

Religion 221—Buddhism: An introduction

Course Description

An introductory survey to the Buddhist tradition, focusing on its history and development, key doctrines and practices, geographic spread, and cultural adaptations. Students will examine the intellectual and philosophical history of Buddhism in detail as well as explore how Buddhism functions as a living, practical tradition. This course fulfills the non-western and humanities requirements.

Course Objectives

- To become acquainted with the history of the Buddhist tradition from the beginnings to the present
- To engage with Buddhist textual and artistic traditions both critically and empathetically
- To articulate the importance of Buddhism for understanding Asian art, history, and culture
- To think through Buddhist doctrines and practices in fruitful dialogue with your own values

Literacies in the Major Learning Outcomes

In addition to the above course objectives, this course will introduce and reinforce key literacies in the Religious Studies curriculum. These include:

Information Literacy

You will learn to cite primary and secondary sources in the *Chicago Manual of Style* citation system.

You will learn how to recognize the purpose and value of different kinds of information, including distinguishing between primary and secondary sources.

You will contribute to the creation of new information by gathering evidence from primary and secondary sources to construct arguments and test hypotheses, synthesizing information into an essay

Oral Literacy

You will participate in discussion, cogently express your ideas, and respond to others respectfully and effectively

Technology Literacy

You will effectively select and use tools to produce complex, professional printed documents.

Visual Literacy

You will look in a sustained way so as to carefully describe an image or object, noting formal qualities distinct from content.

You will learn how to situate images and objects in their historical contexts, aware of distinctions between

representation and presence.

Responsibilities

- ***Participation*** in the course is essential. Participation does not mean simply attending class and handing in written assignments. Participation means active involvement in discussion. One need not know all the answers to speak up; the classroom is a space where questions are especially valued. Come to every class prepared with your insights and your questions. It will be assumed that all students will have completed the session's reading BEFORE arriving to class. You may be called on at any time to contribute to the class with your ideas and questions. We may occasionally break out into smaller groups to have discussions about readings. Your preparation and participation will be vital for these conversations.
- One of the biggest initial hurdles to students grappling with Buddhist texts and traditions is the large number of Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese vocabulary terms, unfamiliar place names, and so on. To enable us to read our sources more fluently and confidently, we will feature five ***terminology quizzes***. These should also prove useful in your preparations for the final exam.
- The Buddhist tradition is not just about scriptures, history, and technical vocabulary. Fluency in the Buddhist tradition requires visual competence as well. To this end I will ask you to engage closely with three different artworks and to write 750–1000 word ***art reflections*** detailing your engagement with these artworks. These exercises will range from close-looking exercises, to iconographic analysis, to more freeform interpretive essays.
- This is an introductory survey to Buddhism, which means we will not have time to go in-depth into any particular topic. To give you the opportunity to pursue your own interests in more depth, you will write TWO ***critical reflection essays*** of 1000–1500 words. In these essays you will be able to engage more deeply with Buddhist scriptures and exegetical works.
- At the end of the semester we will have an ***in-class final examination***, allowing you the opportunity to synthesize and master all the material learned in this course. The exam will feature multiple choice, word identification, short answer, and essay questions.

Grading

Attendance and participation: 20%
Terminology Quizzes: 5 x 5% = 25%
Critical reflection essays: 2 x 5% = 10%
Buddhist art reflections: 3 x 5% = 15%
Final exam: 30%

Course Policies

Course website and syllabus updates: The *Lotus Sūtra* teaches us about *upāyakaśālya*, “skillfulness in expedient pedagogical techniques.” In the Buddhist tradition, good pedagogy is adaptive, adjusting to the proclivities and needs of particular students. As the semester progresses, I may make changes to the syllabus to ensure that our collective efforts are fruitful. If I do make changes to the syllabus, you will be notified via email, via the course website, and in an announcement in class. *Pay close attention to the course website for updates and announcements!*

Decorum: Texting, cell phone conversations, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tiktok, Instagram, Tinder, &c. &c. are simply

not welcome in the classroom. If you feel compelled to surrender your privacy to rapacious Silicon Valley marketeers and to contribute to the corrosive forces of what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism,” please do so outside our sacred halls of learning. With that said, you are free to use laptops or tablets, and I will not monitor, parent, or police you in any way. I assume you are mature and responsible enough to come to the classroom prepared and focused.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Skidmore College is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center. Please remember that *it is in your interest to initiate these conversations and request accommodation at the beginning of the semester!*

Title IX: Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator.

