

draft for a Buddhist philosophy syllabus

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2018 NEH Summer Institute: Buddhist East Asia

Asian Studies Development Program

My goals:

- **To present Buddhist philosophical topics on their own terms**
- **To relate Buddhist philosophy to contemporary issues**
- **To meaningfully differentiate this as an upper-level class distinct from my existing Introduction to Buddhism class**

What is philosophy?

Traditionally, major topic areas are:

- epistemology
- logic
- ethics
- aesthetics
- metaphysics

What is Buddhist philosophy?

Without invoking the major categories of philosophy as traditionally conceived in the West, we can at least say that the following are important topic areas:

- the study of practice (especially, theorizing about how practice leads to certain transformations, or about the conditions for efficacy in practice)
- the study of the language (especially, its limitations)
- the study of the mind (especially, the role of the mind in constructing experience, or the relation of mind to reality)
- the study of causality (i.e., karma)
- the study of compassion and wisdom (e.g., moral reasoning)

What is Buddhist philosophy?

My syllabus will focus mainly on the first point, the study of practice, through the lens of what has come to be called “subitism” or the debate over “sudden enlightenment.”

In addition, I want to stress to students that Buddhist philosophy is not monolithic and ahistorical, i.e., that there are various developmental arcs within its intellectual history.

To do this, I focus the class on philosophical trends taking place between Tang-dynasty China and Kamakura-period Japan.

As a result, the syllabus highlights not only key moments in Buddhism’s intellectual history but also the globalized nature of Buddhist philosophy, by showing students interactions between thinkers in China, Korea, and Japan.