

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/06 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

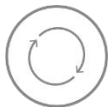
Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

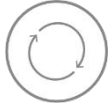
Paper 6 series overview

The developments in Buddhist thought paper covers the life and teachings of the Buddha and 2500 years of subsequent developments in the thoughts, teachings, beliefs and practices in Buddhism. Knowledge and understanding of the teachings and developments and how they interlink are needed in order for a candidate to do well.


Overall, the quality of candidates' responses was very good. Some candidates were extremely well prepared for the exam and showed a high level of knowledge and understanding of the topics in the questions. Most candidates answered Questions 1 and 4 with Question 3 being the least popular choice. Question 1 seemed to be responded less well to than the other questions. Responses to Question 4 were often the best responses and showed a high level of knowledge and understanding. Question 1 seemed to cause problems for candidates because they did not adequately link the three fires to escaping from samsara. Exemplar 1 is intended as an illustration of this.

	AfL	<p>Exemplar 1 shows how a candidate is using their knowledge of the three fires in its wider context. In this case it is the teachings from the Four Noble Truths in relation to craving. However, the only reference to the three poisons is in brackets "(depicted in the three poisons)". The rest of the paragraph, however good is not explicitly tied to the three poisons. Therefore, the candidate does not show in this section that they are responding to the question.</p>
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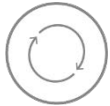
In many candidate responses they made good use of examples. Using examples is one of the best ways to demonstrate understanding of a concept or teaching. Showing understanding is one of the key assessment words in the levels of response for AO1. Candidates who use examples will always gain credit for them. Exemplars 2 and 3 show how candidates have used examples.

	AfL	<p>Exemplar 2 would have been a weak response had it not been for the examples. The response shows that the candidate does understand how the three fires link to samsara.</p> <p>Exemplar 3 is from a full mark response. It uses an example and then develops that point with a criticism and counter criticism.</p>
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In some responses, candidates tended to describe at great length rather than focusing on the point of the questions or paragraph. Responses do not need to be concise but they do need to be precise. Exemplar 4 has a very concise and precise definition of sunyata. This was often laboured over by some candidates. It is a difficult concept to understand and therefore, any lengthy explanation is expected. However, the precision of this definition demonstrated a higher level of understanding from the candidate.


	AfL	<p>Exemplar 4 shows a concise and precise definition of sunyata. Precision is often one of the factors which moves a candidates' response from very good to excellent.</p>
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Some candidates made excellent points but then did not develop those points further to show understanding; to link them back to the question; or to develop a counter argument. Candidates who make statements tend not to gain as much credit as candidates who make statements and then develop those ideas.

	AfL	Exemplar 5 shows a really good point made by a candidate but it the point is not developed. It does not link to other concepts or back to the question. Exemplar 3 shows a really good example of how a point is made and taken to shows criticism and counter criticism. Development is one of the key words in the levels of response for AO2.
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There were two areas where candidates showed misconceptions. In Question 2 some candidates talked about Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism as Western Buddhism. Both these forms of Buddhism developed in China and were refined later in Japan. Therefore, neither would be seen to be 'Western' Buddhism. Sunyata is a difficult concept to understand and explain. However, it is one of the defining characteristics of the developments in Buddhist thought. Nagarjuna's writing can be very challenging. However, there are many scholars to have come to grips with this concept and represented in a more 'user friendly' fashion. Thich Nhat Hanh is a good example of this.

	Misconception	Pure Land Buddhism and Zen are not examples of Western Buddhism, but they are Buddhist traditions that are found in the west. The term Western Buddhism refers to the Buddhist organisations which have developed in the west (i.e. North America and Europe) for example Plum Village or Triratna.
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	Misconception	Emptiness does not mean no inherent worth or empty of substance. Emptiness is not a good word because it suggests nihilism whereas it means that everything is interconnected therefore nothing can exist on its own, create itself or be independent of the rest of the world. It is in this sense that it is empty. Thich Nhat Hanh uses the term inter-being. Which is a much more helpful word than emptiness. Exemplar 4 uses a nice concise explanation.
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Misconceptions such as these have meant that some candidates may have been given more credit for Question 4 where there were fewer misconceptions than for Questions 2 and 3.