Extracurriculars & Scheduling Conflicts: This syllabus contains the relevant deadlines for major assignments. You must notify me *by the second week of the term* about any known or potential extracurricular conflicts (such as religious observances, graduate or medical school interviews, or sports activities). If you have a conflict on the due date of an assignment or exam, it is your responsibility to notify me well in advance to work out an alternative date for the assignment or exam. *I will not accept assignments which are late due to extracurricular scheduling conflicts unless you have rescheduled with me well in advance.* It is your responsibility to communicate and plan with your professor.

Academic Honesty and Honorable Conduct: As a member of the Skidmore community, you are expected to follow the [Skidmore Honor Code](#). I take very seriously my commitment to teaching you the scholarly values of proper citation and attribution. Accordingly, I will report all incidents of suspected academic dishonesty—without exception—to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. **All instances of plagiarism, no matter how “minor,” will result in failure on the assignment, with the possibility of failure in the course.** *If you have any questions about the proper citation practices, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

S/U Grade Option: If you are interested in the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grade option, you are responsible for being aware of the pertinent deadlines set by the Registrar’s Office for choosing this option. Please be advised that the college criterion for “Satisfactory” is the equivalent of a C or better. A grade of “C-” or below will result in the student

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receiving the grade of “Unsatisfactory” or “U” and, as a consequence, the student will receive no credit for the course.

Late Assignments: Late papers will be immediately deducted one step (A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.), followed by one additional step every twelve hours. I never grant extensions on assignments unless there is a dire and documented medical emergency.

Required books

These books are all on reserve at Scribner Library, and for sale through the campus bookstore.

Gethin, Rupert. *The foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN 9780192892232.

Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2009. ISBN 9780415356534.

Lotus Hurvitz, Leon trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780231148955.

Course Outline

T 21 January: Introduction

Gethin “Introduction,” pp. 1–6

Th 23 January: Buddha

Gethin ch. 1, “The Buddha: the story of the Awakened One,” pp. 7–34

Web: Olivelle, Patrick, trans. *Life of the Buddha*. Clay Sanskrit Library 33. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

Read ch. 5: “The Departure, pp. 123–157; ch. 12: “The Meeting with Aráda”, pp. 359–369.

T 28 January: Dharma

Gethin ch. 2, “The word of the Buddha,” pp. 35–49; ch. 3, “Four truths,” pp. 59–84

Web: Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. 2 vols. Teachings of the Buddha. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

Read SN 56.11 *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, “Setting in motion the wheel of the *dhamma*,” pp. 1843–1847.

Th 30 January: Saṅgha

Quiz #1 at beginning of class

Gethin ch. 4, “The Buddhist community,” pp. 85–110

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Web: Horner, Isaline Blew. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka)*. Vol. 1: *Suttavibhaṅga*. Sacred Books of the Buddhists 10. London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1938.

Read “Sudinna Recital,” pp. 21–38.

T 4 February: Growth and development of the Buddhist orders

Gethin ch. 2, “The word of the Buddha,” pp. 49–56

Web Swearer, Donald K. *The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia*. 2nd edition. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010.

Read “Asoka, the Exemplary Buddhist Ruler,” pp. 72–82.

Th 6 February: The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism

Gethin ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 224–234

Williams ch. 1, “Introduction,” pp. 1–44

T 11 February Abhidharma and the Perfection of Wisdom

Gethin ch. 8, “The Abhidharma,” pp. 202–223; ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 234–237

Williams ch. 2, “The Perfection of Wisdom,” pp. 45–62

Web: Conze, Edward. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*. Vol. 1. Wheel Series. Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation; distributed by Book People, Berkeley, California, 1973.

Read Ch. 2 “Sakra,” pp. 96–102

Th 13 February: Madhyamaka

Quiz #2 at beginning of class

Gethin ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 237–244

Williams ch. 3, “Mādhyamika,” pp. 63–83

Web: Garfield, Jay L. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Read chapter 24, “Examination of the Four Noble Truths,” pp. 67–72; commentary pp. 293–321.

T 18 February: Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha

Gethin ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 244–252

Williams ch. 4, “Yogācāra,” pp. 84–102; ch. 5, “Tathāgatagarbha,” pp. 103–128

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Web: Grosnick, William H. “The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*.” In *Buddhism in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr., Abridged edition., 92–106. Princeton Readings in Religions. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Th 20 February: The *Lotus Sūtra* I

Art Reflection #1 due at beginning of class

Lotus chs. 1–3, pp. 1–83

T 25 February: The *Lotus Sūtra* II

Lotus chs. 10–12, pp. 174–201

Th 27 February: Buddhism in China

Critical Reflection Essay #1 due at beginning of class

Web: Sylvie Hureau. “Translations, apocrypha, and the emergence of the Buddhist canon.” In *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, edited by John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, 741–774. Vol. 21-2 in *Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 4: China*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Web: Sharf, Robert H. “The *Scripture in Forty-Two Sections*.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 418–429. Princeton Readings in Religions. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

