CENTRE OF BUDDHIST STUDIES

The Buddhist Studies minor is an academic programme aimed at giving students a broad-based education that is both coherent and flexible and addresses the relation of Buddhism to culture, society, language, art, film and psychology. It would provide a study pathway on the fundamental doctrines, institutions, and representations of Buddhism drawing from historical, artistic, psychological and sociological approaches. Students will have opportunities to gain a greater appreciation of commonly shared elements in Asian cultures (Indian, Japanese and Chinese) and examine Buddhist practices in traditional and contemporary contexts.

To obtain a minor in Buddhist Studies, students are required to take a total of 36 credits. They are expected to take two compulsory core courses (BSTC1001 and BSTC1003) and four advanced courses/cross-listed advanced courses. The course components required for the minor are listed below:

Core courses (12 credits):
BSTC1001. Introduction to Buddhist teachings (6 credits)
BSTC1003. Introduction to religious studies (6 credits)

Advanced courses/Cross-listed Advanced courses (24 credits):
BSTC2002. Life and Buddhism (6 credits)
BSTC2003. Zen in East Asia (6 credits)
BSTC2004. Chinese Buddhism and ritual (6 credits)
BSTC2005. Buddhism in today’s world (6 credits)
BSTC2006. Buddhist psychology and mental cultivation (6 credits)
BSTC2008. Sanskrit language (6 credits)
BSTC2009. Japanese culture and thought: the Buddhist impact (6 credits)
BSTC2010. Buddhist art and architecture (6 credits)
BSTC2013. Buddhism through film (6 credits)
BSTC2014. Chinese Buddhist art (6 credits)
BSTC2015. Tibetan language (6 credits)
BSTC2016. Pāli language (6 credits)
BSTC2017. Buddhism and economics (6 credits)
CHIN2253. Chinese philosophy III: Buddhism (6 credits)
FINE2087. Buddhist art of East Asia (6 credits)
FINE3015. Arts of India (6 credits)
PHIL2800. Buddhist philosophy (6 credits)

Core Courses

BSTC1001. Introduction to Buddhist teachings (6 credits)

Buddhism is a major world religion and holds an important position in mankind’s cultural heritage. Its teachings have not only influenced communities, their way of thinking and expression in art throughout history, but have also been an ongoing source of inspiration for those conducting contemporary research in the fields of psychology, neuroscience and education. This course will introduce students to the fundamental teachings of the Buddha as preserved in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. Special emphasis will be placed on the core doctrines of Buddhism, which include the “four noble truths”, “dependent origination”, cultivation of wisdom and the “Bodhisattva ideal”.

Assessment: 100% coursework.
BSTC1003. Introduction to religious studies (6 credits)

This course introduces students to the field of Religious Studies by discoursing on topics, theories, and methods that are essential for gaining a thorough understanding of religion and its function in human society, culture and history. By drawing materials from different religions, the course introduces students to religious themes and patterns such as myth, ritual, scripture, purity, pilgrimage, and sacred space, enabling them to approach religion as a cross-cultural phenomenon that can be studied and investigated critically. By discussing the works of influential scholarship in the history of the study of religion, it introduces students to the methodological diversity in the field that includes historical, phenomenological, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and feminist approaches and interpretative strategies such as form criticism and redaction criticism.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

Advanced Courses

BSTC2002. Life and Buddhism (6 credits)

This course guides students to explore the thought, values and practices of Buddhism through a detailed analysis and examination of its fundamental philosophical theories and principles. Buddhist teachings focus entirely on the analysis of human life and offer a unique way to address existential problems with an aim to achieve well-being. In this course, we will analyse the core Buddhist teachings of dependent arising, the relationship of mind and body, human behaviours and their consequences, and so forth. Our investigation will draw from the earliest Buddhist literature recorded in the Pāli Nikāya and the Chinese Āgama. This course does not require any prior knowledge of Buddhism.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

BSTC2003. Zen in East Asia (6 credits)

Zen (禪) is a significant element in the cultural backbone of East Asia. In this course, attention will be focused upon three broad areas of study: Zen thought, its practice, and its impact on the culture of East Asia. The course will begin with the introduction of Zen to China, followed by a description of its basic teachings and historical development in China, Korea and Japan. Zen practices will be examined through a survey of Zen monastic life. The cultural impact of Zen forms an integral component of this course and, for this purpose, the following themes will be discussed: paintings, poetry (禪詩), and other forms of Zen art in China and Korea; Cha-no-yu (Tea Ceremony), ‘Haiku’ (俳句) poetry, Zen gardens, and swordsmanship in Japan. In this course, students will gain a basic understanding of Zen Buddhism and the impact it has had upon the thought and culture of East Asia.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

