RELI 125 (HP, CC) Buddhism and Psychology

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Catalog Description: This course explores Buddhism as a kind of ‘psychology’. We will focus on how Buddhism problematizes pain and pleasure: skillfully cultivating pain to detach from pleasure and skillfully cultivating certain kinds of pleasure to detach from our tendency to avoid pain. First, we will read – closely -- key Buddhist texts that problematize this ‘middle way.’ Then we will investigate the debate about their contemporary application through the case study of depression in Asia.

Pre-requisites: Any one of the following: RELI 10, RELI 15, RELI 16, RELI 19, RELI 26, RELI 35, RELI 40, RELI 75, RELI 77, RELI 86, RELI 104, RELI 118, ANTH 117, ASST 021, ASST 011

By the end of this course you will:

- Know what scholars mean by the term “medical globalization” -- and develop, if not your own position on the controversies this term involves, an ability to discuss with sensitivity the pros and cons of the complexities involved as biomedical disease categories universalize. For example: Is a disease universal if it is diagnosed everywhere? What roles do culture, history and society play in mental dis-ease? Are there really "cultural" protectors against certain forms of mental dis-ease (and if so, what happens when these cultural forms interact with Western biomedical technologies and truths)?

- be conversant in some diverse ways that emotions, desires, passions, drives, can be experienced and approached in different cultures -- and in the role that "religion," as one thread, can play in lived textures of emotion. For example: when people treat an emotion with a drug, does that mean they are "somaticizing" feelings?

- What does it mean to apply a “Western” category like psychology – to a religious practice that was developed and utilized in quite different frameworks and life settings? Do we expand our notion of psychology ... and/ or do we reduce our notion of Buddhism? What are the personal and political dynamics of medical syncretism: across cultural lines, across lines of different medical systems, across religion and medicine?
Required Texts

- *Culture and Depression*, Kleinman and Good (eds.) (Berkeley: Univ of CA, 1985).

Assignments:

1) You will write **two papers**, at the end of each section. The first is worth 25% of your grade; the second 35%. You have the option of re-writing the first paper.
2) **Attendance AND knowledgeable** class participation is worth 20% of your grade. Attendance in this class works like karma. You have three absences without any consequences. After three absences, karma kicks in: you will lose 1/3 of a point from your final grade for each absence that you have exceeding your allotted three.
3) You will **lead class discussion** twice during the semester. This will entail formulating a list of 4-6 discussion questions/ starters (video, film ... anything is fair game to keep us started thinking together!) and submitting them to me in advance so that we can meet and discuss them. You will earn 10% of your grade for each time (prepared questions, meeting with me, class discussion itself), for a total of 20%.

**Paper One:** Write 6-8 pages. Use parenthetical citations.

**Sample Topic:**
One synonym for Buddhism is “The Middle Way.” In class, we discussed a number of different “middle ways” – different pairs of extremes between which Buddhism attempts to “middle” (here used as a verb). Pick ONE text we read. Based on a close reading of 3-5 passages in that text, discuss a) what kind of “middle” that text attempts to get its reader to glimpse as well as b) precisely how the text acts upon the reader to help them glimpse or inhabit that middle.

**Paper Two:** Write 10 pages.

**Choice # 1:** This paper is the concluding exercise for our course. Your general task is to put our classic Buddhist texts into conversation with one of the readings about depression in Asia. For example: Compare and contrast at least two passages on “mindfulness” from our readings on the Vinaya and The Longer Discourses of the Buddha with Yangshen as practiced by retired
Beijingers? Or: What would Shantideva have to say about Obeysekere’s argument regarding meditation and depression? Discuss at least three passages in depth.

