Course Code and Title: CURE 3145, Buddhism and Contemporary Life  
(also registered as UGED 3322)

CUHK, Spring 2019 semester  
Time: Wednesdays, 2:30pm to 4:15pm (class); 4:30pm to 5:30pm (tutorial)  
Location: TC Cheng Building, C4  
Instructor: Douglas Gildow (dmgildow@cuhk.edu.hk; office: room 312, Leung Kau Kui Building)

Course Description
This course explores the relationship between Buddhism and contemporary life, focusing on but not limited to Han Chinese Buddhism. The course is structured into three units, introduction (weeks 1-3), themes (weeks 4-12), and conclusion (week 13). The thematic units analyze Buddhism in relation to topics such as meditation, diet, ritual, and politics.

This course assumes that Buddhism as a set of beliefs and practices has always been evolving, and examines how this evolution continues into the present. In addition to a brief introduction to Buddhist teachings, the course will examine how Buddhism and other components of society mutually transform one another. It will also give students the opportunity to consider important life questions about topics such as meaning, suffering, cultural heritage, environmental protection, political authority, and globalization, and to evaluate Buddhist responses to these questions.

Course Syllabus
I. Introduction  
   1. Buddhism and the Buddha  
   2. Basic Buddhist Teachings  
   3. Overview of Contemporary World Buddhism  
II. Thematic Units  
   1. Meditation/Buddhism as Therapy  
   2. Diet/Vegetarianism and Relations with Non-Human Animals  
   3. Ritual/Karma and Environmentalism  
   4. Death/Changing Funerary Customs and Relationships to the Deceased  
   5. Politics/Buddhist Institutions under Different Regimes  
   6. Syncretism/Buddhist Fusions with Local Culture  
   7. Globalization/Transnational Networks of Buddhist Influence  
   8. Hong Kong Buddhism/Local Buddhism in Global Perspective  
III. Conclusions and Synthesis

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will be able to

Knowledge  
1. Describe Buddhist connections with society in various historical settings and contemporary contexts.  
2. Examine the ways Buddhism influences contemporary society and culture, and vice versa.  
3. Explain basic Buddhist teachings and history.

Skills
4. Engage in a critical analysis of academic writings, including finding and assessing the main argument, evidence, implications, and unstated assumptions.
5. Translate skills of critical reading into the related skills of speaking and writing persuasively.
6. Relate textual and social analysis of crucial issues to one’s personal life orientation.

Attitudes
7. Appreciate Buddhism as part of cultural heritage and as a set of potential resources in contemporary life.

Assessment Scheme
Participation: 20%
Mid-Term Exam: 30%
Final Paper: 50%

A Note on Language
The medium of instruction for this course will be English. Required readings will be in English, and student assignments (including reading responses, examinations, and papers) must also be composed in English. Optional, recommended readings in Chinese are provided for some course units for interested students.

Course Requirements
Students will be required to complete the following:
1. Regular attendance, reading, in-class discussion, and response papers. Attend each class, complete the required readings each week, and submit to the class discussion board on Blackboard a brief (100-300 word) reflection on the weekly reading(s), with a potential question for class discussion included. For full credit, at least seven weekly response papers must be submitted for the readings during the following eight weeks: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12. Response papers are due by midnight the night before class.
2. Mid-Term Examination. During week 9 (March 19), a mandatory in-class examination will be held. This exam will include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, map identification, and short response questions. (A short practice quiz may also be given during week 3).
3. Final paper. During the final day of class (April 17), the instructor will provide questions for student final papers, which will be synthetic and creative essays based in large part on course readings. Final papers are due exactly one week afterwards (April 24).

Extra Credit
Students will be permitted to do one extra credit assignment for two points (i.e., two percentage points added to the final course grade) during the semester. This extra assignment consists in presenting to the class news about a contemporary Buddhist development (usually from one or more online media sources). It would involve a 3-5-minute presentation plus several minutes of class discussion. Interested students should reserve a time and discuss their presentations with the instructor in class at least one week before presenting.

Readings
All required readings will be posted on the course Blackboard site. Some of the recommended readings will be posted there as well.

Feedback for Evaluation
An end-of-term university course evaluation will be conducted in class. Students’ comments and feedback on the course through e-mails or personal meeting with the instructor are always welcome.

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Class Schedule

**Week 1 (Jan. 9): Introduction, Buddhism, and the Buddha(s)**
Introduction to the course and basic idea about what Buddhism is and who (or what) the Buddha was/is.

**Week 2 (Jan. 16): Basic Teachings and Worldview**
Buddhist views of the nature of the world, the basic problems of life, and the ultimate solution to all personal problems.

Recommended Reading:

**Week 3 (Jan. 23): The Contemporary Buddhist World**
Major (extant) varieties of Buddhism, and how they come together in Lumbini, site of the Buddha’s birth.

Recommended Reading:

**Week 4 (Jan. 30): Meditation and Mindfulness**
How have Buddhist meditation practices been appropriated in Western cultures, in particular for medical purposes? What effect does this appropriation have on traditional Buddhism worldwide?

Recommended Reading:

**Week 5 (Feb. 13): Diet (Vegetarianism)**
What is the connection between Buddhism and vegetarian diet? How has this connection played out in different Buddhist societies? How has it changed in modernity? Does Buddhist vegetarianism relate to notions of animal rights or environmentalism?


Recommended Readings:
- Extract from the Vinaya in Ten Recitation, Scroll #37 (十誦律卷三十七).
- Fanwang jing, scroll #2, selection of brief passages on diet (梵網經卷二).

Week 6 (Feb. 20): Ritual
Discussion of Buddhist rituals and their functions, focusing on one controversial ritual, “releasing life” (fang sheng). This leads to an examination of the connections between compassion and different models of ethics (roughly, virtue ethics vs. consequentialism).


Recommended Reading:

Week 7 (Feb. 27): Death
Death is a universal event among humans (and all living beings), but the meanings ascribed to death vary between cultures and religions, as do the concrete ways of dealing with the memories and bodies of the deceased. What are some distinct Buddhist approaches to these issues, how have they affected various societies, and how have changes in modernity, in turn, affected Buddhist practices?


Recommended Readings:

Week 8 (March 6): Politics
What is the relationship between politics and Buddhism in modern Chinese states? This unit examines the relationship in democratic civil society (ROC) and in an authoritarian, semi-corporatist one (PRC).


**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 9 (March 13): Midterm Examination and TBA**

**Week 10 (March 20): Religious Syncretism and Relics**

From its earliest inception Buddhism as a set of beliefs and practices has fused with local cultures. This unit examines such a fusion in the case of Taiwanese mortuary practices.


**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 11 (March 27): Pizza Effects**

Examination of transnational flows of influence within the Buddhist world. How does this case from South Korea compare with Buddhism in Hong Kong and mainland China?


**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 12 (April 10): Buddhism in Hong Kong**
Discussion of Buddhism in Hong Kong, focusing on relatively modernist Buddhist institutions and the influence of Buddhism from Taiwan. What does Pong’s thesis leave out, and how would you want to critique and/or update her findings to bring them up-to-date?


Recommended Reading:
- Deng Jiazhou 鄧家宙. 2015. 香港佛教史.

Week 13 (April 17, final class): Conclusions, Discussion of Final Assignment

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Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students’ uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Grade Descriptor:
A    Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
A-   Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
B    Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
C    Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
D    Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.
F    Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.