BSTC2004. Chinese Buddhism and Ritual (6 credits)

Throughout the history of Buddhism, Buddhist traditions have adopted indigenous rituals and practices, and devised a great variety of new ones. This course provides an introduction to Buddhist ritual practice in Chinese Buddhism from the perspectives of their psychological, religious and spiritual significance. We will begin by exploring several theories and research methods of ritual adopted in anthropology and religious studies. Having studied the theoretical basis of ritual studies, students will further examine the doctrinal, mythic and other dimensions of Buddhist practice, investigate the structural patterns of various
rituals, survey the different categories of ceremonies, and analyse the most important groups of rituals. The focus of study will be on the role of ritual experiences in individual enlightenment, and upon ritual as an expression of participants’ understanding of Buddhist teaching. As a comparative approach to Buddhist rituals, the course will analyse related myths, texts, and video recordings of rituals, including: the recitation of sutras (scriptures) and mantras, funeral rites, rituals for the liberation of living animals and saving sentient beings from water and land (shuilu fahui). Fieldwork studies will also be conducted so that students get exposed to the performance and social contexts of Buddhist rituals in Hong Kong communities.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**BSTC2005. Buddhism in today’s world (6 credits)**

Buddhism was founded by Buddha Śākyamuni more than 2500 years ago. Since then, it has spread to various places and has become one of the major religions in the contemporary world. Buddhism has undergone a long historical development and its practices have experienced magnificent changes. This course is designed to explore the development of Buddhism in the contemporary world from various interpretive perspectives. Starting with an overview of major Buddhist doctrines and their history in a concise manner, it will look into a number of aspects of Buddhism as a living religion, including institutional developments, lay movements, ritual practices, and social relationships in various areas of today’s world. Furthermore, this course will explore recent developments of Chinese Buddhism in response to the needs of a modern world.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**BSTC2006. Buddhist psychology and mental cultivation (6 credits)**

In this course we will examine Buddhist discourses on the nature and operation of the mind. We will study basic Buddhist principles and diverse practices of mental cultivation based on ancient Buddhist texts and manuals that present unique perspectives on the psychological, sociological, and environmental problems that concern the individual, family, and society at large. The main topics covered in this course include psychology of dharmma and the theory of “dependent co-arising”, the relation between mind and body, sensory perception and obsession, intentional actions and human wellbeing, positive thinking and self-initiative, controlling emotions and mindfulness practice, selfless being and awakened mind.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**BSTC2008. Sanskrit language (6 credits)**

Sanskrit, being one of the most ancient languages known to humankind, is considered to be a key to understanding human civilization, in particular, the rich cultural, philosophical and religious heritage of India whose influence on our world continues to be felt. Students of history, history of science, comparative literature, general and historical linguistics, philosophy and religions will discover that a basic knowledge of the language greatly enriches their studies. For students who intend to specialize in different aspects of Buddhism, a reading knowledge of Sanskrit is essential. This course will give a comprehensive overview of the history, structure, and grammar of the language, covering topics such as scripts, phonetics, declensions, conjugations, and meters. Students are expected to be able to read and comprehend a simple Sanskrit text such as the Heart Sutra in devanāgarī script by the end of the course.

Assessment: 50% coursework, 50% examination.
**BSTC2009.  Japanese culture and thought: the Buddhist impact (6 credits)**

Buddhism was perhaps the first instance of cultural globalization particularly in Asia beginning from the 3rd century B.C.E. Through missionary zeal it spread far and wide beyond the shores of the Indian subcontinent touching and influencing the lives of many Asian peoples. Since its introduction from Korea to Japan in the 6th century C.E., Buddhism played a pivotal role in moulding the ways of thinking of the Japanese people. This course introduces Japanese culture from Buddhist perspectives especially in light of Buddhist global developments by making constant references to both shared and distinct features in the ways of thinking between Chinese and Japanese peoples, and examining how Japanese Buddhism and culture including Zen, the tea ceremony, and Japanese cuisine became a global phenomenon after the 19th century. The aim is to critically appraise this cultural diversity based on Buddhism and heighten awareness of other cultures through the understanding of Japanese culture and thought.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**BSTC2010.  Buddhist art and architecture (6 credits)**

