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RELX 209/309

The Body in Asian Religions

Semester 2
2016

RELS209/309

The Body in Asian Religions

Welcome to this paper on the Body in Asian Religions. We teach this paper on campus and by distance learning. The coursebook is written with both groups of students in mind, but some details will apply to only one of the two groups. Distance students should make sure to look at the section on "Distance Learning" below.

Introduction

In Asian religious contexts the body has long served as a vehicle for spiritual development through techniques which range from extreme physical austerities to elaborate mental visualizations of the body as superhuman. The human body also provides Asian religious thought with its central organizing metaphor on topics such as society, temple architecture, the cosmos and the nature of divinity. In recent decades the body has become the site of extensive academic discussion and debate. The turn to the body, which initially owed much to the rise of feminist thought, has been sustained by discussion of bodily difference as a marker of identity, and by the emergence of postcolonial and queer theory. Medical innovations have forced rethinking of the ways in which the body has been conceived and modified in many cultures.

This course will examine the confluence of Asian religious and academic concerns with the body through consideration of technologies of the body (such as asceticism, yoga, semen retention, dismemberment and remembering of the body in ritual), idealized representations of the body (as heroic or divine), the role of the body as both vehicle for and hindrance to spiritual progress, and the religious significance of different bodies (male, female, 'other'). The course will also critically examine the way representations of Asian religions in the West, both within and beyond the academy, have been dominated by a fascination with bodily practices such as *satī*, yoga and meditation.

Aims and learning outcomes

The aim of this paper is to understand some of the ways in which the body, gender and sexuality are constructed and practised in cultures dominated by Hindu and Buddhist ideals. Students who successfully complete the paper will be able to demonstrate:

- a sound factual knowledge of the treatment of issues relating to gender in Hinduism and Buddhism;
- an awareness of both diversity and uniformity in religious teaching and practice; and
- an understanding of the social causes and consequences of the construction of gender and sexuality in religious thought.

The paper is also intended to develop:

- the ability to analyse critically the teachings of the religions;
- the ability to research topics using academic texts, journals and other media;
- the ability to defend an argument using a variety of methods in writing; and
- the ability to debate within a peer-group in a constructive, non-confrontational manner.

Course structure

The course is divided into six modules; three on Hinduism, two on Buddhism and a final module on Jains and others. For each module there are three study units, and a tutorial discussion. For distance students, the tutorials will take place using Zoom (see the section on Distance Learning below).

The dates listed below are the times when students on campus will meet and they provide a guideline for distance students to plan their reading. Please ensure that you have read through the study unit and the appropriate section from the reader *before* the class meets (campus students) or the tutorial discussion begins (distance students).

Module 1 Hindu bodies (Keziah Wallis)

13 Jul	Unit 1.1	Bodies in/of theory
	Reading	Cranny-Francis, "Written on the Body"
15 Jul	Unit 1.2	Divine bodies
	Reading	Smith, "Divine and Human Bodies in Hinduism"
20 Jul	Unit 1.3	Integral bodies
	Reading	Holdrege, "Body"
	7pm	Tutorial for distance students
22 Jul	11am	Tutorial for campus students

Module 2 The body as instrument

27 Jul	Unit 2.1	Ascetic bodies (Keziah Wallis)
	Reading	Vail, "Ascetic masquerade"
29 Jul	Unit 2.2	A body of one colour (Will Sweetman)
	Reading	Alter, "The <i>sannyasi</i> and the Indian wrestler"
3 Aug	Unit 2.3	Tantric bodies (Keziah Wallis)
	Reading	Flood, "Tantric civilisation"
	7pm	Tutorial for distance students
5 Aug	11am	Tutorial for campus students

Module 3 Regulated bodies (Keziah Wallis)

10 Aug	Unit 3.1	Burning bodies
	Reading	Harlan, "Perfection and devotion: Sati tradition in Rajasthan"
12 Aug	Unit 3.2	Colonised bodies
	Reading	Mani, "The Debate on <i>Sati</i> in Colonial India"
17 Aug	Unit 3.3	Sexualised bodies
	Reading	Dalrymple, "The Daughters of Yellamma"
	7pm	Tutorial for distance students
19 Aug	11am	Tutorial for campus students

22 Aug–26 Aug	<i>Reading week</i>
29 Aug–2 Sep	<i>Mid-semester break</i>

5 Sep 5pm ***Deadline for submission of essay***

Module 4 Buddhist bodies (Elizabeth Guthrie)

7 Sep	Unit 4.1	Foul bodies
	Reading	Wilson, "The Female Body as a Source of Horror and Insight"
9 Sep	Unit 4.2	Disciplined bodies I: <i>bhikkhus</i>
	Reading	Gyatso, "Sex"
14 Sep	Unit 4.3	Disciplined bodies II: <i>bhikkhunīs</i>
	Reading	Blackstone, "Problems with <i>Bhikkhunīs</i> in the Pali <i>Vinaya</i> "
	7pm	Tutorial for distance students
16 Sep	11am	Tutorial for campus students

