Asian Studies/History 270  
Chinese Thought in the Classical Period  
Kidder Smith  
Spring 2000

This course addresses Chinese history and thought from the time of Confucius, ca. 500 B.C., to the violent reunification of empire about three hundred years later. All subsequent schools of Chinese thought except Buddhism trace their roots to this period, and all subsequent theorists of government, human nature, and the cosmos cite the masters of this time.

Thus we have an object of study. But just as important we have an enterprise. For this is a course in problem solving. You and I will pose questions about how ancient Chinese saw the world and try to answer these questions by looking extremely closely at some of the written records they left. We'll supplement this with modern interpretations, but we can't take any of these latter views for granted. Here is our largest question: how did ancient Chinese conceive order and chaos--and why did this matter so much to them?

I'll ask you to do a lot of writing, of varied kinds. Sometimes I will require you to take careful notes on or make synopses of the reading. Most days I'll ask you to write short essays, either in class or in preparation for class. These must be done by the day that they are assigned, since they will form the basis of our class discussions. Lateness will therefore result in a grade penalty. I will also ask you to write some longer essays. I won't grade any of these until the end of the semester, but I'll offer detailed comments on them. If you're anxious about how you're doing in class, please speak to me and I will give you a sense of your grade to date. I will give everyone a chance for a mid-term grade check before we break for spring vacation. This is optional for upperclass students and required of first-years. Please keep all the papers you do in the course. I will collect them again at the end of the semester, when I have to determine your final grade.

There will be no in-class exams, though some of your in-class writing could be construed as tests. Instead of a final examination I'll ask you to write a final essay that will be due Monday, 15 May, which is the day Student Records has scheduled our final exam. The course grade will be calculated as follows: shorter & longer essays 60%; final essay 20%; class participation 20%. (It will therefore be almost impossible to get an A without speaking in class. If speaking up is difficult for you, please let me know and we can devise strategies to help you voice your views.)

Attendance is required at all class meetings, and more than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade. That's because there's no way to reproduce what happens in the classroom--it's just not capturable in another medium, such as someone else's notes (or even a video in realtime). Sickness, of course, is an excused absence and does not count against you.

My office hours are Wednesday and Thursday 10:00 to 11:00, Friday 9:00 to 10:00, and by appointment. My phone is -3524 and my e-mail address is <kidder>.

The following books should be available for purchase in the bookstore:
Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius--The Secular as Sacred*
D C Lau, tr., *Tao Te Ching*