REL 385  WOMEN AND RELIGION: BUDDHISM

Department of Religions and Cultures
Concordia University*

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Course Description
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.

Assignments and Evaluation
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...

* 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

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


WEEK 3
Jan 22: FEMALE FIGURES IN EARLY INDIAN BUDDHISM


WEEK 4
Jan 29: WOMEN IN PALI TEXTS AND INSCRIPTIONS

Quiz 1 & 1st Group Meeting


WEEK 5
February 5: BUDDHIST MONASTIC CODE AND THE ORDER OF NUNS


WEEK 6

February 12: WOMEN IN TANTRIC TRADITIONS

Book Reports Due


WEEK 7

February 26: BUDDHISM, SEXUALITY, GENDER

And 2 Group Meeting to Prepare for Presentation


WEEK 8

March 5: FROM MALE AVALOKITESVARA TO FEMALE KUAN-YIN

Quiz 2


WEEK 9
March 12: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN CHINA

Student Presentation on China


WEEK 10
March 19: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN VIETNAM

Student Presentation on Vietnam


WEEK 11
March 26: BUDDHIST WOMEN IN JAPAN

Student Presentation on Japan

Short Research Essay on China Due


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


**WEEK 13**

April 16: WESTERN WOMEN AND BUDDHISM

**Final Take-Home Essay Distributed**


April 23: Short Research Essay on Thailand Due