

New York University
College of Arts and Science

CORE-UA 512 001
Cultures & Contexts: China
Spring 2022
Mon, Wed 4:55-6:10 PM
SILV 405

Instructor: Ethan Harkness

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2-5 PM (by appointment)

Teaching Assistants: Emily Long, Yuhang Zhu

Course Description:

This course introduces students to some of the defining features of traditional Chinese culture. By sampling the most important philosophical and historical classics composed in the centuries leading up to and including the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 24 CE), we will contextualize and recontextualize evolving ideas about the culture, focusing on the social order and man's relationship with the natural world. In order to broaden our investigation, we will also look at a number of early texts attempting to codify and transmit technical knowledge of Chinese law, medicine, agriculture, and divination. Today, our understanding of these topics derives primarily from archaeologically recovered manuscripts, and thus archaeological provenance can provide another layer of context to work with when considering them. Both the classics and the technical compendia have played an important role shaping Chinese concepts of the individual, the family, the nation, and the natural world. They have also sustained these concepts through the periods of social turmoil and political division that have repeatedly interrupted the more stable and unified periods that tend to define the orthodox historical narrative of China's past. Taken as a whole, we will develop a sense of the ways that Chinese culture has traditionally viewed itself and the ideals to which it has repeatedly returned in chaotic times. Finally, throughout the course we will refer frequently to the easily overlooked, but nevertheless essential, supporting role of writing and the unique ways that it has developed in the Chinese context.

Course Objectives:

Cultures and Contexts courses are intended to prepare you for life in a globalized world. Through critical engagements with primary cultural materials, they introduce you to ways humans come to understand themselves as members of social, religious, national, and regional collectives, and with the dynamics of cultural interaction and influence. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, this course is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

Course Format:

Following the established format of Core Curriculum at NYU, this course is divided into lectures taught by the faculty instructor and recitations led by graduate teaching assistants.

Required Course Texts:

Confucius, *The Analects*, D.C. Lau, tr. (New York: Penguin, 1979).

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, D.C. Lau, tr. (New York: Penguin, 1963).

All of the above texts are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore, 726 Broadway. Any other required readings will be distributed electronically.

Course Policies and Requirements:

Grading Rubric:

20% Attendance (lectures and recitations) and participation in recitation sections;

20% 10 short papers (1 page, double-spaced, in which students share critical observations organized around quotations from the reading; submitted to recitation section leaders);

20% In-class midterm exam on Wednesday 3/9;

20% Midterm paper (4 pages, double-spaced, due 3/11, submit on Brightspace)

20% Final paper (6 pages, double-spaced, due 5/13, submit on Brightspace)

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else's idea without a reference to the source of the idea; or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).

Electronics: Laptop computers, tablets, and e-readers may be used for class-related purposes.

Accommodations: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are

requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance

Course Calendar:

Mon. 1/24: Introduction

Wed. 1/26: Origins of Chinese writing

Robert W. Bagley, “Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System” in *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process*, 190-237.

Adam Smith, “The Evidence for Scribal Training at Anyang” in *Writing & Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar*, 173-205.

Mon. 1/31: Earliest transmitted texts: The *Changes*

Richard Rutt (tr.), *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi): A Bronze Age Document Translated with Introduction and Notes*, 26-59 and 224-287.

Wed. 2/2: Earliest transmitted texts: The *Documents* and the *Odes*

Stephen Owen (tr.), “The Classic of Poetry: Beginnings,” “The Classic of Poetry: Airs,” and “Feast” in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, 10-27, 30-57, and 274-275.

John Minford and Joseph S.M. Lau (eds.), *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations, Volume 1: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, 156-161.

Mon. 2/7: The *Analects* of Confucius

D.C. Lau (tr.), *The Analects*, Books I-XI, 59-111.

Wed. 2/9: The *Analects* of Confucius

D.C. Lau (tr.), *The Analects*, Books XII-XX, 112-160.

Mon. 2/14: The *Zuozhuan*

Burton Watson (tr.), *The Tso Chuan*, sections 1, 5, 7-15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 28, 29, and 35.
Note: Pay particular attention to sections 7-15 (the saga of Chonger or “Double Ears”).

Wed. 2/16: Film “Confucius”

This week we will watch the 2010 movie *Confucius* starring Chow Yun-fat. For helpful background reading, see *The Analects*, appendix 1 “Events in the Life of Confucius,” and appendix 2 “The Disciples as they Appear in *The Analects*” (161-219).

Mon. 2/21: **No Class – University Holiday!**

Wed. 2/23: *Mencius*

Selections TBD

Mon. 2/28: *Xunzi*

Burton Watson (tr.), *Hsun Tzu*, sections 1, 2, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 23.

Wed. 3/2: The *Daodejing*

D.C. Lau (tr.), *Tao Te Ching*, Book One, 57-96.

Mon. 3/7: The *Daodejing* and related texts

D.C. Lau (tr.), *Tao Te Ching*, Book Two, 99-143.

Stephen Bokenkamp, “The Xiang’er Commentary to the *Laozi*” in *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 29-142. Note: Focus on the introduction (29-58), and read selectively from the translation.

Wed. 3/9: In-class midterm exam

Midterm Paper Due by Fri. 3/11

Mon. 3/14: **No Class – Spring Recess!**

Wed. 3/16: **No Class – Spring Recess!**

Mon. 3/21: Film “Hero”

Wed. 3/23: The *Art of Warfare*

Mon. 3/28: The *Book of Lord Shang* and *Hanfeizi*

Wed. 3/30: The *Records of the Grand Historian* (Qin Dynasty)

Mon. 4/4: The *Records of the Grand Historian* (Han Dynasty)

Wed. 4/6: The *Hanshu* (Han Dynasty)

Mon. 4/11: Early Chinese law

Wed. 4/13: Early Chinese medicine

Mon. 4/18: Early Chinese agriculture

Wed. 4/20: Early Chinese divination (I)

Mon. 4/25: Early Chinese divination (II)

Wed. 4/27: Early Chinese games

Mon. 5/2: The *Taipingjing* and the roots of Daoism

Wed. 5/4: Buddhism and the roots of print culture

Mon. 5/9: Final thoughts

Final Paper Due by Fri. 5/13