

Academic Year 2025-26

Semester 2

HKU

BSTC 2006 Buddhist Psychology and Mental Cultivation

(6 Credits)

(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Course Teacher:

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Class Day and Time: Wednesday 09:00 am – 10:50 am

Class Venue: WLGH [= Wang Gungwu Lecture Hall at Graduate House]

Class Days: (1) Jan 21, (2) Jan 28,
(3) Feb 04, (4) Feb 11, (5) Feb 25,
(6) Mar 04, (7) Mar 18, (8) Mar 25,
(9) Apr 1, (10) Apr 8, (11) Apr 15, (12) Apr 22, (13) Apr 29 [reserved for any makeup class]

[No tutorial classes]

Course Description

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 individual, family, and society at large and world. The main topics covered in this course include psychology of dhamma and the theory of “dependent co-arising”, 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.

Course Objectives

The course aims at training the students to:

- Learn the Buddha’s basic teachings on mind and its operation accurately while developing an enquiring mind within oneself
- Learn to live a positive life while appreciating one’s own life and the lives of others
- Look at the life and the world in a novel way “going against the currents” while developing interests in a conflict-free, stress-free, simple lifestyle
- Identify the Buddha’s psychological terms and concepts while relating them to daily life.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students are expected to develop the ability to:

- Explain the Buddhist teachings on the nature and operation of the mind
- Identify basic Buddhist psychological terms and concepts and relate them to understand one’s own life and the lives of others

- Explain the reason for the existence of diverse Buddhist meditation techniques and practices as to cater to different personality types
- Relate Buddhist ideas and principles in understanding and finding perpetual solutions to complex psychological, social, political and environmental issues in the modern world
- Develop an appreciative and positive attitude towards one's life, family, society, and the world.

Course Outline: Topic and Discussion Questions

| Class 1 21 January 2026 | Dhamma and Psychology | Syllabus discussion Lecture |
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| Introduction to Key Concepts | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is psychology? Is the Buddha's teaching a form of psychology? What is right view? | | |
| Deep Dive into Right View | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is the right view in the pursuit of well-being and happiness of our own and others? • What are the obstacles for developing right view? Why? | | |
| Application and Practical Integration | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the knowledge of the teaching make us better people? How? Can the arising of suffering and the cessation of suffering be understood and experienced through externally driven objective methods? | | |
| Methodological Approaches | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should we study the Buddhist scriptures? What should be the method of study? | | |
| Class 2 28 January 2026 | Theory of Dependent Co-arising | Lecture Class activity |
| Introduction to Dependent Co-Arising | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is unique about the Buddha's causation theory of Dependent Co-arising? | | |
| Understanding and Application in Psychology | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the significance of this theory for understanding psychological phenomena? | | |
| Detailed Analysis of the Theory | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the standard formulation of Dependent Co-arising present the arising of our present suffering? How does it present the possibility that this arising of suffering could be stopped? | | |
| Class 3 04 February 2026 | Human Effort and Self-Initiative in the Pursuit of Life Goals | Lecture Class activity |
| Fundamental Concepts | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is intention? Why is intention a kamma? | | |
| Relationship Between Thought, Action, and Results | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can mere thinking take us to our desired goals? | | |
| Dynamics of Effort and Initiative | | |

- What is the role of human effort and self-initiative in achieving our desired goals

Understanding Cause and Effect

- What is the nature of the correlation between action and its result?

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| Class 4 11 February 2026 | Problem of 'My Self' | Lecture Class activity |
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Conceptual Distinctions

- How does self differ from 'my self'? Why do we cling to a belief in self rather than to a self?

Perception and Identity

- Who can see 'my self' as 'my self'? What makes all experiences 'personal experiences'? Who is a 'person'?

The illusion and Its Psychological Impact

- How does conceit "I am" become the base for the belief in self? How does the Buddha's theory of not-self differ from the no-self theory of rationalism or materialism?

Psychological and Existential Implications

- Why is self an ambiguity? How does this ambiguity cause anxiety and worry?

