

# **RELI 385 WOMEN AND RELIGION: BUDDHISM**

Department of Religions and Cultures  
Concordia University\*

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## **Course Description**

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This course examines various positions, roles and activities of women and nuns within different traditions of Buddhism. We will begin the course with a brief survey of the historical origins of Buddhism considered in the social and religious context of ancient India as a whole. We will investigate images and situations of female figures in early Buddhism described in canonical scriptures and other contemporaneous texts. We will also examine epigraphic and artistic evidence offering insights into the lives and activities of early medieval Buddhist women in India. Bhikkhuni monastic codes and the order of nuns will be explored. Another topic we will deal with is the concept of gender as related to nirvana's achievement; one of the important themes for discussion here will be how, when and why the Indian male bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was transformed into a Chinese female deity Kuan-Yin to become "a cult of half Asia." The spread of Buddhism outside of India during the early medieval period will be discussed through the examination of subsequent developments of Buddhist women's experiences in China, Vietnam, Japan, and Thailand. As such, in the later part of the course, we will explore the religious life of women in contemporary East and Southeast Asia where Buddhism has been adopted and has given rise to local variations and distinctive practices. We will end the class with a discussion of how Buddhism has been studied and reconstructed in the West.

In short, the aim of the course is to provide students with some fundamental knowledge of the history of women's activities in Buddhist communities as represented in texts, social regulations and objects of religious art; and to foster understanding of the development and experiences of Buddhist women in the social contexts of East and Southeast Asia in the present-day.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

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Assignments of various types will be given for assessment so that each student will have a chance to use their own strong skills to shine. Rather than focusing on memorization of material, the assignments are designed to encourage students to engage in dynamic and interactive dialogues that allow students

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\* I would like to acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands, particularly those of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, who are recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we are situated.

to actively share their own insights regarding the reading materials. Essay assignments will help students to foster their abilities to engage with ideas and to think, read and write critically.

**1. Attendance and Participation:** (10%)

This is largely a lecture-discussion based, reading-intensive class. It is strongly suggested that students attend each class having done the readings in advance and being prepared to participate in class. Aside from presenting the main ideas in the class readings, the instructor will provide extra information based on her own fieldwork and research which might not be found in the readings. Occasionally, students will be asked to submit a short note with a few sentences reflecting upon the class lectures, class materials, and/or their own experience regarding particular issues.

**2. Two In-Class Quizzes:** (10 % each) **Jan. 29 & March 5**

These two 15-minute quizzes will be given at the beginning of the class period and will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. A handout of terms and concepts will be given to you one week in advance to prepare for each quiz. The purpose of the quiz is to assess your comprehension of basic but fundamental concepts and doctrines so that you can understand better certain factors that shape Buddhist women's activities and experiences.

**3. Book Report:** (10 %) **February 12**

You will choose to be part of a panel/group that focuses its research on one of the four countries: China, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Each group will examine one country and each member will focus on a different issue relating to Buddhist women of that country. The assignment is to select a book, a chapter or an article (from the bibliography the instructor will provide on Moodle) on situations, experiences and positions of Buddhist women in "your country" and write a summary report (2 pages, double-spaced). The instructor will give you time in class (Jan 29 & Feb 26) to discuss with your group members topics that each of you would like to explore so that they will fit in with your group. You should also discuss within your group the content and structure of your group presentation.

**4. In-Class Group Presentation:** (10%) **March 12, March 19, March 26, April 9**

Each of you will have 5 minutes to present your book report. You will present as a member of a group, hence you will not be alone. Each group will present on a different date. Questions from your classmates are strongly encouraged; they will help the presenters/researchers generate and formulate ideas to develop your book report into a short research essay. The use of audio-visual materials such as pictures and clips in PowerPoint form is strongly encouraged. The purpose of this assignment is to help you build confidence while presenting in front of classmates and practice organizational skill to convey your ideas effectively within a short time-slot.

**5. Short Research Essay:** (20%) **March 26, April 2, April 9, April 23**

Your essay (about 6 pages, double space) is an extension of the investigation you have already begun in your book report, in which you do further reading on the same topic. The topic of your essay should be narrowed down to a particular issue and should not be broad as, for instance, "Buddhist Women in Vietnam". You should use at least 4 academic sources to prepare your essay. A bibliography of academic sources and general guidelines for writing this essay will be posted on Moodle.

