Religion 21 (TAP): Religions in Asia

Bibliographic Research Project

This project will focus on learning how to define a research question, finding materials about your subject matter, and distinguishing between the different kinds of material that you find. The project is focused on an examination of one theme or issue relevant to one of the following texts or topics: the Vessantara Jataka or a biography of the Buddha, or the disciplinary practices of monks or nuns. You must use the resources available at Bailey/Howe to locate three sources (books, book chapters, journal articles, encyclopedia articles, web-sites) that deal with your chosen topic. **Do not limit your search to Google and websites**—use ATLA Religion Database, the library catalogue, the references in *The Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, etc. **Do not use the first three sources that you find.** Instead, select three sources that allow you to discuss the different perspectives and goals of each. For example, you may select one historical, and one literary source that will allow for a fairly easy comparison, although sometimes these categories overlap. To find appropriate sources, you will have to read bibliographical information carefully, and skim contents quickly. In selecting your sources, you must include at least two scholarly sources.

**Possible topics:**
- How the nature of a Buddha is conceived
- Models for human/ethical action
- Gender or sexuality in any text
- Buddhist institutions
- Proper activities for monks or nuns
- The relationship between religion and politics in any of the texts
- Disciplinary practices

**Here are some questions that can help you think about the author’s perspective:**
- Was the source written for a scholarly or popular audience? (What is the publisher—a scholarly press, a religious press, a personal website? Does it presuppose an in-depth knowledge of specialized fields such as ancient languages or history? Does it use technical jargon?)
- When was it published? (Is there reason to think that the author’s ideas are out-of-date?)
- Is the concern of the source about the text in its ancient context or the text’s relevance in today’s world?
- Does the author assume that the stories in the text are true or false?
- Does the author assume that the beliefs or values in the text are true or false?
- Can you discern any other perspectives? (For example, that it is feminist, is Marxist, is primarily concerned with poetry, etc.)
You will produce two pieces of writing about your research:

1. An annotated bibliography of your sources. For each source, give a complete bibliographic citation in MLA format (see below), a brief description of how you found that source, then a summary (2-3 paragraphs). This annotated bibliography is due in class on November 9. Save a copy for your own use.

2. An essay in which you consider how the search for and the study of those sources contributed to your understanding of the Vessantara Jataka, the biography of the Buddha or monastic life. In particular, consider how the author’s audience or the goal shaped his or her work, and whether that perspective made the work more or less helpful for you in understanding the Buddhist phenomenon in question. This essay should be 2-3 pages in length, word-processed or typed, double-spaced, revised for spelling and grammar. Due in class on October 31.

All written assignments must be word-processed, double-spaced, and checked for grammar, spelling, and clear communication. Staple the pages together (pages may be printed back-to-back). Pages must be numbered. Do not include a title page and do not put them in folders or covers.

About MLA format. MLA format is not the same style as the citations found in the Library Catalog or the databases. For a comprehensive presentation, see MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (many copies in the library) or the brief, practical discussion with examples at the Purdue University Online Writing Laboratory Website: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html