Course Overview

Course Description
This course takes as its premise that the family is the primary locus of religious practice in Asian religions. The tendency to study Buddhism in its monastic forms, and to focus on the achievements of individual men, at best presents only a small part of the tradition and, at worst, creates large gaps in knowledge about this religion. In particular, women are often left out of the picture of Buddhism because of this overwhelming attention to male-centered monastic life and enterprises. Focusing on the family, in which women typically control ritual, finances, and education, gives a drastically different picture of Buddhism. The course will consider such topics as:

• Buddhism as a home-centered (not home-leaving) tradition;
• monks and nuns as sons and daughters, and even as husbands and wives;
• dissolving hard distinctions between “lay” and “monastic”;
• women as developers of Buddhist practices and doctrines;
• family relationships and gender symbolisms as central elements of Buddhism, especially in the East Asian sphere.

The course will consider women in both family and monastic lifestyles (not that the two are necessarily mutually exclusive) and will examine topics such as Buddhist ordination in relation to family (real and fictive); female/feminine imagery in Buddhist doctrine; the importance of “the mother” in the development of Buddhism; Buddhism, unborn children, and abortion; gender symbolisms; the development of Guanyin as female symbol and figure; and children’s lives within Buddhist practice.

Much of the course material will deal with historical issues of women and Buddhism. In order to introduce contemporary topics, students will create and lead at least three of the class sessions.

Student Learning Objectives
- Students will be asked to shift perspectives, from thinking of Buddhism as mainly monastic and centered on individual practice to considering it as also located in the dynamics of family and community.
- Students will understand how Buddhism has viewed women throughout its history, and how women have both internalized and rejected those views.
- Students will learn that gender imagery in Asian cultures, and thus in Buddhism, is based on different assumptions than western gender imagery and has profoundly influenced the development of Buddhism.
- Students will understand the great importance of family connections and imagery in all aspects of Buddhism, from monasticism to practice and doctrine.
Required Text

Optional Texts

All other readings will be provided to students through the class Moodle website.

Assignments
Weekly: All students will participate in online discussion of each week’s topics and readings, either through a weekly online voice meeting (via Skype) for lecture OR by posting to the course Moodle site. The voice meeting is expected to take about 90 minutes. Posts to Moodle should be about 1-2 pages in length. Students who post to Moodle will listen to the recorded lecture. These posts will also be discussed in the voice lecture.

Creating a class session: Students will create at least 3 of our class sessions. Depending on the number of students, you may work in groups of 2–3 to do this. Students should decide the topic of their session in consultation with the instructor, select readings for the session, provide some sort of lecture material, and lead the class discussion. This project takes the place of a paper.

Grading
Weekly participation: 60%
Class session: 40%
Week 1: Introductions
Mechanics of the course
3 weeks to be decided and led by students
Themes of the course
Limits of the course
Students post self-introductions to the Moodle website

Part I: Historical and Theoretical Settings

Week 2: Historical and Theoretical Considerations: Buddhism in the Context of Family Life
Required readings:
• Faure, The Power of Denial: 
• Salgado, Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: 

Week 3: Buddhist Attitudes toward Women, Women’s Attitudes toward Buddhism
• Faure, The Power of Denial:
  Ch. 2 The Rhetoric of Subordination, 55–90.
  Ch. 3 The Rhetoric of Salvation, 91–118.
  Ch. 4 The Rhetoric of Equality, 119–142.

Optional:
Part II: Buddhism and the Family Cycle:  
Marriage, Motherhood, Children, Religious Practice

Week 4: Family Dynamics in the Founding of Buddhism 
Required readings:

Optional:

Week 5: Mothers and Their Monks 
Required reading:
  Ch. 5 Mothers and Sons in the Ghost Festival, 80–102  
  Ch. 9 Buddhist Biology, 192–225  

Optional:
  Ch. 5 Monks, Mothers, and Motherhood, 145–80  
  Ch. 7 Crossing the Line, 219–49.

Week 6: Buddhist Clerical Marriage from Three Perspectives: Monks, Nuns, Wives 
Required reading:
Week 7: Buddhism and Children

Required reading:
- Sasson, *Little Buddhas*:
  Ch. 2 Scarecrows, *Upāsakas*, Fetuses, and Other Child Monastics in Middle-Period Indian Buddhism, 43–74. (Amy Paris Langenberg)
  Ch. 4 The Inheritance of Rāhula: Abandoned Child, Boy Monk, Ideal Son and Trainee, 97–123. (Kate Crosby)
  Ch. 9 Ordination (*Pabbajjā*) as Going Forth? Social Bonds and the Making of a Buddhist Monastic, 229–46. (Jeffrey Samuels)
  Ch. 15. Marrying the “Thought of Enlightenment”: The Multivalency of Girls’ Symbolic Marriage Rites in the Newar Buddhist Community of Kathmandu, Nepal, 347–73. (Todd Lewis and Christoph Emmrich)

A few other recommendations in relation to this topic:

Week 8: FALL BREAK (Oct. 26–30) —no class—

Week 9. Women’s Practices for Self, Family, Community

- Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice*:
  Ch. 1 Decolonizing Female Renunciation, 21–48
  Ch. 2 Institutional Discourse and Everyday Practice, 49–76
  Ch. 4. Invisible Nuns, 103–22
  Ch. 7 Renunciation and “Empowerment,” 185–210.

Also highly recommended in relation to this topic:
Part III: Gender Symbolism

Week 10: Gender Symbolism in Asian Cultures and Buddhism
Required reading:

Week 11: Gender Change? The Feminization of Guanyin
Required reading:
• Chun-Fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*: Ch. 6 Indigenous Iconographies and the Domestication of Kuan-yin Ch. 10 Feminine Forms of Kuan-yin in Late Imperial China

Some optional readings on Guanyin:

Week 12 THANKSGIVING BREAK (Nov. 26) —no class—

Part IV: Contemporary Issues
Three sessions to be decided and led by students

Week 13: TBA
Week 14: TBA
Week 15: TBA