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 begin by reading the works attributed to each man, and then we proceed to examine the ways in which their legacies have been and continue to be appropriated by others. Toward this end we explore competing manifestations of Confucius and Lao Tzu in Chinese religion, in popular culture, and in the marketplace of ideas. Themes include the opposing impulses of idolization and iconoclasm, censorship and propaganda, and the sacralization and commercialization of traditional values.
Course Texts:


Burton Watson (tr.), *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia University, 1963-64).

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 the NYU Bookstore, 726 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 subject line “response ##” no later than 10:00 pm on Sunday).

15% 1st writing assignment, due 2/26 at 5pm (submit pdf by email attachment)

20% 2nd writing assignment, due 3/25 at 5pm (submit pdf by email attachment)

25% 3rd writing assignment, due 5/6 at 5pm (submit pdf by email attachment)

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:**

Wed. 9/7: Preliminary Discussion.


Wed. 9/21: 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*” (161-219).

Mon. 9/26: *Confucius* continued.


Mon. 10/3: Burton Watson, tr., *The Tso Chuan*, sections 1, 5, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 28, 29, and 35.
Wed. 10/5: Burton Watson, tr., *The Tso Chuan*, sections 7-15 (the saga of “Double Ears”).

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1: 5-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 10/7 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.

Mon. 10/10: *No Class – University Holiday!*

Wed. 10/12: Perspectives from excavated manuscripts – Guodian.


Mon. 10/31: More selections from Chuang Tzu.


WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2: 5-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 11/4 BY 5PM (EMAIL)

Q: In this paper we will look for wisdom of relevance to modern life in the *Tao Te Ching*. Choose three passages that you can read with reference to your own experience and elaborate on their connection to you despite differences of historical and cultural context.

Mon. 11/7: *Hsun Tzu* “A Discussion of Rites,” “A Discussion of Music,” “Dispelling Obsession,” and “Man’s Nature is Evil.”


Wed. 11/16: Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “The Xiang’er Commentary to the Laozi” in *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 29-58 and 78-142. [In class: The Tao of the internet – discuss selected websites]


Wed. 11/23: No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday!

Mon. 11/28: Lu Xun continued - “Medicine,” “Hair,” and “The Real Story of Ah-Q”.


Mon. 12/5: Yu Dan, *Confucius from the Heart*, selections.

Wed. 12/7: Confucianism and Taoism in the news today – selected articles.

Mon. 12/12: 10-minute in-class presentations of student projects.

Tues. 12/13: 10-minute in-class presentations of student projects continued.

Wed. 12/14: Final Thoughts

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3: 10-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 12/16 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? Do you see an element of manipulation for commercial and/or political purposes?