

<b>Institution: University of Bristol</b>
<b>Unit of assessment: 33 Theology and Religious Studies Panel D</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> General public, teachers, students and carers benefit from deeper understanding of Buddhist practice
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Buddhists and non-Buddhists across the world, educators, students and chaplains are among those who have benefited personally, academically and professionally from the imaginative dissemination of Bristol's pioneering research into Buddhist Death Rituals in Southeast Asia and China. Exhibitions, talks, printed and online learning materials, image archives and websites have all been brought into play. These multiple approaches to the sharing of new knowledge have led to beneficial impacts on a wide variety of individuals, from schoolchildren on the brink of adulthood to people receiving comfort on their deathbed.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Research took place during a three-year (2007 – 2010) AHRC-funded project called 'Buddhist Death Rituals of Southeast Asia and China' (£375,516). The PI was Paul Williams (Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy, 1985–2011) and the Co-I was John Kieschnick (Reader in Buddhist Studies, 2007–11). The Research Assistants were, in chronological order, Dr Rita Langer, Dr Patrice Ladwig and Ailsa Laxton. The outcome of this work was formally assessed as 'good' and the project became an exemplar for funded research on the AHRC website [j], attracting international academic and non-academic attention [e, f].</p> <p>The project was the first comparative academic study of Buddhist death rituals in the two distinct cultural areas of Southeast Asia and China and drew interest not only from academics but also from the general public and the growing number of UK Buddhists.</p> <p>Langer (Research Assistant, 2007) worked on the project from the beginning and remained closely involved with it until its completion. She is a textual scholar and examined texts and chants used in Theravada funerals (in Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar). She documented and defined a common core of Theravada rites [1] and built up a collection of images and chants which featured in exhibitions and outreach events that took place throughout the project. All the images, chants and online exhibitions are now available on the website [4].</p> <p>Ladwig, an anthropologist (Research Assistant, 2007–09), conducted fieldwork in 2007 documenting two festivals for the dead in Laos which had never previously been recorded. His documentary, 'Caring for the beyond' [2], is therefore a unique research output and is supplemented by a research article which examines the interplay of the material and the immaterial in dealings with the dead [1].</p> <p>Similarly, Heise, a sinologist (PhD student, 2007–12), conducted research on festivals for the dead in China (2008), directing a documentary called 'The Spirit's Happy Days' [3] and writing a dissertation and a research article that critically examines the dynamic and changing roles of the festivals [1]. This facilitated comparative work between Southeast Asia and China, which is reflected in the edited volume of papers on Buddhist funerals [1].</p> <p>Kieschnick's role was primarily as PhD supervisor of Heise and referee of articles for the edited volume. Laxton (Research Assistant, 2009–10), who replaced Ladwig when he joined the Max Planck Institute (Halle), translated the findings of the project into outputs accessible to a wider public via exhibitions and the project website. Williams oversaw the project and liaised with authors and publishers for the edited volume.</p> <p>This project's chief importance lies in the documentation of Buddhist rituals and practices not previously recorded [2, 3, 4] or analysed [1].</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p>[1] Williams, Paul and Patrice Ladwig (Eds), <i>Buddhist Funeral Cultures of Southeast Asia and China</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): A peer-reviewed edited volume which</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

contains 13 articles by international scholars, including an introduction and three chapters written by project team members:

- Langer, R, 'Chanting as "*bricolage* technique": a comparison of South and Southeast Asian funeral recitation', pp. 21–58. Listed in REF2
- Ladwig, P, 'Feeding the dead: ghosts, materiality and merit in a Lao Buddhist festival for the deceased', pp. 119–41. Can be supplied on request.
- Heise, I, 'For Buddhas, families and ghosts: the transformation of the ghost festival into a dharma assembly in Southeast China', pp. 217–37. Can be supplied on request.

Two films (now available on YouTube and Vimeo) were commissioned and edited to a high standard by professional film-makers (Gregory Kourilsky and Han Zhang) in consultation with the project researchers (Ladwig and Heise):

- [2] 'Caring for the beyond: Two Lao Buddhist festivals for the deceased'. A film by Patrice Ladwig and Gregory Kourilsky. 35 mins, Lao with English subtitles and voice-over.  
DOI: 10.5523/bris.x4mw2br1zdua15evd3vr7r3xo
- [3] 'The Spirit's Happy Days'. A film by Ingmar Heise and Han Zhang. 45 mins, English voice-over.  
DOI: 10.5523/bris.61jt7gde7kp612np8b0nwb0gs

Project website: Laxton, Ladwig, Heise and Langer contributed the material for the website with the aim of disseminating the research findings as widely as possible. The site contains free resources used by chaplains, educators, students and the general public. These include online exhibitions and galleries (ca. 2,000 images), 15 shorter video documentaries, chanting samples, a downloadable booklet for palliative care of Buddhist patients, lesson plans, presentations and quizzes, bibliographies and links [e, f].

