

Buddhist Philology PhD Program Syllabus (BTKD-NY-BUD)

Program Overview and Aims

The Buddhist Philology PhD Program is rigorous but flexible. Since the number of applicants is usually low, the training is usually customised to fit the students' immediate topic of interest and needs, and fine-tuned according to their particular strengths and weaknesses carried over from their previous degrees.

Knowledge

Students will acquire comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist canonical and exegetical literature across major traditions (Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese), mastering at least two of the languages classical Buddhist texts were transmitted in, ideas related to textual transmission, manuscript traditions, and critical editing methodologies. Next to immersion in textual criticism, they will develop expertise in Buddhist religious thought, doctrinal developments, intercultural relationships across historical periods and linguistic boundaries, and they will become able to participate in international scholarly discourse on the topic of their choice in particular and Buddhist Studies broadly defined.

Skills

Students will demonstrate advanced proficiency in reading, translating, and analysing Buddhist texts in original languages, applying rigorous textual and higher criticism. Should the material they wish to focus on is unedited, they will master the process usually termed as critical edition, its preparation and presentation, textual reconstruction techniques, and the apposite use of digital humanities tools for Buddhist studies (including AI-powered tools), while developing scholarly writing and presentation capabilities.

Attitude

Students will cultivate intellectual rigor, philological precision, and respect for textual traditions while maintaining a critical distance. They will develop collaborative approaches to scholarship, interdisciplinary openness, and ethical awareness regarding cultural heritage and religious sensitivities in academic study. Students will demonstrate independent research design, execution, and critical evaluation of scholarship. They will take responsibility for advancing the field through original contributions, mentoring junior scholars, and engaging with Buddhist communities and institutions in culturally sensitive and intellectually stimulating ways.

Course description

BTKD-NY-BUD-1 Buddhist Philology 1.

This unit is reserved for the discovery of Western textual criticism (Biblical, Greek, Latin), its historical background, development, basic ideas, terminology, problems, and current status. The primary aims of this discovery are to provide a solid foundation for the intellectual debate surrounding editing sacred and worldly texts, to identify what exactly maturing Buddhist philology may learn from this already highly advanced discipline and what innovations it might be able to bring to the table (for example the idea of ‘open’ texts or text-families such as sūtras).

BTKD-NY-BUD-2 Buddhist Philology 2.

Building upon Buddhist Philology 1, this unit provides an in-depth exploration of critical edition and textual criticism. We discuss the principles of stemmatic analysis and their possible application for materials chosen for a paradigm, questions of manuscript collation and apparatus construction, the use of digital tools for textual criticism, the relative merits of diplomatic vs. critical editions, issues of paleography and codicology that might affect transmission, as well as the ethical issues in editing sacred texts.

Bibliography

Greetham, David C. *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*. Garland, 1994.

Maas, Paul, (tr. Barbara Flower) *Textual Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 1958.

Timpanaro, Sebastiano, (tr. Glenn W. Most). *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Trovato, Paolo. *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lachmann's Method. A Non-Standard Handbook of Genealogical Textual Criticism in the Age of Post-Structuralism, Cladistics, and Copy-Text*. Revised Edition. Librariauniversitaria.it, 2017.

Turner, James. *Philology. The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

West, Martin L. *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique: Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts*. Teubner, 1973.

BTKD-NY-BUD-3 Buddhist Philology 3.

In this unit, we aim to put into practice the principles and ideas absorbed in the previous two courses. Allowing for personal interests among the candidates, we select a text that has either not yet been edited or has been edited in a way that invites critical reassessment. As a case study for editing sacred texts, we examine selected chapters from the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, now available in Sanskrit, a Tibetan translation, and three Chinese translations. We read the text carefully, exploring possible textual issues in the Sanskrit (which also serves as a case study for editing a *codex unicus*), examining solutions adopted by the ancient translators, but focusing first and foremost on the fluid nature of such texts, which evolved over time.

