

Words are bound up with discrimination and are the carrier of transmigration. Meaning, Mahamati, is attained from much learning, and this much learning, Mahamati, means to be conversant with meaning and not words. –
Lankavatara sutra, p. 169 (unabridged ed.).

Therefore, each time Huiman spoke Dharma, he said, “The Buddhas speak of mind in order to enable us to realize that mental conceptualization is unreal. Now you are re-adding mental conceptualization. It is in deep contradiction to the Buddhas’ intention, and to add discussion to it is to pervert the great principle.” – *The Bodhidharma anthology*, p. 63.

If you hold various attachments to study the practice and this [Great Dharma], you will not learn anything.
– *Zhuan falun*, p. 2.

Ironically, the very issue as to whether Buddhist sutras should be studied is a point of contention within the Buddhist sutras being studied. Is enlightenment to be gained through experience that transcends all doctrines, symbols and words? Or is it accessed through a strictly Buddhist interpretation of reality, a conveyed creed that shapes and molds perception itself? Does the addition of our Western scholarly approach that demands definitions and taxonomies in fact hinder the spreading of an Eastern dharma? The friction between conveyed and experiential knowledge has become a rather hot topic in modern religious studies East and West, but these arguments have flared up many times within the history of Chinese Buddhism.

The *Lankavatara sutra* may discount the ultimate value of words, but it still uses them – a lot of them, in fact – to triangulate around the meaning of the dharma. After Huiman dismissed discussion of the dharma – he would have been no fun in a Reed conference – he then handed his listeners the *Lankavatara sutra* as “the essence of mind.” Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun gong, dismissed “modernized scholars of Buddhism” like us, but by his own admission, he is building upon all the written canonical traditions that have preceded him. We will be reading texts such as these, discussing what shouldn’t be discussed and applying analysis where it shouldn’t be applied. Yet we do so with respect and admiration.

Welcome to this intensive reading course that endeavors to offer Buddhist answers to the biggest questions. This course is not just on Mahayana Buddhism but also on how people talk about Mahayana Buddhism – from Buddhists to historians, from medieval Chinese to modern Americans. I have this semester heeded a traditional Buddhist scheme for organizing our materials, namely the “Three jewels” or “Three treasures” (San: *triratna*; Chi: *sanbao* 三寶) of Buddha, dharma (law or system) and sangha (discipleship). Through a combination of good primary and secondary sources, we will polish each jewel, and at the end of each third, we will add a modernizing twist. That is, after we learn about the Buddha, we will read Hermann Hesse’s Nobel Prize-winning *Siddhartha*; after we read sutras from all four major Chinese traditions, we will read Jack Kerouac’s attempt at a modern sutra; after we study a bit about the historical *sangha*, we will look at the new U.S. discipleship updating the dharma and merging it with the current ecological crusade.

This course will not be easy. The volume of reading alone appears daunting at first. Furthermore, your predecessors have told me they got headaches from thinking so hard to get their minds around the Buddhist concepts – although they insisted they were *good* headaches and missed them when the course was over. Yet the rewards manifested in creative conversations, in understanding this worldwide tradition, in alternative perspectives – the last so important in Buddhism – are, I believe, worth the effort. There is a great potential for us to build up an insight and gradually construct a dialogue that addresses profound matters, matters including the very nature of existence itself. So grab your sutras and your aspirin bottle, and let’s walk down the Middle Way.

I. Books (in order of reading)

The following list of readings looks immense at first glance – and a second glance will confirm your first glance – but note that this list includes several short readings we will handle in just a day. By my calculations, we will average about eighty pages each session. Sometimes those pages are light readings or familiar, but other times a great deal of thought will also be necessary.

- Lopez, Donald S. *The story of Buddhism: A concise guide to its history and teachings*. San Francisco: Harper, 2001.
- *The story of Gotama Buddha: Jātaka-nidāna*. Translated by N.A. Jayawickrama. Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2002.
- Nakamura, Hajime. *Gotama Buddha: A biography based on the most reliable texts*. Tokyo: Kosei, 2000.
- Hesse, Hermann. *Siddhartha*. New York: MJF Books, 1951. **(Any edition will do.)**
- *Apocryphal scriptures*. Translated by Cleary, Bando, Shih, Gregory and Arai. Berkeley: Numata center for Buddhist translation and research, 2005.
- *The Pratyutpanna samadhi sutra*. Translated by Paul Harrison. Berkeley: Numata center for Buddhist translation and research, 1998.
- *The Lotus Sutra*. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- *The Lankavatara sutra: An epitomized version*. Translated by D.T. Suzuki. Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish, 2003.
- *The Diamond sutra: Transforming the way we perceive the world*. Translated by Mu Soeng. Boston: Wisdom, 2000.
- Scharf, Robert H. *Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism: A reading of the Treasure store treatise*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.
- Whitfield, Roderick, et al. *Cave temples of Mogao: Art and history on the Silk Road*. Los Angeles: Getty, 2000.

