

READINGS in ASIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 216, SPRING 2010



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Course Description:

This course gives students a chance to read and critically analyze classic sacred writings in translation from the South Asian religious traditions, particularly those of Buddhism. The genres sampled will include a law code, ascetic mysticism, religious biography, popular narrative, and scholastic treatises. We will also consider the cross-cultural definition of "text," hermeneutical approaches to exegesis, the idea of a "scriptural canon," and the construction of tradition in the western historical imagination.

Required Textbooks:

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *Samyasa Upanishads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*. NY: Oxford, 1992.

Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu*. NY: Penguin, 1991

E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*. NY: Dover, 2000.

Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Mahayana Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Todd T. Lewis, Subarna Tuladhar, trans. *Sugata Saurabha* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009

Leon Hurvitz, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2009

Stephen Teiser and Jacqueline Stone, eds. *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Edward Conze, *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts*. Buddhist Publishing Group, 2003

Andy Rotman, trans. *Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna*. Boston: Wisdom, 2008.

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*. NY: NYU Press, 2008.

All the books above have been ordered from the Holy Cross bookstore.

Course Requirements:

Separate guidelines for these will be distributed.

1. 3 Commentary Papers: on texts to be discussed in class
2. 8-10 page Term Paper
3. Final Oral Exam.
4. Participation

Course Design and Expectations:

This course is designed to give us a chance to carefully read, analyze, and discuss central texts in the history of two world religions in Asia. *Joining the class entails the expectation that members will complete reading assignments in preparation for class, engage with the material intellectually, and take an active role in class discussions.* Course assignments will entail the freedom for individuals to explore topics, themes, and genres of personal interest.



Lecture Topics and Reading Assignments

INTRODUCTORY

1. 1/20: First Class: Syllabi Distributed and Course Overview

2. 1/25: "Religious Tradition" Texts & Contexts; Exegesis and Hermeneutics

Required Reading:

"Asian Scriptures Among the World's Religions" [E-res]

"Shikar" from Ed Dimock, *Mr. Dimock Explores the Mysteries of the East* [E-res]

TOPIC 1:

Ancient and Formative Hindu Scriptures

3. 1/27: Sanskrit, Veda, Earliest Upanishads

Required Reading:

"Hymn to Agni", "Hymn to Indra", "Katha Upanishad" [E-res]

4. 2/1: Upanishadic Mysticism

Required Reading:

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *Samyasa Upanishads*, 1-169.

5. 2/3: The Asceticism Upanishads: Discussion

Required Reading:

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *Samyasa Upanishads*, 170-287

6. 2/8: Brahmanical Visions of Hindu Society [1]

Required Reading:

Doniger and Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu*, 1-127

7. 2/10: Brahmanical Visions of Hindu Society [2]

Required Reading:

Doniger and Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu*, 128-290

8. 2/15: Thinking Again about Texts and Contexts: Discussion

Required Reading:

Ronald Inden, "Textualizing History, Historicizing Texts," in *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* [E-RES]



TOPIC TWO:

Texts on the Life of the Buddha

9. 2/17: Analysis of the *Aggañña Sutta*

Required Reading:

Steven Collins, trans. "The Discourse on What is Primary" [ERE-s]

10. 2/22: Siddhārtha, Birth and Renunciation

Required Reading:

E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, 1-96

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*, 1-242

11. 2/24: Shākyamuni's Enlightenment

Required Reading:

E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*. 97-142

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*, 243-414

SPRING BREAK

12. 3/8: Shākyamuni, Last Days and *Parinirvāna* (*parinirvāna*)

Required Reading:

E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*. 143-164, 211-236

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*, 415-432

"*Maha-Parinibbana Sutta*," in T.W. Rhys-Davids, *Buddhist Suttas [ERES]*

13. 3/10: A Modern Biography from Nepal: *Sugata Saurabha*

Required Reading:

Todd T. Lewis and Subarna Tuladhar, trans. *Sugata Saurabha*

14. 3/15: A Modern Biography from Nepal: *Sugata Saurabha* (II)

Required Reading:

Todd T. Lewis and Subarna Tuladhar, trans. *Sugata Saurabha*

15. 3/17: NO CLASS

16. 3/22: The Buddha in Other Texts: Presentations and Discussion

TOPIC THREE:

Jātakas and Avadānas: Former Lives of the Buddha

17. 3/24: Storytelling, Parables, Karma Stories as Buddhist Genre

Required Reading:

Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Mahayana Texts from Nepal*, 1-10

Joel Tatelman, "Introduction" in *The Glorious Deeds of Purna*, 28-45 [E-RES]

18. 3/29: Sanskrit Avadānas from the Divyāvadāna [1]

Required Reading:

Andy Rotman, trans. *Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna PART I*, 39-118

19. 3/31: Sanskrit Avadānas from the Divyāvadāna [2]

Required Reading:

Andy Rotman, trans. *Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna PART I, Assigned Stories*

4/5: Easter Break

20. 4/7: Sanskrit Avadānas from Nepal

Required Reading:

Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Mahayana Texts from Nepal*, 11-164



TOPIC FOUR:

Texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: Prajñā

21. 4/12: Overview of Mahāyāna Traditions; Heart Sutra

Required Reading:

Edward Conze, *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts*

Readings in Asian Texts, Syllabus, page 6

22. 4/14: Ultimate Perspectives: Prajñāpāramitā Texts

Required Reading:

Edward Conze, *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts*

23. 4/19: Advice from a Philosopher: Nāgārjuna

Required Reading:

Jeffrey Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nagarjuna's Precious Garland*, 92-164 [ERES]

TOPIC FIVE:

Texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Lotus Sūtra

24. 4/21: Reading the Text (1)

Required Reading:

Leon Hurvitz, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*.

25. 4/26: Reading the Text (2)

Required Reading:

Leon Hurvitz, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*.

26. 4/28: The Lotus Sūtra in its Myriad Contexts: Discussions

Required Reading:

Stephen Teiser and Jacqueline Stone, eds. *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

TOPIC SIX:

Term Studies

27. 5/3: Presentation of Final Essays

Reflections and Reconsiderations;

EXAM PERIOD: INDIVIDUAL ORAL FINALS