

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Unit of Assessment (UoA): UoA 37 Religious Studies

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 3

(1) Context

The Centre of Buddhist Studies (CBS, the UoA) has long been a pioneer in innovative transdisciplinary research collaborations across the arts, social sciences, education, neuroscience, and religious studies. We are committed to pursuing real-world applications of our research to promote social and psychological well-being and to nurture awareness of Buddhist knowledge, practices, and culture. Key beneficiaries include Buddhist and non-Buddhist members of the general public in Hong Kong and abroad, local elementary and secondary school students and educators, mental health and other professionals, and cultural heritage institutions, as well as researchers in other fields, especially psychology, neuroscience, and education. The main forms of impact that have emerged from our research can be organised into the following four types:

Promotion of Mental Health through Mindfulness and Meditation. Our empirical research on the neuropsychology of mindfulness and meditation (Sik HH, Gao, Halkias, Wu) has resulted in the integration of these practices as stress-management strategies in 65% of local Buddhist secondary schools, benefitting over 10,000 students and teachers. Mindfulness has been incorporated into teachers' training in the region and special meditation rooms installed in participating educational institutions. Student and teacher testimonials attest to the programme's beneficial psychological effects, such as the reduction of anxiety and management of obsessive-compulsive symptoms. Media coverage of our research (e.g., Newsweek, South China Morning Post (SCMP), Lion's Roar, Buddhistdoor Global) and public talks have promoted awareness of the positive impact of these practices on mental health locally and around the world.

Enhancement of the School Curriculum. Research by Sik HH has had impact on the primary and secondary school curriculum in Hong Kong through the development of life education programmes and textbooks as well as reforms to how Buddhism is taught in the Religious Studies curriculum. CBS has conducted seminars and workshops for educators in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China to discuss the integration of Buddhist education into the curriculum, such as the Education Bureau-sponsored training course "Ethics and Religious Studies Curriculum: Mindfulness Practicing and Resilience Building in Schools" (2016), the "Teachers' Meditation Retreat to Kyoto" (2018), and the "Strategies for Promoting Mindfulness and Meditation cum Introduction to Learning Package for Non-Buddhist Schools" (2019).

Heritage Preservation and Appreciation of Buddhist Arts and Culture. Tsui's research on the cultural heritage of Dunhuang – the site of ancient cave temples in Western China on the historic Silk Road – resulted in public talks and guided tours for secondary school students organised in connection with the Hong Kong Heritage Museum's exhibition, "Dunhuang – Untold Tales, Untold Riches" (2014–15). In 2016, Tsui led a sharing session on Dunhuang culture and conservation for Youth Square, a HK Government funded youth development centre. Members have also worked towards cultural preservation and dissemination through new translations and interpretations of Buddhist texts: Halkias produced an annotated English translation of a Tibetan sutra (2017); and Endo and Somaratne have translated Buddhist texts from the Pāli into English (2017).

Awareness Raising of Buddhist Teachings and Practices Internationally. Members have raised awareness of Buddhist teachings and practices among professionals in the fields of counselling, education and finance in Hong Kong, as well as Australia, Sri Lanka, the U.K. and the U.S. Members have delivered talks and hosted programmes on Buddhist economics for the Tung Lin Kok Yuen monastery and education centre (Ng), for example, and CBS hosted the international conference *Buddhist Values and Economics: Investing in a Sustainable Future* in 2019, which built new bridges between academics and professionals. CBS organised two MaMa Charitable Foundation Symposia (2018 and 2019) on Buddhist counselling and mental health interventions,

which fostered exchanges of skills and knowledge between researchers and practicing psychologists, counsellors and social workers.

(2) Approach to impact

Building Partnerships with Stakeholders in the Community. Our impact strategy involves establishing and maintaining close collaborations with key community stakeholders and institutions to transfer academic research into practical interventions. During the assessment period, this has included partnerships with the Hong Kong Buddhist Association, Education Bureau, Hong Kong Government Education Commission, Quality Education Fund Secretariat, Tung Lin Kok Yuen, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Buddhistdoor, non-governmental organisations, and local Buddhist primary and secondary schools.

Delivering Public Talks and Engaging with Local and International Media. We encourage all of our members to actively disseminate their research to the community and non-academic users through informative public talks and various forms of media engagement. Aside from talks hosted in partnership with the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Tung Lin Kok Yuen, and Kuan Yin Progress Society, members have been featured on RTHK Radio 3 and RTHK DAB+31 (Ng), Metro Finance and Metro Info Radio (Sik HH, Sik Faren), as well as in Newsweek (Sik HH, Gao), SCMP (Tsui), and Buddhistdoor Global (Ng, Sik HH). CBS has hosted numerous public talks with world-famous speakers including Professor Richard Davidson, Dr. Barry Kerzin, Wong Cho Lam, and mindfulness retreats with Dr. Alan Wallace and Ven. Dhammadipa Thero.

Supporting Members in Seeking Diverse Sources for Funding Impact. We are active in seeking external funding for impact through our established partnerships with Hong Kong's largest Buddhist organisations. The majority of our impact initiatives are funded in this way. Part of the funding is used to collect evidence of impact, including a forthcoming report on the implementation of our meditation programme in Hong Kong schools.

(3) Strategy and plans

Looking ahead, we will advance our empirically-informed mindfulness and mental health interventions and our engagement with key partners in two major ways:

Extending Reach to International Partners. Building on the success of the MaMa Charitable Foundation Symposia on Buddhist counselling, we plan to start two international collaborative impact projects: one on life education with Negi (Emory University); and another exploring the development of Buddhist counselling training models with Shonin (Nottingham Trent University). CBS is also collaborating with hospitals in Shenzhen on a project to examine the effectiveness of meditation in the treatment of epilepsy.

Widening the Scope of Mental Health Applications. We have provided consultancy and supervision for the first Buddhist counselling centre in Hong Kong, the Tsz Shan Monastery Buddhist Spiritual Counselling Centre, and facilitated training for social workers and counsellors to become qualified Buddhist counsellors. CBS has helped the Hong Kong Buddhist Association to develop a Buddhist Spiritual Care Training course to equip volunteers with essential Buddhist counselling skills for patient visits. With these structures in place, we will use Buddhist counselling models to train mental health professionals and volunteers to apply these skills in hospitals, schools, NGOs and other contexts. CBS has secured a HK\$15 million donation from the Simon K.Y. Lee Foundation to conduct research and establish the first professional training programme for Buddhist counsellors in Asia, comparable to existing models for professional mental health counselling in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea.

(4) Relationship to case study

The case study exemplifies our capacity for translating academic knowledge and research into practice and our engagement with key stakeholders, particularly schools, as well our commitment to the application of Buddhist principles of mindfulness and meditation to foster the greater well-being of society.