

**RSOC 115: Tibetan Buddhism**  
Fall 2009 MW 2:15-4:00PM Kenna Hall 216

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Office Hours: Tuesday 9 AM-11:45 AM or by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course we will survey the development of Tibetan Buddhism, looking broadly at the development of its distinct traditions and the history of their interactions in the premodern and modern periods. From the basis of our overview of Tibetan religious history and the fundamental beliefs and practices of Tibetan religious traditions, we will then look closely at three central topics. These will include devotional traditions centering around saints, advanced systems of ritual, yoga and meditation, and the experience of women in Tibetan Buddhist traditions. We will also explore the difficulties faced by Tibetan Buddhist practitioners over the past sixty years, and will explore the state of Tibetan Buddhism in the contemporary world. We will achieve these goals through close readings of primary and secondary texts, as well as the exploration of visual media, particularly short and long documentary films on a variety of subjects.

Course Objectives:

1. Provide a deeper and richer understanding of Tibetan Buddhist traditions.
2. Cultivate the ability to identify and critically evaluate arguments made in primary and secondary texts, as well as in documentary films.
3. Increased ability in developing one's own arguments, and cogently and convincingly expressing them orally and in writing.

Requirements:

Regular attendance is required, and frequent, unexcused absence will result in a grade penalty. I expect active participation in class discussions and will strive to make to class as interactive as possible; you should always feel free to ask questions and contribute your ideas. To do so you should come to class prepared; reading should be completed during the week they are assigned, and be prepared to be called upon to discuss them in any given class. There will be two medium length papers (4-6 pages, 30% each), and four short review essays (400-600 words) of the four of the films that we will watch, one of which will be due with the first paper, and the remaining three with the last paper (10% each).

*Students will be asked to assess the course via narrative evaluations at the end of the quarter. Students will receive regular feedback on their work from their instructor to help them improve their understanding and analytic skills.*

## **POLICIES**

### Attendance

Regular attendance is required. If you must miss a class, you should inform the instructor in advance when possible, and you are responsible for making up missed work. While absences due to unavoidable problems (sickness, etc.) will definitely be excused, I will **NOT** excuse absences for activities associated with other classes. **Unexcused absences will significantly lower your final grade.**

### Academic Honesty

Plagiarism or academic dishonesty in any form (as described in the Student Conduct Code) will result in a failed grade for the project, and possibly for the course. All allegations of academic dishonesty will be reported to the department chair and Office of Student Life. For a full presentation of University policies concerning plagiarism, see:

<http://www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/academicintegrity/>

In order to avoid the sanctions applied to cases of academic dishonesty, please make sure that you properly cite all sources that you utilize in your writing, including works that are directly quoted or paraphrased, as well as works used as a source of information. This includes both print and online sources. Your paper submissions must consist of your own writing, and any direct quotations or paraphrasing from other works must be properly cited.

### Disability Accommodations:

To receive academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in Benson 216. The phone number is 408-554-4109 or inquiries can be emailed to Robin Cole, Administrative Associate, [rcole@scu.edu](mailto:rcole@scu.edu). Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide documentation of a disability to Disabilities Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations.

## **CLASS TEXTS (REQUIRED)**

The following readings will be available in the campus bookstore and on reserve in the library. Other readings will be available in digital format on Angel.

**ITB** John Powers, *A Concise Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Snow Lion 2008)

**TBD** Robert Thurman, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Bantam 1994)

Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, *The Life of Milarepa: A New Translation from the Tibetan* (Penguin 1992)

Richard Kohn, *Lord of the Dance: The Mani Rimdu Festival in Tibet and Nepal* (SUNY 2001)

**BBN** Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun* (Harvard 2004)

Ani Pachen, *Sorrow Mountain* (Kodansha America, 2000)

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **1. INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **Mon. 9/21 Class Introduction**

During the first class we will engage in the usual introductory rituals, and will then move on to broadly discuss the land and peoples of Tibet. We will then begin a brief introduction to Buddhism.

We will cover the basic teachings of Buddhism during this class.

