

6th Annual Student Symposium

Titles & Abstracts

Monday, March 13, 2023

Program

Coffee & Tea **8:30**

Opening Remarks: DRBU President Susan Rounds **8:50**

◆Session 1: Self-Cultivation & Liberation **9:00** ◆

BREAK (10 Minutes)

◆Session 2: Yogacara & Self-Awareness **9:50** ◆

LUNCH & DESSERT (Vegan GF Cheesecake provided by Hasan Friggle) **10:50**

◆Session 3: Self, Others, and the Cultivation of Virtue **2:00**◆

BREAK & Refreshments (20 Minutes)

◆Session 4: Life, Death, and Love **3:40** ◆

Closing Remarks: Symposium Committee **4:25**

Emcee:

James Nguyen (MA Class of 2022)

Brandon Lannan (BA Class of 2021; MA Class of 2023)

Session 1: 9:00-9:40
Self-Cultivation & Liberation

Recitation: “Khandha Paritta” (From the *Snake-King’s Discourse*)
Kittisaro Weinberg, Ajahn Kovilo, Monica Wei, Wenbo Yin,
Blake Plante, Nhat Huynh, Sanju Baral, Enran Xing, Bishnu Bhatta

“Measureless is the Buddha Dharma Sangha, but measurable are all things we’re afraid of.”

“What Does It Mean to ‘Take Refuge’?”

Bhikshuni Fa Ji, MA

Through exploring verses of the Refuge Taking Ceremony using scriptural references on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we discover that the Buddha is a guide rather than a god, his Dharma teachings are alive and dynamic rather than rigid doctrine, and the Sangha are advisors who redirect us when we become lost in our practice. The ceremony is a formal declaration of our commitment to finding refuge in the Three Treasures within ourselves. It reveals our responsibility to exercise discernment in order to avoid misinterpreting the teachings, including the ceremonial texts. By taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we embark on the path to realizing our essential nature, which has always been whole and complete throughout all times and places. Taking refuge in the Buddha is in fact taking refuge in our own potential for awakening. We find refuge in the Dharma through personal cultivation that is guided by constant self-reflection. When we lose sight of our awakened nature and stray off the path of cultivation, the Sangha guides us back to the Good Knowing Advisor within ourselves.

“Understanding Karma by Reason”

Minghui Pan, MA

This paper examines the karma theory in current Western academics. For a long time, there has been a gap in Buddhist studies on the theories of karma. Even though the Buddhist awakening requires us to cultivate through reflection and to ultimately transcend the human mind, the significance of karma as the foundation for Buddhist ethics in this world cannot be overlooked. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, by Damien Keown, set the tone for integrating karma into Western moral philosophy. This paper first reviews the consistencies of arguments on translations and interpretations of karma mainly revealed in the Pali tradition. The paper seeks to offer a new basis for assessing the nature of Buddhist moral thinking by comparative hermeneutics on the spiritual status of karma agency, as it presents in the levels of beings classified by their thoughts and emotions in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. By comparative studies on ancient thoughts, we not only better understand the self through others, but also together work out the possibility to redefine our human beings’ rational existence and the natural law.

Session: 2: 9:50-10:45
Yogacara and Self-Awareness

Recitation: “*Dhammapada* Memorization Fun!”

Ajahn Kovilo, BA

Have you ever wished you knew the Dharma forwards and backwards ... literally? With a few learnable and engaging techniques, you can! To demonstrate the fun of memorizing long passages of Dharma and to exhibit various mnemonic strategies, Ajahn Kovilo will recite the Great Compassion Mantra in Sanskrit and the first chapter of the Dhammapada in Pāli while “walking” everyone through a “mind palace”. Following this, he will open up the fun for audience suggestions (such as: “Recite verse number __”, “What’s a rough English translation for verse __?”, “Recite the __ chapter backwards.”) so as to show the scope of some of these memorization techniques. For a more comprehensive discussion of techniques helpful in Dharma memorization (such as “the Journey Method”, “Spaced Repetition”, “the Major System”, “Initialism”, and more) read: <https://tinyurl.com/3xazb6h6>

“Looking for the Two Fundamentals in the Yogācāra System”

Ziqian Feng, MA

In the *Sūtraṅgama Sūtra*, after Ānanda continuously gives wrong answers regarding the location of the mind, the Buddha points out the two fundamentals that underlie saṃsāra and nirvana. The first fundamental is “the mind that is the basis of death and rebirth and that has continued since time without beginning,” and the second is “full awakening, which also has no beginning; it is the original and pure essence of nirvana.” Understanding the two fundamentals is critical to practice, for the lack of such understanding could lead to mistakes, confusion and ultimately failure in one’s practice. For example, if one mistakes the first fundamental to be the second, no matter how long and how rigorously one practices, one would never realize the ultimate enlightenment—it would be “like someone who cooks sand, hoping to prepare a delicious meal. Even if the sand were cooked for eons numberless as motes of dust, no meal would result from it.” Given such urgency and significance, I try to locate the two fundamentals in the Yogācāra edifice—where are the two fundamentals in the three transformations and the three natures? What is the implication for practice?

“Where the Little Dot Shines”

Xi Xue, MA

“A language will often be wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest of those who speak it. Being like amber in its efficacy to circulate the electric spirit of truth, it is also like amber in embalming and preserving the relics of ancient wisdom, although one is not seldom puzzled to decipher its contents.” – Richard Trench.

