

Undergraduate Course offered by Centre of Buddhist Studies in 2024–25

ELECTIVE COURSE
(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

BSTC2050 Buddhism and Ecology: integrating thought with action

Lecturer	Dr. Dipen Barua
Office	Rm 4.12, 4/F, Centre of Buddhist Studies, The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus
Mob./ Office Tel.	
E-mail address	dipen@hku.hk
Offering Semester	Semester II
Schedule	Every Monday from 3:30 pm to 5:20 pm
Class Venue	CPD-LG.07

Course Description

The adoption of pre-ecological thinking and engagement in environmental action are of paramount importance for the future of the planet and humanity. Within the context of Buddhism, there exists a profound emphasis on the interconnectedness of all entities and their inseparable connection to the natural world. Buddhism acknowledges the significance of embracing the environment and recognizes the karmic consequences of human actions.

This course aims to delve into the foundational principles of ecological thought within Buddhism. It will explore the ethical and doctrinal considerations of Buddhism regarding ecological issues, as well as examine perspectives on the interplay between humanity and nature. Furthermore, the course will scrutinize Buddhist environmental thought and activism, focusing on contemporary trends within the Buddhist community and their endeavors in addressing environmental challenges such as climate change, renewable energy, consumerism, deforestation, and education.

By integrating Buddhist philosophy and action into ecological consciousness, students will not only engage in critical analysis of Buddhism's role in fostering pro-ecological thinking and action, but they will also evaluate how these principles can be applied to foster both individual and communal activism that advances ecological well-being.

Course Objectives

This course endeavors to investigate the intricate connections between Buddhist teachings and the ethical responsibilities we bear towards the environment. Its primary objective is to furnish students with a comprehensive comprehension of how Buddhist doctrines, encompassing compassion, ethical conduct, and dependent co-arising, can facilitate the development of a balanced and enduring rapport with the natural world. Moreover, the course will offer pragmatic approaches for integrating Buddhist teachings with environmental conservation efforts, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to

- gain a deep understating of Buddhist teachings related to ecology;
- integrate Buddhist teachings into thought and action to promote a sustainable environment;
- engage with others and establish communities around environmental issues;
- explore multiple cultural perspectives on the environment with a focus on the importance of understanding alternative ways of engaging with nature; and
- critically evaluate the role of Buddhist thinkers and develop a system thinking framework to understand how social and ecological systems interact.

Teaching and Learning Method

Lectures, viewings, and class discussions

Assessment and Assessment Methods

100% coursework. Coursework consists of

- 10% - Class participation,
 - 20% - Mid-term quiz,
 - 25% - Group presentation (five minutes of video recording of each group member), and
 - 45% - Final essay (Word limit: 2300–2500 [excluding bibliography]).
- (see detailed clarification about the assessment and assessment methods after the lecture outline)

Lecture Outline

Lecture	Date	Contents
Lecture 1	20 Jan 2025	<p>Foundations of Buddhist Ecology: Religious and Philosophical Perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This lecture provides an introductory overview of the course and explore the foundational principles of Buddhist ecology from both religious and philosophical standpoints.
Lecture 2	27 Jan 2025	<p>Exploring the Intersection of Ecological Science and Buddhist Perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This lecture delves into the multifaceted relationship between ecological science and Buddhist perspectives, focusing on the contemporary environmental challenges posed by the Anthropocene era.
Lecture 3	10 Feb 2025	<p>Buddhism and Ecology through the Lens of the Theravada Tradition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This lecture delves into the evolving ecological consciousness within the South and Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions.
Lecture 4	17 Feb 2025	<p>The Evolution of Buddhist Ecology: Eco-Monks and the Practice of Tree Ordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This lecture explores the profound environmental challenges arising from rampant deforestation in Cambodia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. We will delve into the innovative response of eco-monks, who introduced the concept of tree ordination as a means of safeguarding forests.

