

Daoism in Thought and Practice



RELI 244 / EAST 244

Fall 2008 T/R 9:30-10:52 a.m. COLE 21

Professor James Mark Shields • COLE 11 • #71336 • jms089@bucknell.edu

Office hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 p.m., or by appointment

www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/jms089

After a few centuries of lagging behind the West and her near neighbor and rival Japan, China is rapidly taking its place as a major world power. In some ways this is to be expected, since for much of recorded history the 'Middle Kingdom' was the cultural, political, and economic center of East Asia. In recent years the ruling Communist Party has softened its persecution of traditional (if not foreign) religions, even to the point where the ancient sage Confucius and his teachings are now lauded and promoted as a bulwark for twenty-first century Chinese patriotism. Besides the rational ethics of Confucian tradition, China's other great religious legacy remains somewhat clouded in obscurity—i.e., the assemblage of texts, teachings and traditions collectively known as Daoism (aka Taoism). In order to fully understand China—both the traditional culture as well as contemporary values and patterns of thought and belief—one must come to terms with this 'alternative' complex of thought and practice. At the same time, a study of Daoism may lead to insights that extend beyond China to pass into what we might cautiously refer to as a universal style of living one's life.

This course provides an introduction to the Daoist tradition (or traditions) through study of its origins, teachings, ritual practices, values, and historical development, as well as its interaction and involvement with politics, culture, and society. Topics include the origins of yin/yang cosmology, the strange wisdom of the *Daodejing*, the playful paradoxes of Zhuangzi, the development of Daoist "magic" and belief in immortality, the emergence of a Daoist pantheon of deities, Daoist millenarian movements of the Later Han Dynasty, the growth of Daoist monasticism in the Tang Dynasty, Daoist women, the Western appropriation of Daoist ideas and themes in the '60s counterculture, Hollywood movies (e.g., *Star Wars*) and consumer culture (e.g., *feng shui*), and the future prospects of Daoism in China's increasingly wealthy but still officially atheist state.



Course Objectives:

The primary objectives of the course are to: 1) familiarize students with the major texts, ideas, beliefs, values and practices of Daoism; 2) provide an introduction to the historical development of Daoism in key periods of Chinese history; 3) discuss the role of Daoism in shaping and transmitting Chinese visual art and poetry; and 4) allow the student to reflect in both a personal and critical manner on the ideas and themes presented in the course via lectures, readings, and various media.

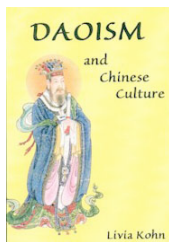
Course Format:

The course follows a lecture-discussion format, with two lectures of roughly 45-50 minutes each on Tuesdays and Thursdays, followed by 25-30 minutes for discussion, clarification or media presentation. Some classes, usually Thursdays, will be set aside for discussion or films. Each week of lectures will encompass a new theme, as dictated by the Schedule of Topics and Readings (see below), and is accompanied by one or more readings, familiarity with which will greatly enhance comprehension of the lecture. Please be prepared.

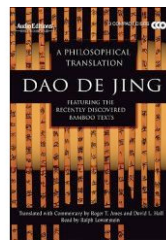
Pedagogical Note:

I want to create at all times a comfortable, enjoyable, and at times provocative environment for learning. This is meant to be an *interactive* course; the student will be asked to respond and engage with the course material, and with the ideas and opinions of the instructor and other students—though, it is hoped, always in a civil and polite fashion. Evaluation for the course will be based largely on the demonstration of both oral and written critical engagement with course material. I will also be employing various media, including Powerpoint presentations, video and DVDs, and so on, in order to stimulate as many learning faculties as possible. Powerpoints will be available prior to each class for those who wish to print them as a basis for note taking. Please note, however, that the Powerpoint slides only provide a basic sketch of the lecture material—i.e., they are meant to supplement note-taking, not replace it.

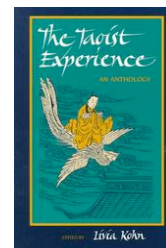
Required Reading Material:



- KOHN, Livia. *Daoism in Chinese Culture*. Three Pines Press, 2001.



- *Daodejing: A Philosophical Translation*. R. Ames and D. Hall, trans. Ballantine Books, 2001.



- KOHN, Livia. *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*. SUNY Press, 1993.

In addition to these four texts, the following Required Readings can be found on Blackboard:

1. Watts, Alan. "Introduction" to *Nature, Man and Woman*, pp. 1–22. New York: Vintage, 1991.
2. Chang Chung-yuan. "Tranquility Reflected in Chinese Poetry." *Creativity and Daoism: A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art and Poetry*, pp. 169-198. New York: Julian Press, 1963.

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Course Requirements

1. ATTENDANCE

I will not take attendance in this class. However, given the nature and format of this course, substantial participation is expected, and it is difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to participate when you are not here.

2. PARTICIPATION

30%

Class participation, including discussion of readings and questions posed on weekly Powerpoint slides, is a requirement. Since we are a small group, I would like to treat this class somewhat like a graduate-level seminar, which means that I will expect each member to make a contribution to each and every discussion. Many of our discussions will be based on a careful analysis of course readings.