- [4] 'Understanding Buddhist Death', <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/thrs/buddhist-centre/projects/bdr/>

#### 4. Details of the impact

**A. General Public (Buddhist and non-Buddhist):** Findings from the research have been used in different ways, including Widening Participation activities at the University of Bristol (master class on 'ghosts' on 24/6/2009, 20 participants). A digital exhibition in Birmingham Museum on the occasion of Buddha Day (24/4/2010) attracted '*an audience of more than 100 people who were touched by the depth of sensitivity and authenticity of the visual descriptions of death rituals in South-east Asia being portrayed*' [c]. Heise (1/12/09), Ladwig (10/11/09) and Langer (15/12/09) were invited by the University of Hamburg to give talks (audience of ca. 100 from the general public) and show their films (audience of ca. 70, general public) as part of their public lecture series, 'Tod und Sterben im Buddhismus' [g]. They also contributed material to two exhibitions of photographs, film, manuscripts and objects designed to offer an insight into the topic. The two exhibitions, 'Ancestors and Hungry Ghosts' (Bristol, 23/10–11/11/09, ca. 150 visitors; Leeds 1–25/2/10, ca. 650 visitors) [h] and 'Tod und Sterben im Buddhismus' (Hamburg, 8/10–18/12/09, ca. 2,000 visitors) were aimed at the general public as well as those with a specific interest in the subject. The venues (Photographique gallery in Bristol, Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Leeds and the foyer of the University of Hamburg main building) were chosen for their public outreach potential [h]. The most accessible and accessed venue (Hamburg), with its spectacular set-up of large photo boards on two levels of the foyer of the University's main building, attracted the widest audience and appealed particularly to 'mature, experienced travellers' [g]. The Bristol exhibition was publicized by way of an interview in a programme called 'Face to Faith' on BCFM Bristol community radio. The films and images have attracted interest and have been shown at various venues including the universities of Bristol, Leeds and Hamburg; the Max Planck Institute (Halle); Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris); and the Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (Atlanta, USA). The discussions during and after the events indicated that the public view of Buddhism had been changed. Buddhism is often labelled a 'philosophy' rather than a 'religion' and evidence shows that recent research has begun to challenge this. The project also invites reflections on death and dying more generally, which prompted the organizers of the Edinburgh Festival 2011 to ask Langer to take part in a panel discussion (Ritual and Memory, ca. 100 audience). The audio-visual material has been available online on the website since 2010 [4] and the site was refreshed and refurbished in 2013 with a

number of additional features (image archive, audio section, tabs for target audiences). The results of the anonymous Bristol Online Survey available on the project website [e] showed that the resources were used in a great variety of contexts, including GCSE preparation, chaplaincy work, undergraduate projects, school and undergraduate teaching, publishing work, school visits at monasteries and inspiration for e-learning material. Of those surveyed, 82.2% said they would use the resources again; 46.3% said the resources had changed their attitude or practice and backed this up with personal statements such as *'I have started to contemplate death more often and started chanting too'*. It is significant that the resources appealed to non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike (57% of participants considered themselves Buddhist) and to a great range of nationalities including Australian, Sri Lankan and Thai [e]. The download statistics for SoundCloud (3,225 downloads), Vimeo and YouTube (combined downloads 1,329) indicate that the material has international appeal. The chants were played in a total of 50 countries including the USA, Russia, Egypt, Laos, Canada, Sri Lanka, Australia, Germany, China and Latvia [f]. Easy online access and the increasing number of links to the research material in blogs and on Twitter has led to a widening audience and user base. The secretary of a Buddhist temple in the UK said: *'It is wonderful to have such a free resource for teaching, chaplaincy and personal education for users ... We have residential family events at the monastery as well as frequent school visits. So I have passed on your email and the link to the website to the various monks and nuns who are involved in these areas, as well as adding it to our general resources for all to use'* [a]. Some people shared moving testimonies of how the resources had affected them personally: *'I had been witness to a ceremony while in Sri Lanka and wanted to know what had happened. I was deeply affected by what I now know was a funeral, so this film has been really helpful to me.'* [e]. Traffic has more than doubled since the launch of the new web pages; the number of referrals shows that there is a sustained need for the project materials [f].

**B. Multi-faith Chaplaincies:** The Government Office for National Statistics refers to the 2001 Census which states that there were 149,000 Buddhists living in Great Britain, which is 0.3 % of the population. However, the World Buddhist Directory lists 513 Buddhist temples, organisations and meditation groups in the UK, which indicates that a considerably higher number of people are involved in the practice of Buddhism. Consequently, there is a greater need for information on the care of ill and dying Buddhist patients, and training is under way. Short videos of interviews with chaplains and a downloadable pamphlet [4] were developed in cooperation with NHS chaplains and hospice workers to provide background information. The pamphlet has been endorsed by the Multi-faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy (MFGHC), which in turn informs organisations such as the NHS, the Army and the Prison Service and is instrumental in the training of chaplains [c]. The material was regarded as exemplary and has prompted a forum discussion about the feasibility of developing similar materials for other religions such as Hinduism. The Chairman of the Buddhist Healthcare Chaplaincy Group (and member of the MFGHC) [c] is involved in the training of NHS Buddhist chaplains: *'The research work presented via this media was incredibly useful and informative to these Chaplains whose understanding of the various cultures was greatly developed from this experience. In due course the material will be used again, with the University of Bristol's permission, as part of on-going Buddhist Chaplaincy training.'* Again, personal testimonies from chaplains indicate that the material affected individuals on a deeper level: *'the resources would be useful in understanding what Asian families need at the time of death to support them'*; *'I would also recommend this site to anyone who is working closely with Buddhists in hospitals or in the wider community'*; *'I have been a Buddhist Chaplain at a prison, this has inspired me maybe to be a chaplain at a hospital'*; *'The Chaplaincy booklet is a useful resource as I do get asked to lead Buddhist funerals outside my own tradition'* [e].

