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RLST 368.01: Contemporary Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia

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Contemporary Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia

RLST 368

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:20

LA 303

Dr. Brad Clough

Office Hours: TR 3:45-5:45 PM or by appointment

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Liberal Arts 158

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Course Description:

The oldest living tradition of Buddhism, the Theravāda (“Teaching of the Elders”), has flourished in South and Southeast Asia from the last centuries of the 1st millennium BCE up to today. In post-colonial modern times, Buddhism in this large region has undergone a number of very significant and quite fascinating changes on many fronts, and has produced major new movements and reforms. This course will closely examine how the religious developments of the past century have altered the way Theravādin Buddhists have seen themselves, this world, and the ultimate reality of nirvana. After investigating the major basic tenets of Theravada Buddhist thought and practice, and surveying the history of this region through the 19th century, the main focus of the course will be on religious issues that have come to the fore in recent decades. Topics such as Buddhist activist movements (which have strongly raised opposition to environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and social inequality), the revival of mindfulness meditation especially among lay Buddhists (a development that has profoundly influenced how Americans practice Buddhism), increasing roles for women in the religious life, and monks’ advocacy of violence in ethnic and political conflicts, will be the major subjects covered. This course has no prerequisite, and so is open to all interested students.

Readings:

Most readings will be available for free in the form of PDF documents. There is one textbook that must be acquired:

Asanga Tilakaratne, *Theravada Buddhism: The View of the Elders*

Requirements:

1. Class participation, consistent attendance, and preparation for discussion. No more than two unexcused absences will be allowed without it affecting your class participation grade. (20% of the final grade).
2. A Mid-Term Exam (25% of the final grade)
3. A Take-Home Essay Final Exam (25% of the final grade).
4. A term research paper, 12-15 pages in length. You may chose from a list of suggested topics, or you may develop a topic of your own, in consultation with the instructor. Please note that a proposal and bibliography are due on March 20, and the final version is due by May 4. (30% of the final grade).

Class Meetings and Assignments:

Tues. 1/23 Introduction to the Course

I. The History of Theravāda Buddhism and its Teachings (Dhamma)

Thurs. 1/25 The Life and Times of Siddhattha Gotama, the Buddha
-Tilakarane: Introduction and pp. 1-22.
-selections from the *Nidāna-kathā* (“Story of the Beginning”)

Tues. 1/30 The Buddha’s Major Teachings
-Tilakaratne: Chapter 4.

Thurs 2/1 The Buddha’s Major Teachings (continued)
-Tilakaratne: pp. 31-32 and 39-43
-The Buddha’s First Sermon: “The Turning of the Wheel of the Dhamma”

Tues. 2/6 The Buddha’s Major Teachings (continued)
-Tilakaratne: pp. 32-39 and 43-45.

Thurs 2/8 The Buddha’s Major Teachings (continued)
-Tilakaratne: pp. 46-51 and 92-107.

Tues. 2/13 The Buddha’s Major Teachings (continued)
-Tilakaratne: pp. 51-60 and 107-111.

Thurs. 2/15 Popular Theravada Buddhist Practices
-Tilakaratne: pp. 24-30, 111-114, and 133-137.

Tues. 2/20 The Theravāda Buddhist Community (Sangha)
-Tilakaratne: pp. 22-24, Chapter 5, pp. 114-120 & 128-33.

Thurs. 2/22 The Historical Life and World of Theravada Buddhist
-Tilakaratne: Chapter 6.
-Evening Video Showing: “Footprint of the Buddha”

II. Major Contemporary Buddhist Movements in South and Southeast Asia

Tues. 2/27 Theravada Buddhism in Modernity
Tilakaratne: pp. 120-128 and Chapter 8.