In this brief ten minutes we are going to take a glimpse at how the etymology embedded in the Yogācāra system has preserved the ancient wisdom like an amber, as presented by Master Xuanzang.

“Samadhi, Yogacara, and Us”

Kathleen Irby, MA

We must enter samadhi to become awakened, to function as a bodhisattva. To do just about anything in Buddhism we need *samadhi*. But what is *samadhi*? Using the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and Three Texts on Consciousness Only, we will examine what is *samadhi*, how to enter this elusive state, and how to recognize *samadhi*'s ten stages?

Session 3: 2:00-3:20

Self, Others, and the Cultivation of Virtue

“Self and Awareness in Virtue Cultivation”

Monica Wei, BA

Drawing insights from Mengzi (Mencius), this paper explores the concept of virtue cultivation in relation to the construction and awareness of the self and the world. I argue that cultivating virtue involves aligning our innate nature with who we think we are and who we appear to be when interacting with the world. This alignment requires a deep understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Then, by extending feelings and behaviors that align with one's heart, virtue is cultivated. It is essential to acknowledge that cultivation is natural, requiring the creation of conditions for growth rather than putting in extra effort, and an ongoing process, where failures can provide valuable experience for future growth.

“Moral Cultivation of Man in an Unhappy Environment”

Irina Passar, BA

In the modern world, individual moral cultivation doesn't seem to be as much of a priority as it was in 300 BCE when Mengzi, a Confucian philosopher, crusaded to bring about a positive change in the world. Much of what happens nowadays seems to be exactly what Mengzi hoped to prevent in his time. It is difficult to cultivate virtue under the negative influence of the environment a person lives in when the mind is occupied with cares and distractions of life. As naive as it may sound, world change begins from within. In my presentation, I will explore what Mengzi teaches us about moral cultivation by looking at passage 6A8, the description of Cow Mountain, and the concept of *qi*. More specifically, I will talk about the metaphor of “nourishment” and the potential and limits of *qi* to restore a damaged environment. In most cases, our environment predetermines our relationship with ourselves, so Mengzi emphasizes the importance of developing restorative *qi* through consistently doing good.

“Mengzi on Self-cultivation: Wisdom through Reflection”

Bishnu Bhatta, BA

Wise people and saints of the past often instructed us to reflect on ourselves. But what does it really mean to reflect? In this paper, I go through various ways Mengzi sees human nature and discuss what he calls “our greater part” or the “good.” In this process, I also journey through what Mengzi calls the “not good.” I discuss the quality of the heart that develops when one “reflects” on what is “greater” or “good” in ourselves. I show how Mengzi uses a Confucius quote about “examining oneself” and “being upright” to shed light on how to practice reflection on “the greater part.” With the help of Mengzi, we can acquire wisdom through reflection.

“Floodlike *Qi*” and Its Intriguing Way of Cultivation”

Bach Nguyen, BA

This is neither an abstract nor not an abstract. This is not an abstract because I want the audience to keep an open mind when they first encounter my presentation and not be too influenced by any words written here. But at the same time, this can be considered as an abstract, for I will show just the right amount of information to trigger the curiosity inside each of you: This paper will give a glimpse into the instruction about Mengzi’s self-cultivation teaching through an analysis about the practice of “floodlike *qi*,” which is based on the accumulation of righteousness and the ability of self-reflection.

“Mengzi on Turning”

Sehen Dilkush Gambewa, BA

Mengzi speaks on the relevance of reflection as a key part of understanding the world, and our relationship with it. His quotation brings in themes from the *Dao De Jing* and *the Analects*, both of which also spoke highly of this particular context, i.e., interconnectivity. In this paper, I break down his passage analytically and examine why the nature of this context matters to us at all, outside of a theoretical glimpse of the workings of human existence, but more as a felt experience. Only by understanding that a difference exists within experience, can the flavor of this passage be truly tasted.

Session 4: 3:40-4:25

Life, Death, and Love

Chopin, Nocturne in E-flat major, op.9, no. 2

Pianist: Feishan Chong, MA

Recitation: William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29

Blake Plante, MA

“You're Already Dead, God is a Graveyard, and You Should Drink Your Brain”

Phoenix Winters, BA

This paper is a 3-page textual analysis of a single sentence from *The Paramarthasara* of *Abhinava-Gupta*. The text surrounds the tradition of Shaivism, and the particular passage describes a metaphor for a practitioner gaining understanding of Shiva, using imagery of death, graveyards, skeletons, and drinking the contents of one's own skull. The paper gives a brief explanation of Shaivism as a non-dual tradition and explains how the textual metaphor might help the practitioner gain some insight of Shiva as all, including the practitioner themselves. The paper is a good example of close-reading, as well as a discussion of the nature of man's consciousness.

“The Death of Śambūka”

Alex Valdes, BA

My paper brings to life a story originating from the book *Rāma's Last Act*, which weaves together elements of Hindu cosmology, human experience, nature, love, and liberation. I contemplate the significance of the destiny of the character Śambūka, a forest ascetic who shortly after causing the death of a Brahmin boy, is killed by the sword of the Supreme Being, Rāma.

Recitation: *Saddharmapūṇḍarīkasūtrasya samantamukhaparivartād gāthāḥ*

(Lotus Sutra, Chapter on Avalokiteśvara)

Sanju Baral, Ziqian Feng, Alex Valdes, Blake Plante