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| Class 5 25 February 2026 | Psychological Analysis of Social Conflicts | Lecture Class activity |
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Foundations of Conflict

- What are the psychological roots of conflict? How do the mental tendencies such as lust, greed, hate, jealousy, and stinginess function as causes of mental agitation?

Progression of Conflict

- How does mental agitation develop into verbal dispute and violent conflict?

Understanding and Analyzing Conflict

- What does it mean to understand a conflict fully? What are the Buddhist methods of understanding a conflict fully?

Resolution Strategies

- What are the models of conflict resolution presented in the Buddha's teaching? Are these models appropriate for resolving conflicts in today's world?

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| Class 6 04 March 2026 | Problem of Suicide | Lecture Quiz 1 |
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Philosophical Foundations

- In what sense our very being/existence is being 'I' or being 'my self'? What is the connection between craving for 'being' and craving for 'unbeing'?

Craving and Its Implications

- Can the worldly person stop craving for 'unbeing' by intensifying sensual pleasure in the present 'being'?

Understanding Suicide

- Why do people commit suicide?

Consequences of Seeking ‘Unbeing’

- How does ‘unbeing’ re-create ‘being’? Why is ‘unbeing’ a furthering of suffering, rather than an escape from suffering?

Resolution Through Cessation

- What is ‘cessation of being’? How does it resolve the conflict between ‘being’ and ‘unbeing’?

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| Class 7 18 March 2026 | Psychological Analysis of Human Experience | Lecture |
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Defining Experience

- What do we mean by ‘experience’?

Components of Experience

- What do we experience? Is it mind and matter or is it name-and-matter (nāma-rūpa)?

Mechanisms of Experience

- What is the role of consciousness in experience? What are the physical and psychological factors involved in an experience?

Impact of Experience

- Why does experience produce mental unpleasant feelings?

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| Class 8 25 March 2026 | Sensory Perception and Obsession | Lecture Class activity |
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Exploration of ‘I’ and ‘My World’

- How do we experience ‘my world’? How do we know ‘I exist’? Can ‘I exist’ without being aware of a world?

Order and Nature of Experience

- In my experience, what do I experience first, being conscious of an ‘I’ or being conscious of the things present around me? Can the reflexive experience take place without an ‘I’?

Concept of ‘I’ as a Parasite

- Why is ‘I’ considered to be a parasite in the structure of reflexive experience? How could this parasite be removed? Once removed, how does the structure of reflexive experience work?

Sensory Perception Leading to Obsession and Suffering

- Why does sense experience lead to obsession and suffering? How could it be stopped?

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| Class 9 1 April 2026 | Controlling Emotions and Dealing with Defilements | Lecture Class activity |
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Understanding Defilements

- What are defilements?

Characteristics of Defilements

- Why do they appear in clusters and groups?

Motives and Conduct

- What is the relationship between motives and conduct?

Impact of Conduct on Character and Destiny

- How does one's conduct define one's present character and future destiny?

Methods to Curb Defilements

- What are the methods for curbing defilements? Why are there many methods?

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| Class 10 8 April 2026 | Mindfulness Practice and Working with Memory | Lecture Class activity |
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Understanding Reflection and Reflexion

- What is the difference between reflection and reflexion?

Role of Right Mindfulness

- Why does the Buddha's teaching promote the practice of right mindfulness?

Approaches to Right Mindfulness

- What are the four approaches to the setting up of right mindfulness?

Mindfulness and Memory

- What is the connection between mindfulness and memory? How does mindfulness help remember things as they really are?

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| Class 11 15 April 2026 | Personality Types and Meditation Techniques | Lecture Quiz 2 |
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Classification of Personality Types

- Why does the Buddha's teaching classify personality/character types into six?

Identification of Personality Types

- How can we identify each personality type?

Meditation and Personality Types

- What is the connection between the meditation subjects and the personality types?

Broader Applications of Personality Type Identification

- Is there any other use of identifying personality types? Are they useful for human resource management?

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| Class 12 22 April 2026 | Positive Institutions and Positive Strengths | Lecture |
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Understanding Positive Institutions

- What are the positive institutions that support our growth as individuals and social beings?

