Course Syllabus - Fall 2013
University of Michigan

China in Ten Words: Foundational Ideas in Chinese Culture
(ASIAN 251: First-Year Seminar in Chinese Studies)

Instructor: Professor Emily Wilcox, email: ewilcox@umich.edu

COURSE TIME and LOCATION: MW 8:30-10:00am, 2402 Modern Languages Building
OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 10:00-12:00pm, Wednesdays 1:00-2:00pm, Thursdays 10:00-11:00
Office hours also available by appointment via email with 24 hours advanced notice.
OFFICE LOCATION: South Thayer 5159 (5th Floor)

Course Description
Some words are so deeply embedded in a place and a cultural tradition that they are
difficult to translate, much less to explain, using the vocabulary of another language or culture.
Understanding the meaning of these words requires seeing the universe in new ways, mapping
and experiencing new versions of the world and humans’ role in it. This course takes its name
from the book China in Ten Words by Chinese writer Yu Hua, which explains contemporary
Chinese society by way of ten culturally significant words. Rather than focusing on contemporary
China, as Yu Hua does, this course looks at words that have been significant in China from
ancient times through the contemporary period, words like Dao (“The Way”), Tian (“Heaven”),
and Qi (“Vital Breath”). These words have remained central to Chinese ways of viewing the
world for centuries, and they continue to define Chinese culture today.

In this class, students will examine ten foundational ideas in Chinese culture, looking at
both their ancient origins and modern incarnations in contemporary China. Course materials will
be drawn from a range of cultural texts, including philosophical writings, religious treatises,
medical texts, etiquette manuals, poems, documentaries, films, paintings, and performance art.
The focus will be on gaining fluency in Chinese cultural concepts through an interdisciplinary
approach that emphasizes connections across fields, times, and genres. As a freshman seminar,
this course is aimed at developing students’ college-level reading, discussion, and writing skills.
In addition to in-class discussions, response papers, and quizzes, students will complete one
midterm exam and one final paper for this course. The final paper will take the place of the final
exam and will be submitted electronically during Exam Period.

Note: Absolutely no prior knowledge of Chinese language or culture is required to enroll
in this class. All readings and discussions will be held in English.

Required Texts
Course Reader (available on Ctools)
Laozi, and Red Pine. Lao-tzu's Taoteching: With Selected Commentaries From the Past 2,000

NOTE: There will be no laptops or electronic readers allowed in class. Students are advised to
prepare hard copies of the readings that they can bring and reference during class discussion.
**First-Year Seminar**

As a First-Year Seminar, this course provides students with the opportunity to engage in a small, discussion-based class on a topic of broad general interest led by a faculty member. It also aims to aid First-Year students with their transition to the University, by acclimating them to the expectations and environment of the college classroom, through an intimate shared learning experience with their peers. Because of the special environment of the First-Year Seminar, students should feel comfortable approaching the professor and their peers with questions about the course and about University life. Likewise, the professor will work to cultivate a positive classroom community in which all students feel comfortable contributing and belonging.

**Learning Objectives**

This course has the following goals for student learning:

- Become familiar with major classical concepts in the history of Chinese thought, with a focus on cosmological, political, aesthetic, and ethical thinking from early China.
- Recognize and understand ways in which classical thought informs aspects of contemporary Chinese culture, both in and outside China.
- Gain practice reading, discussing, and writing about primary source material, including classic works of Chinese philosophy and literature, as well as works of contemporary Chinese culture, such as films, television, novels, popular psychology books, medical textbooks, and political speeches.
- Conduct original research using library resources and popular culture phenomena, and present this research through in-class presentations and formal written assignments.
- Apply classical ideas of Chinese thought to analysis of the contemporary world.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

Students will be evaluated on the following work (see explanations below):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Response Assignments (8)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Attendance and Participation:** In-class discussions and explorations of the assigned readings are a very important part of this class, in which all students are expected to be active participants. Students will be given a grade at the end of each week that assesses their in-class participation for that week. The average of these weekly grades will constitute the overall participation grade. Participation grades will be given on a scale of 0-7, taking into account the following factors: attendance, timeliness, respect for other students and for the instructor, contribution to large group discussions, contribution to small group discussions, attendance at office hours (see note below), preparedness (bringing assigned readings to class, having completed the assignment for the day) and level of intellectual engagement as demonstrated in quality of contributions in all of the above.

