

BUDDHISM AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

AN/RE 263

Bates College, Winter Semester 2011, MW 2:40-4:00

OFFICE HOURS: MTW 11-12, 161 PETTINGILL, 786-6083

FINAL: 1:15-3:15pm, Wednesday, 13 April

BUDDHISM AND THE SOCIAL ORDER approaches the religion that has developed around what the Buddha taught as both a set of teachings about human being and moral behavior and as a social and political formation. The course divides into three parts, the first concerned with Buddhism as it developed in its original civilizational context and the second with Buddhism as a teaching. In the third part of the course, I will move on to the way Theravada Buddhists practice their religion nowadays, emphasizing the rise of Buddhist modernity in Thailand and Sri Lanka.

The Buddha's life provides a focus for the first two parts of the course. In the third part of the course attention moves first to the traditional way Buddhist texts have thought about the social order and on to the forces laywomen and men have exerted on Buddhist practice.

Any religious doctrine comes to be domesticated as clerics, kings, and householders adapt it to the exigencies of the world they inhabit. Because Buddhism is an austere and ascetic religion, the Buddhist case offers a powerful example of the way religions get pulled into this world. By focusing on Theravada Buddhism—"the way of the elders"—this course follows out the domestication of Buddhism in early India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. But the worldly forces which have shaped Buddhism are not exclusively Asian. The rise of Buddhist modernity is also the product of Western scholars, colonial officials, and believers, and today Theravada Buddhism has become a religion practiced across the world, not simply in Asia.

Required Books

- Bechert and Gombrich, The World of Buddhism
- Rahula, What the Buddha Taught
- Gombrich, Theravada Buddhism

Reserve readings

Lopez, "How Buddhism got Ism-ed," Tricycle, pp. 42-43.

Ling, The Buddha, pp. 43-102.

Rhys-Davids, "Asoka," in Buddhist India, pp. 125-39.

Piyadassi, "Women in Buddhist Literature," in The Spectrum of Buddhism, pp. 280-335.

Harvey, "The Later History and Spread of Buddhism," An Introduction to Buddhism, pp. 139-69.

Ekachai, "Thai Buddhism and Women," in Keeping the Faith, pp. 188-234.

Southwold, "True Buddhism and Village Buddhism in Sri Lanka," in Davis, Religious Organization and Religious Experience, pp. 137-152.

Lopez, "The Science of Buddhism," in Buddhism and Science. Pp. 153-95.
Kemper, "Dharmapala's Dharmaduta," in Learman, Buddhist Missionaries
in the Era of Globalization, pp. 22-49.

Calendar of Topics and Readings

1. Early Buddhism in Social Context

- January 11 (T) The Course
- January 13 (Th) Buddhism and the Social Order

Bechert and Gombrich, "Introduction: The Buddhist Way," in The World of Buddhism, pp. 9-14, and Lopez, "How Buddhism got Ism-ed," pp. 42-3.
- January 18 (T) Religion and Civilization

Ling, The Buddha, pp. 43-102.
- January 20 (Th) The Insight

Gombrich, "Introduction," and "Gotama Buddha's problem situation," Theravada Buddhism, pp. 1--60.
- January 25 (T) And its Context

LaMotte, "The Buddha, His Teachings, and His Sangha," in The World of Buddhism, pp. 41-60.
- January 27 (Th) The Dhamma

Gombrich, "The Buddha's Dhamma," Theravada Buddhism, pp. 61-88.
- February 1 (T) The Buddha and his Sangha

Gombrich, "The Sangha's Discipline," Theravada Buddhism, pp. 89-118.
- February 3 (Th) Asoka

Rhys-Davids, "Asoka," Buddhist India, pp. 125-139, and Gombrich, "The Accomodation between Buddhism and Society in Ancient India," Theravada Buddhism, pp. 119-136.
- February 8 (T) Ancient India

Bechert and Gombrich, "Buddhism in Ancient India," The World of Buddhism, pp. 77-89.

- February 10 (Th) The Diffusion of Buddhism
 Harvey, "The Later History and Spread of Buddhism," in An Introduction to Buddhism, pp. 139-69.
- February 15 (T) Review
- February 17 (Th) **First EXAMINATION**
- February 19-27 Winter recess

2. Buddhism as Teaching

- March 1 (T) Footprint of the Buddha (in-class video)
- March 3 (Th) The Dhamma
 Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, pp. 1-44.
 Having returned from break, this week is a good time to start thinking about your final paper. I will talk about the paper a little in class. Instructions can be had at the back of this syllabus. And I will be happy to talk in my office about your initial ideas. Please read the instructions before you come to see me.
- March 8 (T) The Way
 Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, pp. 45-75.
- March 10 (Th) Teachings
 Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, pp. 76-138.
- March 15 (T) Women in Buddhist Literature
 Piyadassi, The Spectrum of Buddhism, pp. 279-335.

3. Buddhism in two contemporary Theravadin Countries

- March 17 (Th) Thai Buddhism
 Bunnag, "The Way of the Monk and the Way of the World," in Bechert and Gombrich, The World of Buddhism, pp. 159-170.
- March 22 (T) Buddhist Modernity in Thailand
 Ekachai, Keeping the Faith, pp. 187-234.

