



PUBLIC LECTURE

# Madhyamaka Philosophy of Mind: Dissolving the Hard Problems of Consciousness



MIND |

CONSCIOUSNESS

TIME & VENUE

4 FEB 2025  
7 - 9 PM  
CPD 2.58

2/F, The Jockey Club Tower  
Centennial Campus, HKU

## LECTURE ABSTRACT

The “hard problem of consciousness” and the “explanatory gap” remain central challenges in the scientific study of consciousness, despite recent advances in cognitive science and neuroscience. This paper explores how the four core principles of Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy—impermanence (*anityā*), nonself (*anātman*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpadā*)—can help reframe these issues and bridge the divide between first-person phenomenology and third-person explanation. By critically examining the dualistic assumptions underlying the notion of phenomenal experience as involving irreducible, non-physical qualia, and drawing on Madhyamaka arguments against the inherent existence of persons and phenomena, the paper proposes an alternative “middle way” between reductive physicalism and Cartesian dualism.

The paper argues that integrating Madhyamaka philosophical insights with the empirical methods of embodied and enactive cognitive science can lead to a new paradigm in the scientific study of consciousness, one that bridges first-person and third-person perspectives without reducing one to the other. While challenges remain in articulating and applying this integral view, the dialogue between Madhyamaka philosophy and contemporary debates in the science of consciousness can shed fresh light on the puzzles of subjectivity and open up new avenues for theoretical and empirical investigation.

## ABOUT THE SPEAKER



**Dr. Sonam Thakchoe**

Dr. Sonam Thakchoe, a Senior Philosophy Lecturer at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) since 2003, is a leading cross-cultural philosopher in Australia. His expertise in Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, and phenomenology of mindfulness is evident in his eight books and numerous peer-reviewed articles published by prestigious institutions. Dr. Thakchoe's unique perspective, stemming from his traditional Indo-Tibetan philosophical training, fluency in Asian languages, and deep understanding of Western philosophy, enables him to bridge Eastern and Western philosophical traditions effectively. His forthcoming book with Jay L. Garfield, *By the Light of the Moon: Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka*, is set to be published by Oxford University Press in early 2025, further cementing his position as a prominent scholar in the field.



## REGISTRATION & DETAILS

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