Impact of Key Institutions

- How do family, democracy, and free inquiry provide positive emotions and strengths to our growth as human beings?

Comparing Family and Monastic Life

- Can the family life of the laity and the monastic life of the Sangha be understood as positive institutions?

Function of Institutions in Promoting Duty and Rights

- How do these institutions function to enrich our positive strengths by guiding individuals to fulfill their duties towards each other and to enjoy full human rights in conformity with the Dhamma?

Knowledge and Skills

Through the course assignments, the Buddhist Studies programme expects students not only learn the subject matter but also acquire some transferable skills such as:

- Write concisely and with clarity
- Effectively structure and communicate ideas
- Explore and assess a variety of sources for research purposes
- Make judgements involving the validity and cogency of arguments
- Develop self-reflexivity.

Assessment Outline

Coursework Breakdown

The entire course evaluation comprises 100% coursework, distributed as follows to assess various competencies:

| Assessment Tasks | Weighting | Due Date | Key Grading Criteria |
|--|-----------|----------|--|
| 1. Class Participation and Activities | 20% | Ongoing | Attendance, Participation, Quality of Contribution |
| 2. Quiz 1 | 10% | March 04 | Accuracy, Understanding |
| 3. Quiz 2 | 15% | April 15 | Accuracy, Understanding |
| 4. Mind-Map on a Buddhist Concept and Its Modern Relevance | 25% | April 08 | Creativity, Clarity and Organization, Accuracy, Relevance |
| 5. Reflective Writing | 30% | April 30 | Creativity, Clarity and Organization, Accuracy, Depth of Reflection, Application |

Detailed Assessment Descriptions with Grading Criteria

1. Class Activities (20%)

Objective:

To assess active participation, consistent attendance, and engagement in class discussions and activities.

Grading Criteria:

- **Attendance (5%):** Regular attendance is mandatory (via HKU Attendance App). Absences must be justified with valid reasons and documented proof.
- **Participation (10%):** Active engagement in class activities.

- **Quality of Contribution (5%):** Depth and relevance of contributions.

Grade Breakdown:

- **A+/A/A- (18-20 points):** Consistent attendance and active engagement in class activities.
- **B+/B/B- (15-17 points):** Regular attendance and engagement.
- **C+/C/C- (12-14 points):** Occasional participation, but engagement is inconsistent.
- **D+/D (10-11 points):** Minimal participation and engagement.

- Related to each class students undertake an individual and/or group activity based on the weekly lecture, lecture notes, specific terminology, or an assigned reading.
- Focus on effort and thoughtfulness, not perfection.
- No make-up for missed activities unless for documented medical reasons unless accompanied by a valid medical certificate.
- No emails regarding missed activities will be replied to unless accompanied by a valid medical certificate.
- Individual and group work quality is assessed based on the submitted written answer.

A Note on Grading In-Class Activities: The 'Quality of Engagement' score (5%) is a holistic assessment of your demonstrated effort and critical thinking throughout the term. It is **not** based on the factual accuracy of responses in low-stakes activities like Menti activities or worksheets. A wrong answer on a Menti quiz will not lower your 'Quality' score; however, consistently providing thoughtful, complete answers on worksheets and actively contributing to discussions will raise it."

2. Quizzes (25%) (Open Book)

- All quizzes are open-book and administered in paper format.
- Permitted materials include printed or digital lecture notes (e.g., on personal devices such as tablets or laptops).
- Use of AI tools, communication with others, or any unauthorized aids is strictly prohibited and will result in disqualification.

Quiz 1 (10%)

Objective:

To test the ability to recall and define basic concepts from lectures 1 to 5.

Date: March 04, 2026

Format: Multiple-choice, short-answer, and definition-based questions.

Grading Criteria:

- **Accuracy (5%):** Correct answers to factual questions.
- **Understanding (5%):** Ability to explain key concepts in own words.

Grade Breakdown:

- **A+/A/A- (9-10 points):** High accuracy and clear understanding of concepts.

