

BSTC2049 BUDDHISM AND GENDER (6 Credits)

ELECTIVE COURSE

(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

Offering Semester: 2nd Semester

Instructor	Prof. Catherine HARDIE
Office	Rm 4.03, The Jockey Club Tower
Office Hours	Tuesday afternoons, or by appointment
Email	cehardie@hku.hk
Lecture Hours	TBC
Class Venue	TBC
Assessment	100% coursework

Course Description

Gender dynamics shape religious worlds in diverse and complex ways. This holds true in Buddhism as it does in other religious traditions. In this course we will take an interdisciplinary approach to critically examine the relationship between Buddhism and gender in a broad variety of historical and Buddhist thematic contexts. To accomplish this, we will immerse ourselves in Buddhist texts and teachings, analyse material and visual culture, and delve into the lived experiences of Buddhist practitioners spanning from Early Buddhism to the present day, across a range of Buddhist traditions, cultures, and geographical settings. In so doing, we will explore topics including the role and status of women, the construction of Buddhist masculinities and femininities, the gendering of religious roles, institutions and practices, and activism towards gender equality in Buddhist communities. No background knowledge of Buddhism is required for this course and all students are welcome.

Course Objectives

By completing this course, students will cultivate an understanding of the importance of gender in the study of Buddhism. They will develop a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between Buddhism and gender in a variety of concrete historical and thematic contexts. Furthermore, students will gain valuable insights into specific gender issues that arise within the context of Buddhist texts, visual culture, and lived religious experience, including issues pertaining to gender identity and representation, as well as soteriology, culture, ethics, and aesthetics.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the significance and utility of adopting gender as a critical lens to study Buddhism.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with a range of disciplinary and methodological approaches to studying gender in Buddhism.
3. Develop a familiarity with gender issues in a variety of concrete Buddhist historical and thematic contexts.
4. Analyse and deconstruct Buddhist texts, visual culture and lived religion using gender critical theories and concepts.
5. Demonstrate the ability to communicate individually and collectively in oral and written forms.

Assessment Ratio

100% coursework with the following breakdown:

- (1) Attendance 10%
- (2) In-class quizzes 50% (Weeks 6 & 11)
- (3) Long essay 40%

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarizing is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:

<http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

Grading Criteria

Correct understanding of the material in the lectures is essential. Students are expected to show critical and research elements in their essays. Further information will be provided in the lectures. Here is the Faculty Grade Expectations.

https://arts.hku.hk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/grade_expectations.pdf

AI Use Policy

Students may use generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) for idea generation, writing support, or research assistance **only if such use is explicitly permitted for a specific assignment**. Any use of AI tools must be transparent and properly acknowledged in submitted work (e.g., "I used ChatGPT to help brainstorm counterarguments"). Students remain fully responsible for the content, accuracy, and academic integrity of their work. Misuse of AI, including unacknowledged or deceptive use, will be treated as academic misconduct.

Lecture Schedule & Topics

Week	Content	Readings and Remarks
Week 1	Introduction to Buddhism and gender	Damien Keown, 'Buddhism and Elephants' (pp. 1-14) and 'The Four Noble Truths (pp.44-56) in <i>Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2000) Oxford: Oxford University Press. Jane Picker and Imelda Whelehan (2004) "Introduction: everywhere and somewhere: gender studies, women's studies, feminist perspectives and interdisciplinarity" in <i>50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies</i> London: Sage (pp. ix-xv) (Option reading) Ursula King, 'Gender and Religion' in Ursula King (ed.), <i>Turning Points in Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Parrinder</i>, Bloomsbury (pp. 275-287)
Week 2	Women in Early Buddhism	Alan Sponberg (1992), "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism" in Cabezón, José Ignacio (ed). <i>Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender</i>. Albany: State University of New York Press (pp.3-29) Susan Murcott (1991) "Introduction to the Therigatha" in <i>The First Buddhist Women: Poems and Stories of Awakening</i>, Berkeley: Parallax Press (pp. 12-20)
Week 3	Women in Mahāyāna Buddhism	R.M. Gross (1992), "Do Innate Female Traits and Characteristics Exist?: Roles and Images of Women in Indian Mahayana Buddhism" in

