Spring 2015

Buddhist Texts: The Vessantarajātaka

Course numbers: RLG465H1S, RLG3740H
Time: Mondays, 2-4 pm. Place: JHB 319
Instructor: Christoph Emmrich. Email: christoph.emmrich@utoronto.ca
Office: Centre for the Study of Religion, 170 St. George St. Jackman Humanities Building, Room 303
Office hours: on appointment

A. Description and guidelines

Content
The tale of the generous prince who renounces his royal home and gives away his children and his wife is probably the best-known story in the Buddhist world: the story most Buddhist children grow up with and the story which has arguably made more Buddhist adults cry than any other. A Mongol proverb actually says: “You read the Vessantara Jātaka, you weep”. Its many “tellings” (A.K. Ramanujan) celebrating the perfection of generosity have upset, bewildered, excited, and inspired Buddhist listeners, readers, and viewers of all ages since the beginning of their shared oral, visual, and literary history. In this course we will read, compare and discuss the story’s most prominent tellings, be they contemporary or medieval, canonical or vernacular, epic, dramatic, or poetic, textual, visual, or performative. The first part of the course will introduce the tellings of the story as a whole, in translations, and situate them in their respective contexts by selectively engaging the copious research on the topic produced by scholars of Buddhism. Apart from presenting the Buddhist hero in its various regional guises, - from the well-known Pali and Sanskrit counterparts Vessantara and Viśvantara to the Newar Bisvamātara, the Tibetan Dri med kun ldan, the Sogdian Sudāśan, the Chinese Xūdāná, the Thai and Lao Wetsandon, the Khmer Vessandor, and the Burmese Wethandaya - we will explore the generous prince’s look-alikes in non-Buddhist storytelling, - like the South Asian princes Hariścandra and Tārāvaloka, and, last but not least, the “Hindu Vessantar” Rāma. In the second part of the course we will isolate the most popular highlights of the story and, depending on the specific expertise of student group, read the original language tellings of the selected sections side by side, discussing issues of transmission, translation, and textual networking. The resulting translations shall be constantly interrogated as to the relation between the linguistic, the visual, and the performative and the crucial role the medium plays in the reading, composition, and transformation of the story.

Requirements
This course will be conducted as a seminar. In order to be graded, students must prepare the reading assignments in due time, attend classes regularly, participate actively in the sessions, presenting their assigned work, and submit either an annotated translation sample or one essay. There will be no exams, quizzes, or tests.

In the first part of the course, the weekly reading assignments consist of an English or visual rendering of a version of the story and secondary scholarly literature. Two primary source tellings and one secondary source are required readings for all students for each session of the first part of the course. Additionally, over the first part of the course, students will have to choose at
least one the secondary readings to give short oral reader’s report to the class on, no longer than eight minutes long.

In the second part of the course, selected passages in Burmese, Chinese, Newar, Pāli, Sanskrit, or Tibetan are to be translated into English. Students can choose one or more languages and texts on which to work and prepare translations for each session during the second part of the course. Please check the Course Calendar below to find out which passages should be prepared for each session.

For the written assignment there are two options. One is to hand in an annotated translation of a select passage of the students’ choice, the length of which must be determined in consultation with the instructor. This assignment includes (1) the original text (Romanized or not), (2) the student’s translation as well as (3) foot- or endnotes elaborating e.g. difficult terms and expressions, grammatical forms, issues of syntax, and, if necessary, giving reasons for the student’s decision in favour of a particular translation and interpretation, possibly conflicting with other translations. You are encouraged to include, if possible, results from in-class discussions.

The other option is to write a research essay of approx. 15-20 pages. Students should choose a topic either spontaneously following their own interest or proposed by, discussed, and specified in coordination with the course instructor. The project should be discussed with the instructor around mid-term the latest. Possible extensions to the deadline should be discussed with the course instructor well in advance. It is advisable to have at least one meeting with the course instructor to discuss the bibliography, the outline of your essay, your work in progress or receive feedback on a draft.

The deadline for the translation and the essay the 7th day counting from the last course session and has to be handed in both electronically and in hard copy.

It goes without saying that it is crucial for written assignments that everything you produce has been either formulated by yourself or marked and referenced as a quotation if you use materials you have taken from a source. As UofT has adopted a firm stance on the issue of plagiarism, please be aware that, if detected, the course instructor has the duty to report them to university authorities.

