Master’s Degree Programme Buddhism (Exploring a Discipline)

The Master’s Degree Programme Buddhism (60 EC) offers the opportunity to explore the academic study of Buddhism, focusing on your own research interests. Through the Internship (12 EC), the MA Thesis (12 EC) and the Master Seminar (6 EC) you are able to pursue your own topics. The programme contains two required courses: Research Skills (6 EC) and Hermeneutics (6 EC). This leaves 18 EC available for following three elective courses on Buddhism.

The Master’s specialization Buddhism contains four electives that are each offered once every two years. You can take three of these four courses, depending upon in which year you enroll. Part time students can also take the fourth elective, however this will mean a 6 EC additional study load.

The four electives are:

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<td>Engaged Buddhism</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Buddhism on the Move</td>
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Part Time Year 1

Part Time Year 2
Course descriptions:

Building interreligious relations 3: Compassion (offered 2019-2020)

This course is an introduction to the field of interreligious dialogue and interreligious studies. It will use as a case study the notion of compassion, its place in Buddhism, Christianity and secularity, and its role in interreligious dialogue. We will delve deeply into the complexities related to the meeting between religions and worldviews (especially the meeting between Christianity, Buddhism and secularity) so that students learn to get a better grasp of the underlying mechanisms that affect this meeting in society (for better or for worse).

We will address fundamental questions touching upon
1. How do we interpret the phenomenon of religious diversity – What is the discourse on world religions and what are its problematic aspects? What are postcolonial and feminist perspectives on religious diversity? What is transreligiosity?
2. How do different models of religious diversity (such as, for example, the model of exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and particularism) impact upon the way we understand the (im-)possibility of interreligious dialogue?
3. What does compassion mean from a Christian, Buddhist, and secular perspective? Which possibilities and challenges does this offer for interreligious and interworldview dialogue?
4. In what ways can compassion offer a contribution to facilitating interreligious and interworldview communication, and reducing conflict and violence? We will discuss (1)Karen Armstrong’s Charter for Compassion and (2)the Compassionate Cities project (Nieuw Wij)

Engaged Buddhism (offered 2019-2020)

This course offers an analysis of the rapidly expanding field of Engaged Buddhism. This term is used to refer to Buddhist scholars and practitioners who are seeking ways to apply the insights from Buddhist meditation practice and Buddhist teachings to situations of social, political, environmental, and economic suffering and injustice, bringing compassion into the world.

Overview of topics to be discussed:
1. Some important voices in Engaged Buddhism (Thich Nhat Hanh, Humanistic Buddhism, Zen Peacemaker Order, David Loy)
2. Compassion in the Buddhist traditions and in contemporary applications
3. Engaged Buddhism in the Anthropocene: ecology and climate change

Interdisciplinary perspectives on Mindfulness (offered 2020–2021)
[preliminary course information: will be updated later]

“Integrating mindfulness-based approaches into medicine, psychology, neuroscience, health care, spiritual care, education, business leadership, and other major societal institutions has become a burgeoning field. This rapidly growing interest in mainstream contemporary applications of ancient meditative practices raises philosophical questions that will be addressed in this course from a

**Buddhism on the Move (offered 2020–2021)**

Buddhism has an exceptionally long and colourful history, of approximately two and a half millennia, during which it spread over most of Asia and beyond. There is something truly international about Buddhism. It may in fact be one of the few common denominators within that notoriously vague and somewhat orientalist notion “Asia”, which is (and always has been) of great importance and impact on the global arena. In the last century and a half, Buddhism is also increasingly spreading beyond Asia, into the most remote corners of this globe, mainly through popular culture (say: Richard Gere). It entered the privacy of our homes (say: mantelpiece Buddha statues) and even the privacy of our very minds (mindfulness).

While we shall strive to find focus in this course by asking what can we learn from the case of ‘Global Buddhism’, this course is open to inquiry and paper projects on all pertinent case studies: from Roman Catholicism, Evangelical Christianity, Islam, Wicca, the practice of (pregnancy) yoga, to the global aspirations of militant Mujahidin.

Guiding questions are: what happens when a ‘religion’, such as Buddhism, ‘spreads’ and becomes a force to be reckoned with; how does it spread and what are the underlying culture dynamics (also in terms of social, economic and political forces); and what local responses are provoked?

Are religions faithfully replicated and adapted from some kind of original blueprint? In this line of thought we often encounter plant and agricultural metaphors such as seeding, grafting, or transplanting: religion is something of definable identity that can pick up its roots and move about (the Dalai Lama thus speculates about Dutch *Tulip Buddhism*). An important question to ask would then obviously be: what is the nature of the transplant?

Or does the observed religious phenomenon bear an imprint and outlook that mainly pertains to the receiving culture? In other words: is it newly invented, locally, and should the most significant analytical aspect derive from considering invention of tradition (cf. the Dutch ‘*Polder Buddhism*’, or better still: ‘*Boerenkool Buddhism’*)? The crucial analytical question would then be: who are we that we are interested in Buddhism?

In this case study of Global Buddhism we shall mainly explore the latter avenue, of local (re)invention, by way of working hypothesis, and try to relate this to the theoretical framings needed for other case studies, in comparative aspect.

The comparative aspect raises many additional questions. Does this analysis work in the same manner for monotheist and non-theist systems? Should we maintain focus on so-called World Religions, or should we, in this high-, late or post-modernity, rather visualise a *bricolage* of complementary types of ‘portable religion’. Should we count on a sense of religious belonging or a missionary drive, or visualise multiple religious belonging or perhaps even rather pluralism? And, while we are at it, should we, in this secular age, still presume a centre of gravity in religion at all or has that effectively shifted to secular domains? How do the observed dynamics relate to New Age spirituality, life-style, self-help, and various agendas of personal growth, or to counter cultural and
mainstream divides? Is religion a stable and useful analytical category at all, between non-modern and modern contexts, between the so-called East & West?

These are some of the questions that this course may trigger, and I am happy to learn of your own questions and join you on an exciting journey of exploration, starting from the meanderings of the ancient eightfold path of Buddhism.