Question 1

- 1* Evaluate the role of the three poisons (three fires) in preventing a person from escaping samsara. [40]

Excellent responses have a holistic understanding of the three fires within the context of samsara and liberation from it. Some candidates could demonstrate through exemplified reasoning why the three fires do and do not prevent liberation. Most candidates showed how other concepts may link to this and the impact they have on liberation. Candidates who showed the interconnectedness of Buddhist ideas tended to gain more credit. Some candidates could explain that the key to enlightenment is fully understanding and integrating the Four Noble Truths and that this itself dispels ignorance and so leads back to the three poisons. Many responses were a little vague and made general assertions about the three poisons. Some did talk about each one in turn and show how each not only prevented liberation but also how it linked with other concepts, and therefore showing its relative importance. Some suggested that the three poisons are less important in Pure Land Buddhism and were able to explain this well.

Exemplar 1

from reaching their ultimate goal. As human craving (depicted in the 3 poisons) causes suffering; as the more we crave the more we are unsatisfied (vicious cycle). Buddha's resolution to this craving was disconnecting oneself from the cycle and to unattach oneself from everything (as you will then prevent yourself from craving). However, this was criticised as being a challenging task for many Buddhists, as it meant giving up everything (many new forms of Buddhism do not follow this teaching - Western & Pure Land). However, the story of ~~the~~ the Buddha (Siddhartha Guatama) emphasises the importance of enlightenment (Nibbana which can then lead to paranibbana) - the ultimate goal of a Buddhist's path.

Exemplar 1 shows how a candidate is using their knowledge of the three fires in its wider context. In this case it is the teachings from the Four Noble Truths in relation to craving. However, the only reference to the three poisons is in brackets "(depicted in the three poisons)". The rest of the paragraph, however good is not explicitly tied to the three poisons. Therefore, the candidate does not show in this section that they are responding to the question.

Exemplar 2

		<p>The first poison is greed. Greed prevents the escape from samsara because it means you are striving for something for personal gain rather than actually trying to end the cycle. For example, if someone is greedy for money, they will</p>
		<p>solely focus on that rather than enlightenment. Greed is also selfish and can cause suffering to others which is one of the biggest issues in Buddhism. However, one criticism of this is, what if someone is greedy to end the cycle of samsara? This would still make the person feel greed but it is for the goal that every Buddhist wants. This is a strong criticism.</p>

Exemplar 2 would have been a weak response had it not been for the examples. The response shows that the candidate does understand how the three fires link to samsara.

Question 2

2* 'Westernised Buddhism has distorted the Buddha's teachings.' Discuss.

[40]

Excellent responses had a clear a holistic understanding of the different contexts that Buddhism has moved into and how this has shaped/ changed Buddhism. There often was some discussion about whether this is a distortion or not. There was a very wide range of responses, from very general concerns about misconceptions of Buddhism in the media. Many candidates discussed the commodification of meditation as self-help (as in Exemplar 3). Others gave extremely detailed accounts of Secular Buddhism, and Dharma Busting, often with fairly detailed theological commentary. Less commonly, some candidates also considered the Triratna and New Kadampa movements, again with greater and lesser amounts of detail. Quite a few discussed the Thai Forest Movement and opinion was divided as to whether or not this constituted 'Western Buddhism'. The Plum Village movement was also occasionally discussed, although many were confused as to its distinctive features. Less well addressed, was the issue of the Dalai Lama. Some candidates seemed to think that he was the best example of Westernised Buddhism and that that he has changed Buddhist teachings for a western audience, although very few could give examples. Others discussed the way he has been portrayed in the media.