Lecture 5	24 Feb 2025	Buddhism and Ecology from a Mahayana Buddhist Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture delves into the ecological issues from the standpoint of Mahayana Buddhism.
Lecture 6	3 Mar 2025	Japanese Buddhist Perspectives on Nature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture explores the environmental ethics and perspectives of Japanese Buddhists, with a particular focus on their reverence for nature.
No Class	10 Mar 2025	Reading Week
Lecture 7	17 Mar 2025	Perspectives on Nature in Tibetan Buddhist Traditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture explores the perspectives on nature within Tibetan Buddhist traditions, highlighting their recognition of the profound relationship between humanity and the physical environment.
Lecture 8	24 Mar 2025	Engaged Buddhism and Ecology: The Concept of Inter-Being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture explores the ecological perspectives of contemporary Engaged Buddhism, highlighting the recognition of the intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems. Mid-term quiz
Lecture 9	31 Mar 2025	Buddhism and Ecology: Perspectives from Western Buddhism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture explores the intersection of Buddhism and ecology from the perspective of Western Buddhism. It delves into academic studies conducted in the West on Buddhist ecology and examines the involvement of Western Buddhist organizations in environmental activism and conservation efforts.
Lecture 10	7 Apr 2025	Ecofeminist Views on Buddhist Ecology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture delves into the ecofeminist interpretation of Buddhist ecology, exploring the intersection between ecofeminism and Buddhism. Ecofeminism emphasizes the interconnectedness between women and nature, and this perspective provides a unique lens through which to examine Buddhist responses to ecological challenges.
Lecture 11	14 Apr 2025	Buddhist Practices and Ecological Worldviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture focuses on Buddhist practices that promote ecological worldviews, highlighting their relevance in addressing environmental challenges.
Lecture 12	28 Apr 2025	Group Discussion and Reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This lecture constitutes group discussion by allowing students the opportunity to express their thoughts and observations on the integration of Buddhism and ecology.

Notes: Lecture notes and supplementary materials will be uploaded to Moodle for each lecture throughout the semester.

Class Participation

Participation grade will be determined by attendance, participation in class discussions, questions during the lectures, and sincere interest in the subject matter.

Mid-term Quiz

The quiz will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and short-answer questions. For the multiple choice, there will be questions and several possible answers, and students will choose the correct one. In the true/false format, different ideas will be presented in true/false statements, and the students will choose which is which. And, for the short-answer questions, students will be asked to provide short written answers to the questions.

Group Presentation

Students may choose one of the following topics for group presentation:

- **Early Buddhist perspective on nature:** emphasize the interconnection and importance of all things in the context of the relationship between Buddhism and ecology.
- **Buddhism and animals:** emphasize the value of living with nature.
- **The dependent co-arising and ecology:** address the interdependence of all phenomena, i.e., how everything arises and exists in a dependent manner, and how this principle is equally applied to ecology.
- **Buddhist non-violence and nature:** explain how Buddhist doctrines of non-violence, compassion, and cooperation can contribute to the direction of ecological awareness.
- **The Bodhisattva path and ecology:** discuss why the Bodhisattva path can potentially be viewed as an extension of compassionate intention toward the natural world.
- **Buddhism and Anthropocentrism:** emphasize how Buddhism provides an alternative perspective to anthropocentrism by addressing the importance of compassion and respect for the natural world.
- **Buddhist environmental knowledge in Southeast Asia:** show how Buddhist teachings encourage people to live in harmony with nature in Thailand or Cambodia.
- **Ecology monks:** discuss how Buddhist ecology monks are committed to environmental conservation and well-being.
- **Tree ordination:** discuss how and why tree ordination rituals and practices originated in South and Southeast Asian Buddhist countries.
- **Right of trees:** explain how trees are recognized as living things and respected in Buddhism for their life-sustaining abilities.
- **Zen Buddhist ecology:** explain why lands, mountains, and rivers are important in Zen Buddhism.
- **Dōgen and deep ecology:** discuss Dōgen's environmental teachings and how they have impacted Zen Buddhist environmentalists.
- **Buddhism and eco-feminism:** explain how ecofeminism and Buddhist perspectives can contribute to a more compassionate attitude and better environmental protection.
- **Earth Sangha:** discuss Earth Sangha's approach to ecological restoration.
- **Thich Nhat Hanh's Bells of Mindfulness:** Discuss Thich Nhat Hanh's Bells of Mindfulness in the context of environmental protection.
- **Green Buddhism:** explain why Buddhism can be called "Green Buddhism."
- **Eco-Dharma:** clarify the concept of "Eco-Dharma" based on David R. Loy's book *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*.
- **"Home practice, wild practice":** explain what "home practice, wild practice" implies in the *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*.
- **Gary Snyder's Buddhist perspective on the environment:** explain why Gary Snyder thinks it is important to reconnect humans with the natural world.