Visual art has always played a key role in delivering the message of the Buddha throughout the long history of Buddhist expansion in Asia. During the process of its dissemination, various forms of visual art were created with symbolic meanings to facilitate, inform and enhance the practice of Buddhist ritual and meditation. When Buddhism was transmitted from India to China from the Eastern Han dynasty onwards, not only did it influence the religious beliefs of the people it encountered, it also had great impact on the development of Asian art, architecture and culture. This course will study and examine Buddhist art and architecture from historical and cultural perspectives and explore its origin, evolution and influence. The transmission of Buddhism as well as its transformations will also be studied through the investigation of the various art and cultural heritage treasures found along the Silk Road. A study of these archaeological artefacts, religious monuments, and art and sculpture from the area would reveal to us the fascinating story of the development of Buddhism from India to Central Asia, China, Southeast Asia and eventually to Korea and Japan.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**BSTC2013.  Buddhism through film (6 credits)**

Film is an important medium for reflecting and constructing not only contemporary cultural values, but also religious sentiments and stereotypes. In this course we will explore: a) how Buddhist doctrines, rituals, practitioners, and institutions are portrayed through films and documentaries produced in Asia and the West; and b) how Buddhist films may be used as forms of religious expression, practice and mission. During the course, students will acquire critical perspectives towards films and documentaries as multi-layered texts that use sound, visual narratives, and symbolic referents to portray religious subject-matters.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**BSTC2014.  Chinese Buddhist art (6 credits)**

The course introduces students to the rich world of Chinese Buddhist art from a historical and thematic perspective, through an examination of important Buddhist caves, paintings, sculptures, calligraphy, architecture, and renowned world cultural heritage sites in China. It will first introduce Indian Buddhist art, followed by a series of thematically designed topics and issues from different historical periods and regions. We will analyze how Buddhism influenced Chinese art and highlight some special features of
Chinese Buddhist art, such as Chan art, Huayan art and Pure Land art, which also influenced East Asian art generally. This course will help students achieve visual literacy and understand the evolution of Buddhist art and iconography as a result of social, political and philosophical changes. Students will be able to analyze and articulate how Buddhist art conveys the meaning and essence of Buddhist teachings. Assessment: 100% coursework.

**BSTC2015.  Tibetan language (6 credits)**

Tibetan is the language of Tibetan Buddhism comprising for the most part translations of Sanskrit works of Buddhism and indigenous compositions. The purpose of this course is to provide a working knowledge of classical Tibetan and a comprehensive overview of the history, structure, and grammar of the language, covering topics such as scripts, syntax, phonetics, and transliteration. The major emphasis will be on the study of selections of Buddhist texts preserved in the Tibetan Buddhist canon. At the end of the course the students will be able to read and understand simple Tibetan passages and sentences in the context of Buddhist philosophy. Students are not expected to have any prior knowledge of Tibetan for attending this course.

Assessment: 50% coursework and 50% examination.

**BSTC2016.  Pāli language (6 credits)**

Pāli is the language of Theravāda Buddhism commonly practiced in South and Southeast Asia. This Theravāda school of Buddhism is the only Buddhist school that has preserved a complete canon since the 3rd century B.C.E. This course is meant for those students who have no prior knowledge of the language and who wish to become familiar with Pāli expressions and idioms, and with the basic requirements to understand Pāli Buddhist texts. The main focus of the course is to introduce basic grammar together with exercises, including phonetics, parts of speech, nouns of different gender and their declensions, verbs and their conjugations, participles and their functions, syntax and classification of sentences. At the end of the course the students are expected to be able to read simple Pāli sentences and understand their religious and philosophical significance in context.

Assessment: 50% coursework and 50% examination.

**BSTC2017.  Buddhism and economics (6 credits)**

Living in a market economy where short-term profit and economic growth appear to be the ultimate goal, can the Buddhist teachings bridge the divide between our spiritual and material needs and reconcile the tension between doing good and doing well? In this course we will introduce some core Buddhist teachings and explore ways of achieving sustainability in individuals, society and the environment through the cultivation of morality and well-being. The efficacy of Buddhist perspectives on decision-making and their practical implications to our daily life will be discussed. Prior knowledge of Buddhism and Economics may be useful but it is not required for this course.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**Cross-listed Advanced Courses**

Please refer to the respective course descriptions of CHIN2253, FINE2087, FINE3015 and PHIL2800 above.