

ELECTIVE COURSE
(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

BSTC2002 Life and Buddhism (6 Credits) (Semester 2)

Lecturer: Dr. Guang Xing

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Office: C0405, Jockey Club Tower

Time for lecture: to be advised

Venue: to be advised

TA: to be advised

Email: to be advised

Tutorial Venue: to be advised

Course Description: (6 credits)

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) Short essay (40%) with 2,500 - 3,000 words (excluding bibliography). Please submit by xxxx, 23:59 (Those who have been found out using AI tool for writing your essays will asked to rewrite it and you will be given zero mark if the percentage is very high.)
- (2) Group Presentation (30%). See below for detail.
- (3) Mid Term Quiz (20%) (multiple choice, 30 mminutes) usually takes place after reading week.
- (4) Class Participation (10%)

Please submit the **final version** of your essay to turnitin at Moodles for **plagiarism check which is a**

university requirement. Please also attach the one page report showing similarities at the beginning of your essay.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarizing is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:

<http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

Group Presentation (Group Project)

1. Group Project will usually start from the fourth week in late September and continue to the end of the semester.
2. A group should consist of FIVE to SIX 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.
3. Each member has THREE minutes to present, and the members may present role play and speak interchangeably, or just speak for three minutes and follow by next presenter. The group should decide what to do, NOT the individual member.
4. Each group may have up to ONE minute to show audio/video clip. In order to facilitate scheduling, group leader is to notify your tutor no later than a week before presentation date.
5. 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.
6. 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.

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 and the aim of this course:

1. Good and correct understanding of the fundamental Buddhist teachings presented in the lectures of this course are essential,
2. Clear, logical and rational presentation and discussion of your ideas and thoughts in the chosen topic,

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 readings in Moodles or from the reference list at the end of each lecture. **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.
4. For those who wish to get A grades, please including these criteria: (1) well documented argumentation supported by Buddhist scriptures and also scholars' research, (2) sound and critical analysis of Buddhist concepts and ideas in relation to human life and problems, (3) original idea if you have although this is NOT required.

Here is the Faculty Grade Expectations. http://arts.hku.hk/grade_expectations.pdf

Course Outline (tentative):

Lecture 01, January

Topic: The Buddhist attitude toward life

Discussion Topics: Buddhist attitude towards life

Reading: Bodhi Bhikkhu. 2005. Introduction to *In the Buddha's Words*.

Lecture 02, January

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*.

Lecture 03, February.

Topic: Buddhist teaching of Dependent Arising

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

Reading: Chapter 3 "Dependent Arising" in Karunadasa's *Early Buddhist Teachings*.

Lecture 04, February.

Topic: Buddhist analysis of Human life:

Discussion Topics: five aggregates, four nutriments, three characteristics of individual existence.

Reading: Chapter 3 "Dharma" in *Introducing Buddhism*.

Chinese New Year Holidays: Feb. 17-23, 2026.

Lecture 05, February .

Topic: Free Will and Moral Responsibility in Buddhism:

Discussion Topics: free will and moral responsibility.

Reading: K. N. Jayatilleke. *Ethics in Buddhist Perspective*. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, online edition 2008.

Lecture 06, March

Topic: Buddhist analysis of human behaviours and their consequences:

Discussion Topics: karma and rebirth

Reading: *Introducing Buddhism*, chapter 1: Karma and cosmology. Chapter 5 “The Buddhist Cosmo The Trice Thousand World” in Gethin’s *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

Reading Week: March 9-14, 2026

Lecture 07, March .

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*.

Lecture 08, March .

Topic: Buddhist concepts of happiness:

Discussion Topics: *nirvana* -- nibbana parama sukha

Chapter IV: “The Happiness Visible in This Present Life” 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*.

Lecture 09, March .

Topic: Buddhist ways to achieve happiness: (I)

Discussion Topics: the noble eightfold path

Reading: Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering*. Chapter 7: “The Buddhist Path” in Gethin’s *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

Lecture 10, April .

Topic: Buddhist ways to achieve happiness: (II)

Discussion Topics: Buddhist meditation.

Chapter 7: “The Buddhist Path” in Gethin’s *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

Lecture 11, April.

