



Li Cheng 李成 (919-967), *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks* 晴峦萧寺.  
Ink and color on silk. 111.76 × 55.88 cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City

**HUMA 5341: The Body in Buddhist and Daoist Literature Provisional Syllabus  
SPRING 2025**

Class: F: 03:00-05:50 PM  
Instructor: Tobias Benedikt Zuern  
Office Hours: F 02:00-03:00 PM or by appointment

Classroom: TBD  
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Office: Academic Building 3343

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Body! There is probably no other phenomenon in the world that is as directly experienceable and tangible and at the same time as disconcerting and opaque due to its unforeseeable and hardly controllable responses as our own physique. Paul Valery mentions in his essay “Some Reflections on the Body” that it “is so much mine and yet so mysteriously and sometimes—always, in the end—our most redoubtable antagonist; [it] is the most urgent, the most constant and the most variable thing imaginable.” (p. 399) This variable, yet at the same time constant aspect of the body made Shigehisa Kuriyama puzzle at the beginning of his book on *The Expressiveness of the Body* how “perceptions of something as basic and intimate as the body [can] differ so?” (p. 8).

In this course, we won’t try to conclusively solve this question. Instead, we will use the diversity of responses our body has triggered throughout human history and engage in conceptualizations of the human corpus that are quite distinct to our modern-day perceptions. In particular, we will explore early and medieval Buddhist and Daoist visions of the body as a microreplica of the cosmos and its impact on various practices such as meditation on body gods, Inner Alchemy, self-immolation or relic veneration. We will use these perspectives as an opportunity to question our own understandings that are mainly influenced by a dichotomy between the body and soul/psyche as developed in a Euro-Christian context and its materialization in the modern disciplines of medicine and psychology. In other words, we will delve into Buddhist and Daoist conceptualizations of the body in order to understand the emphases and some of the limitations of our own preconceived notions that are far from being universal or exhaustive yet heavily determine our actions.

In that sense, this course is essentially an exercise in critical thinking. Using evidence from East Asia, we will be considering ways people have thought about their worlds and acted on those thoughts in the world, as well as the ways other people (i.e. us) think about those people's ideas and activities. The goal is to create an environment in which we will not only learn information about these groups but rather learn from their distinctiveness.

Since we are part of that matrix of reflection, we will be asked to think hard about and to make connections that will not always be obvious or straightforward or even *comfortable*. For example, bodily possessions or the ingestion of mercury will very likely challenge many of our everyday assumptions about the world and contest our comfort zones. Nonetheless, I hope you will become *intrigued* with the problems inherent in ideas and interpretations provided in this course and find it *exciting* to think about old ideas in new ways and new ideas in unusual ways.

## COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

To Be Added

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

1) Attendance and Participation (A/P): Many of the outcomes of this seminar—both concrete and abstract—will come from attending and participating in class on a regular basis. Our main goal is to build an environment in which you all will have the opportunity to share your thoughts and ideas so that you may explore many of the preconceived notions that underlie our daily interaction with the body. Sometimes it will also be necessary to share some of your own experiences with each other.

You are expected to do the assigned readings for each class in advance of the relevant meeting. A quick glance at the class schedule will alert you to the place of each reading in the week's agenda. Since this is a seminar, the class will depend heavily on your preparation and participation. Thus, it is of major importance that you **attend** all class sessions and **contribute actively** to our discussions. Attendance (20%) and Participation (20%) comprises **40%** of the overall course grade. **Passive attendance of the classes won't suffice to receive full credit!!!!**

2) You will produce and upload to canvas two depictions of what you think is the body: one at the beginning (**February 13**) and one at the end of the course (**May 08**). These depictions may employ any form or media you would like to choose: music, paintings, collages, poetry, raps, dance, etc. I want you to think about what the body is and how you would describe it to somebody else. What is central to the body? How does it function? Together, these creative expressions will be worth **10%** of your final grade (**5% each**).

3) Furthermore, you will need to upload two 2-page reflection papers to canvas that discuss your own depictions of the body. The first one will be due **February 21** and the second one on **May 11**.

In the first one, you will focus on the question of why you chose to depict the body the way you did? What did you exclude and why? What do your choices tell you about your own background? How did your depictions differ from the others?

In the second one, I want you to reflect on the changes between your first and second depiction of the body. Why do you think it has changed? How did the depiction change (media-wise, thematically, etc.)? Do you think this change in depiction reflects a change of thinking? How did your thinking change? In case, it didn't change, why do you think it didn't change? What makes you so certain that your depiction and your thoughts at the beginning of the class are right?

In the course of the semester I will be explaining these assignments in more detail. Together, these reflection papers will be worth **10% of your final grade (5% each)**.

