

Understanding Buddhism through its Classic Texts

Berkeley, CA • July 8 – August 2

This seminar is designed to give you insight into the heart of Buddhist culture—its ways of knowing, forms of practice, and world view—and to help you take full advantage of the rich resources study of Buddhist texts offers. To create a rich environment, we hope to invite a diverse group of scholars. We expect that many participants will teach in such fields as Asian religions, world literature, or comparative philosophy, the range of disciplines for which Buddhist texts offer new insights and approaches is almost unlimited. Buddhism is a living force in the world today, a source of fascination for people throughout America, and a storehouse of profound teachings that can open the mind and heart in unexpected ways. No matter what field you teach in, the great texts of Buddhism can enrich the experience for yourselves and for your students. You can download our "Dear Colleague" introduction letter [here \[.doc\]](#), or [here as a \[.pdf\]](#)

The Seminar

The Seminar aims to introduce participants to the study and use of texts and terms as teaching and learning material in the context of the Buddhist tradition. NEH Summer Scholars will learn to look at the classic sources used for this purpose critically, understanding their complexity and multivalence.

How can we bring Buddhist technical terms and concerns into dialogue with the critical tools of a Western academic approach? We will explore that question through a close reading of selected passages in translation. We expect this approach to enrich the experience of participants—and their students—in the study of Buddhism, religion, and the history of ideas. In addition, the Seminar aims to stimulate reflection on what is involved in speaking, teaching, and reading cross-culturally.

The many worlds of Buddhism are quite different from our own, and entering them can be a challenging and stimulating journey for teacher and student alike. Buddhist classics can be a door into these cultural universes, and—at the same time—a mirror for our own culture and our ways of self-understanding. To help

bring such concerns alive, we will encourage and facilitate visits to different Buddhist centers in the Berkeley area, so that you can appreciate the varieties of living Buddhist traditions as they are practiced today.

As we read through the wide range of texts chosen for this seminar, we will look closely at the issues raised by teaching a text in translation, asking who translated the text and for what purposes, exploring together how to make sense of key terms and concepts when we do not have access to the source language. We will explore what the answers to these questions reveal about the transmission and reception of Buddhism over the centuries, and about the transmission of religious and cultural values and practices generally. Sessions led by our two guest lecturers, one bringing Buddhist teachings into dialogue with the modern science of the brain and consciousness, and the other exploring how Buddhist teachings and practices find expression in art, will serve as case studies to illuminate these fascinating and timely issues.

More generally, we will ask what it means to ‘translate’ one culture into another, questioning assumptions about culture and religious thought that students often adopt unthinkingly. Whether we conceive of languages and cultures as self-contained and incommensurate or as the repository of universal values and traits, we must still ask ourselves what is involved in the transmission and transformation of tradition. This seminar will provide an opportunity to grapple with this fundamental question.

Schedule

“Understanding Buddhism Through its Classic Texts” will combine introductory lectures, discussions, small-group work, and individual projects. Each week, we will introduce the central topics and texts, facilitate discussions and small-group work, and advise participants on their research/teaching projects. The seminar will meet four days each week (Monday-Thursday) from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. This schedule allows the possibility of adding afternoon sessions for one-on-one or group discussions of the course materials and/or participants’ individual projects. Since we expect to eat lunch together, there will be ample opportunities for informal discussions.

Three Friday sessions have been scheduled. The first will be a field trip on foot to the C.V. Starr Asian Library and Doe Library at the University of California, Berkeley. For the second, we will take public transit into San Francisco for a tour of the renowned Asian Art Museum, led by Dr. Jeffrey Durham, Assistant Curator of Himalayan Art. There will also be a guest lecture by Dr. Rosenberg. You may wish to take advantage of the diverse Buddhist resources in the San Francisco Bay Area, depending on your particular interests, and the staff of MRC will help facilitate such visits.

For each week of the seminar, participants can expect to spend about 20 hours reading and preparing for the four meetings. In addition, as NEH summer scholars you will pursue individual, self-designed research or teaching projects that engage in in-depth investigation of select texts or key terms and concepts of Buddhist thought (either those introduced through the seminar lectures and readings or topics that interest you personally). We will ask each of you to prepare a 10- to 15-page research report and present your project to the group during the final week of the Seminar, having received feedback at earlier stages from each of us and from your fellow scholars. Projects can also relate to curricular development. We do not expect polished work; rather, you should consider what you do as a work in progress. We look forward to helping shape your project's further development—or tracing its implementation—through ongoing exchanges on the website established for this Seminar.