Module 5 Bodhisattva bodies (Elizabeth Guthrie)

21 Sep	Unit 5.1	The Buddha's bodies
	Reading	Williams, "Some Mahāyāna Buddhist perspectives on the body"
23 Sep	Unit 5.2	Exemplary bodies
	Reading	Gross, "Vajrayoginī"
	Reading	Gómez, "Two Tantric Meditations: Visualizing the Deity"
28 Sep	Unit 5.3	Empty bodies
	Reading	Arnold, "A Buddhist Contribution to a Feminist Discussion"
	7pm	Tutorial for distance students
30 Sep	11am	Tutorial for campus students

Module 6 'Other' bodies

5 Oct	Unit 6.1	Jain bodies (Elizabeth Guthrie)
	Reading	Banks, "Representing the bodies of the Jains"
7 Oct	Unit 6.2	'Other' bodies I: the third sex (Keziah Wallis)
	Reading	Zwilling & Sweet, "Third-sex constructs in ancient India"
12 Oct	Unit 6.3	'Other' bodies II: the <i>hijras</i> (Keziah Wallis)
	Reading	Nanda, "Hijra and Sādhin: neither man nor woman in India"
	7pm	Tutorial for distance students
14 Oct	11am	Tutorial for campus students

Readings

For each topic you should read the Topic Overview in the coursebook, and the following *required* reading. The articles and chapters which make up the required reading have in some cases been abbreviated¹ to keep the focus on the most important sections, but the full versions are available through the library. The references in the readings have in most cases been altered to follow the Chicago style recommended by the Department.

The articles in this coursebook represent the bare *minimum* reading required for successful completion of the paper. You should also read extensively in the works listed as *recommended* reading for each unit, which are intended to provide a starting point for research when writing an essay or preparing a topic for the exam. On Blackboard you will find an extensive bibliography of books and articles, organised by keyword, relating to the topics covered on this paper. Many of the books and articles listed are linked from the Course Documents section in Blackboard.

A prior knowledge of Hinduism or Buddhism is not required for this paper, as all ideas will be introduced in the course notes and readings. However, it can be helpful to be able to place these ideas in their wider religious context.

¹Abbreviations are marked by an ellipsis [...].

Therefore, if you have not studied Buddhism before, we strongly recommend reading Rita Gross's *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). This provides both an introduction to Buddhism, and a discussion of many themes relevant to this paper.

There is no single volume which would be equivalently helpful for those who have not studied Hinduism before but the following introductory works have much to recommend them, and can be read alongside other works which more directly address the concerns of this course: Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2010), Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Lecturers

Keziah Wallis

Keziah Wallis is a final year PhD candidate in both the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology and the Department of Theology and Religion at Otago. Her thesis, based upon fieldwork in Myanmar examines the interactions between "official" religion endorsed by the state and the role of spirit worship in the "unofficial" religious practices of Burmese. Her wider research interests focus on the changing nature of relationships between religion, culture, and modernity in the wake of colonialism and the current push for modernisation of both religion and society. Keziah teaches on a variety of subjects relating to Asian Media and Popular Culture, Asian Religions, and the Anthropology of Asian cultures. As well as lecturing, Keziah will run all the tutorials on the paper.

Contact details

Room 104, 97 Albany Street, Dunedin
Phone 03 479 9272
Email keziah.wallis@otago.ac.nz
Office hours Mondays 10-11 (or at other times by appointment)

Elizabeth Guthrie

Dr Elizabeth Guthrie lectures on Buddhism and Southeast Asian Religion at the University of Otago. Her primary area of research is Cambodia, but she has also travelled and worked in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Burma, Arakan, Southwestern China, and Indonesia. Publications include a book on New Religious Movements in Cambodia, articles on Cambodian Buddhist nuns, the relationship between Buddhism and politics, the biography of the Buddha, and the religious iconography of Mainland Southeast Asia.

Contact details

Room 104, 97 Albany Street, Dunedin
Phone 03 479 5355
Email elizabeth.guthrie-higbee@otago.ac.nz
Office hours Wednesdays 2-5 (or at other times by appointment)

Will Sweetman

Will Sweetman is Associate Professor of Asian Religions. His primary field of research is the encounter between Asian religions and the West in the modern period, and in particular the study of Hinduism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As well as this paper, he also teaches an introductory paper on Hinduism and Buddhism, and papers on Religion in South India, Asian Religions and the West, and Theories of Religion.

Will is course co-ordinator for this paper, and you are welcome to contact him about any aspect of the course.

