Undergraduate Courses offered by Centre of Buddhist Studies

BSTC2002 Life and Buddhism
(6 Credits)
(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Course No.: BSTC2002
Lecturer: Professor Guang Xing
Email: guangxin@hku.hk
Office: C0405, Jockey Club Tower
Time for lecture: Tuesday 4:30 pm to 6:20 pm
Venue: Rayson Huang Theatre [Except Sept 26 (Tue) Meng Wah T1 and Nov 21 (Tue) Library Extension (LE1)]

Course Description:
This course guides students to explore the thought, values and practices of Buddhism through a detailed analysis and examination of its fundamentals of philosophical theories and principles. Buddhist teachings entirely focus on the analysis of human life and offer a unique way to solve life’s problems and achieve happiness. Just as the Buddha said, he taught one thing: suffering and its cessation. In this course, the basic Buddhist teachings of dependent arising, the relationship of mind and body, human behaviours and their consequences, the human condition and its causes, the concept of happiness, etc. will be investigated on the basis of the earliest Buddhist literatures namely the Pali Nikayas and Chinese Agamas. Assessment: 100% coursework.

Objectives:
Even without any prior knowledge of Buddhism, students will be benefited from learning the fundamental theories and practices of Buddhism. Students are expected to obtain a basic understanding of Buddhist philosophy of life, values and attitudes towards life and the Buddhist ways to achieve happiness in life.

Assessments:
Students are required to read the relevant papers before coming to the lecture so that they can participate in our lively discussion. The final examination is based on one essay, one presentation and lecture participation.
(1) 60 % short essay with 2,500-3,000 words (excluding bibliography, deadline for submission is midnight 3rd December)
(2) 25 % group presentation
(3) 15 % class participation
PLEASE submit your essay through email.

Course Learning Outcome:
Students will:
1. Describe and explain the role of morality and wisdom in the Buddhist way of life, (Assessment 1,
2, 3)  
2. Use the relevant information to critically reflect how to live a meaningful and better life,  
(Assessment 1, 2, 3)  
3. Apply the knowledge and understanding to critically examine the problems in life, (Assessment 1,  
2, 3)  
4. Demonstrate an awareness of the impact of one’s behavior to others and the society one live in.  
(Assessment 1, 2, 3).  

Criteria for marking essay:  

1. Good and correct understanding of the Buddhist teachings given in the lectures,  
2. Clear, logical and rational presentation and discussion of your ideas and thoughts,  
3. Show that you have read at least five relevant papers in your essay either in your footnotes or  
endnotes and list them at the end. These five papers can be found from the reading list below or  
from the reference list at the end of each lecture or from Moodles. Internet sources may not be  
acceptable as most of them are not academic. So please visit the recommended internet websites  
in our reading list below for materials and academic papers.

Before you send me your final essay, you need to send it to turnitin for plagiarism check. Then you  
attach the one page result showing similarities at the end of your essay.

Here is the Faculty Grade Expectations.  

Course Outline (tentative):  

Lecture 01 (Sep. 5)  
Topic: The Buddhist attitude toward life  
Discussion Topics: Buddhist attitude towards life  
Reading: Chapters 1 in Rahula’s What the Buddha Taught.

Lecture 02 (Sep. 12)  
Topic: The historical Buddha: a personality analysis  
Discussion Topics: The Buddha’s life  
Reading: Chapter 1: “The Buddha: The Story of the Awakened One” in Gethin’s The Foundations of  
Buddhism. Chapter 2 “Buddha” in Introducing Buddhism. Piyadassi Thera’s The Buddha: His Life  
and Teaching.

Lecture 03 (Sep. 19)  
Topic: Buddhist analysis of Human life:  
Discussion Topics: five aggregates, four nutriments, three characteristics of individual existence.  
Reading: Chapter 3 “Dharma” in Introducing Buddhism. Nyanaponika Thera, The Three Basic Facts  
Lecture 04 (Sep. 26)  Meng Wah T1

**Topic: Life without a permanent soul: Buddhist teaching of non-self**

Discussion Topics: theory of dependent origination, non-soul theory.


Lecture 05 (Oct. 3)

**Topic: Buddhist analysis of human behaviours and their consequences:**

Discussion Topics: karma and rebirth


Lecture 06 (Oct. 10)

**Topic: Buddhist analysis of human predicament**

Discussion Topics: twelve factors of dependent origination.

Reading: Karunadasa, Y. “The problem of suffering: The Buddhist diagnosis of the Human predicament”. Chapter I: “The Human Condition” in *In the Buddha’s Words*. Chapter 3 “Four Truths: The Disease, the Cause, the Cure and the Medicine” in Gethin’s *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

**Reading Week Oct. 16 – 21**

Lecture 07 (Oct. 24)

**Topic: Buddhist concepts of happiness:**

Discussion Topics: nirvana -- nibbana parama sukha


Lecture 08 (Oct. 31)

**Topic: Buddhist ways to achieve happiness: (I)**

Discussion Topics: the noble eightfold path


Lecture 09 (Nov. 7)

**Topic: Buddhist ways to achieve happiness: (II)**

Discussion Topics: Buddhist meditation.


