Course description:
The West has been interacting with Buddhism for many centuries, but it is only in the past couple of decades that a truly sophisticated (postmodernist, postcolonialist) sense of global, and intercultural, hermeneutics has been applied to this history, in order to elucidate effects such as Western overrationalization of Theravada, or romanticization of Tibet, or idealization of Zen, or dismissal of Pure Land. The goal of this course is to examine some studies of Buddhist traditions by taking as broad as possible a view of the theory-of-knowledge issues at play. Arguably, having a deep critical awareness of the selected, constructed nature of perceptions of “Buddhism” is essential to having any understanding of what Buddhism has meant and can mean in the contemporary United States. (However, this particular course will focus mainly on areas other than the twentieth-century interpretations of US Buddhism, with the aim of filling in a wider background for US studies.)

Experience with previous Buddhist studies courses is assumed (i.e. students seasoned to the MA and PhD levels). In format this is an online course. It will proceed by means of introductory material composed by the instructor, weekly readings in sources, and written responses and interactions with the instructor and other students. Heavy emphasis is laid on the weekly written interactions (80%). A final research paper (15-20 pages) is expected (20%). Phone calls and/or Skype are possible options for additional communication.

Student learning objectives:
• To be reinforced in an understanding that nothing about Buddhism should be accepted naively or statically
• To conceptualize “Buddhism” as a whole “family” of traditions and concerns, with a great deal of contextual variation and selectivity among the parts
• To explore various overlaps between Buddhist studies and widespread concerns in contemporary critical humanities, e.g. postcolonial studies, modernity, globalization, and transnationalism
• With the above issues in mind, to critically examine specific examples of research that deal with historical interactions among civilizations that involve Buddhism

Required texts:
No particular textbook is required. Course readings will be available as PDFs from the course Moodle site. (Or students can acquire the books independently.)

Schedule in brief:
The instructor would best like to work with the participating students to adapt the exact readings to the past experience of the students. Initially, however, the following topics are
on the table.
1. Buddhist thought and poststructuralism
2., 3. How poststructuralist critiques have penetrated historiography and other methodologies in the humanities, leading to an implicit overlap between these methodologies and broadly “buddhist” concerns
Then, case studies in historiographical / hermeneutical work, i.e. examples of research on the diverse intercultural interactions between / among various civilizational areas:
4., 5. Indian Buddhism and Tibet; then, later interactions with Tibet, especially in the modern “West”
6. Premodern China and Indian Buddhism
7., 8. European encounters with Buddhism, especially up to the early 20th century
9., 10. British encounters with Buddhism
13. Buddhism in Taiwan (China reinterprets itself)
14. Wrap-up, final papers due

Evaluations and Assignments:
Since this is an online course class activity is heavily based on writing submitted to the Moodle page. Students are required to post responses to the week’s readings no later than Wednesday, then required to reply to each another’s responses as well as pose questions online. More detail will be posted on the course’s Moodle page.

Research papers should relate to some problem introduced in the course, according to the interests of individual students. Consultation with the instructor will occur in the course of the semester.

Tentative topics and readings (selections from below):

Week 1: September 4-7: Introduction to course, students, instructor, and course topics; initial orientation
Sometimes “Buddhism” is a bit too concerned about its own identity; usually a “Buddhist” standpoint is established by beginning with the mythos of the Buddha, etc. A wider perspective can be obtained by starting in a more general way with “Buddhism” as a quasi-universal problem in knowledge: all knowledge is interdependence, and all knowledge is interpretation. We will review problems in historiographical theory and theory in modern humanities; small hermeneutics (texts) vs. big hermeneutics (cultural translation and assimilation); hybridization / creolization; orientalism, colonialism, postcolonialism; all politics is local; Buddhism vs. Buddhisms; “unmediated experience?” (Also post a short introduction of yourself to the Moodle site.)

Park, Buddhisms and Deconstructions

Week 2: September 10-14: Critical historiography
(continued) In (Western) humanities studies the issues raised by poststructuralist critique have permeated for decades now, and recent “historiography” may thus embrace all kinds of cross-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary concerns ranging from literature to
anthropology to postcolonial studies (orientalism).

Iggers, *Global History of Modern Historiography*; Burke, *What is Cultural History?*; *Transbuddhism*, preface; Budd, *Modern Historiography Reader*

**Week 3: September 17-21: Critical historiography**
(continued)

**Week 4: September 24-28: Tibetan encounters**
Indian Buddhism and Tibet; later interactions with Tibet, especially in the modern “West”


**Week 5: October 1-5: Tibetan encounters**
(continued)

**Week 6: October 8-12: Premodern China and Indian Buddhism**

Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*; Chen, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*

**Week 7: October 15-19: European encounters with Buddhism, especially up to the early 20th century**


**READING WEEK: October 22-26: No scheduled coursework.**

**Week 8: October 29-November 2: European encounters**
(continued)

**Week 9: November 5-9: British encounters**

Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*; Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter*; Bluck, *British Buddhism*; Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain*

**Week 10: November 12-16: British encounters**
(continued)

**Week 11: November 19-23: Nineteenth-century American Encounters**

Week 12: November 26-30: Nineteenth-century American Encounters 
(continued)

Week 13: December 3-7: Contemporary Taiwan (China reinterprets itself)

Madsen, Democracy’s Dharma; Chandler, Establishing a Pure Land on Earth; Huang, Charisma and Compassion; Jones, Buddhism in Taiwan

Week 14: December 10-14: Wrap-up: Final papers due Friday December 14