Will's contact details

Room 105, first floor, 97 Albany St, Dunedin
03 479 8793
will.sweetman@otago.ac.nz
Office hours: Tuesday 11am and Friday 10am
(or at other times by appointment)

Assessment overview

There are three components in the assessment for this paper:

- reading journal (5%);
- an essay of 2,000 words (RELS/X 209) or 2,500 words (RELS/X 309) (35%);
- a three-hour exam (60%).

1. Reading Journal (5%)

Each week you will be expected to write a short summary and reflection of the readings and submit these to your Blackboard Journal. RELS 209 students are expected to write one page of notes/reflections per reading while RELS 309 students should write two pages per reading (approx. 500 words). The submission of journal entries for each module will close off after the tutorial sessions. At the end of each module, Elizabeth or Keziah will look over the journal entries and provide feedback to you. There are no grades for this exercise but rather if you submit all of your journal entries then you will receive 100%, if you do not then you will be given 0%.

Some ideas to think about in terms of your reflections are:

- Did you like/dislike the reading? Why or why not?
- Do you agree/disagree with the author's claims? Why or why not?
- What insights have you gained from the reading?
- What are the limitations (if any) of the reading and why?
- Did the reading make you question or think about any other readings in this course (or in another course)?
- What questions were you left with after finishing the reading?

Please note you do not have to answer all of these questions in each reading response. These questions are just to get you started thinking about the readings more broadly. Some questions will inspire you more than others from reading to reading.

Instructions on Submitting Journal Entries

If you click on the “Reading Journals” link at the left-hand menu in Blackboard you will be able to see a link to the journals which are open for you to enter your reading responses. Once you click on the appropriate link you will be able to “Create a Journal Entry” and enter your reading responses. Please make sure to submit a separate entry for each reading and enter the response into the message field directly, do not attach it as a word document. You may find it easier (and safer) to write your response out in Word or another document program and then copy and paste your response into blackboard. Make sure you click the “Post Entry” button or your response won’t be submitted.

2. Essay (35%)

The second component of assessment for this course is **one** essay on a title chosen from the list below. The word-limit for students taking RELS 209 is 2,000 words and for those taking RELS 309 is 2,500–3,000 words. You are *not* expected to adapt or replace the title of the essay (as is usual in some universities). Any such alteration to the title of the essay *must* be negotiated with the lecturers (Keziah for essays 1–4, Elizabeth for essays 5–6). Guidelines for presentation of essays are given in the Department’s *Study and Style Guide* which is available from the office, or through Blackboard.

The deadline for the essay is 5pm on Monday the **5th of September**.

3. Examination (60%)

In the examination you will be required to answer three questions, one from each of three sections. The date for the examination will be sent to you as soon as it has been set by the Registry. All arrangements for examinations are handled by the Registry as outlined in the Student Handbook. Past exam papers are available from the library.

Essay titles

1. Why are physical manifestations of the divine so important in Hinduism?
2. Olivelle speaks of ‘a process of domestication that ... radically changed the character of renunciation’ and Sanderson similarly of a ‘process of domestication’ in the spread of Tantric cults in Indian religion. Discuss what is meant by ‘domestication’ in relation to the development of either asceticism, or tantrism, or both, in the history of Indian religion.
3. Assess the impact of colonialism on the ways in which the body, gender, and sexuality are constructed and practised in India.
4. How have the practices of *sati* and of the devadasis been enlisted in “the cause of women” in modern India?
5. What is the first *pārājika*, and what effect does committing this *pārājika* have on a monk’s career?

6. In the *Mahāparinibbāna-sūtra*, the Buddha declared: “If, Ānanda, women had not obtained the going forth from home into homelessness in the dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder... true dhamma would have endured for a thousand years. But since, Ānanda, women have gone forth... true dhamma will endure only for five hundred years.” Discuss.

Distance Learning

This paper is taught concurrently on campus and by distance. While distance students cannot come to the weekly lectures, we make sure that they stay on target by recording lectures and sharing them on Blackboard. These recordings can be used alongside uploaded pdfs of the lecture slides used for each class.

Tutorials for distance students will take place on Wednesday evenings, from 8.10–9pm, as indicated on the schedule (i.e., 20 July, 3 & 17 August, 14 & 28 September, 12 October). As for campus students, tutorials are *optional* but highly recommended. Tutorials will use Zoom Videoconferencing (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/services/teaching/otago028772.html>)—for instructions and requirements see the link in the next section on Resources. Please try to log in a few minutes early so the tutorial can begin on time at 8.10pm.

Resources

A comprehensive list of advice about the Religion programme is available and regularly updated on our website at: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/religion/courses/resources.html>. This includes information on how to use Blackboard and Zoom, how to format and submit assignments, and where to find help. It is important that you review this information!