

UF RELIGION

# NEWSLETTER



## NEWS

- **Dr. Vasudha Narayanan** was mentioned on a segment for NPR radio. Read *Page 2* for more details.
- **Dr. Anna Peterson** gave a keynote lecture at the University of Chile. Read *Page 3* for more details.
- **Dr. Mario Poceski** published a chapter for *Routledge Companion to Chinese Philosophy*. Read *Page 4* for more details.
- **Dr. Rachel Gordan** published a chapter for the *Oxford Handbook of American Jewish History*. Read *Page 4* for more details.

## EVENTS

- **Fall Commencement** will be taking place from December 12-13th. ***Congratulations to all Graduates!***
- The last day of the semester is December 12<sup>th</sup>. ***Enjoy the Winter Break! See you in the Spring semester.***



## NEWS

- **Dr. Vasudha Narayanan** was recently featured in a segment aired by **NPR**. This segment—originally recorded locally at WUFT by Rose Schnabel for *Morning Edition* and later picked up nationally—explores how a river in Florida has become a meaningful stand-in for a sacred Hindu tradition. In India, the Ganges River serves as a sacred place to release the ashes of loved ones. For those unable to travel there, the Suwannee River in Florida has taken on that role.

The story follows **Vasanti Doshi**, who grew up under apartheid in South Africa and found solace in a song about the Suwannee River. Years after moving to Florida, she unexpectedly settled beside that same river when her husband bought a small motel. After her father's passing, she held a Hindu funeral ceremony on the Suwannee, and word soon spread. Their motel became a gathering place for Hindu families seeking a spiritual alternative to the Ganges, with Vasanti and her daughter now guiding these riverside rites and embracing the Suwannee as their own "Ganges."

The segment includes Dr. Narayanan's expertise on the topic as she directs the study of Hindu traditions here at the University of Florida. *"Hindus believe sprinkling a loved one's ashes in the Ganges liberates the soul from the body, and local rivers often become a substitute. They know it's the Suwannee or the Mississippi. They do think it is infused with the sacrality of the mother of all rivers, which is the River Ganges from India,"* said Narayanan.



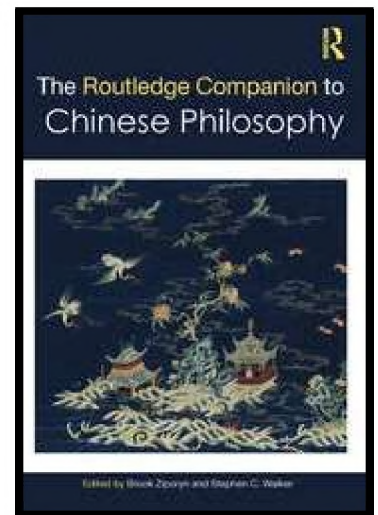
Dr. Narayanan



## PUBLICATIONS

- **Dr. Mario Pocesi** recently published a chapter in “Chinese Reactions to and Adaptations of Buddhist Monasticism,” in Brook Ziporyn and Stephen Walker’s edition of the *Routledge Companion to Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 245-55.

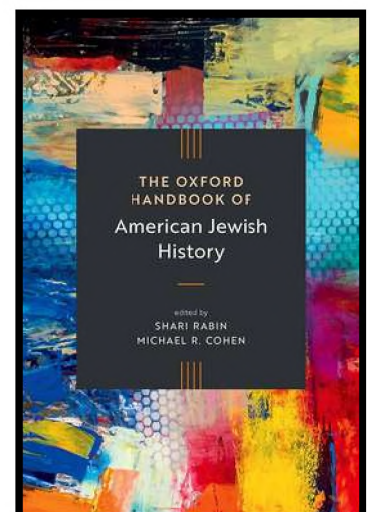
The chapter explores how Chinese elites responded to the introduction of Buddhist monastic ideals, practices, and institutions—responses that shaped both the early reception and later development of Buddhism in China. It outlines how monasticism was adapted through historical processes that sought to reconcile tensions between Buddhist values and established Chinese ethical, social, and political norms. Focusing on key critiques raised by influential members of the sociopolitical elite, the chapter highlights concerns about the perceived incompatibility of monastic renunciation and celibacy with the central virtue of filial piety *xiao*, as well as the challenges of incorporating the monastic order into China’s authoritarian political system.



- **Dr. Rachel Gordan** recently published a chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of American Jewish History*, edited by Shari Rabin and Michael R. Cohen, titled “Cold War American Judaism.”

The handbook features chapters by leading scholars in American Jewish history, offering a comprehensive study combining traditional and emerging methodologies to deepen the understanding of the Jewish American experience.

Dr. Gordan’s chapter examines how the Cold War shaped American perceptions of Judaism, highlighting how the era’s framing of religious conflict as Abrahamic versus non-Abrahamic enabled Jewish Americans to be seen as a part of “middle-class American religion.”





## PRESENTATIONS

- **Dr. Anna Peterson** attended the Religion Dynamics and Social Change: Challenges and Transformations in Contemporary Society Conference at the University of Chile on December 9<sup>th</sup>. She gave a keynote lecture titled “Religion, social movements, and the public sphere,” which was organized by **Nelson Marin Alarcon**, a Ph.D. alumnus who graduated from UF in 2023 and is now working at the University of Chile.

Religious dynamics in today’s society reflect a complex interaction with social change—serving both as a guardian of tradition and a catalyst for reform. They face challenges such as secularization, pluralism, materialism, and tensions with evolving values like gender and sexuality, while simultaneously adapting through modernization, migration, and emerging spiritual movements. These shifts foster greater diversity, individualism, and exert significant influence on politics, human rights, and global issues.



**Dr. Anna Peterson**



*Logo for the  
University of Chile*

## ACTIVITIES

- On December 5<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Religion came together for a joyful holiday party to celebrate the season and wrap up another wonderful semester. Faculty members (including Chair **Mario Poceski**) joined student assistants **Sophia Wang**, **Kaitlin Edmonds**, and **Julianne Do**, along with Administrative Assistant **Ashley Tisher**, graduate students, and friends from the CLAS Dean's Office and Shared Services Center. The room was filled with laughter, delicious food, and festive music that truly brought the holiday spirit to life. We're so grateful to everyone who made this semester special and wish you all a happy holiday season and a relaxing winter break!



*Pictured left to right: Poli Sci grad student Long Xiao, Yuan Zhang, Prathik Murali, a religion major, Mario Poceski, Ashley Tisher, Julianne Do, and Laura James*

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## Want To Contribute to the Newsletter?

If you have any information that you would like featured in the newsletter, please email **Ashley Tisher** ([a.tisher@ufl.edu](mailto:a.tisher@ufl.edu)).

*We look forward to hearing from you!*