**Dates, deadlines and evaluations**

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<th>Assignment type</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<td>in-class participation before drop date</td>
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<tr>
<td>in-class participation after drop date</td>
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<td>reader’s report</td>
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<tr>
<td>research essay/translation</td>
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**Course grading scheme**

Undergraduate

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<td>73-76%</td>
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Graduate

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<td>A</td>
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Interaction with the course instructor
Address all your requests and queries about the course to the course instructor. Though incoming mails are viewed on a daily basis and though the course instructor will try to address your issues as swiftly as possible, it may take up to three days for the instructor to reply to your mail, so do wait for that period before reacting and do mail in time if you have any urgent requests. Always prearrange meetings, also those during office hours, by email or in person.

Recommended preparation:
RLG 206Y1 (USG) / RLG 206H5 (UTM)

Required preparatory reading before beginning of class:

Textbook:
None. All readings will be made available by the instructor in the first session.
B. Schedule

1. Introduction

Session 1, Jan. 5, 2015: Buddhist Birth Story Literature

Optional follow-up reading for session 1:

2. Tellings and Practices

Session 2, Jan. 12, 2015: Viśvantara, Tārāvaloka, Maṇicūḍa, and Hariścandra

Primary reading; choose at least two:
- Khoroch, Peter (tr.), Once the Buddha Was a Monkey: Ārya Śūra’s Jātakamālā, Chapter 9.
- Speyer, J. S. (tr.) Jātakamālā, or Garland of Birth Stories, Chapter 9.
- Das Gupta, Kabita (tr.). Viśvantarāvadāna. Sanskrit Text from the Gilgit Buddhist Manuscripts.
- Das Gupta, Kabita (tr.). Avadānakalpalatā, Chapter 23.
- Tawney, Charles Henry (tr.), The Katha sarit sāgara; or, Ocean of the Streams of Story.
- Yuan Ren (tr.). Śrīmanamahāśattvamānicūḍamahārājabodhisattvāvadāna.

Secondary reading; choose at least one:
- Gombrich, Richard F. “The Vessantara Jātaka, the Rāmāyaṇa, and the Dasaratha Jātaka”

Session 3, Feb. 19, 2015: Sudāśan, Xūdānā须大拏, and Dri med kun ldan

Primary reading; choose at least two:
- Chavannes, E. (tr.), Cinq cent contes et apolouges.
- von Schiefner, F. Anton. (tr.) Tibetan Tales. Visvantara.
- Benveniste, E. (ed. and tr.). Vessantara Jātaka, texte sogdien édité, traduit et commenté.

Secondary reading:
- Bokencamp, S.R. The Viśvantara Jātaka in Buddhist and Taoist Translations.

Session 4, Jan. 26, 2015: Bisvaṃtara

Primary reading:
- Lienhard, Siegfried (reprod., ed., and tr.). Die Legende vom Prinzen Viśvantara (Berlin: Museum für Indische Kunst, 1980); plates (“Tafeln”) only.

Secondary reading:
- Emmrich, Christoph. How Bisvanṭara Got His Dharma Body: Story, Ritual and the Domestic in the Composition of a Newar Jātaka.

Session 5, Feb. 2, 2015: Wetsandon and Vessandor

Primary reading; choose at least two:
- Crocker, John (tr.), The Wetsandon Jataka.
- Lefferts, Leedom and Sandra Cate, with Wajuppa Tossa. Buddhist Storytelling in Thailand and Laos. The Vessantara Jataka Scroll at the Asian Civilisations Museum, scroll images only.
- Kepner, S. (tr.). The Lioness in Bloom: Modern Thai Fiction about Women, pp. 95-100.

Secondary reading; choose at least one:
- Jory, Patrick. Thai and Western Buddhist Scholarship in the Age of Colonialism: King Chulalongkorn Redefines the Jatakas.
- Ladwig, Patrice. Emotions and Narrative: Excessive Giving and Ethical Ambivalence in the Lao Vessantara-Jātaka.

Session 6, Feb. 9, 2015: Wethandaya ဝဿASရ'

Primary reading; choose at least two:
- Goss, Louis Allan (sum.), We-than-da-ya. A Buddhist Legend.
- Bohmu Ba Shin, The Lokahteikpan.

Secondary reading; choose at least one:
- Green, Gillian. Verging on Modernity: A Late Nineteenth-Century Burmese Painting on Cloth Depicting the Vessantara Jataka.
- Raymond, Catherine. Notes on a Burmese Version of the Vessantara Jataka, as Represented on three Shwe Chi Doe in the NIU Burma Art Collection.

Session 7, Feb. 23, 2015: Vessantara

Primary reading; choose at least two:
- Horner, Isaline B. (tr.). Conduct of Vessantara. (Vessantaracariyaṁ).
- Horner, Isaline B. (tr.). Do all Bodhisattas give away their Wife and Children?

