

TALK> Nicholas Witkowski, live and virtual talk "Searching for the Ancient Dalit Buddhist?"

Discussion published by Stephanie Balkwill on Thursday, September 29, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

The Center for Buddhist Studies at UCLA is hosting Dr. Nicholas Witkowski (University of San Diego) for a hybrid in-person and virtual talk on October 13 from 4:00-5:30 pm PST. We would love to see you there. Please register for either virtual or in person at this link: <https://www.international.ucla.edu/buddhist/event/15779>

I have pasted the abstract below.

With warmest wishes to all,

Steph

Searching for the Ancient Dalit Buddhist? Uncovering the Outcaste Socio-Economics behind Buddhist Cemetery Asceticism

The practices of the cemetery ascetic (śmāśānika) have long been treated as peripheral (or even antithetical) to our conception of late ancient Indian Buddhist monastic practice. In strong contrast to this classic scholarly conception of the Indian Buddhist monastery, I contend that cemetery asceticisms should be treated as constitutive of monastic institutional orthopraxy, and thus as foundational to our definition of early institutionalized Buddhism. I will argue that Buddhist orthopraxy was reconfigured (and even subverted) due to recruitment into the Buddhist Order of low-/outcaste populations engaged in the deeply impure vocations of the ancient Indian death economy. I hope to show that these newly recruited subaltern monastics challenged Brahmanizing monastic authorities in that they adapted the technēs of the cremation ground into a new brand of “Buddhist” asceticism.

Nicholas Witkowski is Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of San Diego. His current project, *Lifestyles of Impurity*, is a study of low-/outcaste monastic communities in first millennium CE South Asia that employs the theoretical armature of historians of the everyday. This book project integrates feminist, Marxist, post-colonialist, and Foucauldian literary-critical approaches to the study of textual sources documenting the socio-religious practices of low-/outcaste communities. What Dr. Witkowski hopes to convey is a nuanced articulation of the social locations of marginality as wellsprings of cultural innovation that continued to resist, challenge, and, in certain key respects, transform Brahmanical imperial discourse and practice across the Sanskrit cosmopolis throughout the first millennium CE.