Choice #2: To conclude your learning in this course, pick one emotion that we have been discussing throughout the course. Pick one of the various ways of problematizing, or relating to, that emotion which we have discussed in this course. Apply that “way” or “practice” to the emotion of your choice for 3 weeks. You can do this on the fly as this emotion comes up during your day, or you can do this by setting aside 10 minutes or so everyday to meditate upon the emotion in your day. In either case, you MUST develop an intentional “practice” modeled on one of your readings, using our class discussions as your guide (I can help you do this if you like!). Write an essay in which you reflect on the process by interacting with at least four passages from our readings (you must include readings from both sections One and Two).

Be sure to tell me: 1) What is your usual way of approaching this emotion? 2) What happened when you approached it in this different way? (and... what did you think would happen?) 3) Then relate what actually happened to what the reading says? 4) What does trying to approach an emotion in a way that differs from your usual way teach you: about the nature of emotions? Or about the impact of "religio-cultural frameworks and practices" on idioms of emotion?


a) Discuss the view of mindfulness in this text.

b) Reflect upon at least two classic Buddhist texts that we have read that speak about "mindfulness": how are they the same and how are they different? What happens to the notion and practices of mindfulness when placed in the context of biomedical understandings of ‘health’ (versus when the Buddha speaks of himself as a ‘doctor,’ for instance).

c) Compare and/or contrast the use of mindfulness in Silverton and Zinn to one of the techniques of approaching depression we read. Are they doing the same thing – or something essentially different? That is, what happens when medical globalization works in the other direction, across different relations of knowledge and power?

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

CLASSIC TEXTS: Buddhism as Psychology:
What to do with Emotions? Train (with) them...

**W Sept 4 – Healthy-Minded or Sick Soul?**
William James, Varieties of Religious Experience (excerpt)

**M Sept 9 and W Sept 11** – basic discussion of all those things about Buddhism you learned in class but now only dimly remember

*The Deer Park sermon* (long version)
CASE STUDY: Depression in Asia

M Oct 28 & W Oct 30 -- Medical Globalization
Byron Good, "The Complexities of Pharmaceutical Hegemonies in Indonesia." In Pharmaceutical Self, 117-144. Will introduce you to key terms in the scholarly discourse of medical globalization AND will introduce you to an important caution: Psychotics vs. SSRIs.

M Nov 4 and W Nov 6 -- Westerners psychologize – Chinese somaticize?

M Nov 11 and W Nov 13 – Challenge # 1 from Sri Lanka
Gananath Obeysekere, "Depression, Buddhism and the Work of Culture in Sri Lanka," in Culture and Depression, 134-152.
What would Santideva have to say about the Buddhist retreats of which Obeysekere speaks? OR: What would the Buddha as he appears in the vinaya have to say about this way of practicing Buddhism?

M Nov 16 – Interlude: Challenge from the West # 1

W Nov 20 – Response #1: Chinese Capitalism is Depressing!
Sing Lee, "Depression: Coming of Age in China," in Kleinman, Deep China (University of CA: 2011), 177-212.

M Nov 25 no class (conversion day – all classes follow Friday schedule)
W Nov 27 no class
M Dec 2 & W Dec 4 -- Response # 2: Self-Help in China: “Don’t be Angry!” -- Yangsheng
Is Yangshen and its approach to pain and anger similar or different to Santideva? Or the Athakavagga? What is Yangshen’s relation to renunciation? To the pleasures of mindfulness? (Think about the selections from the early Vinaya and the Long Discourses).
Alternatively: who would you have to be(ome) for these practices to work in the ways that they do for retired Beijingers? OR: Is Yangshen ‘somaticization’ a la Kleinman -- or do these Beijingers acknowledge psychology but approach it through ways that do not oppose body and mind?

M Dec 9 & W Dec 11 -- Response # 3: Prozac in India
What would Obeyesekere have to say about Buddhist monks taking Prozac but in the context of Ayurveda and its ancient links to Buddhist monasteries? What would Santideva say, in terms of the bodhisattva ideal?

