



With Michael Como, Lan Li, and C. Pierce Salguero

Expounding upon the interdisciplinary scope of the medical humanities, Professor C. Pierce Salguero (Associate Professor of Asian History and Religious Studies at Penn State University, Abington College) spoke of how he has been exploring the interrelation between Buddhism and medicine through a variety of methods, including history and specifically the history of medicine, translation studies, literary studies, and anthropology. Seeking to contextualize Buddhism and Buddhist engagements with health in a global history, Professor Salguero provided an overview of his project to date, departing from the knowledge and traditions of healing in China, where an archival abundance facilitates in-depth scholarly research.

What emerges from such research foregrounds the role of Buddhism in transporting medical ideas and practices from the Indo-European world into eastern parts of Asia. From the earliest Buddhist texts in early India, Buddhist writers have consciously identified their tradition as the solution for issues of human suffering, and illness, healing, and doctors feature frequently in narratives and similes. In fact, the first written records of Indian medical terminology can be found in early Buddhist scriptures, and the Buddhist monastic literature on disciplinary practices shed light on how fundamentally medicine undergirded everyday habits. Buddhism facilitated medical exchanges across multiple intercontinental networks even in the seventh century, giving rise to diverse healing practices throughout the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries turned on Buddhist medical practices with suspicion and an impulse to suppress, but recent decades have seen the remaking of Buddhist ideas to align with modern biomedical frameworks. Configurations of Buddhism and biomedicine in countries across southeast Asia as well as in the United States have opened up new areas for interdisciplinary research, inviting scholars of different fields and medical practitioners alike to engage with health

and healing in a cross-cultural and transhistorical study that amplifies non-white and non-English voices.

Professor Michael Como responded (Tōshū Fukami Associate Professor of Shinto Studies at Columbia University) by drawing attention to local contexts of Buddhist practices and the uncontainable presence of the spiritual, challenging us to speak of Buddhist healing without limiting it to ideas that can be transcribed onto western practices and knowledge. Questions from the audience likewise pondered the critical stakes of the ethnographic work involved in studying Buddhism and health together, including questions of transmission and exchange. We can appreciate, however, the value of medical humanities in creating such interdisciplinary dialogues and reflexively probing for inclusivity.

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