- **B+/B/B- (7-8 points):** Mostly accurate answers with some minor errors.
- **C+/C/C- (5-6 points):** Basic understanding but with significant errors.
- **D+/D (4 points):** Limited understanding and frequent errors.
- Permitted materials include printed or digital lecture notes only (e.g., on personal devices such as tablets or laptops).
- Use of AI tools, communication with others, or any unauthorized aids is strictly prohibited and will result in disqualification.

Quiz 2 (15%)

Objective:

To test the ability to recall and define basic concepts from lectures 6 to 10.

Date: April 15, 2026

Format: Multiple-choice, short-answer, and definition-based questions.

Grading Criteria:

- **Accuracy (7%):** Correct answers to factual questions.
- **Understanding (8%):** Ability to explain key concepts in own words.

Grade Breakdown:

- **A+/A/A- (9-10 points):** High accuracy and clear understanding of concepts.
- **B+/B/B- (7-8 points):** Mostly accurate answers with some minor errors.
- **C+/C/C- (5-6 points):** Basic understanding but with significant errors.
- **D+/D (4 points):** Limited understanding and frequent errors.
- Permitted materials include printed or digital lecture notes only (e.g., on personal devices such as tablets or laptops).
- Use of AI tools, communication with others, or any unauthorized aids is strictly prohibited and will result in disqualification.

3. Mind-Map on a Buddhist Concept and Its Modern Relevance (25%)

Objective:

To visually represent a Buddhist concept and demonstrate its relevance to modern life.

Due Date: April 08, 2026

Format: A single-page mind-map with clear connections between the concept and its modern applications.

Grading Criteria:

- **Creativity (5%):** Originality in the design and presentation of the mind-map.
- **Clarity and Organization (10%):** Logical structure and clear connections between ideas.
- **Accuracy (5%):** Correct explanation of the Buddhist concept.
- **Relevance (5%):** Clear demonstration of the concept's modern relevance.

Grade Breakdown:

- **A+/A/A- (22-25 points):** Highly creative, well-organized, accurate, and relevant.
- **B+/B/B- (18-21 points):** Creative and organized, with minor inaccuracies or less relevance.
- **C+/C/C- (14-17 points):** Basic structure and accuracy, but relevance is unclear.

- **D+/D (10-13 points):** Poor organization, inaccuracies, and limited relevance.

4. Reflective Writing (30%)

Objective:

To engage in deep reflection on a personal experience or contemporary social issue, linking it to Buddhist concepts discussed in class.

Word Limit: 1500 words

Due Date: April 30, 2026

Structure Suggestion:

1. **Description (10%):** Outline the event or idea.
2. **Interpretation (10%):** Connect the event or idea to a relevant Buddhist concept or theory.
3. **Outcome (10%):** Discuss personal learnings and implications for future behaviour.

Grading Criteria:

- **Creativity (5%):** Originality in approach and presentation.
- **Clarity and Organization (5%):** Logical structuring and clear articulation of thoughts.
- **Accuracy (5%):** Correct explanation and application of Buddhist concepts.
- **Depth of Reflection (10%):** Insightfulness and thoroughness in analysis.
- **Application (5%):** Relevance and practicality of the Buddhist concept to personal growth.

Grade Breakdown:

- **A+/A/A- (27-30 points):** Highly creative, well-structured, accurate, insightful, and relevant.
- **B+/B/B- (22-26 points):** Creative and organized, with minor inaccuracies or less depth.
- **C+/C/C- (17-21 points):** Basic structure and accuracy, but reflection is superficial.
- **D+/D (12-16 points):** Poor organization, inaccuracies, and limited reflection.

Resources and Notes

- **Resources:** For examples of high-quality reflective writing, refer to the course Moodle page under the 'Resources' section.
- **Note:** Engaging with external sources isn't mandatory for reflective writing assignments, but clarity of thought and depth of reflection are essential.