II. Other readings are all on e-reserves, accessed via Moodle. There are also some good online resources (in addition to the *Encyclopedia of religion*) you might use, including the following:

Oxford Reference Online Dictionary of Buddhism

http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t108&subject=s22

Access to Insight: Readings in Theravāda Buddhism

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/>

Buddhist Studies WWW Virtual Library

<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Buddhism.html>

Journal of Buddhist Ethics

<http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/>

III. Requirements

1. *Six exploratories (1 page, single-spaced)*. Most of you have had courses with me before and so know what I mean by “exploratory,” but I attach a reminder to the back of this syllabus anyway and urge you to re-read it. Because this is an upper level course, I will not ask for the exploratories a day in advance unless there is consensus otherwise, but there is a price to pay. You will be called on in conference to introduce your topic and lead us in brief discussion on it. (Feel free to call on people to read out passages, express opinions, etc.) Sometimes I may pose a specific question, but usually I will leave the topic up to you.
2. *One lecture of the ruyi 如意*. Starting with our exploration of the sutras, you will each be asked to give us one mini-lecture (no more than fifteen minutes) propagating your assigned sutra’s message as you see it. This lecture is not an exploratory because you will play the role of the abbot and take the position of *advocating* the sutra itself. **Your job is not to summarize but to make an argument, to take a position.** In fact, the *ruyi* is a wood or bronze scepter used by abbots when lecturing on sutras (and yes, we have a real one at our disposal). As abbot, you can quote from the sutra, have us read out passages, use modern examples or applications and do whatever it takes to get us to understand that sutra’s message. As your monks, we will reverently ask you questions after your lecture. (Lecturers are exempt from the next round of exploratories to give you a break.)

3. *Three short papers (4-6 pages)*. For each jewel, I have assigned a broad paper project appropriate to that jewel. I intentionally call them paper “projects” because I want you to consider them more than merely research papers.
4. *Quizzes*. There is one very important quiz near the beginning of the second jewel on key vocabulary terms, and near the middle of the semester, I may occasionally begin giving short quizzes to ensure that everyone is on board for that day’s discussion. As you know, I don’t like quizzes. My goal is to get you to look forward to the readings – to love this stuff as much as I do (even though I claim no expertise in Buddhism myself) – but experience tells me that in all classes there is a point in the semester when high standards and ambitions can slip a bit. I don’t want to leave anyone behind. Those quizzes are not on the syllabus.
5. *Non-traditional projects*. Most of you know me by now, so you know I’ve usually got something up my sleeve. There will be little assignments along the way such as translation and iconography identification exercises, and the last time I taught this course, we spent our final sessions in the Chinese garden drinking tea and discussing Chan poetry. I am open to suggestions.
6. *Active and informed conference participation*. I expect active participation every day, and so be fully prepared for each conference, preparation consisting of both reading *and* thinking about the materials. It’s a small conference, which is good because you will get lots of direct input, but that does mean you need to be fully engaged throughout. Silence is noticeable. Appended to this syllabus are some suggestions on conference dynamics. If conference does not seem to be going well in your opinion, please talk to me, and we will endeavor to remedy the situation. I seek your comments and take them very seriously.
7. *Final group project*. As we end with the jewel of the sangha, it is appropriate that we conclude with a group project, and here I am completely open to suggestions. It can involve the participation of small groups or the entire class.

Policy on paper extensions and incompletes: *Only* for medical problems and extreme emergencies and *only then* accompanied by a note from the Dean's Office or Student Services. As the deadlines are already indicated on the syllabus below, multiple-paper crisis does not count as an excuse. Late papers will still be considered, but the lateness will be taken into account and no comments will be given. The later it is, the more subjective I become. (I apologize in advance for being draconian, but it is necessary due to our large numbers and due to the fact that I want your papers *before* the group discussions devoted to the respective focal text.)