**Office Hours:** Office hours present a precious opportunity for you to get to know the professor, to get advice on your assignments, and to get questions answered about course material. Take advantage of them! You are expected to attend office hours twice during the semester, including once in the first two full weeks of classes (before Sept 20th). Times and locations can be found at the top of this syllabi. Sign-up sheets and instructions are posted on the professor’s office door. Please sign up early to ensure you get a spot.
Assignments: These are very short (1 page double-spaced) papers in which students respond in a structured way to an assigned reading or film. Assignments must be printed out and are due in class, at the start of class, on the day listed on the course Schedule (see below). If students are absent from class, the assignment should be submitted by email before the start of class. Because the purpose of the assignments is to help students reflect on the assigned readings and films in order to prepare for class discussions, no late assignments will be accepted. In cases of printer malfunction, students may submit the assignment by email for a partial grade. Specific requirements for each assignment will be announced in class and will be posted on Ctools by Wednesday evening prior to the week they are due.

Quizzes: Periodically, the professor will give pop quizzes in class to assess students’ preparation of the assigned readings/films. Unlike assignments, there will be no prior warning for quizzes, with the exception of the Vocab Quiz given during the first full week of class. Quizzes are designed to provide incentives for keeping up with the course readings, as well as a system to reward students who consistently complete the assigned reading and viewing assignments.

Research Presentation: You will be required to give one group research presentation for this class, on one of three possible topics (see the Course Schedule for topics and dates). The goal of the research presentations is to allow you to work with your classmates to discover connections between the course material and everyday Chinese culture today, and for you to share your findings with the class in a dynamic and interactive exchange. Presentations will be graded on originality, relevance to the course material, clarity of content, use of multi-media elements (video, sound, images), and interactivity. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Ctools during the first full week of classes. Students will sign up for research presentations on Sept 9th and on Sept 11th, students will visit the UM Asia library and learn from the UM Chinese Studies Librarian about library resources available for their research.

Midterm Exam: There will be one midterm for this class, which will be held in class on Wednesday, October 30th. The midterm will be composed of short answer questions and one essay question. It will be designed to assess both your understanding of and original reflections on the material covered during the first half of the semester. A review session will be conducted one week before the exam to help prepare you and to answer any questions you may have.

Final Paper: Students will complete a final paper in place of a final exam for this course. The paper will be due on the official final exam date listed in the Exam Schedule (see below). For this assignment, students will use the knowledge gained in this course, together with some outside research, to conduct their own original analyses of a work of contemporary Chinese culture. Works to be analyzed may include a piece of modern literature, a modern performance work, a television or film series, a self-help or popular psychology manual, a popular magazine series, a political tract, a textbook, etc. Depending on student language ability, works may be analyzed in the original or in translation. Students should start consulting with the professor early in the semester about ideas for the final project. A library session with the UM China Librarian is scheduled toward the end of the semester to provide students assistance with locating primary sources and supporting research material in the UM library. However, students are encouraged to work with the librarian before this session to begin to locate possible source materials.

Disabilities and Special Accommodations: This course is intended to be accessible to students with all abilities and special circumstances. Students needing special accommodations for documented disabilities or other reasons should present requests in writing within the first two
weeks of classes (by September 20th) in order to ensure plans can be made to comply with these needs.