4) You will be invited to carry out a **research project** in form of a 12-15-pages essay (3000-4000 words) on a topic of your choice (**overall 40% of grade**). This is an opportunity for you to pursue in some depth a problem or topic that emerges during the course of our inquiries and that more importantly interests YOU. You may choose a topic close to the general theme of the class; however, you are more than welcome to focus on a field of your interest. If you decide to write about a very different topic than the materials discussed in class, please meet me in the office hours in advance to discuss and confirm your ideas. This research project will be developed in four steps:

a) I want you to see me to discuss your topics in my office hours **at any point prior to April** to work out a feasible project for you.

b) I want you to generate a thesis out of our discussions in the office hour and a preliminary bibliography that you will turn in at the latest by **April 11**.

c) If you want feedback on your work in progress, please hand in a fully written and worked out draft of your paper by **May 8**, on which I will comment.

d) An electronic copy of your final draft will be due on **May 24**.

I will provide a list of possible topics around Mid-March to help you narrow down your options, so you may begin focus on your final project.

**IF AT ANY TIME DURING THE SEMESTER YOU ARE UNCLEAR ABOUT WHAT IS EXPECTED OR THE CONTENT OF THE CLASS, PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO ASK**

**Evaluation Criteria Are as Follows:**

An **“A” paper** or exam is clearly written and well organized, and most importantly, contains a thoughtful, original, and analytical central argument supported by illustrations and evidence drawn from course materials. It demonstrates that the student has grappled with the issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings and discussions, and formulated a compelling, independent argument. An **“A” paper** is polished and grammatically fluid.

A typical **“B” paper** is a solid work that demonstrates that the student has a good grasp of the course materials. This type of paper provides a mastery of ideas and concepts covered in the readings and discussions, but with little evidence of independent thought or synthesis. Other **“B” papers** do give evidence of independent thought but do not present an argument clearly or convincingly.

A typical “C” paper provides a less thorough or accurate summary of course materials, or a less thorough defense of an argument. A paper that receives a grade less than “C” typically does not respond adequately to the assignment, is marred by frequent errors, unclear writing, poor organization, evidence of hasty composition, or some combinations of these problems.

The grading scale utilized in this class is as follows:

97+ = A+  
93+ = A  
90+ = A-  
87+ = B+  
84+ = B  
80+ = B-  
77+ = C+  
74+ = C  
70+ = C-  
67+ = D+  
64+ = D  
60+ = D-  
< 60 = F

### **Class Attendance:**

This is an in-person class. Therefore, when your health allows, you are expected to be present and engaged in class. At the same time, each community member has an individual responsibility to help prevent the spread of diseases. Following public health guidance is part of living in an honorable community. The following recommendations should guide your decision about coming to class:

Self-isolation is the recommended course of action for anyone experiencing flu-like symptoms. Please stay at home if you feel sick. If you need to miss a class, or series of classes, due to illness, self-isolation or quarantine, you are responsible for emailing me to let me know as soon as possible. You are also responsible for coordinating with me to complete work that you might miss due to absences. **Just a reminder: Anything in class can be made up for, so please take care of your and your classmates’ health and stay at home if you feel sick!!!**

### **Special Needs**

We will make every effort to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Please notify me as soon as possible of any special accommodations needed.

### **Religious Observances**

Please notify me in advance if you need to miss class or reschedule assignments due to participation in religious holidays.

### **Late Work/Academic Misconduct**

Late work will be accepted only by prior arrangement or documented emergency situations. If you have schedule conflicts, please contact me right away. I am willing to adjust deadlines if students inform me at least 24h in advance. Any student not making prior arrangement will automatically be given a failing grade on the missed assignment. Academic misconduct, including plagiarism and sexual harassment, will not be tolerated. If instances of academic misconduct are detected, action will be taken in accordance with university policies.

### **Expression and Debasement**

Talking about religion is tricky at a university, but that should not mean that it must become a taboo subject. Reed College has very specific language about what kind of speech should be avoided in this context. Following this policy, students should avoid expressions that clearly derogate and debase a student or students in the class on the basis of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability. At the same time, it is important to note that students should also tolerate opinions about the historical or contemporary consequences of religious or political positions when expressed in a way that is not derogatory towards others. Students uncomfortable with either of these policies should not take this course.

