

**Seminar in Japanese Buddhism**  
**The Many Lives of the Buddha: Buddhist Biographical writing in**  
**Premodern Japan**

University of Southern California  
Spring 2013  
W 2:00-4:50  
Instructor: Christopher Callahan



**Course Description**

The topic of this course is Buddhist “biographical” literature in pre-modern Japan. As what constitutes the “life” of a Buddha or Buddhist may be said to extend back to previous lives and transcend the singular life of the individual, the writing and telling of life stories within Buddhist cultures has resulted in a variety of narrative texts which expand the category of “biography.” This course aims at enabling students to acquire advanced knowledge of the range of narrative literature in premodern Japan through a reading of both primary and secondary sources. In particular, we will focus on a variety of Buddhist “biographical” texts by reading selections from various biographical genres. The secondary readings in English and Japanese are to reflect on the category of “biography” and explore different theoretical issues and methodological problems. From the outset of the class, we will be re-thinking the category of “biography” as it applies to Buddhist literature in Japan. Through an examination of a variety of biographical texts and secondary literature, we will examine four issues with respect to Buddhist biography:

1.) biography myth and history; 2.) biographical paradigms and tradition; 3.) biographical writing and genre 4.) biographical imagination and social reality.

## **Requirements and Grades**

**CLASS PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION:** The classes will consist of the translation of primary texts and the reading of related secondary scholarship in English and Japanese. The class is intended to both improve the close reading of the primary texts and to facilitate discussion of the theoretical and methodological issues concerning Buddhist biographical literature in Japan. Students should come to class having done the readings and prepared translations. Participation will include a close reading of the primary texts in class and discussion of the secondary readings.

**FINAL WORKSHOP:** The last week of the class students will bring biographical texts that they are working on for their final paper. We will read excerpts from these texts in class and collectively work together to think through some of the issues of the texts in question. A short list of possible texts for reading and translation will be submitted with the Final Paper prospectus.

**FINAL PAPER:** Students will also be required to submit a final paper 20-25 pages (double spaced, 12 point font) in length. A prospectus for the paper, which proposes the paper topic, offers a preliminary thesis, provides an outline and a bibliography, should be submitted by March 20th. **Final Paper is due May 13th. Final paper assigned in lieu of a Final Exam.**

**FINAL PRESENTATION:** A short audio-visual presentation will be given on the final paper summarizing the results of research and the highlights of the final paper.

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class preparation and participation	15%
Final Paper	50%
Final Project	15%
Final Presentation	20%

I would like to meet with each of you individually at least once during the semester to talk about the class, final paper, etc. My office is in ACB 103B and my office hours will be Tuesday 2-4 and after class on Wednesday.

### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

**Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:**

**[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213)**

740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX)  
[ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus) or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

## **Week One: Theoretical Concerns and Methodological Questions**

January 16th

### **Readings:**

William Lafleur, "Biography," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2005.  
Bernard Faure, "Alternatives," Chapter Four, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, Princeton: Princeton University, 1993.

### **Selected Bibliography:**

Capps, Donald and Frank Reynolds, eds. *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1976.  
de Certeau, Michel. *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.  
Dobbins, James. "The Biography of Shinran: Apotheosis of a Japanese Visionary." *History of Religions* (1990):179-196.  
Spiegel, Gabrielle. *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997.

## **Week Two and Three: Sakyamuni—Paradigm and Change**

January 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>

**Primary Reading:** *Konjaku Monogatari-shû* ("Tales of Time Now Past" 今昔物語集)  
Sakyamuni stories.

### **Secondary Reading:**

Honda Giken, "Shakaden," in *n Sōden, Jisha engi, emaki, eden*. Edited by Itō Hiroyuki, Imanari Genshō, Yamada Shōzen. Tokyo: Benseisha, 1995.

**Selected Bibliography:**

- Jaffe, Robert. "Seeking Sakyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism." *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 2004.
- Osamu Tezuka, *Budda*, 14 vols. Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 1972-83.
- Reynolds, Frank E. "The Many Lives of the Buddha: A Study of Sacred Biography and Theravāda Traditions," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds & Donald Capps, 37-61.
- Strong, John. *The Buddha: A Short Biography*. Oxford: One world Publications, 2001.

**Weeks Four and Five: Biographies of Birth/Death**

February 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>

**Primary Reading:** *Nihon ōjō gokuraku ki* (A Record of Japanese Born into the Pure Land 日本極楽往生伝), Preface, selections

**Secondary Reading:** Tashima Kazuo, "Ōjōden" in *Soden, Jishaengi emaki eden*. Bukkyō bungaku kōza vol. 6.

**Selected Bibliography:**

- Blum, Mark. "Biography as Scripture: Ōjōden in India, China and Japan." In *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2007), pp. 329-350.
- Bowring, Richard. "Preparing for the Pure Land in Late Tenth-Century Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25/3-4 (1998): 221-257.
- Kotas, Frederic J. "Ōjōden: Accounts of Rebirth in the Pure Land." Ph. D. diss. University of Washington, 1987.
- Deal, William E. "Women and Japanese Buddhism: Tales of Birth in the Pure Land." In *Religions of Japan in Practice*. Ed. by George Tanabe, Jr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Inoue Mitsusada and Ōsone Shōsuke, eds. *Ōjōden-Hokke genki*. Nihon shisō taikai 7. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1982.
- Wetzler, Peter. "Yoshishige no Yasutane: Lineage, Learning, Office and Amida's Pure Land." Ph.D. diss. University of California-Berkley, 1977.