## **6. Final Take-Home Exam: (30%) April 30**

The take-home exam will be an essay-style exam (about 10-12 pages, double space). The question(s) for this exam will be distributed on the last day of class, and you will have two weeks to write the exam. You must only draw on the materials from the coursepack, handouts, class lectures, and Moodle posts. Any outside sources must first be approved by the instructor or TA.

### **Course Readings**

1. An anthology (coursepack) of articles and book chapters has been prepared for this course. It can be purchased at the Concordia University Book Store.
2. Additional hand-out materials will be posted on Moodle.

### **Academic Integrity and Policies on Absences & Late Assignments**

1. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be reported. If you do not know what plagiarism is, ask the instructor or the TA about what constitutes plagiarism. In short, plagiarism is using people's ideas, images, graphs and words without giving acknowledgement or citing your sources. For details please visit Concordia University's website for the code of academic conduct (see <http://www.concordia.ca/programs-and-courses/academicintegrity/>).
2. Extensions on the short research essay and the final take-home exam will only be accepted with medical or other relevant proofs. Delayed submission of these assignments will be downgraded by half a grade per day (5%) and weekend days are included in the deduction.
3. Excuses for the absence from in-class quizzes and presentation will not be accepted. No make-up quizzes or presentation will be possible; however, a limited exception will be made on the basis of doctor's certificate for sickness or other relevant proofs.
4. Papers must be dropped off ONLY in the mailbox situated on the main floor of annexe FA (2060 Mackay)

### **Grading Criteria**

- A range: Superior grasp of material, exams well written, clear explanation, original insights.
- B range: Good understanding, clear and orderly presentation.
- C range: Adequate grasp of material, reasonably clear.
- D range: Evidence of having done the reading but inadequate comprehension
- F range: Failure; absence of evidence that the requirements were met.

### **Note from Concordia University**

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

## Course Schedule

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### WEEK 1

Jan 8: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM IN ANCIENT INDIA

### WEEK 2

Jan 15: THE BUDDHA, BUDDHISM, WOMEN & BUDDHISM

Gethin, R. (1998). "The Buddha: The Story of the Awakened One" in *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford & NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 7-34, 277-280, 319-322.

Mitchell, D. (2002). "The Teachings of the Buddha" in *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*. NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 33-63.

Barnes, N. (1987). "Buddhism" in *Women in World Religions*. Albany: SUNY, pp. 105-133.

### WEEK 3

Jan 22: FEMALE FIGURES IN EARLY INDIAN BUDDHISM

Walters, J. (1994). "A Voice from the Silence: The Buddha's Mother's Story". *History of Religions* 33, pp. 358-379.

Ohnuma, R. (2007). "Mother-Love and Mother-Grief: South Asian Buddhist Variations on a Theme." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23/1, pp. 95-116.

Harrison, P. (1987). "Who Gets to Ride in the Great Vehicle?" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10/1, pp. 67-89.

### WEEK 4

Jan 29: WOMEN IN PALI TEXTS AND INSCRIPTIONS

Quiz 1 & 1<sup>st</sup> Group Meeting

Findly, E. B. (1999). "Women and the 'Arahant' Issue in Early Pali Literature." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 57-76.

Sponberg, A. (1992). "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism" in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. Albany: SUNY, pp. 3-36.

Barnes, N. (2000). "The Nuns at the Stupa: Inscriptional Evidence for the Lives and activities of Early Buddhist Nuns in India" in *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*. Boston Wisdom Publication, pp. 17-35.

### WEEK 5

February 5: BUDDHIST MONASTIC CODE AND THE ORDER OF NUNS

Collett, A. (2014). "Pali Vinaya: Reconceptualizing Female Sexuality in Early Buddhism" in *Women in Early Indian*

*Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 62-79.

Falk, N. (2001). "The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism" in *Unspoken Worlds*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 196-206.

Clarke, S. (2014). "Nuns who become pregnant" in *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, pp. 120-149, 215-226.

## WEEK 6

February 12: WOMEN IN TANTRIC TRADITIONS

### Book Reports Due

Shaw, M. (1994). "Women in Tantric Circles: Adepts and Experts" in *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*. Princeton University Press, pp. 74-100, 220-227.

Bentor, Y. (2008). "Can Women Attain Enlightenment through Vajrayana Practices?" in *Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 123-135.