March 24 (Th)	Sinhala Buddhism Lopez, "The Science of Buddhism," in <u>Buddhism and Science</u> , pp. 153-95, reserve, and Gombrich, "Protestant Buddhism," <u>Theravada Buddhism</u> , pp. 171-195.
March 29 (T)	Buddhism: Protestant and Village Southwold, "True Buddhism or Village Buddhism in Sri Lanka," in Davis, <u>Religious Organization and Religious Experience</u> , pp. 137-152.
March 31 (Th)	Buddhism Abroad Kemper, "Dharmapala's Dharmaduta," in Learman, <u>Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization</u> ," pp. 22-50, reserve.
April 5 (T)	Second EXAMINATION
April 7 (Th)	Reading Week

Your research paper is due at my office on the hour of the day of the final examination, namely 1:15pm, Wednesday 13 April.

Course Requirements

The material requirements for this course include two examinations (25% and 30%), a research paper (35%), and class participation (10%). There is no final as such.

I value what students have to say, and they usually have a lot to say about Buddhism. Hanging 10% of a final grade on class participation is a form of coercion, but I believe that learning to talk in a classroom is an academic skill as important as learning how to analyze an argument. Do not assume you are being judged on the content of your comments. I judge students merely on whether they say something. There are no dumb comments—there are only students who do not contribute and students who do. I regard taking an interest in the readings sufficient to want to talk about those readings after class or in my office as a form of class participation.

The largest share of the final grade (35%) comes from the research paper so let me be explicit about what I have in mind.

What I want you to do for the paper is to pursue a research topic in the library which leads to a research paper—of some 8-10 pages—starting off from one particular reading and commenting (that is, elaborating, extending, critiquing) on that reading in an adventurous way. The first part of the assignment is simply to explain the point or points in class readings that got you going; the second part requires gathering materials, sorting out arguments, and developing your own position.

I would like you to put the reading in some larger intellectual context, which means I want you to do **one of several things**, beginning with what you take to be important points raised in the article or book you've chosen.

Consider the following four approaches as examples:

1. Compare the issue under discussion to some other part of the Buddhist tradition—another time or place. We have read about Asoka as a paradigm of Buddhist kingship. Is his example still important in the Buddhist world?

2. In the third part of the course, we consider the onset of modernity in Buddhist societies, especially as regards women. There is no end of historical and ethnographic material about Buddhist women. Several of the readings have considered how their role in contemporary Buddhism deviates from historical practice, as well as from the picture of women one sees by reading Buddhist texts. What are the forces behind these changes? How do they take distinctive form in other parts of the Theravadin world?

3. A more aggressive strategy: challenge one of the assertions you encounter in the readings that you believe is wrong, incomplete, or overgeneralized.

4. If you want to take up a comparative project, don't compare what the texts, let's say, make of meditation with the modern period. There are too many variables to make that comparison persuasive. Compare how monks use meditation with what monks do in another Theravada country, or with what laypeople do with it or Westerners.

Focus your research on Theravada Buddhism.

Doing well on this assignment requires taking on an issue from the readings and expanding on it—not by way of sharing your feelings about it but by investigating other sources.

Approaching this paper from the perspective I have in mind requires more argumentation than simply asserting, "I think Gombrich should have discussed the position of women in early Buddhism." His failure to do so may be striking or interesting to you, but you do not have an argument until you can show that what he does say—about men or Buddhism or the social world of early Buddhism—is wrong (or misleading) because he leaves women out.

The paper, in other words, needs to have more than a topic. It needs a problematic—a connection to a body of academic argument, a reason for taking it seriously other than one's own curiosity, a context that requires you to do more than report on the phenomenon. Begin the paper by saying explicitly "In this paper I intend to investigate...The issue grows out of a reading we did in class..." or something to that effect.

A problematic, on my definition, often takes on the character of a contradiction. One example: the Buddha preached a religion that centers on the idea of no-soul and downplays the seductions (and the reality) of the body. Yet relic veneration begins—according to the texts, at least—with the dispersal of the Lord Buddha’s own body after his cremation. Relic veneration has marked Theravada Buddhism ever since, and image veneration is almost as ancient. How can this be the case? How do Buddhists themselves think about the contradiction? Do they see a contradiction?

Some contradictions lie fallow for centuries and then become contentious for reasons that are worth pursuing in a research paper.

Not all problematics have the character of being a contradiction for the actors themselves. I’m not sure that monastic landlordism in Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka and Tibet, for instance, is an internal contradiction (for Buddhists) or an external one (for outsiders interested in Buddhism for scholarly reasons). It is both. If two scholars have conflicting interpretations about something such as monastic landlordism, you have what is at least an external contradiction. A good paper follows.

Ladd Library has a superb collection of Buddhist materials. You will not be thwarted by lack of material. You need to remember the fact that there is even more Buddhist material than is visible to someone browsing the stacks on the third floor. A large fraction of the library’s holdings (on Buddhism and everything else) is found in the basement in the periodical stacks. You can get an idea of those sources by looking at the bibliographies of books and articles we are reading in the course. I will be impressed by your ability to get into the periodical literature (in the stacks or academic sources found on-line).

If you are having trouble (or pleasure) with the readings, the course or me, please come see me straightaway.

All students are responsible for reading and understanding the Bates College statement on academic honesty, crediting of sources, and plagiarism.