Medicine, Health, and Culture

“Although health is naturally the goal of the doctor’s activity, it is not actually ‘made’ by the doctor.” from The Enigma of Health: the Art of Healing in an Scientific Age (1996) by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Lecture: Monday 1:30 pm-3:15 pm, NAH 11
Tutorial: Monday 3:30 pm-4:15 pm, NAH 401
Instructor: Hsuan-Ying Huang 黃宜穎 (NAH 322, hsuan-ying.huang@cuhk.edu.hk) Office hour: to be announced
TA: Claudia Ka-Sin Yuen (NAH 406, claudia.yuenks@gmail.com)

Brief Course Description:

What is medicine? What is health? How to define health and its alleged opposite – illness or disease? How to enhance or deal with various health-related conditions? Seeing doctors and taking drugs? What alternative forms of healing exist in your local world and beyond? What would happen when a person fall sick? What does getting sick mean to the person him- or herself and the family or community he/she is situated in? What causes a person to get sick, to turn from being healthy into being sick? What could we learn from the health-related experiences and practices that exist in other cultures or societies?

This course is designed to introduce students to the field of medical anthropology, a discipline driven by these questions (and many other associated with them). It is divided into two parts. The first examines its major theoretical positions and themes. Here we pay close attention to how medical anthropology, initially an applied sub-field of social-cultural anthropology, could have developed a unique theoretical character in the past few decades. Here we will read some of the most important works of the field’s founding figures, including Arthur Kleinman and Margaret Lock.

The second part selects a small number of issues—technology (death and organ transplantation), HIV/AIDS epidemic, and mental health—from a multitude of topics that confront contemporary medical anthropologists. Unfortunately we do not have time to cover more. But we already touch on several topics in the first part as we intend to introduce ideas through ethnographic cases. All these offer great opportunities for us to apply and rethink the theories introduced beforehand. At the end of the semester, we will touch upon a fundamental issue in medicine— caregiving—and use it to wrap up the entire course.
Learning Outcomes:

Upon the completion of this course, student will be able:

1. to become familiar with the history and major theoretical positions of medical anthropology.

2. to comprehend the diversity of health-related beliefs, systems of knowledge and practices across different cultures and societies.

3. to analyse the interactions of biological, cultural, and social factors in the shaping of health-related experiences.

Course Materials:

The course does not have a textbook.

All the readings (required and optional) will be posted on Blackboard. All the film excerpts will be shown in class.

Evaluation:

1. Course attendance and participation (20%):

Attendance, in both lectures and tutorials, is essential. The participation grade will be based on your preparation (readings) and contribution to discussions (especially in tutorials).

2. Précis (10%):

You need to write a précis (600-800 words in English or 1000-1300 characters in Chinese) to summarise and evaluate a particular week’s readings during the semester. This exercise will begin from the third week, by which you will be asked to sign up for a specific week. The précis has to be submitted by 10 am on the day of the lecture via e-mail to the instructor and the TA.

3. Illness narrative assignment (30%):

Each student is expected to interview a patient to solicit a narrative of illness experiences. The topic will be covered on Sep 26, but you should begin looking for an interview candidate once the class begins.

Oral presentation (10%)—on Oct 16.

Paper, 1200-1500 words in English or 2000-2500 characters in Chinese (20%)—due on Oct 23 (before class).

4. Final Paper (40%):
Choose a topic of particular interest to you (of course it has to be related to medicine and health). Although this is an Anthropology course, the project doesn’t need to be based on fieldwork. The paper (2500-3000 words in English or 4200-5000 characters in Chinese) should include at least 2 references from the course. It is due on Dec 14 (5pm).

Format and Submission:

The illness narrative assignment and the final paper should be submitted via the plagiarism-detecting website Veriguide (https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jspx). You also need to submit a signed declaration confirming your awareness of the University’s policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures when submitting the hard copy of your paper.

Course Expectation and Policies:

Reading:

Reading is an important part of the learning experience. You should finish the required readings before the lecture. The articles labelled as “further reading” are optional, but you're strongly encouraged to read them. Take notes while you read, and bring your questions and thoughts to the tutorial to discuss with fellow students.

Course attendance:

You should attend lectures regularly. Tutorial attendance is mandatory. If you have an unavoidable conflict or become too sick to attend the tutorial, you must contact the instructor and the TA before the tutorial begins.

Academic Integrity:

Students need to know how to cite properly and how to avoid plagiarism— using someone else’s ideas or words without attribution. Please read the University’s guidelines about academic honesty (https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/). It’s worth refreshing your memory even if you have read it before. Pay particular attention to Section 1 (What is plagiarism), Section 2 (Proper use of source material), and Appendix 1 (Details guidelines on proper use of source material).

Late Policy:

All the assignments are due on the day and time specified in the syllabus. Extension is only granted to documented medical or family/personal emergencies. You should contact the instructor and the TA as soon as possible if such unfortunate events occur. Each day late without an approved extension will result in a reduction of 1/3 of a letter grade (i.e. A becomes A-; B+ becomes B).
# Calendar:

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Reading List

PRELUDE

Sep 4: Introduction to the Course (No tutorial during this week)


PART I: Main Ideas of Medical Anthropology

Sep 11: The Precursors


Further reading


Sep 18: Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing

Film: excerpts from *The River* (河流) by Tsai Ming-Liang (蔡明亮), 1997.


Sep 25: Meaning, Experience, and Narrative


Three medical tales, written respectively from patient, doctor, and caretaker perspectives:
“What’s Wrong with Me,” Meghan O’Rourke, New Yorker, August 26, 2013 issue (http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/08/26/whats-wrong-with-me)

“The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,” Oliver Sacks


Oct 2: No Class (Oct 1, the National Day of the PRC)

Oct 9: Biopolitics


Oct 16: Illness Narrative Presentations

Oct 23: Local Biology


Further Reading


Oct 30: Social Suffering and Structural Violence

Film: excerpts from Bending the Arc (pending availability) by Kief Davidson and Pedro Kos, 2017.


Further Reading

PART II: Three Selected Topics

Nov 6: Technology—Death and Organ Transplantation


Nov 13: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic


Nov 20: Mental Health


FINALE

Nov 27: Caregiving (No tutorial during this week)

Film: excerpts from The Long Goodbye (被遺忘的時光) by Yang Li-Chou (楊力州), 2010.