		<i>Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism</i>. New York: SUNY Press. (pp. 55-77) <i>The Lotus Sutra</i>, Chapter 12, (pp. 179-185)
Week 4	Buddhist masculinities	Dessislava Vendova (2023) "Middle Way Masculinity: The Bodhisattva Siddhārtha as a Renunciant in Early Buddhist Texts and Art" in Megan Bryson and Kevin Buckelew (eds.), <i>Buddhist Masculinities</i>, New York: Columbia University Press (pp. 21-47)
Week 5	Gender and monasticism	Ward Keeler (2023), "Being a Man vs. Being a Monk: Alternative versions of Burmese Buddhist Masculinity" (pp. 183-201) Kate Crosby (2013), "Monks, Monasteries, and Their Position in Society" in <i>Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity</i>, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. (pp. 197-205)
Week 6 READING WEEK	Buddhism and motherhood In-class quiz 25%	Reiko Ohnuma (2012), "Short-Lived" versus "Long-Standing": Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī Compared" in <i>Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism</i>, Oxford University Press (113-133)
Week 7	Constructions of gender in Buddhist Art and Iconography	Yü Chün-fang (2000) "Introduction" in <i>Kuan-yin: the Chinese transformation of Avalokitesvara</i>, New York: Columbia University Press (pp. 1-29)

Week 8	Women in Chinese Buddhism	Yü Chün-fang (2020) “Chapter 8: Buddhism and Gender” in <i>Chinese Buddhism: A Thematic History</i> , Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, (pp. 218-239).
Week 9	Women in Tibetan Buddhism	Geoffrey Samuel (2012) “Tibetan Buddhism, women and gender” in <i>Introducing Tibetan Buddhism</i> , Routledge (pp. 203-219)
Week 10	Gender empowerment in modern Buddhism I	Bhikkhu Bodhi (2010), “The Revival of Bhikkhunī Ordination in the Theravāda Tradition” in Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen (eds.) <i>Dignity and Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns</i> , Boston: Wisdom Publications, (pp. 99-142)
Week 11	Gender empowerment in modern Buddhism II In-class quiz 25%	Padma ‘Tsho, “The Future of Tibetan Women” and Padma ‘Tsho and Sarah Jacoby, “Lessons from Buddhist Foremothers” (2021) in Holly Gayley (ed.), <i>Voices from Larung Gar: Shaping Tibetan Buddhism for the 21st Century</i> , Boulder: Shambhala (pp. 209-233)
Week 12	The third gender and transgenderism	Witchayanee Ocha (2023), “Buddhism, gender, and sexualities: queer spiritualities in Thailand” In 42(5) <i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal</i> . (pp. 685-705).
		Final long essay due Tuesday 2 December, 2025.

Assessments

1. Attendance 10%

Following the conclusion of the add-drop period, attendance will be recorded on a weekly basis.

2. Two in-class quizzes 50%

Students will complete two 20-minute closed-book quizzes with both multiple choice questions (MCQs) and short-answer questions (SAQs) during class in Weeks 6 and 11. Each quiz will assess their understanding of the content, concepts and materials covered in Weeks 1 to 10 and will contribute 25% to their overall grade.

3. Long essay 40%

Students are required to compose a 1500-word essay exploring a course-related topic that engages with a predefined set of readings. The essay topic will be provided in Week 9, and students are expected to submit their essays by the end of Week 13.

Recommended Readings

Introductory Reading on Buddhism:

Harvey, Peter. 2013. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (2nd Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keown, Damien. 2013. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gethin, Rupert. 1998. *Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Introductory Reading on Gender Studies:

Nancy Naples. 2020. *Companion to Women's and Gender Studies*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Recommended Readings:

Bryson, Megan and Buckelew, Kevin (eds). 2023. *Buddhist Masculinities*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cabezón, José Ignacio (ed). 1992. *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Collett, Alice. 2016. *Lives of Early Buddhist Nuns: Biographies as History*. New York: Oxford University Press

Findley, Ellison Banks (ed.) 2000. *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Gutschow, Kim. 2004. *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Gross, Rita M. 1993. *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Falk, Nancy Auer. 2001. "The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism." In *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*. 3d ed. Edited by Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Falk, Monica Lindberg. 2007. *Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Jacoby, Sarah H. 2014. *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Keeler, Ward. 2017. *The Traffic in Hierarchy: Masculinity and its others in Buddhist Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Keyes, Charles F. 1986. "Ambiguous Gender: Male Initiation in a Northern Thai Buddhist Society." In *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, edited by Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman. Boston: Beacon.

Murcott, Susan (1991). *The First Buddhist Women: Poems and Stories of Awakening*. Berkeley: Parallax Press

Paul, Diana Y. 1985. *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition* (2nd ed). London: University of California Press.

Tsomo, Karma Lekshe (ed). 2019, *Buddhist Feminisms and Femininities*, Albany: SUNY Press.

Yu, Chun-fang 2020. *Chinese Buddhism: A Thematic History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.