3. READING ASSIGNMENTS

10%

Every class one student will be asked to provide a short summary of one of the assigned readings for that particular week, along with at least two questions for discussion based on that reading. As we are a small group, this means that each of you will give two of these presentations over the course of the semester. A schedule will be provided by the second week of class.

4. MUSEUM FIELD TRIP REPORT

10%

If possible, at a certain point during the semester, likely a Saturday soon after the Fall Recess, we will be taking a 'field trip' to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to see the Daoist paintings within the Chinese collection. A 1000 word report will be submitted one week after the visit, providing detailed descriptions, analysis and thoughts on one or several works of art seen at the Museum. Detailed instructions will be given prior to the visit.

5. PRESENTATION

20%

Each student will give a 25-30 minute in-class presentation toward the end of the semester. Details will be provided several weeks into the course. The topic of your presentation should be the same as that of your research paper.

6. RESEARCH PAPER

30%

Each student will write a 3000 word research paper on a topic chosen from a list of diverse themes and issues relevant to Daoism. Details will be provided several weeks into the course. The research paper will be due at the end of the semester, but I will ask for a detailed outline in early October.

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Grading Policies

Grading for Participation is quite straightforward: the more engaged you are in the class, the higher your grade. I am particularly fond of the 3 e's: energy, effort, and enthusiasm. Please be aware of the subtle but significant psychological effect of me actually knowing who you are, and even a little bit about you. Though I do not evaluate you on your personality, the very fact that I am able to identify you implies that you have participated in the class in some fashion.

In grading the research paper I ask the following questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Is the thesis interesting / relevant to the course?
3. Is the paper free from long quotations / excessive borrowing of ideas?
4. Is the paper reasonably well written (i.e., sentence structure, grammar, spelling)?
5. Is it long enough / not too long?

If the answer to any of the above is 'no', the paper will receive a 'C' grade of some form. If the answer to more than two of the above is 'no', the paper will receive a 'D' grade. If all of the above are answered by 'yes', the following additional questions apply:

6. How thoughtful / original is the paper?
7. How well organized is the paper? Does it have a conclusion?
8. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
9. Does the writing betray any special elegance?
10. Does the paper go 'beyond' the course material to explore other possibilities?

Depending on the answers to these questions, the paper will receive some form of A or B grade.

When it comes down to it, there is absolutely no reason for anybody to get a grade lower than B- in this class. The only way you can get a C, D or F is if you fail to attend and/or do not do the work.

GRADING RUBRIC:	93-100% =	A	4.00	Near Perfect!
	88-92%	=	A-	3.67 Excellent
	83-87%	=	B+	3.33 Very Good
	78-82%	=	B	3.00 Good
	73-77%	=	B-	2.67 Average
	68-72%	=	C+	2.33 Below Average
	63-67%	=	C	2.00 Acceptable, but...
	58-62%	=	C-	1.50 Not so Good
	50-57%	=	D	1.00 Poor
	0-49%	=	F	0.00 Not Acceptable

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Revised Schedule of Topics and Readings (11/07)

I. Introduction

R	08/27	1. Course Introduction	DCC	1-7
T	09/02	2. Correlative Cosmology	DDJ	11-53
R	09/04	3. DISCUSSION: Making Life Significant	TE	#31

II. Daoism as Philosophy and Lifestyle

T	09/09	4. Laozi & the <i>Daodejing</i>	DCC	11-26
			DDJ	1-10; 55-71
R	09/11	5. DISCUSSION: <i>Daodejing</i> I – <i>dao</i>	DDJ	#1, #4, #6, #25, #32, #37, #42, #46
T	09/16	6. DISCUSSION: <i>Daodejing</i> II – <i>wu-wei</i>	DDJ	#2, #3, #5, #10, #11, #28, #32, #42
R	09/18	7. DISCUSSION: <i>Daodejing</i> III – <i>de</i>	DDJ	#7, #8, #9, #18, #19, #21, #46, #56
T	09/23	8. <i>Zhuangzi</i> : Living a Daoist life	DCC	27-42
R	09/25	9. DISCUSSION: <i>Zhuangzi</i>	TE	#4, #32, #37
T	09/30	10. Daoism in the Modern West	BB	Watts
R	10/02	11. FILMS: <i>Star Wars</i> / I ♥ <i>Huckabees</i> / <i>Fight Club</i>		

III. Daoism as Art and Culture

T	10/07	12. Daoist Poetry: 7 Sages of the Bamboo Grove	BB	Chang
			TE	#40
R	10/09	13. Daoist Art: Tang Landscape Paintings	BB	Little
			TE	#7

T	10/14	FALL RECESS–NO CLASS		
R	10/16	NO CLASS		
S	10/18	14. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM FIELD TRIP		