**Weeks Six and Seven: Biography and History**

February 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>

**Primary Reading:** *Godenshō* ("The Biography" 御伝抄): Sections One and Two

**Secondary Reading:**

- Miyazaki, Enjun. "Shinran denki ni tsuite." In *Gendaigoyaku Shinran zenshū*, gen. ed. by Yūki Reimon, vol. 4:5-26. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1974.
- Yoshida Kazuhiko. "The Thesis that Prince Shotoku did not exist." *Acta Asiatica* 91. 2006.

*Selected Bibliography:*

- William Deal, "Hagiography and History: The Image of Prince Shōtoku" in *Religions Of Japan in Practice* (1999).
- Lai, Whalen. "The Search for the Historical Sākyamuni in Light of the Historical Jesus," *Buddhist Christian Studies* (1982).
- Mabbet, Ian. "The Problem of the Historical Nāgārjuna Revisited," *Journal of the America Oriental Society*, (1998).
- Ōyama Seiichi. 'Shōtoku Taishi' no tanjō, *Rekishi bunka raiburarii* 65. Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbun-kan, 1999.
- Ury, Marian Bloom. "Genkō shakusho: Japan's first comprehensive History of Buddhism: a partial translation, with introduction and notes." Ph.D diss. Berkeley, Univ. of California, 1970.

## **Weeks Eight and Nine: Biography and Dreams**

March 6<sup>th</sup> 13<sup>th</sup>

**Primary Reading:** *Godenshō*: Sections Three, Four and Eight

**Secondary Reading:**

Taira Masayuki, "Shinran to Nyobonge" in *Shinran to Sono Jidai*. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2001.

**Selected Bibliography:**

- Andrews, Allan. "A Personal Account of the Life of Venerable Genkū," in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. by George Tanabe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 370-383.
- Faure, Bernard. "Dreaming," chapter five of *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Serenity, Young. *Dreaming in the Lotus: Buddhist dream narrative, imagery & practice*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995.
- Tanabe, George. *Myōe the dreamkeeper: fantasy and knowledge in early Kamakura Buddhism*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies at Harvard: 1992.

## **Week Ten: Spring Break**

## **Weeks Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen: Biography and the Dharma**

March 27<sup>th</sup> April 3<sup>rd</sup> April 10<sup>th</sup>

**Primary Reading:** *Godenshō*: Sections Six and Seven, *Tannishō* ("Notes Lamenting Deviations" 歎異鈔): Section Three

**Secondary Reading:**

- Berling, Judith. "Bringing the Buddha down to Earth: Notes on the Emergence of Yūlu as a Buddhist Genre." *History of Religions* 21/7 (1987).
- Taya Raishun, "Tannishō no chosaku ni tsuite no mondai," in *Gendai Shinran Zenshū* 1, pp. 126-136.

Unno, Mark. "The Nembutsu of No-Meaning and the Problem of Genres in the Writings and Statements of Gutoku Shinran." In *The Pure Land: Journal of European Pure Land Buddhism*. Nos. 10-11. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1994.

**Selected Bibliography:**

Todorov, Tzvetan. "Origin of Genres." *New Literary History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 159-170.

Walters, Jonathan S. "Suttas as History: Four Approaches to the Sermon on the Noble Quest (Ariyapariyesana Sutta)." *History of Religions*, 36, no. 3 (Feb. 1999). 247-284.

Yampolsky, Philip B. *The Platform sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch: the text of the Tun-huang manuscript with translation, introduction, and notes*. New York, Columbia University, 1967.

**Weeks Fourteen and Fifteen: Biography and Ritual**

April 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>

Primary text: *Godenshō*: Section Fifteen

*Chiōn kōshiki* ("Ceremonial to Know Benevolence" 知恩講式)

**Secondary Reading:**

Agawa Bunsho, "Chiōnkōshiki to Hōnen Shōninden ni kansuru shomondai." *Taishō Daigaku kenkyūkiyo* vol. 51 (1966): 1-48.

**Selected Bibliography:**

Foard, James, "Competing with Amida: A Study and Translation of Jōkei's Miroku Kōshiki." *Monumenta Nipponica* Vol. 60 no. 1 (Spring 2005): .

Guelberg, Niels. "Buddhist Ceremonials (Kōshiki) of Medieval Japan and Their Impact on Literature." *Annual of the Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism* 15 (1993), pp. 66–81.

Guelberg, Niels. *Kōshiki* data base (KDB).

<http://www.f.waseda.jp/guelberg/koshiki/kdb/main/main.htm>

Yamada Shōzen. "Kōshiki: Sono seiritsu to tenkai" . In vol. 8 of *Bukkyō bungaku kōza: Shōdō no bungaku*. ed. Itō Hiroyuki, Imanari Genshō, and Yamada Shōzen, pp. 11–53. Benseisha, 1995.

**Week Sixteen: Final Workshop based on student chosen materials**

May 1<sup>st</sup>

**Final Paper in lieu of Final Exam due May13th**

