

The Mindfulness Movement and the Erasure of Buddhism

Prof. Mario Poceski
(University of Florida)

June 25, 2018, 6-8 p.m.

Room 121, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, East Wing

The practice of mindfulness has been an integral part of the Buddhist landscape for long time. Its newfound popularity, however, represents a distinct stage in the diffusion and mainstreaming of Buddhist ideas and practices within American and other Western societies. While many may view this as a desirable or positive development, in the process Buddhism as a living tradition often becomes absent from the picture. That is especially the case in the growing recognition and deployment of mindfulness practice in various secular settings—including schools, corporations, governmental agencies, and clinics—which raises a number of pertinent questions. The lecture will primarily explore if the simplified and secularized brand of mindfulness, as deployed in hospitals, schools, or corporate environments, should be deemed to constitute a form of cultural (mis)-appropriation. While it is difficult to foresee Buddhist organizations trademarking the term and the practice, along the lines of what corporations do with their intellectual property, one could argue that there should be clearer calls for disclosure and honesty about the origins of the practice, and open acknowledgement of the central role of Buddhism. That can also pave the way for a more candid and nuanced reassessment of the whole mindfulness movement. Bringing a more traditional Buddhist perspective can perhaps even lead to a clearer understanding of some of the downsides—including the missed opportunities and things lost—in this specific instance of spiritual commodification and cultural (mis)appropriation.



Mario Poceski, a professor of Buddhist studies and Chinese religions at the Religion Department, University of Florida, received a PhD in East Asian Languages and Cultures, with specialization in Buddhist studies, from the University of California, Los Angeles (2000). He has spent extended periods as a visiting researcher at Komazawa University (Japan), Stanford University, the National University of Singapore, the University of Hamburg (Germany), and Fudan University (China), and has received several prestigious fellowships, including an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship. Prof. Poceski's most recent books are *Communities of Memory and Interpretation: Reimagining and Re-inventing the Past in East Asian Buddhism* (Hamburg 2017, ed.), *The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature* (Oxford

2015), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to East and Inner Asian Buddhism* (Blackwell 2014, ed.), *Introducing Chinese Religions* (Routledge 2009), and *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford 2007). His publications also include two other books and numerous articles and chapters on various aspects of Buddhist studies.