

## HUMA 2911 Buddhism: Origin and Growth

Spring Semester 2025

Mon 15:00-16:20 and Fri 10:30-11:50

Eric S. NELSON (Professor, Philosophy, HUMA)

Email: [eric.nelson@ust.hk](mailto:eric.nelson@ust.hk)

Office and office hours: room 2383, Fri 13:00-15:30 and by appointment.

Language: English, no other language requirements.

TA: tba

### Course Description

This course offers an introductory historical survey of the philosophical foundations of select Buddhist traditions in South and East Asia and exploration of the history of Buddhism with an emphasis on its basic ideas, arguments, and interpretive strategies. We will explore key Buddhist concepts such as dependent origination, emptiness, no-self, loving-kindness, and compassion as well as philosophical questions concerning knowledge, language, ethics, and psychology (meditation and the mind) by closely interpreting texts from Buddhist teachings and traditions in relation to their historical contexts, philosophical contents, and their potential contemporary significance.

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

1. Develop an introductory understanding of classical Buddhist philosophies and their motivations and argumentative, interpretive, and rhetorical strategies.
2. Learn different approaches and perspectives to philosophical issues in the context of South and East Asian thought and further develop one's own philosophical perspective.
3. Improve abilities in recognizing, evaluating, and discussing ideas, interpretations, and arguments.
4. Cultivate skills in the critical analysis and discussion of textual sources and in scholarly communication.

### COURSE OUTLINE

Dates	Topics
1. Feb 3 (Mon)	Introduction to the Course, the Buddha, and Buddhist Philosophy
<b>I. Self and No-Self: The Discourses of the Buddha</b>	
2. Feb 7 (Fri)	Introduction to the Buddhist Path: <i>Discourse on the Noble Quest (Ariyapariyesana Sutta)</i> . Read EBD, pages 1-18
3. Feb 10 (Mon)	The Priority of Experience: <i>Discourse on the Kālāma (Kālāma Sutta)</i> . Read EBD, pages 19-25
4. Feb 14 (Fri)	Causality and the Interdependent World: <i>The Greater Discourse on Cause (Mahānidāna Sutta)</i> . Read EBD, pages 26-41
5. Feb 17 (Mon)	Philosophical Psychology I: Cultivating Mindfulness - <i>Greater Discourses on the Foundations of Mindfulness (Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta)</i> . Read EBD, pages 42-58
6. Feb 21 (Fri)	Philosophical Psychology II: Overcoming Attachment - <i>Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving (Mahātanhāsankhaya Sutta)</i> . Read EBD, pages 59-72
7. Feb 24 (Mon)	<b>Documentary and small group discussions</b>
8. Feb 28 (Fri)	<b>QUIZ ONE</b>
<b>II. Emptiness, the Person, and Consciousness</b>	

## Tentative syllabus (1/13/25)

9. March 3 (Mon)	Confronting the Paradoxes of Buddhist Philosophy: <i>Questions of Milinda (Milinda Pañha)</i> , chapters 1-2 (selections)
10. March 7 (Fri)	<i>Questions of Milinda</i> , chapters 3-5 (selections)
11. March 10 (Mon)	Pudgalavāda and Buddhist personalism? Pudgalavāda Doctrines of the Person (selections)
12. March 14 (Fri)	Mādhyamika: The Emptiness of Emptiness and the Two Truths Nagarjuna, <i>Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)</i> . (selections)
13. March 17 (Mon)	Yogācāra: Consciousness and the Three Natures in Vasubandhu, <i>Treatise on the Three Natures (Trisvabhāvanirdeśa)</i> . (selections)
14. March 21 (Fri)	The Bodhisattva's Way I: Śāntideva, <i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i> (selections)
15. March 24 (Mon)	Way of the Bodhisattva II: Śāntideva, <i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i> (selections)
<b>16. March 28 (Fri)</b>	<b>Documentary and small group discussions</b>
<b>17. March 31 (Mon)</b>	<b>QUIZ TWO</b>
<b>Spring Break</b>	
<b>III. Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism</b>	
18. April 7 (Mon)	Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet (selections)
19. April 11 (Fri)	Sengzhao and Chinese Mādhyamika
20. April 14 (Mon)	Fazang and Huayan: Rafter Dialogue and On the Golden Lion
<b>Easter Break</b>	
22. April 25 (Fri)	Chan (Zen) Buddhism: Linji's paradoxes and the <i>gong'an</i> 公案 ( <i>kōan</i> )
<b>23. April 28 (Mon)</b>	<b>Documentary and small group discussions</b>
<b>24. May 2 (Fri)</b>	<b>FINAL QUIZ THREE</b>
<b>Buddha's Birthday: No classes on May 5</b>	
<b>25. May 9 (Fri)</b>	<b>Poster Presentations (groups of around 4/ a few minutes each)</b>

### Please note Course Requirements

By taking this course, students agree that they required to:

1. Note and keep track of announcements and changes in class and on canvas.
2. Not commit any type of plagiarism. The HKUST has a no plagiarism policy.
3. Read assigned readings.
4. Maintain regular class attendance.
5. Participate in class discussion and discussion groups.
6. Complete all assignments on-time for full grade.

### Planned Assessment Tasks (100%)

1. Three in-class Quizzes = 60% (20% each)
2. In-class small group discussions = 10%
3. Group Posters = 15%
4. Direct Attendance and in-class participation and discussion = 15%

### Notes on Assignments

1. Quizzes will be a mixture of hand-written short answer, multiple choice, and fill in the blank questions. No devices, aids, or plagiarism will be permitted.
2. In-class small groups (around 4 students each) will discuss selected questions for greater understanding and in preparation for quizzes.

## Tentative syllabus (1/13/25)

3. Group posters are a small group assignment (around 4 persons per group): each group formulates an idea and analysis and presents it in printed poster form during our final meeting.
4. Every class you attend will increase your attendance and final grade.
5. Every class in which you make comments and pose questions will increase your participation grade.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

1. [EBD] *Early Buddhist Discourses* (Hackett, 2006; ISBN: 0872207927)
2. *Questions of Milinda* (Buddhist Publication Society, 1993; ISBN: 9552400678)
3. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Oxford University Press, 2008; ISBN: 019954043)
4. Short selections on canvas (listed under date by which you should do assigned reading)