Semester at Sea Course Syllabus
Buddhism in the Modern World  Religion 3559-102
Spring 2013  8-9:15 am. A Day
William Waldron

COURSE DESCRIPTION
In this course we will explore the diversity of Buddhist traditions in modern world, both on the ground in various countries in Asia and as it is developing in Western countries. We will examine its transformation from pre-modern Asia to the modern global era by focusing on several related themes: the role of Buddhism in political movements for national liberation, social justice and the environment; its complex relation with modern science and psychology; and its place in popular practice and imagination.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
To understand the complex relations between Buddhism as a monastic tradition oriented toward spiritual liberation and its social, cultural and political dimensions in various cultures; to explore how modern Buddhists seek to revive, reform and renovate their traditions; to improve students’ ability to analyze the dynamic processes of modern religious, social and political movements; to improve students’ ability to comprehend and appreciate multiple, often conflicting, perspectives.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS
Mishra, Pankaj. An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World
Queen, C., King, S. Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia (EB)
McMahan, D. Buddhism in the Modern World

FIELD WORK  FIELD LAB  Exploring Buddhism in Ho Chi Minh City. February 12, 2013
Description: In this field lab, we will first visit the Tinh Xa Trung Tam, or Central Temple, home to a recent Mahayana-Theravada tradition unique to Vietnam, about which we will study in class.
Academic objectives: To discern and better understand the unique diversity of Buddhist teaching and practice in Vietnam by observing sacred sites, daily rituals and meeting lay Buddhists as well as monastics; to gain a better appreciation of the fluidity of religious institutions and practices.

FIELD ASSIGNMENTS
Students will be expected to participate fully in each aspect of the trip will write a 5-7 page paper analyzing how Buddhism was presented and practiced in the Central Temple. Special attention will be paid to the presentations by temple representatives and to personal experiences at the site.
Students should include specific examples or concepts discussed in class.
NOTE: There may be small assignments in port related to the content of the class.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC
Attendance and Participation Grade. 20%
This means coming to every class having done the reading and being prepared to discuss it.
Response paper: 2 pages on no-self, identity and dependent arising. 10%
Field Assignments and Field Lab Paper. 5-7 pages. 35%
Paper: 4 page paper and Final Exam. 35%

HONOR CODE SAS students enroll in an academic program administered by Univ. of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University’s honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager’s Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.
Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: “On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment.” The pledge must be
signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed “[signed].”

McMahon, BMW, McMahon, Buddhist Modernism, pp. 160-176

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
Explanation of syllabus and assignments. What is the academic study of religion? What are its advantages and drawbacks? What is Buddhist Modernism? What are its main characteristics? Why is self-identity fraught with uncertainty and striving?

Mishra, End of Suffering
   pp. 23-47. Invention of ‘Buddhism’ pp. 84-110. World of the Buddha
Ereserve: Collins, Selfless Persons, ‘Renouncing Individual,’ pp. 60-64.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
What were the major religious ideas and practices at the time of the Buddha? Which aspects of them did he retain and which did he reformulate? What is the Middle Way? What exactly did the Buddha see under the Bodhi Tree?

Jan. 17. Thursday. Class A3
Watch Before Class Movie: Footprint of the Buddha (52 min.)
Mishra, End of Suffering,
   pp. 380-388. Last journey

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
What are the Four Noble Truths? What is the relationship between lack of permanent self-identity and dependent arising? What is the relationship between the republic that the Buddha was born in and the rules he set down for the monastic community? What was and is the relationship of the sangha with the lay community?

Jan. 19. Saturday. Class A4
Mishra, End of Suffering,

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
What were some of the characteristics of colonial era? How did the colonial experience collide with modernity in India? How did this help promote nationalism? What is the relation between freedom and individualism?


Jan. 23. Wednesday. Class A5
McMahan, BMW, Queen, ‘Socially Engaged Buddhism,’ pp. 196-213
Queen, King, Engaged Buddhism, ‘Introduction,’ pp. 1-44. Basic themes.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
The spread of Buddhism to East Asia. Why is a nation an ‘Imagined Community’? How are they related to the history of colonialism, independence and nationalist movements? What is the tension between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘political’?