Dec 12 and Dec 13 -- reading days. Paper conferences.
Scheduled Exam Period -- Final paper due

DISABILITIES POLICY
If you believe you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, qualified individuals with disabilities will not be discriminated against in any programs, or services available at Hofstra University. Individuals with disabilities are entitled to accommodations designed to facilitate full access to all programs and services. SSD is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will provide students with documented disabilities accommodation letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact SSD as soon as possible. All students are responsible for providing accommodation letters to each instructor and for discussing with him or her the specific accommodations needed and how they can be best implemented in each course. For more information on services provided by the university and for submission of documentation, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities, 2’2 Memorial Hall, 516-463-7075.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
Plagiarism is a serious ethical and professional infraction. Hofstra’s policy on academic honesty reads: “The academic community assumes that work of any kind […] is done, entirely, and without assistance, by and only for the individual(s) whose name(s) it bears.” Please refer to the “Procedure for Handling Violations of Academic Honesty by Undergraduate Students at Hofstra University” to be found at http://www.hofstra.edu/PDF/Senate_FPS_11.pdf, for details about what constitutes plagiarism, and Hofstra’s procedures for handling violations.

UNIVERSITY DEADLINES
Please be mindful of University deadlines. See www.hofstra.edu/deadlines.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course fulfills the following learning goals for the Department of Religion:

**Learning Goal 3:** Students will be able to **analyze** the social implications of religion [Analysis]

Objectives
- a) Students will explain the inseparability of religion and its social context
- b) Students will give examples of the links between religion and other dimensions of social life (gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, politics, economics, science, technology)

**Learning Goal 4:** Students will be able to **interpret** a variety of religious texts [Application]

Objectives
- a) Students will demonstrate an acquaintance with a religious text or texts
- b) Students will read religious texts critically

This course fulfills the following learning goals for general education:

**Goal 1. Students will demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively.**
1.a Clearly and accurately summarize and evaluate the facts, presumptions, viewpoints, values, and arguments presented in a text or creative work.
1.b Gather and assess relevant information, and apply appropriate cognitive methods in solving problems or answering questions raised in a text or creative work.
1.c Construct well-reasoned solutions or conclusions; test and defend conclusions against relevant criteria and standards.
1.d Critically analyze one’s own thinking by identifying one’s presumptions, values, and viewpoints as well as problems, inconsistencies, and unanswered questions.
1.e Conceive and defend alternative hypotheses and viewpoints; offer and explain reasons for provisionally rejecting or accepting them.

**Goal 2. Students will apply analytical reasoning across academic disciplines.**
2a. Read with comprehension, and critically interpret written work in discipline-specific contexts.
2g. Describe, comprehend, and analyze the role of philosophical ideas, historical movements, or ethical debates in the development of civilizations.

**Goal 3. Students will demonstrate proficiency in written communication.**

3a. Compose grammatical sentences.

3b. Use various sentence forms to effectively modulate style and tone.

3c. Compose a sequence of paragraphs that develop a point.
3d. Summarize, quote, and respond to reliable texts to support and develop claims; apply relevant standards for citation.

3e. Write an effective argumentative essay.

3f. Respond to writing assignments using appropriate style, structure, and voice.

3g. Apply editing, proofreading, and revising strategies.

**Goal 5. Students will develop an awareness of and sensitivity to global issues.**

5b. Demonstrate knowledge of the intellectual, social, political, economic, or cultural practices of at least one of the peoples in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, or of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia.
Bibliography for Religion & Medical Globalization in Asia: Focus on Depression (Mood Disorder)


Farquhar, Judith. 2013. “Same and Different in Trans-Local East Asian Medicine.” Culture, Medicine, Psychiatry 37:105-110.


The Perspectives of Buddhist Monks.” *Culture, Medicine, Psychiatry* Vol 35:396–416.


_____. 2013. Depression, Constraint, and the Liver: (Dis)assembling the Treatment of Emotion-Related Disorders in Chinese Medicine.” *Culture, Medicine, Psychiatry* 37: 30-58.

