HRS 296: “Great Books of China”

Fall 2014
Richard Shek
Tuesdays 6:00-8:50
Mendocino 4007

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Office Hours: TW 5:00-6:00 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A graduate-level reading and analysis of three primary texts that serve as the foundation of the three cultural traditions of China—Confucianism, Daosim (Taoism), and Chan (Zen) Buddhism. They are, respectively, the Analects, the Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), and the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. This careful study of the texts should enable the students to gain insight into the world of Chinese cosmological assumptions, moral values, social ethics, religious practices, and aesthetical sensitivities.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

The success of a seminar course like this one depends upon the participation of every student. You are responsible for attending all class sessions, mastering all assigned readings, making insightful and productive contributions to class discussions, and submitting assignments on time. The material we’ll be exploring in this course is of fundamental importance to the understanding of the Chinese mind. You are going to learn a lot and we will all have a great time as long as everyone does his/her part.

TEXTS

The following are available at the campus bookstore.

You are responsible for bringing the appropriate primary readings to each of our weekly class sessions. You may bring printed hard copies to class or access them using a laptop or some other electronic device. Every student should have his/her own copy of every text. Bringing the appropriate texts to class is a factor in class participation.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

The “Discussion Questions” that appear below in connection with each text are designed to draw your attention to important questions and issues associated with the readings. The “Discussion Questions” are a good guide to what is most important about each of the assigned texts. Avoid being ”literal” in your reading. Remember: these are translated texts, and some of the words and phrases used may appear idiosyncratic and whimsical, if not altogether incomprehensible! Class discussions may clarify some, probably not all, the confusion.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Regular attendance and productive contribution to class discussions: (30 points)
Three 3-5 page response papers: 30 points (10 points each)
One 15-18 page research paper/interpretive essay: (40 points)

**GRADING**

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**ATTENDANCE AND PRODUCTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO DISCUSSION**

Careful reading of the assigned portions of each text before class, and active participation in discussion in class are assumed for all students. There may be occasions on which I will divide the class into small groups responsible for leading class discussions on specific topics the following week. This will be counted as part of your performance in “regular attendance and productive contribution to class discussions.” The same goes for your brief presentation of your research paper/interpretive essay at the end of the semester.

**RESPONSE PAPERS**
The three Response Papers are 3-5 page, double-spaced responses to the “Discussion Questions” on the assigned readings. Although the response papers are informal, they must be clearly written, demonstrate real familiarity with the texts, and give evidence that you have put considerable thought into them. It is your responsibility to refer frequently to the syllabus in order to determine when Response Papers are due.

RESEARCH PAPER/INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

You need to write a paper on any topic that relates directly to the three Chinese cultural traditions covered in this course. The paper must be comparative in nature, involving at least two, but preferably three of the traditions. The “Discussion Questions” for each of the texts should give you plenty of suggestions/inspirations for comparison. (e.g., the Chinese sense of religiosity, the shared ethical values of the three traditions, the common concerns regarding human life and the cosmos, the different views of the nature and acquisition of knowledge, etc.).

The semester moves along quickly, so it is important to find a topic quickly – especially since your proposal for a topic and source materials is due at our ninth class meeting (October 28).

To get started in your thinking about possible topics, browse through this syllabus. Check out the readings and Discussion Questions that form the basis of our class discussions. Each of the translated texts has an extensive bibliography that should provide useful lead for further reading and analysis. You can also ask me for help. I will be happy to sit down and brainstorm with you. Make sure you choose a topic that really interests you. Be sure you have the linguistic and research skills required for your topic.

Papers must be 15-18 pages in length and written in 12-point Times New Roman with one-inch margins all around. Quotations of more than three lines should be single-spaced and slightly indented. Your name and title should appear on a separate page stapled to the front of your paper. In formatting notes, you may use any of the commonly accepted styles (MLA, Chicago, etc.).

Papers must be written in clear, lucid prose and free from errors of spelling and grammar. Your reasoning must be clear, mature, and based on solid foundations. You must have good use of solid sources. (Wikipedia is NOT a reliable source!). Be sure to give proper credit to those whose work you use in your paper. You need to submit your drafts and final version of your paper to Turnitin for “originality” check.