- Thurs. 3/1 The Mindfulness Meditation Revival
 -Bradley Clough: “Vocational Diversity in the Theravāda Sangha: The Modern Period”
 -Chapters 1, 3, and 5 from Nyanaponika Thera’s *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*
- Tues. 3/6 ****Mid-Term Exam****
- Thurs 3/8 Mindfulness Meditation and Lay Buddhism
 -Eric Braun: “In the Hands of the People: Ledi Empowers the Laity”
 -Pierluigi Confalonieri: “The Life of Sayagyi U Ba Khin: The Man and the Teacher”
Goenka reading???
- Tues. 3/13 The Influence of the Meditation Revival within the Lay Community
 -Chapters 4 & 5 from George Bond’s *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*
- Thurs. 3/15 The Restoration of Nunhood in Theravāda Buddhism
 -Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes Towards Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism”
 -Ute Husken, “The Legend of the Buddhist Order of Nuns in the Theravada Vinaya-Pitaka”
 -Evening Video Showing: “Doing Time, Doing Vipassana”
- Tues. 3/20 The Restoration of Nunhood (continued)
 -Bhikkhu Bodhi, “The Revival of the Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravada Tradition”
 -Tessa Bartholomeusz, “The Dasa Sil Mata in Contemporary Sri Lanka”
****Term Paper Proposals and Bibliographies Due****
- Thurs 3/22 The Restoration of Nunhood (continued)
 -Tessa Bartholomeusz, “Women as Fundamental and Fundamentalist Women: The Case Buddhist Sri Lanka”
 -Nirmala Salgado, “Tradition, Power, and Community among Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka”
- Tues. 4/3 Buddhism and the Environment: The Case of Thailand
 -Lily de Silva, “Early Buddhist Attitudes towards Nature”
 -Sallie King, “Introduction” to *Socially Engaged Buddhism*
 -Sulak Sivaraksa, “Buddhism and Environmentalism”
 -Phra Payutto (aka Dhammapitaka), “Buddhist Solutions for the Twenty-first Century”

- Thurs. 4/5
- Buddhism and the Environment (continued)
 -David Gosling, "Thailand: A Case Study"
 -Susan Darlington, "Buddhist Development: The Ecology Monks of Thailand"
- Tues. 4/10
- Buddhism and the Environment (continued)
 -Leslie Sponsel and Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel, "A Theoretical Analysis of the Potential Contribution of the Monastic Community in Promoting a Green Society in Thailand"
 -Donald Swearer, "The Hermeneutics of Buddhist Ecology in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Dhammapitaka"
- Thurs. 4/12
- Religion, Politics and Violence; The Case of Myanmar (Burma)
 -Matthew Kosuta, "Postcolonial Religious Conflict in Southeast Asia"
 -Moe Thuzar, "Understanding Democracy, Security, and Change in Post-2015 Myanmar"
 -Theja Gunawardhana, "Aung San Suu Kyi: A Woman of Conscience in Burma"
 -Aung San Suu Kyi: "Freedom from Fear," "Towards a True Refuge," and "The Need for Solidarity among Ethnic Groups"
- Tues. 4/17
- Religion, Politics and Violence
 -select writings from the leaders of the 969 and MaBaTha movements
 -Iselyn Frydenlund, "The Birth of Buddhist Politics of Religious Freedom in Myanmar"
 -reading on the "Four Laws to Protect Race & Religion"
- Thurs. 4/19
- Religion, Politics and Violence
 -Matt Schissler, Matthew Walton, and Phyu Phyu Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, Narrative Making and Memory in Myanmar"
 -writings on the current slaughter and exile of the Rohingya Muslims
- Tues. 4/24
- Religion, Politics and Violence
 -Matthew Weiner, "Maha Ghosananda as a Contemplative Social Activist"
 -selections from Maha-Ghosananda, *Step-by-Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*

Thurs. 4/26

Buddhism and Social Inequality

-selections from:

- 1) Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India : Challenging Brahmanism*
- 2) Gail Omvedt, *Caste and Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*
- 3) Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*

Tues. 5/1

Buddhism and Social Inequality

-selections from Ambedkar's *The Buddha and the Dhamma*, *The Annihilation of Caste*, and *Buddha and the Future of his Religion*

Thurs. 5/3

Buddhism and Social Inequality

-Christopher Queen, "Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation"

Fri. 5/4

*****Final Term Papers Due*****

Thurs. 5/10

***** Final Take-Home Essay Due*****