Note

- Your essay must be 1500 words, making the acceptable range 1450–1550 words. The word count applies only to the main body text and excludes the cover page, table of contents, footnotes, reference list, bibliography, and appendices.
- You may use any academically recognized citation style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago), as long as it is applied consistently and all sources are properly credited.
- You must complete and include the AI Tools Declaration Form with your submission (the form can be downloaded in our course Moodle page). Combine your essay and the declaration form into a single Word or PDF document. Submissions without the form will not be graded.

- If you use AI tools for grammar checking or rewording, you must also include your original, unedited writing as an appendix or separate section within the same submission file. Adherence to these guidelines ensures fairness and maintains academic integrity.

Your final Course Grade:

Please note that we will award assignment grades based on your meeting the requirements or required standards set by the course (that is what we consider that your assignment truly deserves). However, at the end of the course, if more than 35% students of the course were to receive A range grades as final course grades, in such occasion, we will apply a curve to limit the A range grades to 35% maximum. So working to your maximum ability is required to receive a higher grade in this course.

In addition, the course grading criteria take into account the details given in the following two university documents:

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

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>

A Note on how to submit your two written assignments

- The two written assignments are to be submitted by uploading onto Moodle prior to 23:50 of the due date, late submission will be subjected to mark deduction. Files must be renamed as "LASTNAME First name", e.g., "LEUNG Chi Wai Tony".

Start your assignments early and submit them by the deadlines [No extension will be granted beyond the deadline except on strong medical ground].

Recommended Reading List

1. Analayo, Bhikkhu (2010) *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.
2. Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1993) *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
3. Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
4. Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2012) *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Ānguttara Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
5. Bronkhorst, Johannes (1998) *Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsiidas.
6. De Silva, Padmasiri (2014) *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Gethin, R.M.L. (2001) *The Buddhist Path to Awakening (Classics in Religious Studies)*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
8. Gethin, Rupert (1998) *The Foundations of Buddhism*. USA: Oxford University Press.
9. Govinda, Lama Anagarika (1961) *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy and Its Systematic Representation According to Abhidhamma Tradition*. London: Rider & Company.
10. Hart, W. (1987) *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka*. San Francisco: Harper.

11. Harvey, Peter (1995) *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
12. Harvey, Peter (2000) *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13. Jayasuriya, W.F. (1976) *The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism: An Introduction to the Abhidhamma*. Kuala Lumpur.
14. Johansson, Rune E.A. (1979) *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*. Oxford: Curzon Press.
15. Kalupahana, David J. (1987) *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
16. Karunadasa, Y. (2010) *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
17. Karunadasa, Y. (2013) *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
18. Karunadasa, Y. (2015) *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
19. Karunaratne, W.S. (1988) *Theory of Causality in Early Buddhism*. Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Indumati Karunaratne.
20. Nāṇamoli, Bikkhu (1999) *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga (Vipassanā Meditation and the Buddha's Teaching)*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
21. Nāṇananda, Bhikkhu (1986) *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
22. Nyanaponika Thera (1956/1996) *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Boston: Weiser Books.
23. Somaratne, G. A. (2022) *An Introduction to Early Buddhist Soteriology: Freedom of Mind and Freedom by Wisdom*. Palgrave Macmillan.
24. Somaratne, G. A. (2021) *The Buddha's Teaching: A Buddhistic Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
25. Walshe, Maurice (1995) *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. London: Wisdom Publications.

Recommended Internet Resources

1. An Entrance to the World of Buddhism [www.buddhistdoor.com]
2. Buddhism and Science [www.mindandlife.org]
3. Journal for mindfulness practitioners [www.inquiringmind.com]
4. Mindfulness teachers talks [www.dhammadse.org]
5. Access to insight [www.accesstoinsight.org]
6. Buddhist Dictionary [glossary.buddhistdoor.com]
7. Translations of the Buddha's discourses [http://suttacentral.net/]
8. For Learning the Buddha's Teaching [www.dhammadialgoue.com]

A Note:

Please check the Course Moodle Page regularly for course updates, announcements, weekly lecture notes, readings materials, class activities, quizzes, attendance marking, submission of assignments, sample assignments, recordings of classes, and feedback for your submitted assignments.