

**Dennis Deng (Xiao Song)**

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**Class time**

Fall 2010

**Introduction to Buddhism -Fall**

Buddhism has over twenty-five hundred years of history and has taken root, in one form and another and at one time or another, in virtually every country in Asia. In more recent times, it has found a niche in Western nations as well.

This class aims at giving the students an overview of basic Buddhist doctrine, a introduction of the history of its development in India, China and Tibet and a discussion of certain related religious topics, such as religious experience and asceticism. This class will be divided into three parts, namely, early Buddhism in India, Mahayana Buddhism in China and Tantric practice in Tibet. Each of the three part will be dealt with in the above mentioned doctrinal and historical perspectives. Though this class is primarily a survey class of Buddhist practice, there will be sessions of class addressing specific issues of Buddhist practice. It is considered to be beneficial for the students to dive deeper into certain areas of the vast array of social and cultural phenomena that have clustered in the course of time around a figure called the Buddha. The purpose of doing so is to portray somehow more precisely the thoughts and actions of the large segment of human race who have called themselves Buddhists.

15% to 20% of the class time will be used to have a class discussion on the assigned reading. Several school organized field trips to religious places of worship and Buddhist monasteries as a part of the class activities will provide the students with first hand experience of the living Buddhist practice.

**Core Curriculum Requirements:**

Knowledge Area(s) satisfied: Theological and Religious Studies

Knowledge

Skill(s) Developed: Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions

Values Requirement(s) satisfied: Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World

### **Learning Objectives:**

Knowledge Area (Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge):

By taking this course, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge, with attention to historical development, of the central texts, beliefs, ethical understandings, and practices of Buddhism. By way of example, students who take this course should be able to: (1) name and discuss some of the most important Buddhist scriptures; (2) Articulate the general outline of the historical evolution of Buddhism, including its different major branches; and (3) Define and discuss key Buddhist concepts, terms, values, and religious practices.

The course addresses other competencies as well. By taking this course, for example, students should be able to analyze and interpret Buddhist religious texts, beliefs, and practices using standard scholarly methods and tools (competency a). For example, students should be able to analyze and interpret some Buddhist scriptures and scriptural passages. Students taking this course will also be able to demonstrate knowledge of the central ethical teachings and perspectives of Buddhism (competency e), e.g., the ethical teachings foundational to the "eightfold path". Finally, students taking this course will be able to evaluate the religious perspectives of Buddhists (competency d) in light of what they learn about the teachings and practices that are foundational to Buddhism in its many forms.

Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):

Students will:

(1) "Comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning of varying forms of communication."

In class discussions, quizzes, and/or examinations, students will demonstrate the ability to comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and/or contextualize a variety of religious texts, histories, and ideas, as well as scholarly arguments about those texts, histories and ideas.

(2) Develop "strategies for seeking and synthesizing information to support an argument, make a decision, or resolve a problem."

In class discussions, quizzes, and/or examinations, students will be encouraged to articulate reasoned arguments about materials studied in the course or to critique arguments to which they are exposed in the class.

(3) Monitor students' own "individual thinking or behavior" in relationship to Buddhism "in order to question, confirm, validate, or correct" their presuppositions and prejudgements.

Class discussions will require students to reflect on their own presuppositions and correct erroneous opinions by appealing to data and reasoned argumentation.

Values Area :

(1) The course addresses a diversity of Buddhist traditions in several parts of the world. For example, the course will cover Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana forms of Buddhism; these three are considered distinct traditions, and they are practiced in different parts of the world; e.g., Theravada in Sri Lanka and parts of Southeast Asia; Mahayana in China and Japan; and Vajrayana in Tibet. To that end, the course will discuss the history, nature, and/or practice of Buddhism in at least two--and usually more than two--different countries, such as India, Nepal, Tibet, Thailand, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, or the United States.

Values Area (Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World):  
By taking this course, students will be able to "demonstrate knowledge of and capacity to articulate the foundations of" Buddhism, whether they are Buddhist themselves ("one's own" belief or faith tradition") or not ("others' beliefs or faith traditions"). They will also be able to "demonstrate how faith traditions or belief systems"--in this case Buddhism--have been or can be related to the intellectual and cultural life of Buddhists(e.g., Buddhist systems of philosophy, ritual customs that characterize Buddhist countries, Buddhist beliefs about the relationship between humans and other kinds of living beings, Buddhist beliefs about the human body and how illness and healing take place, and so forth.)

**Required Textbooks**

Bercholz, Samuel, ed. *Entering the Stream*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1993.

Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. London & Bedford: The Gordon Fraser Gallery.

All assigned readings for this class will be put on reserve for the students to check out for a period of time not exceeding 2 hours.

## **Grades**

The term grade consists of class attendance 10%, class involvement 10%, mid-term exam 20%, two pop quizzes 20% and a term paper 40%. Unexcused absence is not allowed in this class. Late attendance may eventually cause attendance grade deduction. Term paper (10-15 pages) should be submitted no later than the last day of the class.

## **Class Advancement**

### Week 1

Teacher and class introduction

The Buddha-life story *Before He Was Buddha-the life of Siddhartha* and basic Buddhist teachings-the Four Noble Truth  
(*What the Buddha Taught* P16-50 *The Buddhist Religion* P34-39 *Entering the Stream* P57-61 P83-86)

### Week 2

The Four Noble Truth and Karma, the wheel of life and Buddhist cosmology  
*Entering the Stream* P122-130 *What the Buddha Taught* P51-66  
Founding the Buddhist Community and the Buddha's passing away  
*The Buddhist Religion* P42-47 *Answers to Common Questions about Buddhism* P165-217

### Week 3

Religious life in early centuries

*The Buddhist Religion* P67-79 *The Experience of Buddhism* P45-79

The Spread, Development and Evolution of Buddhism in China

*Answers to Common Questions about Buddhism* P219-253 *Buddhist Saints*

*in India* Chpt 1.2

week. 4

The Spread, Development and Evolution of Buddhism in China

*The Buddhist Religion* P170-217 *Buddhist Saints in India* Chpt 3.4

The teaching of Emptiness and the rise of Mahayana

*The Buddhist Religion* P 82-91 *Buddhist Saints in India* Chpt 5

(Chinese National Day Holiday, Oct.1-7)

Week 5

Field Trip

Week 6

Mid-term Exam

Week. 7

The Bodhisattva Path

*The Buddhist Religion* P99-108 *The Experience of Buddhism* P158-172

Chan

*Zen mind, the beginner's mind*

Week. 8

Weekend Field Trip

Week 9

Introduction of Tantra

*The Buddhist Religion* P123-132 *Entering the Stream* P251-253 P258-265

Tibetan Buddhism-an overview

*The Indestructible Truth* P17-207

Week 10

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

Topics on Tibetan Buddhism-Dalai Lama, Milarepa

*Life of Milarepa*

Week.11

Tantric rituals, Mandala and systematic advancement

Week 12

Religious Experience

*The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Buddhist Asceticism

*Buddhist Saints in India*

Week 13

Buddhist Asceticism

*Buddhist Saints in India*

Review of the class

The term paper is due during the final week