3
Lecture 10 (Nov. 14) twelve
**Topic: Buddhist moral teaching,**
Discussion Topics: criteria for judging good and bad,

Lecture 11 (Nov. 21) (Tue) **Library Extension (LE1)**
**Topic: Buddhist Values,**
Discussion Topics: Five Precepts, Four Sublime State of Mind.
[http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/precepts.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/precepts.html)
[http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html)

Lecture 12 (Nov. 28)
**Topic: Buddhist attitude to death:**
Discussion Topics: Death, abortion and organ donation.
Reading: Gunaratna, *Buddhist Reflections on Death.* The Wheel Publication No. 102/103, 1982
Buddhist Publication Society.

**Group Presentation**

**Rules about Group Presentation (Group Project)**

1. A group should consist of FIVE to TEN students working together as a team for a single project on a chosen topic. The group should consult the tutor for presentation topic if necessary.
2. Each member has THREE minutes for presentation, and the members can have role play and speak interchangeably, or just speak for three minutes and finish. The group should decide what to do, NOT the individual member.
3. Time will be counted on group basis NOT on the basis of individual members. So if one member speaks more than three minutes than another member will have less than three minutes to present his or her ideas. Therefore, in order to be fair, group members should not excel their assigned time.
4. There will be a time keeper who will ring the bell three times towards the end of the group presentation. The first ring (one ring only) is when three minutes are left and the second (two rings) is when one minute is left and the last ring (three or more rings) is at the end.

In accessing the presentation, we will look into your (1) cooperation as a team, (2) time management, (3) presentation skills, (4) correct understanding of the lectures.

**Suggested Essay topics**

1. Discuss how this course has changed or improved your life. (Reflective Essay about the course)
2. Discuss Buddhist attitude towards life?
3. Discuss the Buddha as a teacher in light of his personality.
4. What is the Buddhist analysis of human life?
5. Discuss the moral responsibility in light of the concept of no-soul or Anatta.
6. No soul or Anatta is a characteristic of Buddhism as a religion. Discuss.
7. Is the Buddhist concept of karma a determinism?
8. Is Buddhist concept of karma an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?
9. “Buddhism is pessimistic.” Discuss in the light of Buddhist Teaching of suffering.
10. Why Buddhism starts with Dukkha or suffering? Discuss.
11. Discuss the Buddhist concept of Happiness.
13. Why the noble eightfold path is described as transcending the two extremes of austerities and sensual indulgence?
14. Discuss the Buddhist concept of Nirvana.
15. Discuss the Buddhist way of life in light of the noble eightfold path.
16. How the Buddhist meditation related to a better life?
17. Discuss the importance of mindfulness in our life.
18. Discuss the Buddhist attitude towards death. (Please do not include attitude towards physical body and funeral ceremony)
19. Discuss the importance of five precepts in our life.
20. Buddhism is rational. Discuss.
21. Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy? Discuss.

You may choose your own essay topics provided it relates to our course. Please write a title page with the following information: (1) the course title, (2) topic of the essay, (3) your name and dates, (4) your email address. Please use Essay Format to write your essay and use Chicago Citation Style which can be found in Moodle.

Required Reading
Karunadasa, Y. 2014. Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong. Can be purchased from the Centre of Buddhist Studies.
Further Reading


[http://www.buddhistethics.org/2/harvey.html](http://www.buddhistethics.org/2/harvey.html)


[http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/khantipalo/wheel147.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/khantipalo/wheel147.html)


Piyadassi, Thera, *The Buddha's Ancient Path* from
http://www.buddhastation.org/english/buddha%20ancient%20path.html


http://www.bps.lk/wheels_library/wb_015.html


**Reference and Internet Resources**

1) Dictionaries

**Digital Dictionary of Buddhism**, eds., Charles Muller. Free. This is an internet based dictionary similar to *Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, by Soothill and Hodous, but has much more entries. If you know the Chinese Buddhist technical terms, but do not know how to translate it into English, please visit Muller’s DDB website address: http://www.acmuller.net/ddb/ Users can access the search function with the user ID of "guest" (case-sensitive, no quotes), leaving the password area blank allowing 20 searches in a 24 hour period. To search Sanskrit and other terms containing diacritics, type in the term in simple ascii.


This is the online version of *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism* that was published in 2002. There are more than 2700 entries, including cross references. The dictionary does not aim to cover the
entire Buddhist lexicon. Rather, it is meant as a guide for readers of Nichiren's works.

A Dictionary Buddhism, eds., Damien Keown. This Dictionary needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.


Oxford Reference Online Premium. This reference contains many encyclopaedia and dictionaries for all kinds of studies. It is good for beginners of Buddhism to look for basic information. This Dictionary needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.