**C. Educators:** Many of the documented rituals are not specific to the death context and the project material is suitable for teaching the more practical aspects of Buddhism. The audio-visual material [2, 3, 4] and the subject matter (particularly ghost festivals) are both accessible and well-suited to outreach activities. In cooperation with teachers, project findings were translated into e-learning materials. The head of religious studies at a UK secondary school [d] piloted the study resources with A-level Buddhism students: *'I know I will be both using and directing my students to use the resources in the future. Even with a number of years' experience teaching A level Buddhism, it is always good to have an injection of new resources to breathe new life into one's work.'* The head of RS at another secondary school [b], not currently offering Buddhism at A-level, states: *'After*

looking at the resources available I am considering adapting our existing work on Buddhism in KS3–4 and introducing it as a unit of work in KS5 [A-level]. The resources would support me greatly as a teacher, and the lesson plans and resources are easy to use and adapt to fit with our lessons and the introduction of a new scheme of work at A-level.’ And yet another head of RS at a secondary school decided to move over to an examinations board which allows more Buddhist content and approached the department with the idea of a collaborative project to develop more e-learning resources for the study of Buddhism. The overwhelmingly positive reaction of educators and students to the website indicates that high-profile research can be made accessible to schools. Some comments from the online survey: ‘Photos, films, chants, lesson plans. Excellent and rich resources – immensely useful for my teaching practice’; ‘Has lead me to a more hands-on approach when teaching. Possibility to show students images, films, etc., I deem now as very important’; ‘I have no doubt that my religious studies GCSE grade was significantly helped by these resources’; ‘I gained ideas about current practices. Usually, I have rather a (classical) text-based view on Buddhism’ [e]. The material is highly adaptable and equally valuable in undergraduate teaching provision, as a UK lecturer in Thai language and culture [h] observes: ‘These resources are very valuable for our students taking my Buddhist module. Students can get in-depth insights into this important topic thanks to the fantastic work you and your team have done. I am particularly impressed with the film material. This will certainly help to enthuse students in their study of Buddhist ritual and thought world. Having access to these films now will enable me to make some significant changes to the way I teach my Buddhism module.’ A lecturer at a German university remarked in an email how the material changed the perception of the students and helped them move away from labelling Buddhism as simply ‘a philosophy’. Apart from benefiting individual educators and students, the material attracted the attention of educational publishers and exam board representatives: ‘Although as free resources they compete with our commercial publications, actually for a less studied area like Buddhism it is good when resources are created and distributed freely, as they would not be viable otherwise. We would certainly reference them in relevant publications and direct teachers and students to them’ [i]. This goes to show that there is demand for high-profile research in the field of Buddhist Studies and that making the findings of just one project widely available can have a large-scale impact.

**D. Personal development:** Two of the Research Assistants moved to posts at prestigious institutions before the end of the project: Langer was appointed full-time lecturer at the University of Bristol and received £25,459 funding under the AHRC Research Leave Scheme for a four-month follow-up project (‘Preacher and Ritualist: the role of Theravada Buddhist monks’, 2010). Ladwig followed Langer as RA and was offered a research position at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Germany). Kieschnick was appointed professor at Stanford University (USA) and Heise was offered a two-year postdoctoral position in Taiwan. The high quality research outputs have also contributed to the University of Bristol’s Centre for Buddhist Studies’ growing status as an institutional centre of knowledge. The centre was founded in 1993, was the first of its kind in the UK and has hosted visiting scholars from Croatia, India, Japan and the USA and continues to attract scholars from abroad. The research project was also publicised on the AHRC website as one of the first case studies and as such served as an example for other projects in the field [j].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [a] Email from Buddhist nun, Secretary, Amaravati (Theravada Buddhist Temple, UK).
- [b] Email from secondary school teacher in UK.
- [c] Chairman of Buddhist Healthcare Chaplaincy Group (UK).
- [d] Head of Religious Studies at UK secondary school, Devon.
- [e] Bristol Online Survey results: <https://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/?surveyid=147489&op=results>
- [f] Download statistics: project website, SoundCloud, Vimeo, YouTube, Time Educational Supplement.
- [g] Email from organizer of event series at Hamburg University.
- [h] Lecturer in Thai language and culture, UK university.
- [i] Email from educational editor for ZigZag Education (Edexcel).
- [j] AHRC case study: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Browse-Case-Studies/Pages/Buddhist-Death-Rituals-of-Southeast-Asia-and-China.aspx>