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: Thursday 10:30-12:15, NAH 12
Tutorial: To be determined
Instructor: Hsuan-Ying Huang 黃宣穎 (NAH 322, hsuan-ying.huang@cuhk.edu.hk)
Office hour: by appointment
TA: To be determined

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 that tried to answer these problems (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, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, and Margaret Lock.

The second part selects a small number of issues—mental health, death and organ transplantation, and HIV/AIDS—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.

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.

Required Texts:

All the required readings will be posted on Blackboard. MA students need to read those labelled as “further reading” in addition to the required readings.

Evaluation:

Tutorial participation:

25% Students should finish the readings before the tutorials. Active participation and thoughtful discussion are highly appreciated.

Précis:

25% Each student is expected to write a short précis (around 800 words)—synopsis of the readings and reflections, thoughts, or questions that arise during your reading—for two classes (12.5% for each précis. This will begin from the third week. The précis needs to be turned in by 5pm on Wednesday via e-mail.

Final Paper:

Choose a topic of particular interest to you (of course it has to be somehow related to medicine and health). You are expected to meet with the instructor and/or TA to discuss your potential project during the second half of the semester. The project could involve fieldwork (interview or observation) or other kinds of materials (for example, written accounts or audio-visual works).

50%: The final paper itself (3000-3500 words). It should include at least 2 references from the course. Due on Dec 15. Please note: extension is granted to documented medical or family/personal emergencies only.

Course Policies:

Tutorial attendance is mandatory. If a student has an unavoidable conflict or becomes too sick to attend the tutorial, he/she must contact the TF before the tutorial begins. Students may miss one tutorial without penalty. If a student is sick for an extended period of time and thus must miss multiple sections, he/she must contact the instructor to help him/her devise a make-up plan.
Students need to know how to cite properly and how to avoid plagiarism. One of two citation formats may be used:

Students should read the guidelines and examples in the University's website at www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/index.htm. Also, the University requires all papers to be checked by VeriGuide (https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jspx) before submission.

**Reading List**

**Sep 8: Introduction to the Course**

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


**Further Reading**


*(No tutorial during the first week)*

**Sep 15: The New Beginning of Medical Anthropology**


**Further Reading**


**Sep 22 : Meaning, Experience, and Narrative 1**


Further Reading

Good, Byron 1994 “Illness Representation in Medical Anthropology: A Reading of the Field,” in *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 25-64

**Sep 29: Meaning, Experience, and Narrative 2**


McGill Illness Narratives Interview (MINI), a research tool that could be downloaded at: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/files/tcpsychmcgill_illness_narrative_interview.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/files/tcpsychmcgill_illness_narrative_interview.pdf)

Further Reading


**Oct 6: Biopolitics**


Further Reading


**Oct 13: Biology and Its Local Forms**


Further Reading


Oct 20: Social Suffering


Further Reading


Oct 27: Structural Violence


Scheper-Hughes, Nancy 1995 “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology,” Current Anthropology, 36 (3), pp. 409-420 (You can continue to read pp. 420-440 for comments by some well-established anthropologists on this article if you have time.)

Further Reading


Nov 3: Mental Health

Kleinman, Arthur 1988 “What is a Psychiatric Diagnosis,” in Rethinking Psychiatry: From Cultural Category to Personal Experience, New York: Free Press, pp. 1-17

**Further Reading**


**Nov 10: Death and Organ Transplantation**


**Further Reading**


**Nov 17: No Class (Graduation Ceremony)**

**Nov 24: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic**


**Further Reading**


**Dec 1 : Taking Care and Wrapping Up**

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


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