Jan. 25. Friday. Class A6
**Watch Before Class Movie:** *Japan: Land of the Missing Buddha.*
McMahan, BMW, Chilson, ‘Searching for a Place to Sit: Buddhism in Modern Japan’ pp. 50-68;

**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**
The recent history and diverse sects of Buddhism in modern Japan. What is ‘modern’ about Suzuki’s version of Zen Buddhism? Why did it appeal so much to Japanese as well as Westerners? How did it differ from older, more traditional forms of Buddhism?

Feb. 1. Friday. Class A7
Follow-up discussion on Japanese Buddhism.
McMahan, BMW, pp. 69-88, Fisher, ‘Buddhism in China and Taiwan.’
**Ereserve:** Mitchell, *Buddhism,* ‘Cultural Experience of Chinese Buddhism Today,’ pp. 236-244

**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**
What is Mahāyāna Buddhism? What are the new Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhist Scriptures? Why is the practice of compassion central to the Bodhisattva path in Mahāyāna Buddhism? How do these inform Chinese Buddhist practice?

Feb. 9. Saturday. Class A8
Follow-up discussion on Chinese Buddhism.
**Queen** King, *Engaged Buddhism,* Thich Nhat Hanh and Unified Buddhist Church, pp. 321-363.
**Ereserve:** Thich Nhat Hanh, ‘History of Buddhist Social Order,’ pp. 1-8.

**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**
How was Thich Nhat Hanh influenced by his Western experiences to reform Vietnamese Buddhism? How did the movement expand from protecting Buddhist practice to struggling against oppression and working for peace? How do Vietnamese Buddhists, as Buddhists, respond to the suffering and violence around them? Is this ‘political’? Why or why not?

Feb. 11. Monday. Class A9

**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**
What are the various kinds of Buddhism in modern Vietnam? What are some of the challenges for Buddhists in present-day Vietnam?

Feb. 12. **Field lab: Exploring Buddhism in Ho Chí Minh City**

Feb. 19. Tuesday. Class A10
Follow-up discussion on Vietnamese Buddhism.
McMahan, BMW, ‘Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Southeast Asia,’ pp. 10-27
McMahan, BMW, ‘Buddhism, Politics and Nationalism,’ pp. 178-194
**Ereserve:** Swearer, *Buddhism and Society in Southeast Asia,* Ch. 2, ‘Buddhism, Political Legitimation, and National Integration,’ pp. 33-52.
Ereserve: Jerryson, Buddhist Fury, Ch. 5, ‘Identity,’ pp. 142-177.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
The pattern of ‘church-state’ relations in Southeast Asian Buddhism. How did Buddhist institutions interact with the state or king in traditional Southeast Asia? What were the advantages and tensions in such a relationship? What is legitimation and how did Buddhist institutions help legitimize political rule and national integration? How is Thai nationalism connected to Buddhist identity?

Feb. 22. Friday. ***Paper on Field Lab Due. 5-7 pages.

Feb. 23. Saturday. Class A11

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
The monks and the Burmese regime have differing interpretations of Buddhism, of morality, of an ideal of subjectivity, and the appropriate exercise of power. What are these and how do they lead to conflict? How is Buddhism conducive or not to democracy as an ethic of self-governance at both individual and institutional levels? In what sense is identity always constructed? Is there some tension in the very idea of a ‘Buddhist identity’?

Mar. 2. Saturday. Class A12
Follow-up discussion on Burmese Buddhism.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
The changing conditions of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In Ariyaratne’s view how are individual and social liberation dependent upon each other? What does ‘awakening’ or liberation mean in this context and how does this differ from traditional understandings? On what grounds did some Sri Lankan Buddhists come to justify or advocate the civil war in the name of Buddhism? To what extent is this defensible?

