

Religious Studies Lecture & Workshop 2016

Guest Speaker: Misha Tadd

Postdoctoral Fellow at the
Institute for Advance Humanistic Studies of Peking University

Misha Tadd received his doctorate from Boston University's Division of Religious and Theological Studies and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Advance Humanistic Studies of Peking University. His research focuses on the intersection of Daoism, mysticism, medicine, and politics, and has worked extensively on a 1st c. commentary of the *Daodejing*. He co-edited *Parasites and Worms in Religion and Culture*, recently translated *Order in Early Chinese Excavated Texts: Natural, Supernatural, and Legal Approaches*, and has been assisting in the preparations for the 2018 World Congress of Philosophy in Beijing.



Thursday, February 25
4:30 pm, Williams-Bryce Building - 133

Topic: "Demonic and Medical Possession in China"

The topic of the lecture was a fascinating look at the ideas of the soul, of medical infestations, and of religious and spiritual possession in China as understood and expressed through the *Daodejing*, the primary text of Daoism.

In the traditional Chinese conception of the individual, Tadd explained, there is not just one soul for each body as in western ideas of the self, but ten souls per body. Each soul has a different function in the individual body. Illness of body, mind, or spirit is attributed to an imbalance in the functioning of the souls. Thus traditional Chinese medicine has been concerned with using medications and treatments to balance the varied functions of the body.

Examining both ancient and modern texts regarding the role and use of internal parasites and worms Tadd brought out a number of interesting ideas. While in social, medical, and religious contexts parasites are often framed negatively, as enemies to guard against and annihilate (what we might call an "oppositional" view), in many cases non-native forces or unequal relationships are essential aspects of life (what we might call a "complementary" view).

These two basic stances ultimately parallel theological ones: Does God flow within everything (complementary)? Are parasites complements to humans created by God? Is God hopelessly removed from this corrupted world (oppositional)? Are parasites creatures of the Devil eternally opposed to humans? The repercussions in choosing either pair of options are manifold, and from this angle the conception of lowly worms and parasites fundamentally affects one's view of the entire cosmos.



Wednesday, February 24
6:00 pm, Currell 204
Workshop on the *Daodejing*

A small but engaged group gathered for the workshop, discussing the formation and role of the *Daodejing* in Chinese society and philosophical thought from ancient times through history right up to the present. Some in the group came from a long familiarity with the *Daodejing* while others were learning about it for the first time.

Tadd looked at the following passage from the *Daodejing* with the participants in the workshop

Embodying the Dao

The Dao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Dao.
The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.
(Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth;
(Conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things.
Always without desire we must be found,
If its deep mystery we would sound;
But if desire always within us be,
Its outer fringe is all that we shall see.
Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names.
Together we call them the Mystery.
Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.