Campbell, J. (1996). "A 'Traveller in Space': The Significance of the Dakini and her Sacred Domain" in *Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism*. NY: George Braziller, pp. 124-146, 205-7.

## WEEK 7

February 26: BUDDHISM, SEXUALITY, GENDER

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Group Meeting to Prepare for Presentation

Young, S. (2007). "Female Mutability and Male Anxiety in an Early Buddhist Legend." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 14-39.

Peach, L. J. (2002). "Social Responsibility, Sex Change, and Salvation: Gender Justice in the 'Lotus Sutra'". *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 50-74.

Richman, P. (1992). "Gender and Persuasion: The Portrayal of Beauty, Anguish, and Nurturance in an Account of a Tamil Nun" in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. Albany: SUNY, pp. 111-136.

## WEEK 8

March 5: FROM MALE AVALOKITESVARA TO FEMALE KUAN-YIN

### Quiz 2

Reed, Barbara E. (1992). "The gender symbolism of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva" in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. Albany: SUNY, pp. 159-180.

C. N. Tay (1976). "Kuan-Yin: The Cult of Half Asia". *History of Religions*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 147-177.

John Guy (2011). "Pan-Asian Buddhism and the Bodhisattva Cult in Champa" in *The Cham of Vietnam: History, Society and Art*. Singapore: NUS Press, pp. 300-322.

## WEEK 9

March 12: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN CHINA

### Student Presentation on China

Tsai, Kathryn Ann (1981). "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries." *Historical Reflections*, Vol. 8, No.3, pp. 1-20.

Schuster, N. (1985). "Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women" in *Early Chinese Buddhism*. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 87-112.

Crane, H. (2011). "Resistance through Transformation? The Meanings of Gender Reversals in a Taiwanese Buddhist Monastery" in *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies*. Lanham: Lexington, pp. 185-200.

## WEEK 10

March 19: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN VIETNAM

### Student Presentation on Vietnam

Karuna (1988). "Nuns of Vietnam" in *Daughters of the Buddha*. Ithaca. N.Y.: Snow Lion, pp. 154-159.

Soucy, A. (2012). *The Buddha Side: Gender, Power, and Buddhist Practice in Vietnam*. University of Hawai'i Press. Chapter 5 and 6, pp. 97-137.

Leshkovich, A. Marie. 2006. "Woman, Buddhist, Entrepreneur: Gender, Moral Values, and Class Anxiety in Late Socialist Vietnam". *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, No 1-2, pp. 277-307.

## WEEK 11

March 26: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN JAPAN

### Student Presentation on Japan

### Short Research Essay on China Due

Osumi K. (2002). "Historical Notes on Women and the Japanization of Buddhism" in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, pp xxvi-xli.

Uchino, K. (1986). "The Status Elevation Process of Soto Sect Nuns in Modern Japan" in *Speaking of Faith: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change*. London: The Women's Press, pp. 149-163.

Arai, Paula (1993). "Soto Zen Nuns in Modern Japan: Keeping and Creating Tradition" in *Religion and Society in Modern Japan: selected readings*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, pp. 203-218.

### April 2: Short Research Essay on Vietnam Due

## WEEK 12

April 9: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN THAILAND

### Student Presentation on Thailand

### Short Research Essay on Japan Due

Kirsch, A. T. (1985). "Text and Context: Buddhist Sex Roles/Culture of Gender Revisited". *American Ethnologist* 12, pp. 302-320.

Collins, S. and McDaniel, J. (2010). "Buddhist 'nuns' (mae chi) and the teaching of Pali in contemporary Thailand. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 6, pp. 1373-1408.

Falk, M. L. (2000). "Women in Between: Becoming Religious Persons in Thailand" in *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*. Boston Wisdom Publication, pp. 37-61.

### **WEEK 13**

April 16: WESTERN WOMEN AND BUDDHISM

Final Take-Home Essay Distributed

Gross, R. (1993). *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. Albany: SUNY. Chapter 14, pp. 209-224.

Schneiderman, S. (1999). "Appropriate Treasure? Reflections on Women, Buddhism, and Cross-Cultural Exchange" in *Buddhist Women Across Cultures*. Albany: SUNY, pp. 221-238.

Collett, A. (2006). "Buddhism and Gender: Reframing and Refocusing the Debate." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 55-84.

April 23: Short Research Essay on Thailand Due