About the Seminar Directors

Luis Gómez is professor emeritus at the University of Michigan, where he founded the Buddhist Studies Program more than 30 years ago, and Academic Director at Mangalam Research Center. In 2012 he served as visiting professor at the University of Hamburg, and in 2013 at Stanford. His interests include the application of contemporary translation theories to the translation and interpretation of Buddhist literature, especially in India, and exegetical and hermeneutic theories in Asia and the West. His interest in reception theory ties together his interests in psychology (cognitive models for religious literature and language) and in the history of classical translation and exegesis in Asia. He also holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and is a practicing therapist.

Parimal Patil is the chair of the South and Southeast Asian Studies Department at Harvard University. He received his Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religions from the University of Chicago. His commitment to teaching excellence has led him to be twice nominated for the campus-wide Levenson Teaching Prize. He is interested in South Asian intellectual practices and their relevance to broader issues in the Study of Religion. He is particularly interested in Indian Buddhism and its intellectual history in Southern Asia, as well as philosophy of language and Sanskrit language, literature, and poetics.

Guest Lecturers

Two guest lectures will introduce topics that naturally complement the text-based orientation of the seminar as a whole. Dr. Jeffrey Durham, assistant curator for Himalayan Art at the world-famous Asian Art Museum, focuses in his own research on how Buddhist philosophy informs Buddhist art and vice-versa. We will meet him at the museum, where he will show us works in the museum's collection to broaden our understanding. Dr. Erika Rosenberg will report on her own work in assessing through third-person scientific methods the impact of meditation, and on her role in an innovative program at Stanford Medical Center that assesses the effect of compassion practices on mental health. She will also give an overview of the emerging field that investigates the relationship between Buddhist teachings and practices and the natural sciences, sometimes described in the current literature as “naturalizing Buddhism.” The language of science is increasingly put forward as a viable alternative for translating Buddhist texts; Dr. Rosenberg's lecture will give participants an opportunity to judge this link for themselves.

Our Facilities and the Community

The Mangalam Research Center is home to a fine library, offering 4,300 sq. ft. of stacks and study space, housed in a grand building that will celebrate its centenary in 2013. The library's holdings include the world's most complete collection of texts from the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, collected in 727 atlas-sized volumes; more than 2,000 Western-language books on Buddhism; and numerous Sanskrit and Pāli texts, including the complete Pāli

Canon in both Pāli and English. NEH Summer Scholars will have carrels available to them for their research. MRC Library hours during the Summer Seminar will be 8:30 AM – 5:30 PM, M-F and 1:30 – 5 pm on Saturday. Books in the Mangalam library do not circulate.

NEH Summer Scholars will also have full access (but not check-out privileges) to the world-famous library facilities of the University of California, located a ten-minute walk away. The UC campus features the beautiful new C. V. Starr East Asian Library, as well as the Doe Main Library. The highest ranked public research library in the country, its holdings include more than 11 million books and 100,000 journals, and it subscribes to virtually all online library services, such as JStor and Project Muse. Main Library summer hours are 9 am-9 pm M-Th, 9 am -5 pm Friday, and 1 pm – 9 pm Sunday.

MRC has full wireless access to the internet throughout its facilities. We recommend that you bring your own laptop, but we will have several computers available for your use.

MRC's location in the heart of downtown Berkeley places it at the hub of cultural and social activities and acts as a significant draw for scholars and students. The Berkeley Arts District, featuring theater and live performance venues, is two blocks away. MRC is situated just one block from the Downtown Berkeley BART (rapid transit) station, offering direct connections to San Francisco and the San Francisco International Airport. Seminar participants will have the opportunity to purchase a one-month membership at the YMCA just across the street, which offers state-of-the-art health-club facilities, including a pool. Berkeley in the summer enjoys a temperate Mediterranean climate, with average highs and lows for July of 74°/54° F. There is easy access to the Pacific Ocean, the San Francisco Bay, the East Bay Regional Park District, and (several hours distant) the Sierra Nevada mountains. If you bring your car, a monthly garage pass is available for \$110.