Please go to Turnitin.com to enroll. The Class ID is 8392159, and the Password is HRS296sec1. There is a due date for your draft (December 1) and your final version (December 16) for originality check. Only the final version needs to be submitted in hard copy form by 5:00 pm on December 16, 2014 in my office.
SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (September 2): Introduction

Introduction to course and members of the class. A brief discussion of the “world of thought” in ancient China

Week 2 (September 9):
Reading: Analects Books 1-5

Discussion Questions:
- The Confucian view on Learning
- The Confucian view on Family
- What is the definition of the Confucian “gentleman” or “superior person”?  
- What is good government?  
- What is filial piety?  
- What is the function of ritual?  
- What is the function of music?

Week 3 (September 16):
Reading: Analects Books 6-10

Discussion Questions:
- What is “good”?  
- What is the Confucian definition of the “sage”?  
- What are the “worries” of Confucius?  
- What is Confucius’ attitude towards the “supernatural”?  
- What is the Confucian sense of “mission”?  
- Why is Yan Hui the best student?

Week 4 (September 23):
Reading: Analects Books 11-15

Discussion Questions:
- What is the style of Confucius’ interaction with his disciples?  
- Revisit the topics of “gentleman”, “governance”, “learning”, and “goodness”  
- What is the Confucian view of “law”?

Week 5 (September 30):
Reading: Analects Books 16-20

Discussion Questions:
• What does Confucius mean by “the way”?
• What is the Confucian view of “human nature”?
• What is the Confucian view of “heaven”?
• How is Confucius perceived by his students?

**Week 6 (October 7):**
**Response Paper on Analects due**
**Reading: Wandering on the Way Chapters 1-7**

**Discussion Questions:**
• What does the story of the transformation of the fish into a bird signify?
• How do you understand the “usefulness” of the “useless”?
• “Withered wood” and “Dead ashes” as a perfect mystical state
• “I” and “Other”
• “This” and “That”
• The Daoist “Way”
• The Daoist “sage”
• Futility of debate and disputation
• Zhuangzi’s Dream

**Week 7 (October 14):**
**Reading: Wandering on the Way Chapters 1-7**

**Discussion Questions:**
• Daoist view of “knowledge”
• The “Ultimate Man”
• The ideal Daoist ruler
• Life and death
• The story of the Cook
• “Fasting of the Mind”
• “Sitting and Forgetting”
• Daoist view of “governance”
• The story of “Wonton”

**Week 8 (October 21):**
**Reading: Wandering on the Way Chapters 8-22**

**Discussion Questions:**
• Zhuangzi’s view on culture, political authority, and civilization
• Zhuangzi’s view on goodness and morality
• Sage kings
• Anti-Confucian sentiments
• The tortoise dragging its tail through the mud
• Zhuangzi’s conversation with a skull
• The drunkard and the cicada catcher
• The significance of natural spontaneity
• Zhuangzi’s Confucius
• The ubiquity of the Way

**Week 9 (October 28)**

Proposal for Research Paper topic due. Your proposal should consist of a paragraph in which you describe your subject/topic and how you will approach it and a list of primary and secondary sources you intend to use.

**Reading:** *Wandering on the Way* Chapters 23-33

**Discussion Questions:**
• The futility of words
• Hui Tzu
• Zhuangzi on his deathbed
• The subjectivity of reality

**Week 10 (November 4)**

**Response Paper on Wandering on the Way due**

**Reading:** *Platform Sutra* pp.1-121

**Discussion Questions:**
• Chan in History of Buddhism
• Chan in China
• The Story of Hui-neng
• The compilation of the *Platform Sutra*

**Week 11 (November 11)**

No Class (Veterans’ Day observed)

**Week 12 (November 18):**

**Reading:** *Platform Sutra* pp.125-150 (Chapters 1-28)

**Discussion Questions:**
• The relationship between *ting* (meditation) and *hui* (wisdom)
• No-thought, non-form, and non-abiding
• Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Dharmakaya Buddhas
• Maha-prajna-paramita

**Week 13 (November 25):**

**Reading:** *Platform Sutra* pp.150-183 (Chapters 29-57)

**Discussion Questions:**
- The *Diamond Sutra*
- Sentient beings and Buddhas
- Sudden or Gradual Enlightenment
- Clergy and laity
- True meditation

**WEEK 14 (December 2): Student Presentations**
Response Paper on *Platform Sutra* due

**WEEK 15 (December 9): Student Presentations**

**WEEK 16 (December 16): Research Paper due in Instructor’s Office by 5:00 pm**