- **“Joanna Macy and the Great Turning”**: explain Joanna Macy’s understanding of “the Great Turning”.

The group is also free to come up with its own presentation topic. However, the group should consult the course teacher for approval.

Group Formation

A group will consist of THREE to FOUR students who will collaborate as a team on a single project on a topic of their choice. Each group should have a group leader who is responsible for contacting the course teacher as soon as the group is formed. A form to be uploaded to Moodle in which students can input their name, UID, email address, and topic of choice. The complete form should be sent to the teacher by the group leader.

Preparation of Video Recording

Each member will present for five minutes, and they may alternate between role playing and presenting, or they may just talk for five minutes and be followed by the next presenter. Each group has one minute to show an audio or video clip during its presentation.

The group should record as a video its PowerPoint presentation. It is important to plan the recording process with group members for a smooth and unified presentation. Each member will only have five minutes for presentation, including his/her introduction. A four-member group will have only 20 minutes to present their work, including any audio or video showing during the presentation.

Video recording submission

The video should be sent to the course teacher by email using a file-sharing platform. Grades and comments will be sent to the group leader shortly after the submission or on the due date of feedback.

Grading Criteria for Group Presentation

Presentation assessment consists of content (25%), delivery (25%), structure (25%), and teamwork (25%). For an excellent grade, presentations should be: (a) comprehensive, (b) well-researched in the use of material, (c) display clear understanding of Buddhist teachings related to the ecology, (d) able to clarify major concepts, (e) clearly and timely presented, (f) engaging with the audience, (g) confident with the subject, (h) logically organized.

Final Essay

Students may choose one of the following subjects for this essay:

- Critically evaluate a documentary, film, discussion, or interview that highlights the relationship between Buddhism and the environment.
- Choose a book about Buddhism and ecology and review it using your own understanding of the subject.
- Evaluate the contributions of a renowned Buddhist environmental activist, such as Joanna Macy, Sulak Sivaraksa, Ken Kraft, or Thich Nhat Hanh, to the ecological movement.

- Go to a Buddhist sanctuary, park, or woodland and spend some time exploring the various features of nature and write an essay on the plants, animals, and ecosystems you encounter. Consider how these ideas relate to the Buddhist teachings on dependent co-arising and the necessity of living in harmony with nature.
- Meet with local environmentalists or Buddhists. Interview with them to learn about their perspectives on Buddhism and the environment and write an essay with personal thoughts.

Students are also free to choose their own topics as long as it is relevant to Buddhism and ecology. However, students should choose topics that stimulates their interest and allow them to delve deeper into the subject. The essay should explore the primary themes and teachings of Buddhism in relation to ecological challenges.

Students may compare and contrast Buddhist ideas on ecology and provide case studies or examples of how contemporary Buddhist teachings can be applied to address ecological challenges.

Essays should be written in a clear and concise manner, with well-structured exploration of thoughts that are cohesively presented. Students must properly cite the sources for this essay and include a bibliography only of sources cited in the essay. There must be a minimum of five citations. Students may use any academic reference style consistently.

Grading Criteria for Essay

For an excellent grade, the essay should be extensively researched and demonstrate the Buddhist teachings in addressing ecological challenges. Students must pay careful attention to the essay's logical framework, write a strong introduction, offer precise examples and facts, and employ academic language to express their feelings. There should be a summary or conclusion with key findings and arguments while also making insightful and creative recommendations for individual and social activities that can promote ecological well-being. Students should also show creativity and originality in expressing concepts and consider how the course could impact their future decisions and activities with regard to ecological issues.

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Videos:

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