IV. Syllabus

Śākyamuni’s world: The Buddha or Fo 佛

Each of the three jewels will begin with a secondary summary, namely Donald Lopez’s excellent *The story of Buddhism*. I will ask *you* to teach *me* using this readable, comprehensive secondary source. Then we turn to the Buddha’s life. Or rather, lives. We start with his previous lives via a selection of jātaka tales that are full of folklore and popular concerns, but more importantly, the 5th century C.E. preface to that collection of tales is the first Pali large-scale connected biography of the Buddha. We then move to the opposite side of the spectrum as Nakamura tries to excavate the ‘historical Buddha’ (a bit like Christians looking for the ‘historical Jesus’). It’s not the most fun book to read, but like your vegetables, it’s good for you. Finally we take the image of the Buddha up to the modern day with Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, a fictional man who meets the Buddha and tackles the same existential questions with different [??] results, and then with Bertolucci’s “Little Buddha,” probably the most far-reaching popularization of Buddhism in recent years.

Introduction 29 August	
Giving conceptual shape to the Buddha and his universe 31 August	Lopez, pp. 1-102. I await your instruction....
<i>Jātaka-nidāna</i> I 2 September	DeCaroli, <i>Haunting the Buddha</i> , 108-12; <i>Jātaka-nidāna</i> , ix-xviii, 1-61.
<i>Jātaka-nidāna</i> II 7 September	<i>Jātaka-nidāna</i> , 63-127; Rhys Davids, <i>Stories of the Buddha</i> , 34-42, 146-48, 221-39.

The Buddha's biography I 9 September	Nakamura, 15-116.
The Buddha's biography II 12 September	Nakamura, 117-215.
The Buddha's biography III 14 September	Nakamura, 217-308.
The Buddha's biography IV 16 September	Nakamura, 309-84.
<i>The modern twist: Hesse's Siddhartha</i> 19 September	Hesse's <i>Siddhartha</i>
Screening of "Little Buddha" TBA	Keanu as Buddha: "Enlightenment – whoa!"

Paper project: ... to be announced and I'm open to suggestions
(Due 17 September at 5 p.m. via e-mail, hardcopies 19 September in conference)



Ānanda's world: The Dharma or *Fa* 法

Now that we have the cast, we turn to the script, namely the sutras themselves. We will spend more time on this jewel than the others because it contains the actual ideas and core tenets of Buddhism (or at least text-based Chinese Mahayana Buddhism). After sampling all the main Buddhist traditions of China, we will then devote our musings to the Chan/Zen tradition for which Hesse is a nice segue, a tradition that denounces texts but ironically produced more of them than the others. After reviewing Lopez's summary and tackling the issue of how language (Sanskrit or Chinese) affects content, we begin with the main texts of the Tiantai, Huayan and Pure Land traditions. These sutras will give us a good frame to contextualize the later Chan movement. While our other sutras may have originated in the Indian sub-continent and Central Asia, the *Treasure store treatise* is clearly a Chinese adaptation of Chan (and Scharf will amply contextualize it for us). Yet Chan itself is a big label, and within it there was a head-on collision between two text-based traditions, namely between the *Lankavatara* and *Diamond* sutras. We will read them back-to-back to see if we can tease out the differences for ourselves.

"Law" or "system"? A survey of the dharma I 21 September	Lopez, 103-129, 206-253. I await your instruction....
"Law" or "system"? A survey of the dharma II 23 September	Vocabulary quiz on Lopez, 257-64. (I suggest also reading Watson's <i>The lotus sutra</i> , 325-42.)
Original sutra style conventions 26 September	Nakamura, <i>Ways of thinking</i> , 130-151; Mair, "What is <i>geyi</i> , after all?", 227-64; Mizuno, <i>Buddhist sutras</i> , 41-55, 157-86.
Four Chinese apocryphal scriptures 28 September	"The bequeathed teaching sutra," "The Ullambana sutra," "The sutra of forty-two sections," "The sutra on the profundity of filial love," in <i>Apocryphal scriptures</i> .
<i>Pratyutpanna samadhi sutra</i> I	Harrison, 1-58.

30 September	Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>Pratyutpanna samadhi sutra</i> II 3 October	Harrison, 59-104. Exploratories by everyone else.
<i>The lotus sutra</i> I 5 October	Watson, 3-116. Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>The lotus sutra</i> II 7 October	Watson, 117-223. Exploratories by everyone else.
<i>The lotus sutra</i> III 10 October	Watson, 224-324.
<i>The flower ornament sutra</i> I 12 October	<i>The flower ornament sutra</i> , 695-754. Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>The flower ornament sutra</i> II 14 October	<i>The flower ornament sutra</i> , c.754-811. Exploratories by everyone else.
Fall break – Slowly read <i>Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism</i> .	