Mar. 5. Tuesday. Class A13
Watch Before Class Movie: Arising Light: Dr. Ambedkar, Birth of a New Era in India. 28 min.
Queen, King, EB, Queen, ‘Dr. Ambedkar and Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation,’ pp. 45-72.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
What was the process by which Dr. Ambedkar came to embrace Buddhism? Who are the Dalits and what did they need liberation from? How did Dr. Ambedkar reformulate Buddhism to serve the specific needs of the Dalits?

Mar. 13. Wednesday. Class A14
McMahan, BMW, Wilson, ‘Buddhism and Gender,’ pp. 257-272
Queen, King, EB, Barnes, ‘Buddhist Women and the Nun’s Order in Asia,’ pp. 259-294.
Ereserve: Cheng, “Luminary Nuns’ Order in Contemporary Taiwan: A Quiet Feminist Movement,” 40-54
**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**

The historical antecedents to the current circumstances of Buddhist nuns in Asia today. What are the differences between the order of Buddhist nuns in South Asia and those in East Asia? To what extent could we consider the Luminary Buddhist nuns in Taiwan feminist? How does this reformulate the notion of liberation?


***Assignment (4 pages):*** Independence, National Identity and/or Consolidation, Social Uplift-ment, Equitable Development and Gender Equality—Buddhism has been used for all these in modern Asia. Write an interpretive essay discussing the tensions between the Buddha’s spiritual message of liberation and the ways in which Buddhist traditions are used for more worldly aims. Cite examples from several of the countries we have studied. (Note: ‘Tension’ does not necessarily mean contradiction. Tensions often result from two equally indispensible values that push a tradition or culture in divergent directions, like freedom and equality in the US).

**Watch IN Class Movie:** ‘Becoming Buddha in L.A.’ (56 min.)

Mar. 19. Tuesday. Class A16

**Watch Before Class Movie:** Kundun. (NOTE length: 135 minutes!)


**Ereserve:** Robinson, _Buddhist Rel._, Ch. 11, ‘Buddhism in Tibetan Cultural Area,’ pp. 271-296.

**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**

The recent history of Buddhism in the Tibetan cultural area. What were the (various) traditional relations between Buddhism and the Tibetan state in the pre-modern era? How did these change in the 20th century with the arrival of the Chinese Communist state?

Mar. 22. Friday. Class A17

**Watch Before Class Movie:** Compassion in Exile. (62 minutes).


**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**

The recent and current uneasy circumstances of Tibetan Buddhism in the PRC today. What was the Dalai Lama’s position regarding independence and resistance to Chinese control? What are the religious motivations of the monks and nuns in the Tibetan protests?


**Ereserve:** Prebish, Baumann, ed. _Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia_, Clasquin, ‘Buddhism in South Africa,’ pp. 152-162.

**Topics, Questions, Assignments:**

The characteristics of Buddhism in the West. How do the experiences of Asian Buddhist immigrant in America different from those of American ‘converts’? How do European Buddhists reinterpret traditional teachings? What impression of American Buddhists does Mishra get from his Zen retreat and how does Buddhism ‘overcome nihilism’?

April 1. Monday. Class A19

**Ereserve:** Seager, _Buddhism in America_, ‘Gender Equality,’ pp. 185-200.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
How does the presence and role of women in American Buddhism differ from its Asian counterparts? How do African-Americans fit into the picture?

April 4. Thursday. Class A20
Watch Before Class Movie: Dhamma Brothers (76 minutes).

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
The practice of meditation in Western Buddhism. How does meditation improve the lives of the ‘Dhamma Brothers’? What are the promises and perils of studying meditation scientifically? Why do Western Buddhists prioritize the practice of meditation?

Ereserve: Brauen, Dreamworld Tibet: Western Illusions, Ch. 4, ‘In Search of “Dharma-la” and Tibetan Lamas,’ pp. 163-205.
Ereserve: Paine, Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West, Ch. 7, ‘Coming Attractions,’ pp. 165-182.

Topics, Questions, Assignments:
The image of Buddhism portrayed in modern media. What has the image of Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, been in the modern media? Why?


April 17. Wednesday. Class A23 A Course Final Exams