**Extensions/Absence Policy:** There will be no extensions for assignments in this class. In the event that a student is absent the day of a quiz or exam, he/she may make up the quiz or exam only if proof can be provided of a serious reason for the absence. This could include a doctor’s note or official documentation of required campus business. All absences will result in a lowering of the Attendance and Participation grade for that week unless the absence is excused by providing the proof listed above.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in an automatic failing of this course and possible disciplinary action by the University. It is your responsibility to understand the rules of plagiarism and to cite your sources appropriately in assignments for this course. For your own benefit, please read the following explanation of plagiarism as defined by the UM: http://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity/understanding-plagiarism-and-academic-integrity

**Classroom Community:** All students are of equal importance and value in this classroom. If you ever feel that your ability to participate and learn in this class is limited by the behavior of the professor or of other students, please let the professor know immediately so that change can be made. The professor welcomes student input at all times and on all aspects of the class. In the process of humanistic inquiry, we may at times differ in our ideas and our personal experiences. Let us join in celebrating these differences (and similarities, when they arise!), and let us work together to make this classroom safe space for the expression of all views and all backgrounds.

**SCHEDULE**

**Wednesday, Sept 4**
Course Introduction, no assigned readings.

**I. Historical Background: Classical and Contemporary China**

**Monday, Sept 9**

*Assignment 1 due at the start of class

Research Presentations Sign-up

Wednesday, Sept 11 (Meet in Asia Library classroom on 4th floor of Hatcher Graduate Library)

*Vocab Quiz (Ten Words)

Library Workshop with Dr. Liangyu Fu, Chinese Studies Librarian at UM

**II. 氣 / 氣 Qi and 阴阳 / 陰陽 Yinyang – Cosmology and Metaphysics: The Formation and Order of the Universe**

**Monday, Sept 16**
*Assignment 2 due at the start of class

**Wednesday, Sept 18**

**Monday, Sept 23**

**Wednesday, Sept 25**

**Monday, Sept 30**


Guest Speakers: Drs. Rou Wang and Raymond Kong, Chinese medicine practitioners

**Wednesday, Oct 2**
*Research Presentations Group 1: Yin-yang and Qi in contemporary Chinese culture

**III. 天 Tian, 道 Dao, and 和 He – Religion and Philosophy: Heavenly Realms and Achieving the Way**

**Monday, Oct 7**

*Assignment 3 due at the start of class

**Wednesday, Oct 9**

**Monday, Oct 14**
No Classes (Fall Study Break)

**Wednesday, Oct 16**

*Assignment 4 due at the start of class
Monday, October 21

Wednesday, October 23
*Review for Midterm*

Monday, October 28
Film: Zhang Yimou *Hero*
*Assignment 5 due at the start of class*

Wednesday, Oct 30
*Midterm*

IV. 像 Xiang and 韻/韻 Yun – Aesthetics and Poetics: Artistic Experience, Creation and Appreciation

Monday, Nov 4
*Assignment 6 due at the start of class*

Wednesday, Nov 6

Monday, Nov 11
Guest Speaker on Chinese music TBD

Wednesday, Nov 13
*Research Presentations Group 2: Poetry, art, and music in contemporary China*

VI. 礼/禮 Li, 仁 Ren and 孝 Xiao – Ethics and Morality: Correct Action in Relations with Others

Monday, Nov 18


*Assignment 7 due at the start of class

**Wednesday, Nov 20**


**Monday, Nov 25**


**Wednesday, Nov 27**

Documentary: *Last Train Home* (2009) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udVpkE0Mm2Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udVpkE0Mm2Y)

*Assignment 8 due at the start of class

**Monday, Dec 2**

*Research Presentations Group 3: Relationships and morality in contemporary China

**Wednesday, Dec 4**

Research Day for Final Papers (Meet in Asia Library classroom) lead by UM China Studies Librarian Dr. Liangyu Fu

**VII. Final Papers**

**Monday, Dec 9**

Paper Topic Presentations

*Final Paper Plan due at the start of class

**Wednesday, Dec 11**

Paper Topic Presentations

*Final Paper Plan due at the start of class

Course Wrap-up

Final Paper due date: Thursday, December 19th 9:00AM