<i>Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism</i> I 24 October	Scharf, 1-76. Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism</i> II 26 October	Scharf, 77-133. Exploratories by everyone else.
<i>Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism</i> III 28 October	Scharf, 137-92. Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism</i> III 31 October	Scharf, 193-261.
<i>The sutra of perfect enlightenment</i> 2 November	In <i>Apocryphal scriptures</i> .
<i>The Lankavatara sutra</i> I 4 November	<i>The Lankavatara sutra</i> , 1-59. Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>The Lankavatara sutra</i> II 7 November	<i>The Lankavatara sutra</i> , 60-125. Exploratories by everyone else.
<i>The Lankavatara sutra</i> III 9 November	<i>The Lankavatara sutra</i> : Close-reading exercise (from unabridged Suzuki translation)
<i>The Diamond sutra</i> I 11 November	<i>The Diamond sutra</i> , 3-68. Ruyi lecture: _____
<i>The Diamond sutra</i> II 14 November	<i>The Diamond sutra</i> , 71-139.
The modern twist: TBA 16 November	

Paper project: ... to be announced and I'm still open to suggestions
(Due 19 November at 5 p.m. via e-mail, hardcopies 21 November in conference)



Mid-12th century copy of the Mahaprajnaparamita sutra

Upāli's world: The *Sangha* or *Seng* 僧

We have the man; we have the message. Yet Buddhism (or any religion) is a movement of people. Our readings on the sangha of course begin with Lopez, but then we'll take this opportunity to look at their concrete images and physical settings by visiting the caves carved out by the faithful at Dunhuang. After all, religions travel via text *and* image, and often the images are more memorable and meaningful, giving the disciple guiding symbols and mental images rather than just words. After leaving those caves, we will peruse some recently translated Chinese monastic codes – will we see the dharma being enacted in them? – and then we'll move to the sangha's legendary exemplars as preserved in the hagiographies of famous Chinese monks and nuns. Finally we'll briefly consider the modern Buddhist by focusing on one issue where Buddhism – or at least the label of Buddhism – has become the authoritative seal of approval, namely the environmental movement. Yet you've now read more sutras than most modern self-identified Buddhists. Does the dharma in this case support the modern sangha and their ecological message? Judge for yourself.

The discipleship, both monastic and lay
18 November

Lopez, 130-205.
I await your instruction....

Physical settings and tangible images I
21 November

Cave temples of Mogao, 1-69.
Ruyi lecture: _____

Physical settings and tangible images II
23 November

Cave temples of Mogao, 70-136.
Exploratories by everyone else.

Monastic codes
25 November

Chanyuan qinggui, 112-49, 190-220.
Ruyi lecture: _____

“Biographies of Buddhist nuns”
28 November

In *Lives of great monks and nuns*, 61-154.
Exploratories by everyone else.

The eminent monk
30 November

Kieschnick, 67-138.

The modern twist: Buddhists and Buddhicologists

Buddhism and ecology, 71-88, 165-75, 187-217, 269-

2 December	90.
Returning to the "Heart" of this course 5 December	"Heart sutra," in <i>Ways with words: Writing about reading texts from Early China</i> , 113-45. (Hum 230 library reserves)
Our <i>gatha</i> 7 December	
Paper project: ... to be announced and I'm, once again, open to suggestions (Hardcopies due 9 December at 5 p.m.)	
Final group project(s)	<i>Due 14 December at noon.</i>

V. Consciousness of conference technique

Much of our educational system seems designed to discourage any attempt at finding things out for oneself, but makes learning things others have found out, or think they have, the major goal.

– Anne Roe, 1953.

At times it is useful to step back and discuss conference dynamics, to lay bare the bones of conference communication. Why? Because some Reed conferences succeed; others do not. After each conference, I ask myself how it went and why it progressed in that fashion. If just one conference goes badly or only so-so, a small storm cloud forms over my head for the rest of the day. Many students with whom I have discussed conference strategies tell me that most Reed conferences don't achieve that sensation of educational nirvana, that usually students do not leave the room punching the air in intellectual excitement. I agree. A conference is a much riskier educational tool than a lecture, and this tool requires a sharpness of materials, of the conferees and of the conference leader. It can fail if there is a dullness in any of the three. Yet whereas lectures merely impart information (with a "sage on the stage"), conferences train us how to think about and interact with that information (with a "guide on the side"). So when it *does* work

I look for the following five features when evaluating a conference:

1. Divide the allotted time by the number of conference participants. That resulting time should equal the leader's ideal speaking limits. (I talk too much in conference. Yet when I say this to some students, they sometimes tell me that instructors should feel free to talk more because the students are here to acquire that expertise in the field. So the amount one speaks is a judgment call, but regardless, verbal monopolies never work.)
2. Watch the non-verbal dynamism. Are the students leaning forward, engaging in eye contact and gesturing to drive home a point such that *understanding* is in fact taking on a physical dimension? Or are they silently sitting back in their chairs staring at anything other than another human being? As a conference leader or participant, it's a physical message you should always keep in mind. Leaning forward and engaging eye contact is not mere appearance; it indeed helps to keep one focused, especially if tired.
3. Determine whether the discourse is being directed through one person (usually the conference leader) or is non-point specific. If you diagram the flow of discussion and it looks like a wagon wheel with the conference leader in the middle, the conference has, in my opinion, failed. If you diagram the flow and it looks like a jumbled, all-inclusive net, the conference is more likely to have succeeded.
4. Determine whether a new idea has been achieved. By the end of the conference, was an idea created that was new to everyone, including the conference leader? Did several people contribute a Lego to build a new thought that the conferees would not have been able to construct on their own? This evaluation is trickier because sometimes a conference may not have gone well on first glance but a new idea evolved nonetheless. The leader must be sure to highlight that evolution at the end of the conference.
5. Watch for simple politeness. "Politeness" means giving each other an opportunity to speak, rescuing a colleague hanging out on a limb, asking useful questions as well as complimenting a new idea, a well-said phrase, a funny joke.

Note that most of the above points (with the exception of the fourth) are content-free. Content obviously counts most of all, but the proper dynamics can serve as a catalyst to fully developed content. If you feel a conference only went so-so, instead of simply moving on to the next one, I would urge you, too, to evaluate the conference using your own criteria and figuring out how you (and I) can make the next one a more meaningful experience.

In the end, as long as you are prepared and feel passionate about your work, you should do well, and if passion ever fails, grim determination counts for something.

VI. The exploratory

Sometimes conferences sing. Yet just when I would like them to sing opera, they might merely hum a bit of country-western. After my first year of teaching at Reed, I reflected upon my conference performance and toyed with various ideas as to how to induce more of the ecstatic arias and lively crescendos, and I came up with something I call an "exploratory."

Simply put, an exploratory is a one-page, single-spaced piece in which you highlight one thought-provoking issue that caught your attention in the materials we are considering. This brief analysis must show thorough reading and must show *your own* thoughtful extension –

- Your own informed, constructive criticism of the author;
- Your own developed, thoughtful question (perhaps even inspired by readings from other classes) that raises interesting issues when seen in the light of the author's text;
- Your own application of theory and method to the primary source;
- Your own personal conjecture as to how this data can be made useful; or (best of all)
- Your own autonomous problem that you devised using the data under discussion.

I am not here looking for polished prose or copious (or any) footnotes – save all that for our formal papers. (I do not return exploratories with comments unless a special request is made.) Exploratories are not full, open-heart surgeries performed on the text. Instead, exploratories tend to be somewhat informal but focused probes on one particular aspect in which you yourself can interact with the text and can enter into the conversation.

What is *not* an exploratory? It is not merely a topic supported by evidence from the book, nor is it a descriptive piece on someone else's ideas, nor is it a general book report in which you can wander to and fro without direction. Bringing in outside materials is allowed, but the exploratory is not a forum for ideas outside that day's expressed focus. (Such pieces cannot be used in our conference discussions.) It is instead a *problematique*, an issue with attitude.

The best advice that I can give here is simply to encourage you to consider *why* I am requesting these exploratories from you: I want to see what ignites your interest in the text so I can set the conference agenda. **Note that I am not requiring them before conference in this course (unless the consensus desires otherwise), but late exploratories are still of no use.** (Being handed a late exploratory is like being handed your salad after you've eaten dessert and are already leaving the restaurant.) I base roughly half my conferences on exploratories, and I will use them to draw you in, parry your perspective against that of another, and build up the discussion based on your views. Exploratories help me turn the conference to issues that directly interest you. They often lead us off on important tangents, and they often return us to the core of the problem under discussion. So if you are struggling with finding "something to say," simply recall why I ask for these exploratories in the first place. Is there something in the text you think worthy of conference time? Do you have an idea you want to take this opportunity to explore? Here is your chance to draw our attention to it. Your perspectives are important, and if you have them crystalized on paper in advance, they will be easier to articulate in conference.

Since I began using exploratories, most students have responded very favorably. Students like the fact that it is a different form of writing, a bit more informal and more frequent, somewhat akin to thinking aloud. It forces one not just to read a text but to be looking for something in that text, to engage that text actively. And it increases the likelihood that everyone leaves the conference singing Puccini.