Bibliography

Gómez, Luis, Paul Harrison, and Mangalam Translation Group. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa. The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*. Mangalam Press, 2022.

Study Group of Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, The Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism, Taisho University. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa. A Sanskrit Edition Based Upon the Manuscript Newly Found at the Potala Palace*. Taisho University Press, 2006.

Bibliotheca Polyglotta online version:

<https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=volume&vid=37>

BTKD-NY-BUD-4 Buddhist Philology 4.

For the genre of texts that have a more stable transmission history, we examine the two epistles attributed to Nāgārjuna: the *Suhṛllekha* and the *Ratnāvalī*. Both texts are now available in the original Sanskrit, a Tibetan translation, and four Chinese translations. We read carefully, weighing all variants and interpretive possibilities, as well as the testimony provided by the commentaries and translations, which naturally present their own textual challenges. These courses (3-4) embody the philologist's cardinal principle: textual criticism is learned by doing. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and only by wrestling with actual manuscripts, weighing genuine variants, and reconstructing textual histories can abstract methodology become internalised skill.

Bibliography

Hahn, Michael. *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī Vol. 1: The Basic Texts (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese)*. Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1982.

McClintock, Sara, and John Dunne. *Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland: Ratnāvalī*. Wisdom Publications, 2024.

Phurtsham 普仓. 梵文写本《宝鬘论颂》校勘与研究 *Ratnāvalī: Critical Edition of the Sanskrit Manuscript from Xizang*. 贝叶经特殊文本专项挖掘系列丛 3, 2022.

Okada, Yukihiro. *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī Vol. 2: Die Ratnāvalīṭikā Des Ajitamitra*. Herausgegeben Und Erläutert. Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1990.

Szántó, Péter-Dániel. *Buddhism for Beginners I: The Suhṛllekha attributed to Nāgārjuna*. Brill, forthcoming.

BTKD-NY-BUD-5 Buddhist Philology 5.

This course explores the sophisticated hermeneutical vocabulary and exegetical techniques developed by Buddhist commentators across linguistic traditions, all stemming from the Indic śāstric blueprint. Students will examine the technical terminology of Indian scholastic interpretation and trace how these categories shaped doctrinal debate and textual understanding. We analyze concrete exegetical strategies: how commentators resolve apparent contradictions, reconcile scriptural passages with philosophical positions, employ etymology and grammatical analysis, and deploy citation practices to establish textual authority. Special attention is paid to the intersection of linguistic analysis and doctrinal interpretation, examining how Buddhist scholastics borrowed from and transformed Brahmanical Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics while developing distinctive approaches to scripture. Through close reading of representative commentaries—from Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*, Rāmapāla's *Sekanirdeśapāñjikā* and beyond—students gain practical facility with the interpretive frameworks that have shaped Buddhist textual traditions.

Bibliography

Isaacson, Harunaga and Francesco Sferra. *The Sekanirdeśapāñjikā of Rāmapāla*. UNO, 2014.

La Vallée Poussin, Louis de. *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā. Prajñākaramati's Commentary to the Bodhicaryāvatāra of Ćāntideva. Edited with Indices*. Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1901–1914.

Pecchia, Cristina. *Dharmakīrti on the Cessation of Suffering: A Critical Edition with Translation and Comments of Manorathanandin's Vṛtti and Vibhūticandra's Glosses on Pramāṇavārttika II.190-216*. Brill, 2015.

Tubb, Gary A., and Emery R. Boose. *Scholastic Sanskrit. A Handbook for Students*. AIBS – CBS – THUS, 2007.

BTKD-NY-BUD-6 Buddhist Philology 6.

Building upon the above, in this course we examine what may be seen as “philology” in Buddhist exegesis. How did commentators deal with the facts of variant readings, incorrect textual transmission, and what kind of terminology they devised and employed? Turning to Tibetan exegesis, we explore how Tibetan authorities dealt with issues of translation, local transmissions, and scholasticism in a changed environment.

