CHINESE BUDDHIST TEXTS AND TRADITIONS
RELI 390: Topics in Comparative Religion, RG, C (4 credits)
Fall 2014, Chengdu, China

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course introduces students to some of the major ideas and practices of Chinese Buddhism. The first to thirds of this course will be spent in learning to read, in English translation, some of the important religious texts of the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Through careful study of these materials, students will gain a greater appreciation for the complexity and diversity of Buddhist thought. We will also learn about the various ritual forms in which these ideas are expressed religiously. In the final third of the course, we will shift away from the study of primary texts to other approaches. Students will take advantage of the location of this course by making overnight visits to two important Buddhist sites within driving distance of Chengdu. We will study the history of, and then visit Mt. Éméi 峨眉山, one of China’s “Four Famous Buddhist Mountains (Sìdà fójìào míngshān 四大佛教名山).” There we will experience lived Chinese Buddhism. We will also explore and learn from the Buddhist carvings at Dàzú 大足 in Chongqing, which have been designated as a World Heritage Site. After this deep exploration of the historical and contemporary manifestations of Buddhism in China, we will end the course by reading two memoirs to learn about the history of Chinese Buddhism over the last century. In general, this course is designed to help students learn and grow in the following ways:

♦ Gain knowledge about the historical development of, and key ideas and practices within, Buddhism, and Chinese Buddhism in particular
♦ Develop your ability to read and critically analyze primary texts
♦ Hone your sense of empathy for other religious traditions, and your ability to engage in constructive dialog about beliefs that differ from your own
♦ Learn to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to understand lived religions

NOTE: I will be holding additional, optional reading sessions for any students with the necessary skill in Chinese. In these sessions, we will slowly go over the Chinese versions of the texts we are studying. These texts will be available in traditional Chinese characters 繁體字, though some accommodation can be made for students who are only able to read simplified Chinese characters 简体字.

REQUIREMENTS
Preparation and Assignments: Students are expected to have completed each day’s assigned readings prior to class. Late work will not be accepted: Work is late if it is not submitted in person prior to the start of class on the day it is due. Unless stated otherwise, I do not accept assignments sent to me electronically.
Language Requirement: No previous knowledge of Asian languages is required for this course, but students should be prepared to become familiar with dozens of words in Sanskrit and Chinese.

ASSIGNMENTS
There will be preparation questions assigned weekly. Students will also complete two, 4 to 6 page papers over the course of the semester. Details on these assignments will be made available at the beginning of the course.
**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Wk 1: Introduction**
History, early development, and arrival in China
Key concepts and practices
Reading: Intro to Buddhism PDF

**Wk 2: Basics of Buddhism**
Reading: Intro to Buddhism PDF

**Wk 3-5: Reading Chinese Buddhist Thought**
Reading: Gregory

**Wk 6: Emptiness Philosophy**
Reading: Prajñāparamitā Heart Sūtra; Vajra Prajñāparamitā Sutra

**Wk 7-8: Devotional and Social Practices**
Reading: Amitabha Sūtra; The Yulan Bowl Sūtra, etc.

**Wks 9-10: Samantabhadra Bodhisattva 普賢菩薩 and Mt. Emei 峨眉山**
Readings: The Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva; Selections from Hargett

**Wks 11-12: Modern Chinese Buddhism**
Reading: Chen-hua

**Site Visits: Dates TBA**
Dàzú Grottoes
Mt. Éméi

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**READINGS**

**REQUIRED BOOKS (Students should purchase these before coming to China)**

**ELECTRONIC TEXTS**
The *Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*. Trans. Upasika Chihmann. Buddha Dharma Education Association, Inc. (A Chinese edition will also be posted.)
*Prajñāparamitā Heart Sūtra*. Translated by Yifa and Peter Romaskiewicz.
*Vajra Prajñāparamitā Sutra*. Translated by Yifa, Peter Romaskiewicz, and Michael Owens.
*The Yulan Bowl Sūtra, etc.* Translated by Yifa and Peter Romaskiewicz.