Additional Buddhist Resources

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MRC is four blocks from the Institute of Buddhist Studies (affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union), and half a mile from the other seminaries and divinity schools that comprise the Graduate Theological Union. It has a close affiliation with the nearby Nyingma Institute, located on the opposite side of the UC campus, which offers Sunday evening Dharma talks, weekend workshops, etc. Optional meditation instruction in at least two different traditions will also be offered at MRC during the program.

Additional Buddhist resources in Berkeley and the wider Bay Area include the San Francisco Zen Center, Green Gulch Zen Farm, Spirit Rock (insight meditation), Berkeley's Thai Temple (famed for its Sunday brunch), and dozens of other centers. Stanford's Ho Center for Buddhist Studies is an hour away by car, and San Francisco's world-famous Asian Art Museum—where we will take a special tour led by one of our visiting scholars—is directly accessible via BART.

Meals, Housing, and Stipend

NEH Summer Scholars will be strongly encouraged to take part in working lunches in the Commons at Mangalam Research Center each day that the program is in session. There is no charge for these meals, since they are an integral part of the program.. Joining in group meals gives everyone a chance to continue discussions among themselves and with instructors in a friendly, informal setting shared by students and volunteers from MRC's affiliated centers. Hot vegetarian buffet-style lunches are served daily. For days when the program does not meet, there are some 40-50 restaurants featuring at least a dozen different cuisines within a 10- minute walk of MRC, ranging from simple hamburger joints to gourmet paradises. The world- famous Gourmet Ghetto is about a 15 minute walk.

Berkeley is an expensive city to live in, and depending on your travel costs, it's possible that your stipend will not cover all your costs. But there is an upside to this. Berkeley is also a city of countless delights with more than a dozen distinct neighborhoods, many of which feature lovely walks, unique shopping opportunities, and distinctive houses in the Berkeley arts and crafts style. Since we would like to give Summer Scholars the opportunity to sample Berkeley as its residents would, we will be offering program participants the opportunity to stay in shared apartments or houses, each with a private bedroom and various amenities.

All housing will be within walking distance of MRC, and we expect that you will find the pleasures of the daily walk an important part of your stay; however public transport is always an option. We will let scholars know about the housing options available once they are accepted, and will do our best to accommodate special needs. We expect costs for this option to range from about \$1,400 to \$2,100 per person.

For those who want to stretch their stipend, we will have a few single rooms available in the MRC building itself; the cost will be \$1,300. These rooms have private bathrooms, double beds, and microwaves and mini-refrigerators, but no real kitchen. Another low-budget option is the YMCA hotel, located directly across the street from MRC, where a single room with shared bathroom and kitchen privileges will cost approximately \$1,100 (rate subject to change); this option comes with free access to the well-equipped Y health club, which features yoga classes and a lap pool among other amenities, but the rooms are Spartan (twin beds).

Each NEH Summer Scholar will receive the standard stipend for a four-week NEH Summer Seminar, \$3,300. The first check for half of the stipend will be available on the first day of the seminar. The second check for the remaining amount will come halfway through the project. Keep in mind that stipends are taxable income.

Application Process

Who should apply: College and university teachers participating in this seminar should have a strong interest in the study of Buddhism and the teaching of non-Western culture, but no prior knowledge of Buddhism is expected. It is assumed that participants will come from a variety of fields in the humanities—art history, history of religions, world history, philosophy, Asian studies, etc. The target audience for this seminar will therefore be college and university teachers who have included or plan to include Buddhism and Buddhist cultures as an important component or topic of study in their courses in philosophy, religion, literature, art or history. Priority will be given to scholar-teachers who include (or would like to include) Buddhism in their courses and/or research but need guidance on how to select and use translated resources. We will give preference especially to those instructors interested in developing new courses, or adding new components on Buddhist culture to their existing courses. We will attempt to select a group representative of these diverse disciplinary perspectives and needs.

How to apply: [\[download the Application Information and Instructions, .docx\]](#) Please print this document as a cover letter and submit it to the address below, along with all requested materials mentioned. The most important part of the application is the essay, which should be no more than four double spaced pages. This essay should include your reasons for applying to the specific project; your relevant personal and academic information; your qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish; and the relation of the study to your teaching.

Your completed application **must be postmarked no later than March 4, 2013**, and should be addressed as follows:

NEH Summer Seminar
Mangalam Research Center for Buddhist Languages
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Berkeley, CA 94704