Bibliography

Ishihama, Yumiko and Yoichi Fukuda. *A New Critical Edition of the Mahāvyutpatti*. The Toyo Bunko, 1989.

Ishikawa, Mie. *A Critical Edition of the Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa. An Old and Basic Commentary on the Mahāvyutpatti*. Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1990.

Kapstein, Matthew. “Other People’s Philology: Uses of Sanskrit in Tibet and China, 14th -19th Centuries.” *L’espace du sens. Approches de la philologie indienne / The Space of Meaning. Approaches to Indian Philology*. Collège de France, 2018.

Norman, K.R. *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*. London: SOAS, 1997.

Simonsson, Nils. *Indo-tibetische Studien*. Almqvist & Wiksells, 1957.

Verhagen, Pieter C. *A History of Sanskrit Grammatical Literature in Tibet. Vol. I: Transmission of the Canonical Literature*. Brill, 1994.

Verhagen, Pieter C. *A History of Sanskrit Grammatical Literature in Tibet. Vol. II: Assimilation into Indigenous Scholarship*. Brill, 2001.

Selected passages from unedited materials by Szántó. Unpublished.

BTKD-NY-BUD-7 Buddhist Philology 7.

This unit provides an in-depth review of Buddhist manuscript traditions and collections. Starting from the Gāndhārī corpus, through the manuscript hoards recovered from the Silk Roads, East Asia, and the Gilgit region, we turn to the mediaeval corpora preserved in Nepal and Tibet. We explore in detail issues of codicology, palaeography, indigenous and modern preservation, practices of digital archival and access.

Bibliography

Hartmann, Jens-Uwe. "Research on the Buddhist Manuscripts from Northern Turkestan." In *Buddhist Manuscripts*, Vol. 3. Hermes, 2006, 153-160.

Von Hinüber, Oskar. "The Gilgit Manuscripts. An Ancient Buddhist Library in Modern Research." In *From Birch Bark to Digital Data*. Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2014, 79-135.

Kapstein, Matthew (ed.). *Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books* vols. 1-2. Cornell University Press, 2024.

Salomon, Richard. *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra*. Wisdom, 2018.

Silk, Jonathan A., ed. *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Multiple volumes. Leiden: Brill, 2015-.

Steinkellner, Ernst. A Tale of Leaves: On Sanskrit Manuscripts in Tibet, their Past and their Future. Gonda Lecture, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004.

Steinkellner, Ernst. Sanskrit manuscripts on palm-leaves, paper and birch-bark in the TAR: What now?

https://www.academia.edu/28767209/Sanskrit_manuscripts_on_palm_leaves_paper_and_birch_bark_in_the_TAR_What_now_now_now

Selected catalogues and hand-lists of manuscript collections.

<https://idp.bl.uk>

<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/sanskrit/1>

BTKD-NY-BUD-8 Buddhist Philology 8.

We have now witnessed two revolutions in information processing in a lifetime: the advent of the digital age and the rise of artificial intelligence. These two events have introduced fundamental changes to every aspect of life, and they are transforming philological work as well. In this unit we explore the opportunities, tools, and best practices that this technological transformation offers to Buddhist textual scholarship, from digital manuscript repositories and optical character recognition to computational text analysis and machine learning applications for paleography and translation. Students will gain hands-on experience with essential digital resources (CBETA, GRETEL, Tibetan Buddhist Canon resources), learn to employ text encoding standards, and critically evaluate how AI-assisted tools can aid—and potentially complicate—tasks such as collation, pattern recognition, and linguistic analysis. Ultimately, this course prepares philologists to harness computational power while maintaining the rigor, nuance, and cultural sensitivity that Buddhist textual traditions demand. Our school has direct access to the developers of Dharmamitra, the foremost custom-designed tool for Buddhist textual scholarship and this provides us with a significant opportunity to become not only passive users but to take an active part in its development.

Bibliography

<https://dharmamitra.org>

<http://www.rkts.org>

<https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw>

<https://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel.html>