

Religion 230—Buddhism: An introduction

Course Description

This course is a broad introductory survey to the Buddhist tradition, focusing on the tradition's history and development, its key doctrines and practices, its geographic spread, and its cultural adaptations. The course materials have a dual focus. We will examine the intellectual and philosophical history of Buddhism in detail; and we will also explore how Buddhism functions as a living, practical tradition.

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

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.
- 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 5-page critical reflection essays. 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: 25%
Terminology Quizzes: 5 x 5% = 25%
Critical reflection essays: 2 x 10% = 20%
Final exam: 30%

Course Policies

Course website and syllabus updates: The *Lotus Sūtra* teaches us about *upāyakaūśalya*, “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, Instagram, Tinder, &c. &c. are simply not welcome in the classroom. If you feel compelled to surrender your privacy to rapacious Silicon Valley marketeers, 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, I am happy to accept an assignment turned in ahead of time. *I will not accept assignments which are late due to extracurricular scheduling conflicts.* It is your responsibility to turn in the assignment on or before the due date.

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.*

Late Assignments: Late critical reflection essays will be deducted one letter grade immediately, followed by another letter grade for every additional day the assignment is late. Quizzes are held promptly at the beginning of class; unless you have a real, documented medical emergency, there is no way to make up a missed quiz.

Required books

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

W 6 September: Introduction

Gethin “Introduction,” pp. 1–6

M 11 September: 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.

Web: Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Teachings of the Buddha. Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications in association with the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 1995. Read MN 26: *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* “The Noble Search,” pp. 253–268.

W 13 September: Dharma

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

RE 230—Buddhism: An Introduction (Fall 2017)
MW 14:30–15:50
Ladd 206

Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
roverbey@skidmore.edu
Office Hours: T 13:00–16:00 @ Ladd 212

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.

M 18 September: Saṅgha

Quiz #1 at beginning of class

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

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.

W 20 September: 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.

M 25 September: The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism

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

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

W 27 September: 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. Ch. 2 “Sakra,” pp. 96–102; Ch. 3 “Reverence for the Receptacle of the Perfections, Which Holds Immeasurable Good Qualities,” pp. 103–115

M 2 October: 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 2, “Examination of Motion,” pp. 6–9; commentary pp. 124–135.

W 4 October: Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha

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

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

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.

M 9 October: The *Lotus Sūtra* I

Lotus chs. 1–3, pp. 1–83

W 11 October: The *Lotus Sūtra* II

Lotus chs. 10–12, pp. 174–201

M 16 October: Buddhism in China

Critical Reflection Essay #1 due at beginning of class

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

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

W 18 October: 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

M 23 October: Esoteric Buddhism

Quiz #3 at beginning of class

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.
chs. 1–2, pp. 3–36

W 25 October: Tibetan Buddhism

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

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

Web: “The adoption of Buddhism and the foundation of Samyé monastery” and “Inscriptions and edicts from the reign of Tri Songdetsen.” In Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 60–76.

M 30 October: Modern Tibetan Buddhism

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.

Web: Tuttle, Gray. “Uniting Religion and Politics in a Bid for Autonomy: Lamas in Exile in China and America.” In *The Tibetan History Reader*, edited by Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, 561–82. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

W 1 November: Buddhism in Śrī Laṅkā and Southeast Asia

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.

M 6 November: Buddhism in Japan: State protection and Zen

Quiz #4 at beginning of class

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.

W 8 November: 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

RE 230—Buddhism: An Introduction (Fall 2017)
MW 14:30–15:50
Ladd 206

Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
roverbey@skidmore.edu
Office Hours: T 13:00–16:00 @ Ladd 212

M 13 November: 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

W 15 November: Pure Land Buddhisms

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

M 20 November: *No class—RRO at the American Academy of Religion conference!*

Please watch the film *To the Land of Bliss*, available streaming through the Skidmore library. After you watch the film, submit a 1-2 page response via email.

Link: <http://skidmore.kanopystreaming.com/node/116100>

W 22 November: *No class—Thanksgiving Recess!*

M 27 November: Buddhist revival in Burma and Śrī Laṅkā

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.

W 29 November: Theosophy and "world religions"

Quiz #5 at beginning of class

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

Web: Henry Steel Olcott, *A Buddhist Catechism*

M 4 December: Buddhism in America: The Beat Generation and beyond

Web: Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl*

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

RE 230—Buddhism: An Introduction (Fall 2017)
MW 14:30–15:50
Ladd 206

Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
roverbey@skidmore.edu
Office Hours: T 13:00–16:00 @ Ladd 212

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.

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

W 6 December: 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

Th 14 December: FINAL EXAMINATION, 9:00–12:00 @ Ladd 206