

A Socio-political Analysis of Mindfulness Practice in Hong Kong

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Abstract : Mindfulness, derived from Buddhism, has been developed to improve individuals' well-being, first in the West and then gaining growing popularity in Asia. Numerous research studies have proven the effectiveness of mindfulness among clinical groups and the public all over the world. However, as enthusiasm surges, reflections on mindfulness and its commodification and instrumentalization arise. Hong Kong was seen as the model of a free market by neoliberal economists. The relationships between its socioeconomic neoliberalism, Western-inspired democracy aspiration, and political harmonization with China Mainland have been fraught with tensions, which have been further exacerbated by socio-political changes since the 2010s. Under such circumstances, mental health problems have come into the spotlight in Hong Kong recently. Mindfulness has gained growing popularity in Hong Kong, with its influence reaching from primary schools to corporate settings. A more comprehensive socio-political analysis of mindfulness within the Hong Kong context warrants further exploration. Drawing on interview responses from mindfulness practitioners, we examine the connections between the ideologies underlying mindfulness and contemporary capitalist society. On the one hand, mindfulness focuses on the present moment and self-improvement, representing neoliberal capitalist spirituality and reinforcing existing power relations. On the other hand, mindfulness fosters the acceptance of difference, which is argued to demonstrate the potential for advancing democracy at both the individual and community levels. Academically, this research provides empirical evidence to advance the current discussions and debates surrounding the socio-political potential of mindfulness. Practically, it serves as a reflection on mindfulness practices to optimize their impact on individuals and society.

Keywords : neoliberal subjectivity, qualitative analysis, social construction, technologies of the self, therapeutic culture

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