### **GenAI Policy**

Generally, it is allowed to use GenAI in this class as long as you mark and mention in your assignments whenever you have used and consulted GenAI during the research process. However, you may not use any text generated by GenAI. In other words, all your writings need to be produced solely by you. \*

### **Policy Regarding Lecture Recordings**

To protect students' privacy and to discourage a practice of voluntarily missing lectures and tutorials, this course does not provide any recordings. If you have to miss class, please reach out to your classmates and schedule an appointment with me to discuss the materials we covered in class.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS (MIGHT BE MORE IN FINAL VERSION):**

**Bokenkamp, Stephen R. *Early Daoist Scriptures*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.**

## **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

### **Block 1: What is the Body?**

- F Feb 7      **Welcome and Introduction to Course**  
Reading: Judith Farquhar and Margaret Lock,  
“Introduction,” 1-18; Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 3-11 and 20-37;  
William R. LaFleur, “Body,” 36-54
- F Feb 14      **Introduction to Daoism and Discussion of Students’ Depictions of the Body**  
Reading: Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*  
and D. C. Lau, *Lao tzu*

**Submission of your Depiction of “What is the Body” on Canvas Due February 13**

### **Block 2: Celestial Masters and Bodily Healing**

- F Feb 21      **Celestial Masters, the *Xiang’er* Commentary and the Body of Lord Lao**  
Reading: Terry Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*, excerpts; *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, 1605-11 and 1616-20; Stephen Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, chapter 1 and 149-85, 230-46 and 261-74

**Submission of first Reflection Paper on Canvas Due Feb 21**

- F Feb 28      **Sexual Rites in the Celestial Masters Movement**  
Reading: Christine Mollier, “Conceiving the Embryo of Immortality,” 87-110 and *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, 1668-70 and 1684-88; Terry Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*, 146-89

### **Block 3: Upper Clarity Daoism and The Body as a Divine Dwelling**

- F Mar 07      **The Daoist Body as a Dwelling for Divine Beings**  
Reading: Jean Lévy, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, 105-26, Susan Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, 25-65, *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, 1643-45 and 1938-42; James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism Part II*, 265-68
- F Mar 14      **Shangqing Daoist Revelations: The *Huangtingjing***  
Reading: Isabelle Robinet, *Taoist Meditation: The Maoshan Tradition of Great Purity*, 55-117, and Paul Kroll, *Religions of China in Practice*, 149-55; Jia Jinhua, “Longevity Technique,” 1-31; Henry Balfour, *Daoist Texts, Datong jing*
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- F Mar 21      **NO CLASS** – Workshop on Ritual in Early China

### **Block 4: Inner Alchemy and the Body as a Cauldron**

- F Mar 28      **Outer and Inner Alchemy (Double Session)**  
Reading: Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China*, 67-120 and *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, 1561-69; Fabrizio Pregadio, *Awakening to Reality: The Regulated Verses of the Wuzhen pian, a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy*, 1-19, 25-41, 48-53, 60-66, and 70-73 and Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China*, 203-23; David Wang, “Nei Jing Tu,” 141-58 and Susan Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, 65-85 and *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, 1826-32  
[https://www.partingcloudsdaoisteducation.com/?fbclid=IwAR1Ce\\_du8tNb00wpDfJEcNA5WV\\_b\\_jlu0vej-QAtuHF17UFHh6HC3qlz5-4](https://www.partingcloudsdaoisteducation.com/?fbclid=IwAR1Ce_du8tNb00wpDfJEcNA5WV_b_jlu0vej-QAtuHF17UFHh6HC3qlz5-4)
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### **Gender, Cosmic Fetuses and Inner Alchemy**

Reading: Dominic Steavu, "Cosmos, Body, and Gestation in Taoist Meditation," 111-46 Elena Valussi, "Female Alchemy: Transformation of a Gendered Body," pp. 201-24 and Douglas Wile, *Art of the Bedchamber*, 202-4

F Apr 04      **NO CLASS** – Spring Break

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### **Block 5: Dharmakaya, Relics, and Textual Bodies**

F Apr 11      **Introduction to Buddhism: The Body as a Source of Suffering**  
Reading: Prebish and Keown, *Introducing Buddhism*, excerpts; Rewata Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha*, pp. 17-20; Charles Hallisey, *Evil and Suffering*, pp. 36-66

**Thesis of Your Final Paper Due April 11**

F Apr 18      **NO CLASS** – Good Friday

F Apr 25      **Self-Sacrifice, Relics, and the Production of Dharma-Bodies**  
Reading: W. J. T. Mitchell, "Founding Objects," pp. 111-124 and "Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry," pp. 188-200; John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, pp. Xiii-20, Kevin Trainor, *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, pp. 1-17, and Gregory Schopen, *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, pp. 256-268; James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, excerpts; *To the Land of Bliss* (50min)

F May 02      **Texts as Dharma-Bodies: The Lotus Sutra**  
Reading: Burton Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 23-33, 47-62, 80-87, 97-100, 107-116, 160-169, 182-189; Ruben Habito, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*, 186-208; Daniel Stevenson, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*, 132-50

**Submission of the Second Depiction of the Body” Due May 8**

F May 09

**Statues and cCultural Objects as Dharma-Bodies plus  
Discussion of the Second Depiction of the Body**

Reading: TBD

**Submission of Your Second Reflection Paper Due May 11**

**Final Paper Due May 24**