Women in Buddhist Traditions

RLST 231/3515
TR 2:35-3:50
Garland Hall 301-F
Vanderbilt University

Fall 1999

Professor Paula Arai
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301-D Garland Hall
Office Hours: TR 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m.
or by appointment

Course Description

Exploring Buddhist traditions through the contributions and concerns of women in various cultural contexts (Indian, Sri Lankan, Tibetan, Thai, Chinese, Japanese, and North American) and time periods (ancient and modern). Critical analysis of practices, texts, and hermeneutical schemes that foster misogyny.

Special attention will be given to laying a theoretical foundation in the construction of gender in each cultural and religious context encountered. We will look into the reasons why texts on religion have not always included the voices of women as we investigate ways to uncover them through research techniques and developing hermeneutical strategies.

Previous background in women's studies and Buddhism is optimal. Some knowledge of Asia and the study of religion would be helpful.

Course Requirements

1. Active participation in class discussions (5%), 10 short response papers (total of 15%), facilitating a discussion (5%).

2. One 8-page essay due in class on Oct. 7. (35%)

3. One 15-page research paper due by 4:30 p.m. on December 9. (35%) If I am not in my office, please slide your paper under my door.
4. Presentation (5%) 

All papers must be typed, double-spaced, and in a 12 or 14 point font. (about 300 words per page).

Texts and Class Paks are sold in the Rand bookstore.  
All reading materials on reserve at Divinity library.  
*by reading material indicates that it is in Class Pak.  

Vanderbilt's Honor Code governs all work in this course (e.g. tests, papers homework assignments).  

Students who may need disability-related classroom accommodations should make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. Also, visit or call the Opportunity Development Center, Baker Building Room 108, for information about other services available. The telephone number is 322- (V/TDD*).

The course schedule may be modified during the semester.  

Course Schedule  

Week 1 Introduction to the Study of Women  


Week 2 Women in Early Indian Buddhism I.  

I.B. Horner, Women Under Primitive Buddhism, 1930. pp. 95-161; 211-379
Week 3 Women in Early Indian Buddhism II

Week 4 Women in Early Indian Buddhism III
   *Yuichi Kajiyama, "Women in Buddhism," The Eastern Buddhist

Week 5 Women and Tibetan Buddhist Teachings
   Anne Klein, Meeting the Great Bliss Queen. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 Sept. 28:
   Turn in suggestions for paper

Week 6 Women in Tantric Buddhism
   Oct. 7: Paper due

Week 7 Women in Thai Buddhism
   Kabilsingh, Chatsumarn, Thai Women and Buddhism. Berkeley:
   Parallax Press, pp. 1-86.

Week 8 Women in Chinese Buddhism
   *Miriam Levering, "The Story of Miao-Tao'

Week 9 Women in Japanese Buddhism

Week 10 Women in Japanese Buddhism


Week 11 Women in American Buddhism


Week 12 Individual Meetings with Prof. to discuss papers

Week 13 Class Presentations