Topic: Buddhist moral teaching,

Discussion Topics: criteria for judging good and bad,

Reading: Peter Harvey, “Criteria for Judging the Unwholesomeness of Actions in the Texts of Theravāda Buddhism.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 2 1995.

Lecture 12, April.

Topic: Buddhist values: love and compassion,

Discussion Topics: Five precepts, The Four Sublime States,

Reading: Buddhārakkhita. *Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love*. The Wheel Publication No. 365/366, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society 1989.

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. Is there free will in Buddhism? Discuss.
6. Discuss the moral responsibility in light of the concept of no-soul or *Anatta*.
7. No soul or *Anatta* is a characteristic of Buddhism as a religion. Discuss.
8. Is the Buddhist concept of karma a determinism?
9. Is Buddhist concept of karma an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?
10. "Buddhism is pessimistic." Discuss in the light of Buddhist Teaching of suffering.
11. Why Buddhism starts with *Dukkha* or suffering? Discuss.
12. Discuss the Buddhist concept of Happiness.
13. "Buddhism teaches annihilation." Discuss in the light of Buddhist concept of *Nirvana*.
14. Why the noble eightfold path is described as transcending the two extremes of austerities and sensual indulgence?
15. Discuss the Buddhist concept of Nirvana.
16. Discuss the Buddhist way of life in light of the noble eightfold path.
17. How the Buddhist meditation related to a better life?
18. Discuss the importance of mindfulness in our life.
19. Discuss the Buddhist attitude towards death. (Please do not include attitude towards physical body and funeral ceremony)
20. Discuss the importance of five precepts in our life.
21. Buddhism is rational. Discuss.
22. 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

- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2005. *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. Boston: Wisdom Publication. [294.3823 I351 B66](#)
- Haybron, Dan. 2013. *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press. [152.42 H41](#)
- Gethin, R. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press. [294.3 G394f](#)
Ebook available.
- Guang Xing, 2005. "Filial Piety in Early Buddhism" in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 12, 82-106. <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/2010/04/27/filial-piety-in-early-buddhism/>
- Jayatilke, K. N. *Ethics in Buddhist Perspective*. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, online edition 2008. https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh175_Jayatilke_Ethics-in-Buddhist-Perspective.pdf
- Karunadasa, Y. 2021. *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*. Chinese and English Bilingual Version. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University

of Hong Kong. Can be purchased from the Centre of Buddhist Studies.

Keown, Damien. 2021. *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Laumakis, Stephen J. 2008. *Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy*. England: Cambridge University Press. [181.043 L375 i61](#)

Prebish, Charles S. and Damien Keown, ed. 2006. *Introducing Buddhism*. New York; London: Routledge. [LB 294.3 P922 i61](#) The book is available from HKU Bookstore for purchase.

Emmanuel, Steven M. (editor) 2013. *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Wiley online library.

Ebook library. Access through HKU library electronic resources. Good Book with many issues introduced and discussed.

Further Reading

Abe, Masao. "The Meaning of Life in Buddhism." In *The Meaning of Life in the World Religions*.

Edited by Joseph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000. [201 M48](#)

Anderson, Carol S. *Pain and its ending: the four noble truths in the Theravada Buddhist canon*. Surrey, England: Curzon, c1999. [294.391 A54](#)

Dockett, Kathleen H. G., Rita Dudley-Grant, C. Peter Bankart, (ed.) *Psychology and Buddhism: from individual to global community*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, c2003. [294.3375 P97 D63](#)

Guang Xing. 2022. *Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism*. New York and London: Peter Lang.

Gunaratna, V.F. *Buddhist Reflections on Death*. The Wheel Publication No. 102/103, 1982 Buddhist Publication Society. http://www.bps.lk/wheels_library/wh_102_103.html

Guruge, Ananda W. P. "Humanistic Elements in Early Buddhism and the 'Theravada Tradition'" *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism*, V. 1 (2000), pp. 85-122.
<http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-JHB/jhb94216.htm>

Hamilton, Sue. 2000. *Early Buddhism: a new approach: the I of the beholder*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon. [294.34209 H221](#)

Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Keown, Damien. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001, c1992. [294.35 K3](#)

Keown, Damien, Charles S. Prebish and Wayne R. Husted., (ed.) *Buddhism and human rights*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998. Main L [342.0852 B9](#) Law L [KC200 B9](#)

Keown, Damien. (ed.) *Contemporary Buddhist ethics*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, c2000. [294.35 C76](#) [BJ1289 .C66 2000](#)

Lau Joe, **Critical Thinking**: <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/> Very good resources for teaching and learning.

