Among the early Chinese philosophers whose ideas have framed moral, social and political discourse in East Asia, the figures of Confucius and Lao Tzu stand out, not only as thinkers of towering influence, but also as diametrically opposed archetypes of wisdom. In this seminar, we will begin by reading the works attributed to each man, and then we will proceed to examine the ways in which their legacies have been and continue to be appropriated by others. Toward this end we will explore manifold competing manifestations of Confucius and Lao Tzu in Chinese religion, in popular culture, and in the marketplace of
ideas. Themes will include the opposing impulses of idolization and iconoclasm, censorship and propaganda, and the sacralization and commercialization of traditional values.

Course Texts:


Burton Watson (tr.), *The Tso Chuan: Selections from China’s Oldest Narrative History* (New York: Columbia University, 1989).


All of the above texts are available for purchase at Shakespeare & Co. Booksellers, 716 Broadway. Any other required readings will be distributed electronically.

Course Policies and Requirements:

Grading: Grades will be awarded on the following basis

10% Completion of 10 one-paragraph weekly response papers (submit by email attachment labeled with your name and the date no later than midnight on Monday of each week). Submit more than 10 responses for extra credit!

15% 1st writing assignment, due 2/24 at 5pm (submit by email)

20% 2nd writing assignment, due 3/23 at 5pm (submit by email)

25% 3rd writing assignment, due 4/27 at 5pm (submit by email)

30% Class participation, including punctual attendance, completion of assigned readings, and participation in class discussion. This aspect of the class is weighted heavily because it will be to
everyone’s benefit if you are actively engaged with class readings and work together with your classmates through class discussion to draw connections with larger themes of the course. Please note – bodily attendance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for receiving participation credit. Exceptions will be made for documented medical illnesses or family crises. Whenever possible in such cases, please notify me by email in advance of your absence.

Late papers will be penalized by one letter grade per day. No rewrites will be allowed, but you are encouraged to discuss drafts of your papers with me or with tutors at the Writing Center in advance of final submission deadlines.

**Academic Integrity:** High standards of academic integrity are essential to your reputation and that of Gallatin/NYU. I will uphold the Gallatin policy on cheating and plagiarism found at [http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html).

**Electronics:** Cell phones should be turned off and placed out of sight during class. Laptop computers, tablets, and e-readers may be used for class-related purposes.

**Course Calendar:**

Tues. 1/24: Preliminary Discussion; “Confucius Peace Prize” handout.


Thurs. 2/2: Confucius, *The Analects*, Book XII – Book XX.

Tues. 2/7: This week we will watch the 2010 award-winning Hong Kong 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*."

Thurs. 2/9: *Confucius* movie continued.


Thurs. 2/16: Burton Watson, tr., *The Tso Chuan*, sections 1, 5, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 28, 29, and 35.
Tues. 2/21: Burton Watson, tr., *The Tso Chuan*, sections 7-15 (the saga of “Double Ears”).

Thurs. 2/23: Perspectives from excavated manuscripts – the missing generation?

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1: 5-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 2/24 BY 5PM (EMAIL)**

Q: Some passages of *The Analects* may seem impossibly remote from our modern lives, but others can still resonate strongly with familiar experience. Choose three passages that appeal to you and describe how they provide insight or wise counsel in a modern context.


Tues. 3/13: No Class – Spring Recess!

Thurs. 3/15: No Class – Spring Recess!


**WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2: 5-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 3/23 BY 5PM (EMAIL)**

Q: What is Tao (Dao 道)? What is Te (De 德)? Use passages from Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* to support your definitions. Can philosophical terms be meaningful but defy linguistic analysis?

Tues. 3/27: Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “The Xiang’er Commentary to the Laozi” in *Early Daoist Scriptures*,
29-58 and 78-142.


Tues. 4/3: The Tao of the internet – discuss selected websites


Thurs. 4/12: Yu Dan, *Confucius from the Heart*.

Tues. 4/17: Yu Dan, *Confucius from the Heart*.

Thurs. 4/19: Yu Dan, *Confucius from the Heart*.

EXTRA CREDIT: SUBMIT DRAFT OF 10-PAGE FINAL PAPER FRIDAY 4/20 BY 5PM (EMAIL)

Tues. 4/24: 10-minute in-class presentations of student projects

Thurs. 4/26: 10-minute in-class presentations of student projects

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3: 10-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 4/27 BY 5PM (EMAIL)

Q: Discuss a modern adaption of either Confucian or Taoist philosophy (e.g. books of the genre “Tao of …”). Do these ancient texts provide useful tools for modern life? Is there an element of manipulation for commercial and/or political purposes?

Tues. 5/1: Confucianism and Taoism in the news – selected recent articles.
Thurs. 5/3: Final Thoughts