**Secondary reading:**
- Collins, Steven. The Vessantara Jātaka. Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire.

### 3. Episodes and Translations
For abbreviations see bibliography of primary sources.

**Session 8, Mar. 2, 2015: The Gift the Royal Elephant**
**Read telling(s) from at least one Asian language tradition:**
- for Tibetan-track students: VJ Tib. SBhV Das Gupta 90-93 (§§ 12-16); VJ Tib. SBhV tr. von Schiefner 258-260; VJ Tib. tr. Bacot 27-47.

Additional tellings:

**Session 9, March 9, 2015: The Gift of the Children**
**Read telling(s) from at least one Asian language tradition:**
- for Newar-track students: VJ New. BRK ed. Lienhard caption 46-50 (p. 57; cp. plates XV-XVI)
- for Tibetan-track students: VJ Tib. SBhV ed. Das Gupta 49-52 (§§ 35-43); VJ Tib. SBhV tr. von Schiefner 262-265; VJ Tib. tr. Bacot 64-67

Additional tellings:
Further reading:
- Durt, Hubert. The Offering of the Children of Prince Višvantara/Sudāna in the Chinese Tradition.

Session 10, Mar. 16, 2015: Maddi’s Lament

Read telling(s) from at least one Asian language tradition:
- for Pāli-track students: VJ Pa ed. Fausbøll Jā VI 565⁻⁵-568¹⁸; VJ Pa tr. Cone & Gombrich 72-74


Additional tellings:

Session 11, Mar. 23, 2015: The Gift of Maddi

Read telling(s) from at least one Asian language tradition:
- for Pāli-track students: VJ Pa ed. Fausbøll Jā VI 569⁻⁵-571⁴; VJ Pa tr. Cone & Gombrich 75-77
- for Newar-track students: VJ New. BRK ed. Lienhard caption 59-68 (p. 58; cp. plates XIX-XXI)

Additional tellings:
Further reading:
- Durt, Hubert. The Casting-off of Mādri in the Northern Buddhist Literary Tradition.
- McDaniel, Justin. Blissfully Buddhist and Betrothed: Marriage in the Vessantara-Jātaka and other South and Southeast Asian Buddhist Narratives.

Session 12, Mar. 30, 2015: The Great City
Read telling(s) from at least one Asian language tradition:
- for Newar-track students: VJ New. BRK ed. Lienhard caption 69; 77-81 (p. 59; pp. 59-60; cp. plates XXI; XXIV-XXVI)
Additional tellings:

C. Bibliography

Primary sources


Gnoli, Raniero (ed. & transl.). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*: being the 17th and last section of the Vinaya of the Milasarvāstivādin, with the assistance of T. Vankatacharya. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977-78; vol. II pp. 119-133.


**Secondary sources**


Appleton, Naomi. *Jātaka Stories in Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).


Gerini, G.E. A Retrospective View and Account of the Origins of the Thet Mahâ Ch’at Ceremony (Mahâ Jāti Desanā) or Exposition of the Tale of the Great Birth as performed in Siam (Bangkok Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 2dn ed. 1976 [1st ed. 1892]).


Jory, Patrick. Thai and Western Buddhist Scholarship in the Age of Colonialism: King Chulalongkorn Redefines the Jatakas. The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Aug., 2002), pp. 891-918


Lienhard, Siegfried. ‘La légende du Prince Visvantara dans la tradition népalaise’, Arts asiatiques XXXIV (1978), pp. 139-56


D. Audiovisual Sources
Khmer
Footage, Pāli version: Vessantara Jataka 1/15 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4MreYHW0I [starts at index 8:00 / 1:00:43]

Footage, Khmer version: Maha Vessantara Jataka with Poem Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DztkTXbGzz4

Footage, Khmer version, chapey [Khmer lute with vocal]: Chapey - Vessantara Jataka: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDM6shR_a28

Lao
Parade procession of royal Vessantara [in Isan, NE Thailand]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoXjuyBVJLg

Thai
Thai poem with acting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1kQa0YVA6Y; second episode at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qQYroEpUKs

Reading of Thai version of section VJ 11 (by Phra Warat Gambhirapañño Norasingha, recorded at Wat Kassatthrathirat Woravihan, Ayutthaya, Thailand on 13th November 2012.): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFOtt-dNWj0

Shakin’ It with Chuchok in Bangkok: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esBSBO_66ck [Coconuts TV]

Tibetan
Footage: [Tibetan Opera 720HD] dri med kun ldan / https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDWdpw2z6oY