Lopez, Donald S. (edited) *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. [294.307 C9](#)

Ñanamoli Thera edited. The Buddha's Words on Kamma: Four Discourses of the Buddha from the Majjhima Nikaya. *The Wheel* Publication No. 248/249, Kandy: [Buddhist Publication Society](#), 1993. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nanamoli/wheel248.html>

Nyanaponika Thera, "The Four Sublime States: Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity." *The Wheel* Publication No. 6, Buddhist Publication Society, 1993.

- Nyanaponika Thera, *Kamma and its Fruit*, Selected Essays. *The Wheel* No. 413, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2003.
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/kammafruit.html>
- Padmasiri, De Silva, 2014. *An introduction to Buddhist psychology and Counselling Pathways of Mindfulness-based Therapies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. **EBook**
- Padmasiri, De Silva, 1996. "Suicide and Emotional Ambivalence: An Early Buddhist Perspective," in Frank J. Hoffman and Deegalle Mahinda edited *Pali Buddhism*. London: Curzon Press, 117-132.
- Pietz, William. "Person", in Donald S. Lopez edited *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, 188-210.
- Segall, Seth Robert., (ed) *Encountering Buddhism: Western psychology and Buddhist teachings*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. [\[electronic resource\]](#)
- Smith, F. Harold. 2008. *The Buddhist way of life: its philosophy and history*. London : Routledge. [294.3 S647](#)
- Stone, Jacqueline, "Death" in Donald S. Lopez edited *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, 56-76.
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *The Healing Power of the Precepts*.
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/precepts.html>
- Watts, Alan. 2006. *Eastern wisdom, modern life: collected talks, 1960-1969*. Novato, Calif.: New World Library: Distributed by Publishers Group West, c2006. [294.3 W34](#)

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.

A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms. Edited by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous. You can download for free from <http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/soothill/>

Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism. Free. Edited by Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism in Japan. <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/toc/>

Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism. Edited by Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. This Dictionary needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.

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

Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines, edited by Nyanatiloka. Free. You can either download it from http://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/dic_idx.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.

Encyclopedia of Religion. Lindsay Jones, Ed. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 10735 pp. 15 vols. This *Encyclopedia* needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.

Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Donald M. Borchert, Ed. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006. This *Encyclopedia* needs subscription, so use it through HKU Electronic Recourses.

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Free, it contains a large number of papers in Buddhist and Confucian studies. <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/>

3) Journals

Journal of Happiness Studies. Please logon to HKU library Electronic Resources and find this journal. <http://link.springer.com.eproxy2.lib.hku.hk/journal/10902>

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/>

Journal of Buddhist Ethics. Free. This is a web based academic journal for free distribution. Web address: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/category/volume-22-2015/>

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> 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>

Japanese Journal of Religious Studies. Free academic journal dedicated to Japanese religions including Buddhism. [http://www.ic.nanzan-](http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/jjrs_cumulative_list.htm)

[u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/jjrs_cumulative_list.htm](http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/jjrs_cumulative_list.htm)

Asia Major. Academic Journal dedicated for the Asian study. All past papers are freely downloadable. <http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~asiamajor/>

Journal Asiatique. Free. This academic journal is published in Paris for Asian studies.

<http://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal.php&code=JA>

Buddhist Studies Review. Published twice a year by the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, started form 1984. Both printed and electronic versions are available from HKU Library, the electronic version is gradually uploaded to the web. Now the Journal is free for download from 1983-2005.

<http://www.ukabs.org.uk/ukabs/resources/journal-archives/buddhist-studies-review-vols-1-22/>

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

4) Website Recourses

Accesstoinsight. 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 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.

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/>

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

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>. This website includes volumes 1-55 & 85 of *Taisho Edition of Chinese Tripitaka*.