PHIL 345 - Chinese Philosophy: Interpreting the Daodejing

Description:
Selected philosophical topics in Chinese literature.

Learner Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Identify the major schools of the Chinese philosophical tradition.
- Explain the differences and commonalities of the various philosophical traditions of China.
- Verbally and expositorally articulate an understanding of the philosophical traditions of China and their influences on the wider social milieu.
- Develop analytical, reading and writing skills.
- Recognize and describe the full tradition of Chinese philosophy.
- Recognize and identify the difficulties in defining Chinese philosophy and separating it from religious ideas and practices.

This quarter we are doing an in-depth examination of the Daoist classic, the Daodejing. Traditionally considered the foundation of Chinese Daoism, the text has a long and complicated history of interpretation and debate. The second most translated text in the world (the Bible being number one), it lends itself to an intriguing set of questions. Is it a philosophical or religious text, neither, or both? What role has/does it play in the history of Chinese philosophy and religion? Is there a distinction? Does it have cross-cultural and/or trans-historical relevance?

And if that’s not enough, the text is one of the most popular contemporary resources for western self-help authors (in no way an endorsement from me, but hey….see my “Dao of” presentation in class): as Wayne Dyer writes in his rendering, the Daodejing is “a valuable resource for achieving a way of life that guarantees integrity, joy, peace, and balance. I recently read about someone who overcame life-threatening addictive behaviors by reading and rereading the 81 verses of this ancient text…it describes a way of living that’s balanced, moral, and spiritual; and that works for all facets of life on earth.” Change your thoughts, change your life: living the wisdom of the Tao 2007.

Through a sustained analysis of the text, its history, and the commentarial/translation that has arisen around it, we will probe questions about hermeneutics, cross-cultural/trans-historical translation, and contemporary applicability, all the while learning about the intersection of Chinese Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian philosophy, as well as Western philosophical applications. We’ll examine the claims of popularizers such as Dyer and issues of cross-cultural appropriation as well.

The course meets requirements in the Religious Studies (Eastern) and Philosophy (Diversity) majors and minors. Tell your friends, classmates, roomies and family! I look forward to seeing everyone, in person no less (!) in the winter!

Questions? Contact me at Jeffrey.Dippmann@cwu.edu