

The Buddhist Body

Winter 2019 Mondays 4-6:50pm HIB 469
(EA220. Seminar; 4 units)



This course explores the use and understanding of the human body in Buddhism. We live an embodied existence, which presents a contentious and fascinating question to religious traditions the world over: “*is the body is a barrier to a spiritual realm, or a means toward it?*” In all religions (indeed, in our everyday lives irrespective of our spiritual affiliations) the body is utilized to particular ends through its alteration, its transcendence, its care, and its mortification. Buddhism, in its many forms, does not differ. Here we will focus mainly on East Asian Buddhist practices and beliefs, and will use sutras and scriptural commentaries, literary and visual materials, and music and film, to consider understandings of the human body in Buddhism. Our topics will include ritual choreography; sex, sexuality, and gender; death; spirit possession; worship of the body-relic; Buddhist statuary; and the implications and significance posed by VR and bio-hacking within the Buddhist context.