change. You are responsible for all changes made to the calendar as provided by the instructor during class sessions.

Week 1 <i>The Buddha and His Message</i>
8/27 Introductory session (no preparation required)
8/29 <i>The Vision of Buddhism</i> , pp. 1-27
8/31 <i>The Vision of Buddhism</i> , ch. 1
<u>Video</u> : <i>Footprint of the Buddha</i> (in class)

Week 2 <i>Where Do Buddhas Come From?</i>
9/3 NO CLASS – LABOR DAY
9/5 <i>Buddhist Scriptures</i> , pp. 19-33
9/7 <i>Buddhist Scriptures</i> , pp. 34-66

Week 3 <i>Buddhism in the World</i>
9/10 <i>The Vision of Buddhism</i> , ch. 2
9/12 <i>Buddhism in Practice</i> , ch. 11
9/14 <i>Buddhism in Practice</i> , ch. 47

Week 4 ***Buddhism at Home***

- 9/17 *Vision of Buddhism*, ch. 3
9/19 *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 25
9/21 *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 13

Week 5 ***Monks and Nuns***

- 9/24 *The Vision of Buddhism*, ch. 4
9/26 *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 69-97; *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 37
9/28 Video: *Becoming the Buddha in L.A.* (in class)
PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS!

Week 6 ***Buddhism in Dialogue and Debate***

- 10/1 *The Vision of Buddhism*, ch. 5
10/3 *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 190-220
10/5 *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 22

Week 7 ***Buddhist Psychology***

- 10/8 *The Vision of Buddhism*, chs. 7 & 8
10/10 *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 98-144; *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 30
10/12 **NO CLASS – MID-FALL RECESS**

Week 8 ***Teaching, Learning, and Knowing the Dharma***

- 10/15 *The Vision of Buddhism*, ch. 9
10/17 *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 181-189
Video: *Principles and Practices of Zen* (in class)
10/19 *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 7

Week 9 ***The Promise of Liberation***

- 10/22 *The Vision of Buddhism*, ch. 10
10/24 *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 145-167
10/26 *Buddhism in Practice*, ch. 48

Week 10 ***Women in Buddhism I: Good Mothers and Loose Women***

- 10/29 *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 3-24
10/31 *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 25-59
11/2 **PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS!**

Week 11 ***Women in Buddhism II: Renunciants and Scholars***

- 11/5 *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 60-105
11/7 **NO CLASS – ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE CELEBRATION** (details TBA)
11/9 *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 106-133

Week 12 ***Women in Buddhism III: Goddesses and Buddhas***

11/12 *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 166-184, 217-231

11/14 *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 247-302

11/16 **NO CLASS – INSTRUCTOR AWAY** * Begin reading *The Buddha From Brooklyn* *

NOVEMBER 19, 21, 23: INSTRUCTOR AWAY/THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13 ***Buddhism in America***

11/26 *The Buddha from Brooklyn*, chs. 1-8

11/28 *The Buddha from Brooklyn*, chs. 9-16

11/30 *The Buddha from Brooklyn*, chs. 17-22

Week 14 ***Buddhism in the Movies: Kundun*** (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1997; rated PG-13)

12/3 Video: *Kundun* (part one – in class)

12/5 Video: *Kundun* (part two – in class)

12/7 Video: *Kundun* (part three – in class)

PAPER #3 DUE IN CLASS!