Exemplar 3

		<p>one area of Buddhism that has been western countries have particularly taken notice on is meditation and mindfulness.</p> <p>Arguably this is because of an evergrowing ^{work} for peace in a busy and materialistic world. Other ^{reasons to} areas implement meditation include the help for inmates in prison, since they can gain control over their thoughts, reducing anger for example. Now While the adoption of some Buddhist techniques and practices seems unthreatening, some have a strong view in opposition. Some have argued that there is no point to this, that it will only lead to mundane enlightenment, suggesting that Buddhism without the dharma is nothing. This could be taken as distorting the Buddha's teachings almost by picking and choosing, forgetting some aspects entirely, opening up Buddhism to be vulnerable as the the mass teachings could be lost.</p> <p>However, Carfield would argue otherwise. He argues that the the integration of Buddhism into the West is good for both the western cultures, and the Buddhism itself. It is explained that Buddhism enters and transforms cultures, while also being transformed by</p>
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Exemplar 3 is from a full mark response. It uses an example and then develops that point with a criticism and counter criticism. Shows how a candidate is using their knowledge of the three fires in its wider context. In this case it is the teachings from the Four Noble Truths in relation to craving. However, the

only reference to the three poisons is in brackets "(depicted in the three poisons)". The rest of the paragraph, however good is not explicitly tied to the three poisons. Therefore, the candidate does not show in this section that they are responding to the question.

Exemplar 3 shows a really good example of how a point is made and taken to shows criticism and counter criticism. Development is one of the key words in the levels of response for AO2.

Question 3

3* To what extent is emptiness (*sunyata/sunnata*) the most important concept in Mahayana Buddhism? [40]

Excellent responses demonstrated a holistic understanding of sunyata and its place within Mahayana thought. Candidates who demonstrated through exemplification a clear understanding tended to receive more credit. Many candidates showed a range/ depth of concepts which they linked to and interconnect with sunyata. In many cases it was the conclusion which showed the most insight into the issue. Many compared sunyata to the Bodhisattva path discussing which could be said to be the most important, but only the strongest suggested that sunyata underlies the Bodhisattva ideal. Also, some suggested that sunyata has less significance as it does not help to attain enlightenment. Only a few understood the true significance of sunyata in its assertion that there is, ultimately no difference between samsara and nibbana and that to realise this equates to enlightenment. It was, however, this relational understanding of the significance of sunyata that was found in responses which were given the most credit.

Exemplar 4

		dependent origination. Can An effect cannot separate from its cause and vice versa. Cause and effect are interdependent concepts. Due to this
		idea of universal contingency, it follows the importance of sunyata follows. If everything is conting but it must be empty.))

Exemplar 4 shows a concise and precise definition of sunyata. Precision is often one of the factors which moves a candidates' response from very good to excellent.

Question 4

4* Critically discuss the role of women in the monastic sangha.

[40]

Excellent responses tended to have a holistic understanding of the role of women in the Sangha and showed this through a range/depth of examples. Many candidates showed that the concepts and issues surrounding women in the Sangha are clearly understood. These concepts and issues were then used well in the discussion of the role of women. This was a very popular, possibly the most popular question and by a large number of candidates responded to it very well. Most had quite detailed knowledge. Some concentrated on the historical issue, and the extent to which the Buddha did or did not support female ordination. Most referred to the story of the Dragon King's Daughter, although only a few of the better responses seemed to be aware that there are a variety of different ways in which it can be interpreted. Other responses focused on the more contemporary issue, particularly of the problems of female ordination in the various traditions, and the role that particular nuns are taking in trying to change things. Many used Burma/Myanmar and Sri Lanka as examples. There were lots of references to 'The Saffron Road' by Christine Toomey which discusses all of these issues in detail.

Exemplar 5

	one view of women is ascetic misogyny, the belief women play the role of being dangerous temptresses to monks causing them to crave, keeping them trapped in samsara. The Buddha described women in the pali canon as 'despicable', 'temptresses' giving them the role of being nothing more than a symbol of sex here to test monks on the road to Nirvana.
	However another view of women is that they can actually reach enlightenment and can gain personal spiritual development to Nirvana. Over 500 of the Buddha's female followers reached enlightenment, the most famous one is Sujata who is an inspiration to most Buddhist women hoping to follow the path to enlightenment. However just

Exemplar 5 shows a really point made by a candidate but it the point is not developed. It does not link to other concepts or back to the question.

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