

CURE 3145, Buddhism and Contemporary Life
(Also registered as UGED 3322)

CUHK, Spring 2024 term

Time: Thursdays, 10:30am to 12:15pm (class); 12:30pm to 1:15pm (tutorial)

Location: Lee Shau Kee (LSK) 210

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 4-11), and conclusion (week 12). 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 evaluate Buddhist responses to important life questions and social issues.

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
- 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. Student assignments (including reading responses, examinations, and papers) must be composed in English.

Course Requirements

Students will be required to complete the following:

1. *Participation: 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, seven weekly response papers must be submitted for the readings during the following weeks: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11. Response papers are due by 11:59pm the night before class.
2. *Mid-Term Examination.* During week 9 (March 21), 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 18), 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 25).

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. 11): 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. 18): 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.

- Strong, John S. 2015. *Buddhisms*, pp. 113-134 (chapter 4, "Some Permutations of the Middle Way").
- Four Pali Suttas (handout, early Buddhist scriptures or selection thereof, from *The Norton Anthology of World Religions: Buddhism*, pp. 158-201).

Recommended Reading:

- Gethin, Rupert. 1998. *Foundations of Buddhism*, pp. 59-84 (chapter 3, “Four Truths”).

Week 3 (Jan. 25): The Contemporary Buddhist World

Major (extant) varieties of Buddhism, and how they come together in Lumbini, site of the Buddha’s birth.

- Strong, John S. 2015. *Buddhisms*, pp. 1-36 (chapter 1, “Buddhisms: An Introduction”).
- Pew Research Center. 2015. *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2015*. Available here: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>. (especially read the parts on Buddhism)

Week 4 (Feb. 1): 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?

- Wilson, Jeff. 2014. *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*, pp. 75-103 (chapter 3, “Medicalizing Mindfulness”).
- Nanamoli and Bodhi, trans. 1995. “The Foundations of Mindfulness” (MN 10). In *The Middle Length Discourses*, pp. 145-155.

Recommended Reading:

- Bodhi, Bodhi. 2011. “What Does Mindfulness Really Mean.” *Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 12, pp. 19-39.
- Wilson, Jeff. 2017. “Mindfulness Makes You a Way Better Lover: Mindful Sex and the Adaptation of Buddhism to New Cultural Desires.” In *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science*, edited by David L. McMahan and Erik Braun. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Week 5 (Feb. 8): 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?

- Kieschnick, John. 2005. “Buddhist Vegetarianism in China.” In *Of Tripod and Palate*, edited by Roel Sterckx, pp. 186-212.
- Jaffe, Richard M. 2005. “The Debate Over Meat Eating in Japanese Buddhism.” In *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya: Essays Presented in Honor of Professor Stanley Weinstein*, edited by Stanley Weinstein and William M. Bodiford, 255-275. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

Recommended Readings:

- Tarocco, Francesca. 2007. *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma*. New York: Routledge, pp. 25-39.
- 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).

Feb. 15. No class. Happy New Year!

Week 6 (Feb. 22): 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).

- Yang, Der-Ruey. 2015. “Animal Release: The Dharma being Staged between Marketplace and Park.” *Cultural Diversity in China* 1 (2): 141-163.
- Ritual Manual, 放生儀規 (in Chinese).

Recommended Reading:

- Gildow, Douglas M. 2014. “The Chinese Buddhist Ritual Field.” *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 27: 59-127. Available here: <https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~dmgildow/2.7.html>
- Smith, Joanna F. Handlin. 1999. “Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist Inspiration and Elite Imagination.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58 (1): 51-84.

Week 7 (Feb. 29): 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?

- Chan, Yiu Kwan. 2008. “Popular Buddhist Ritual in Contemporary Hong Kong: Shuilu Fahui, a Buddhist Rite for Saving all Sentient Beings of Water and Land.” *Buddhist Studies Review* 25 (1): 90-105.

Recommended Readings:

- Rowe, Mark. 2004. “Where the Action Is.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31(2): pp. 357-388.
- Sik, Hung Hin and Fa Ren Sik. 2016. “A Case Study of the Decline of the Buddhist Funeral Ritual, the Guangdong Yuqie Yankou.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 17 (1): 116-137.

March 7. No Class. Enjoy Reading Week!

Week 8 (March 14): 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).

- Kuo, Cheng-tian. 2008. *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan*, pp. 1-34.

Recommended Readings:

- Madsen, Richard. 2007. *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- LaLiberte, Andre. 2011. “Buddhist Revival Under State Watch.” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40 (2): 107-134.
- Gildow, Douglas M. 2018. “Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), Religion, and His Plan to Save China through Buddhism.” *Asia Major, Third Series* 31 (2): 107-148.

Week 9 (March 21): Midterm Examination and TBA

Week 10 (March 28): 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.

- Gildow, Douglas M. 2006. "Flesh Bodies, Stiff Corpses, and Gathered Gold: Mummy Worship, Corpse Processing, and Mortuary Ritual in Contemporary Taiwan." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 33, pp. 1-37.

Recommended Readings:

- Fan Lizhu 范丽珠. 2010. "北方民间信仰中的肉身成道：从王二奶奶到香河老人." *宗教人类学* 2: 210-231.
- Gouin, Margaret E. 2010. *Tibetan Rituals of Death: Buddhist Funerary Practices*, pp. 80-95.
- Gildow, Douglas M. 2011. "The Reintroduction and Diffusion of Mummification Practices in Taiwan, 1959-2011." Conference paper for the Fourth Congress of the *Réseau Asie & Pacifique*. Available here: <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~dmgildow/2.5.html>

April 4. No Class. Happy Tomb-Sweeping Day!

Week 11 (April 11): 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?

- Joo, Ryan Bongseok. 2011. "Countercurrents from the West: 'Blue-Eyed' Zen Masters, Vipassanā Meditation, and Buddhist Psychotherapy in Contemporary Korea." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79 (3): 614-638.

Recommended Readings:

- Bharati, Aghananda. 1970. "The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (2): 267-287.
- Buswell, Robert E. 2005. *Currents and Countercurrents: Korean Influences on the East Asian Buddhist Traditions*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Week 12 (April 18): Conclusion

- Class content TBD.

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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/academic_honesty/.

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.