Dictionary of Pali Proper Names edited by G P Malalasekera (1899-1973). It is a dictionary solely devoted to the proper names of Theravada tradition. It is available as printed version from the Pali Text Society. However, you can check online for free http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/dic_idx.html

Sanskrit-English Dictionary edited by Monier Williams. Free. This is the largest dictionary for Sanskrit studies at the moment. You can check online at http://students.washington.edu/prem/mw/mw.html

The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue. [compiled by] Lewis R. Lancaster in collaboration with Sung-bae Park, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. This is a catalogue of Mahayana Buddhist Sutras in Sanskrit together with Tibetan and Chinese translation. It also lists the translators and date of Chinese translation. If you know the title of a sutra in Chinese, but you don’t know how to translate it into Sanskrit, then you can find it in this catalogue. A Hardcopy can be found in HKU Library XR 016.294382 L2. The electronic version can be found at: http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/ Free. You can download the entire web version.

2) Encyclopaedia

Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, eds., Robert E. Buswell, Jr., Ed. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003. 982 pp. 2 vols. This encyclopedia describes the Buddhist world view, basic teachings and practices of Buddhism, as well as its different schools and sects. This Encyclopedia needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.


USA, 2006. This Encyclopedia needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.

**Routledge Encyclopaedia of philosophy** [electronic resource]. Edward Craig, ed. London: Routledge. Contains over 2,000 state-of-the-art articles, covering a broad range of topics in the philosophical canon, as well as philosophy from all continents and all periods. Includes fast and flexible searching capability, over 25,000 cross-reference hyperlinks and other features. This Encyclopedia needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.


**Encyclopedia Britannica Online.** This Encyclopædia needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses. [http://search.eb.com/](http://search.eb.com/)

**Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.** Free, it contains a large number of papers in Buddhist and Confucian studies. [http://plato.stanford.edu/](http://plato.stanford.edu/)

**The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.** Free it contains a large number of papers in Buddhist and Confucian studies. [http://www.iep.utm.edu/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/)

3) Journals


**Journal of Philosophy of Life.** Published by Waseda University in Japan. The aim of this journal is to promote international dialogue on the philosophy of life. It features original, full-length papers as well as research reports and other relevant materials. Every paper in the journal is published in PDF format and is freely downloadable from this website, the repository of Waseda University, and/or the repository of Osaka Prefecture University (OPERA). This journal is a member of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and Philosophical Research Online (philpapers). [http://www.philosophyoflife.org/](http://www.philosophyoflife.org/)


**Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies.** This is the largest and best journal for Buddhist Studies. You can access and download papers older than five years. Free. [https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/jiabs/issue/archive](https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/jiabs/issue/archive) HKU holdings: S 294.305 I6 A8

**Journal of Global Buddhism.** Free. This is a web based academic journal for free distribution. [http://www.globalbuddhism.org/dig.html](http://www.globalbuddhism.org/dig.html)


You can also get it from HKUL Catalogue: 294.3 B927 S9

The Eastern Buddhist. HKU Library. Published twice a year by the Eastern Buddhist Society in Kyoto. Japan, started from 1965. S 294.3 E13 B9

Contemporary Buddhism. HKU Library. Published twice a year, Richmond, England: Curzon, c2000- S 294.3 C761 B

Buddhist-Christian Studies. HKU Library. Published once a year Publisher: University of Hawai‘i Press started 1981.

4) Website Recourses

Accessstoinsight. Free. This is a website entirely dedicated to the teaching of Theravada Buddhism including the Pali Canon, Theravada text archive and sources. Most of the Pali texts are translated into English for free distribution. Website address: www.accesstoinsight.org/

Buddhist Publication Society. Free. This is an organization in Sri Lanka devoted to the publication of Theravada Buddhist Books and some of them are for free distribution. So you can download them for your own use. The Wheel Publication Series and Bodhi Leaf Series are scholarly studies of Theravada Buddhism. Please follow the link and visit Online Library http://www.bps.lk/

Buddhist Digital Library and Museum. Free. There is a good collection of academic articles some with full texts in both Chinese and English. It is a good place to relevant academic articles for your study. Website address: http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/DBLM/index.htm please go to database.

JSTOR The Scholarly Journal Archive. This Archive needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses. http://www.jstor.org/jstor

NII Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator. Mostly Free. The National Institute of
Informatics (Japan) has incorporated approximately 2.8 million full text articles (PDF) in NII-ELS, from 1,000 published academic journals. Currently NII has obtained permission of 271 academic societies. NII-ELS also provides full text (PDF) of Research Bulletins of Japanese universities. All of the full text articles incorporated in NII-ELS are available through CiNii along with bibliographical information on other academic papers.

_Taisho Edition of Chinese Tripitaka._ Free. If you can read classical Chinese and wish to refer to the original Chinese texts, please visit [http://www.cbeta.org/index.htm](http://www.cbeta.org/index.htm). This website includes volumes 1-55 & 85 of _Taisho Edition of Chinese Tripitaka._

*(Last updated: July 19, 2017)*