T 3 March: Buddhist integration in China

Web: Sørensen, Henrik Hjort. “The History and Practice of Early Chan.” In *Readings of the Platform Sūtra*, edited by Morten Schlütter and Stephen Frederick Teiser, 53–76. Columbia Readings of Buddhist Literature. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Web: Yampolsky, Phillip, trans. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.
Read §1–§38, pp. 125–162

Th 5 March: Buddhism in Śrī Laṅkā and Southeast Asia

Quiz #3 at beginning of class

Gethin ch. 10, “Evolving traditions of Buddhism,” pp. 253–257

Web: Swearer, Donald K. *The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia*. 2nd edition. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010.
Read Part I: “The Popular Tradition”, pp. 1–70.

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T 10 March: No class—Spring Break!

Th 12 March: No class—Spring Break!

T 17 March: Esoteric Buddhism

Gethin ch. 10, “Evolving traditions of Buddhism,” pp. 266–269

Web: Farrow, G.W. and Menon, I., trans. *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992.

Read chs. 1–2, pp. 3–36

Th 19 March: No class—RRO at the Association for Asian Studies conference in Boston!

T 24 March: Tibetan Buddhism

Gethin ch. 10, “Evolving traditions of Buddhism,” pp. 270–273

Williams ch. 9, “The path of the *bodhisattva*,” pp. 187–208

Th 26 March: Modern Tibetan Buddhism

Art Reflection #2 due at beginning of class

Web: “The Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s Last Testament.” In Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*, 740–745. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013

Web: Lopez, Jr., Donald S. “A Prayer for the Long Life of the Dalai Lama.” In Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. *Buddhism in Practice*, 170–175. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

T 31 March: Buddhism in Japan: State protection and Zen

Web: Bowring, Richard. *The religious traditions of Japan, 500–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Read Chapter 1: “The introduction of Buddhism.” pp. 15–35; Chapter 14: “Zen Buddhism.” pp. 304–320.

Th 2 April: Pure Land Buddhisms

Quiz #4 at beginning of class

Web: Gómez, Luis O. *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1996. Read “The Shorter Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra”, pp. 145–151.

Web: Heller, Natasha. “Buddha in a box: the materiality of recitation in contemporary Chinese Buddhism,” *Material Religion* 10.3 (2014): 294–315

T 7 April: Buddhism in Japan: Lotus Buddhisms

Williams ch. 7, “The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Lotus) Sūtra and its influences,” pp. 149–171

Web: de Bary, Wm. Theodore., ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume One: From Earliest Times to 1600*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Read ch. 13, pp. 292–305.

Web: Bowring, Richard. *The religious traditions of Japan, 500–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Read Chapter 15.3: “Worshipping the Lotus.” pp. 332–343

Th 9 April: Buddhism in modern Japan

Web: Nelson, John Kenneth. *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan*. Topics in Contemporary Buddhism. Honolulu, Hawai‘i: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013.

Read ch. 2, “Japanese versions of Buddhism,” pp. 26–69

T 14 April: Buddhist revival in Burma and Śrī Laṅkā

Quiz #5 at beginning of class

Web: Bond, George D. *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation, and Response*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Read chapter 2: “The early revival and Protestant Buddhism,” pp. 45–74.

Th 16 April: Theosophy and “world religions”

Gethin ch. 10, “Evolving traditions of Buddhism,” pp. 273–276

Web: McMahan, David L. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Read chapter 4: “Modernity and the discourse of scientific Buddhism,” pp. 89–116

T 21 April: Buddhism in America: The Beat Generation and beyond

Art Reflection #3 due at beginning of class

Web: Snyder, Gary. *Smokey the Bear Sūtra*

Web: Nattier, Jan. “Who Is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America.” In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, edited by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth Ken'ichi Tanaka, 183–95. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998.

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Th 23 April: Buddhism in America: Race and American Buddhism

Web: Han, Chenxing. “We’re Not Who You Think We Are.” *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner’s Quarterly*. 14.4 (Summer 2016): 48–55, 83.

Web: McNicholl, Adeana. “Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 86.4 (December 2018): 883–911.

T 28 April: Modern global Buddhisms

Critical Reflection Essay #2 due at beginning of class

Web: McMahan, David L. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Read chapter 2: “The spectrum of tradition and modernism,” pp. 27–59

M 4 May FINAL EXAMINATION 18:00–21:00 @ Tisch 302