•**ITB 17-29, 45-53**

- Mon. 9/28     **Mahāyāna Buddhism**  
 We will cover the basic teachings of the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism.  
 •ITB 31-43
- Wed. 9/30     **Tantra**  
 We will introduce the basic teachings and practices of the Tantric form of Buddhism. As the remainder of the course will focus on this form of Buddhism, this will be a survey of ideas that we will cover in more depth  
 •ITB 63-94
2.  
 Mon. 10/5     **Sanctity, Yoga, and Death**  
**The Four Orders of Tibetan Buddhism and their Founding Saints**  
 We will overview the history of the four main orders of Tibetan Buddhism, with a focus on the founding “saints” of these traditions.  
 •ITB 103-139
- Wed. 10/7     **Discussion: The Life of Milarepa**  
 We will read and discuss the famous biography of one of Tibet’s best know saints, the great yogī Milarepa.  
 •Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, *The Life of Milarepa*, 9-197
- Mon. 10/12    **The Yogis of Tibet**  
 We will view and discuss a documentary on contemporary Tibetan Buddhist yogis and yogic traditions.  
 •Film: “The Yogis of Tibet” (2002, 77 min.)
- Wed. 10/14    **Death, Enlightenment, and Buddhist Yoga**  
 We will explore Tibetan beliefs concerning death and rebirth, as well as religious practices designed to empower one to gain conscious control over the dying process, or even become enlightened while experiencing it. We will also watch a short documentary on Tibetan funerary practices.  
 •TBD 5-91  
 •Film: Ellen Bruno, “Sky Burial” (2005, 15 min.)  
**Suggested topics for paper #1 distributed**
- Mon. 10/19    **Discussion: The Tibetan Book of the Dead**  
 We will read and discuss this influential Tibetan Buddhist scripture.  
 •TBD 97-242  
**Donald Lopez, “The Book” (on Angel)**
- Wed. 10/21    **Contemporary Use of the Tibetan Book of the Dead**  
 We will conclude our study of this topic with a viewing and discussion of a documentary on the use of the Tibetan Book of the Dead in a contemporary Tibetan community.

•**Film: Barrie McLean, “The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Way of Life” (2004, 90 min.)**

- 3. Tibetan Buddhist Ritual**  
Mon. 10/26 We will next turn our attention to the topic of Tibetan Buddhist ritual. We will focus on the figure of the maṇḍala, which are Tibetan artistic representations of the cosmos. They are sites for initiation, and also objects of contemplation that can aid one on one’s journey to awakening.  
•**David Gray, “Mandala of the Self” (available on Angel)**  
**Paper #1 & Film Review #1 Due**
- Wed. 10/28 **The Kālacakra Rite of Initiation**  
We will view a documentary on contemporary performances of the Kālacakra initiation ritual in India and Europe.  
•**Film: Werner Herzog, “Wheel of Time” (2003, 80 minutes)**
- Mon. 11/2 **Discussion: The Mani Rimdu Festival**  
We will focus on the Mani Rimdu celebration, a multi-day ritual conducted regularly by Tibetan Buddhist communities in the Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal.  
•**Kohn, 3-264**
- Wed. 11/4 **The Mani Rimdu Festival**  
We will view a documentary on a contemporary performance of the Mani Rimdu festival.  
•**Film: Richard Kohn, “Destroyer of Illusion” (2006, 56 minutes)**
- 3. Women in Tibetan Buddhism**  
Mon. 11/9 **Being a Buddhist Nun**  
In order to explore the status of women in Tibetan Buddhism, and the roles available to them, we will read the Kim Gutschow’s book *Being a Buddhist Nun*, a study of a community of Geluk Buddhist nuns in the region of Zangskar, an ethnic Buddhist community in the far north of India.  
•**BBN 1-76**
- Wed. 11/11 **Discussion: *Being a Buddhist Nun***  
•**BBN 77-256**
- Mon. 11/16 **Discussion: Doljin Khandro Suren, a contemporary female lama**  
•**Film: Costanzo Allione, “We will meet again in the Land of the Dakini” (1995, 30 min.)**  
**Paper #2 Suggested Topics Distributed**

- Wed. 11/18 **Tibetan Buddhism and the Challenge of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**  
 We will conclude the course with an exploration of Tibetan Buddhism in the contemporary world, beginning with the traumatic events of the Chinese invasion of Tibet, which forced many Tibetans into exile, and have forced the Tibetans who remained to endure a fiercely repressive occupation.  
 •ITB 181-218  
 •Film: Ellen Bruno, "Satya: A Prayer for the Enemy" (1993, 28 min.)
- 11/23 & 25 **Thanksgiving break!**
- Mon. 11/30 **Discussion: Sorrow Mountain**  
 We will read and discuss the autobiography of Ani Pachen, a Tibetan nun who resisted the Chinese invasion of Tibet.  
 •Ani Pachen, *Sorrow Mountain*, 3-278  
 •Alexandra Schultheis, "Subjectivity Politics in Sorrow Mountain: Transnational Feminism and Tibetan Autobiography" (on Angel)
- Wed. 12/2 **Tibetan Buddhism in Exile**  
 We will conclude the class with a viewing of the film "The Cup," a realistic portrayal of the lives of young Tibetan monks living in exile in India.  
 •Film: Khyentse Norbu, "The Cup" (2000, 93 min.)
- Wed. 12/9 **Paper #2 & Film Reviews #2-4 Due**  
 Due by 4 PM in my email inbox or Angel dropbox