IV. Daoism as Devotion, Monasticism and Revolution

T	10/21	15. Han Cosmology and Immortality	DCC	43-58
			TE	#5
R	10/23	16. Communal Organizations: Celestial Masters	DCC	61-81
T	10/28	17. Self-Cultivation Groups: Highest Clarity	DCC	82-99
			TE	#11, #34
R	10/30	18. DISCUSSION: Becoming Immortal	TE	#16, #39
T	11/04	19. DISCUSSION: Becoming Immortal	TE	#47, #48
R	11/06	20. Daoist Monasticism: Complete Perfection	DCC	153-168
			TE	#12, #13
T	11/11	21. Daoist Gods and Goddesses	TE	#8, #10
			BB	Despeux 1

V. Daoism as Physical Technique and Spiritual Practice

R	11/13	22. Daoist Ritual Practice	DCC	117-126
		FILM: <i>Dao: A Question of Balance</i>	TE	#14
T	11/18	23. DISCUSSION: Daoist Bodily Techniques	TE	#19, #20, #35, #36
R	11/20	24. Daoism Today: Qiqong & Fengshui	DCC	171-203
T	11/25	25. Daoist Practice/Party!	TE	#17, #18
R	11/27	THANKSGIVING RECESS – NO CLASS		

VI. Presentations & Conclusions

T	12/02	26. Presentations I, II & III		
R	12/04	27. Presentations IV, V & VI		
T	12/09	28. Presentations VII, VIII & IX		

Key:

BB = Required Blackboard Readings

DCC = Kohn, Livia. *Daoism and Chinese Culture*

DDJ = *Daodejing: A Philosophical Translation*, R. Ames and D. Hall, trans.

TE = Kohn, Livia, ed. *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*

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RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Assigned:	Tuesday, September 16
Proposal Due:	Tuesday, October 7
Due Date:	Monday, December 15
Length:	3000 words, typed, double-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12) MUST be submitted as a Word doc, via e-mail (no hard copies)
Worth:	30% of Final Grade

Each student will be required to write a 3000 word research paper on a topic related to one or more branches of the many forms and streams of Daoism. You have 13 weeks to complete this assignment. A one-page typed proposal will be due in 4 weeks. Please be forewarned: I will not accept a late research paper for any reason.

I would like to give you a lot of freedom in this research report, though I am also providing a list of a dozen fairly specific topics. You should first decide which general area interests you the most: religious history, psychology of religion, ethics, cosmology, mysticism, rituals, politics or religion and culture (including both 'high' and 'popular' culture). Please avoid topics in visual art or architecture, since this area will be covered in your 'Art/Museum Report' assignment. You may focus your research on a particular idea (e.g., *wuwei*), figure (e.g. Laozi) or text (e.g. *Zhuangzi*)—or you may choose to look more closely at the more "religious" aspects of Daoist rituals, the impact on Daoism of shamanism, mountain worship, folk religion, or even of foreign religions like Buddhism or Christianity. You may focus on Daoism in a particular period of Chinese history (e.g., the Yellow Turban Rebellion) or you may look at Daoism in medieval Japan (e.g., *onmyodo*) or in the modern West (e.g., Beat generation, *feng shui*). If you choose a topic that is not on the list, you must confirm it with me before undertaking the research.

Since the paper is not very long, keep the details to a minimum, and try to develop an interesting "argument" on the topic (though it need not be a completely novel one—this is not a Ph.D. thesis). You may choose a topic discussed in lectures or texts for the course, though you need to explore a dimension other than what you hear in lectures or read in the course material. In other words, you need to do some of your own research. Finally, I would like you to approach your topic *critically* (i.e., add you own reflections and arguments, rather than just repeating what others write or suggest). At the same time, do not just tell me what you feel without providing any 'support'.

If you have any further questions, or are having problems, come to see me.

JMS

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RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT: POSSIBLE TOPICS

AREA 1: Daoist Philosophy and Ethics

- Daoism as a practical philosophy / ethics
- Mencius and the concept of human nature
- Daoism and Western philosophy: a comparative study
- a philosophical analysis of a key Daoist concept: *dao*, *de*, *wuwei*, *ziran*, *he*

AREA 2: Daoist Cosmology and Psychology

- Daoist magicians in medieval Japan (*onmyodo*)
- Daoism and modern psychology (e.g., Jung)
- *feng shui* in the modern West
- Daoism and traditional Chinese medicine

AREA 3: Daoist Doctrine and Devotion

- the transformation of Laozi into Laojun
- the Daoist body / Daoist 'tantra'
- the eight drunken immortals
- Daoist monasticism (e.g., Complete Perfection)

AREA 4: Daoism and Culture / Arts

- impact of Daoism on Chinese martial arts
- impact of Daoism on traditional Chinese culture
- Daoism and the Beat Generation (e.g., Alan Watts)
- Daoism in modern Western film (e.g., *Star Wars*)

AREA 5: Daoist History and Myth

- historical and/or mythical origins of Daoism
- women and/or goddesses in Daoist history and myth
- Daoist influence on Chinese Buddhism (e.g., Zen)
- Daoism as political rebellion (e.g., Yellow Turbans)

AREA 6: Daoism in Chinese Literature

- *Seven Taoist Masters*
- *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*
- *Dream of the Red Chamber*
- *Journey to the West / Monkey / Dragonball*