ASIA 33XX:

Introduction to Chinese Culture and Humanities:

Encountering the Dragon

University of Texas at El Paso

**UISFL and Asian Studies at UTEP**

* Asian Studies Minor: since 2008 the UTEP College of Liberal Arts has offered an interdisciplinary minor in Asian Studies, composed entirely of courses already regularly offered within other departments: history, philosophy, religious studies, political science, etc.
* Development of a Certificate of Chinese Studies: will serve students within the broader Asian Studies minor and comprise an independent program of Chinese language and culture studies; the certificate will include the three core courses developed in the UISFL initiative plus a sequence of two Chinese language courses.
* The three core courses will ideally be housed within the Asian Studies minor and be taught as ASIA courses, not as courses housed within separate departments.

**Encountering the Dragon: *Long* and *Jia***

* We conceive of this course as organized around two principles fundamental to the history and culture(s) of China: *long* (dragon) and *jia* (family).
* *Long* represents a diverse and transformative principle, evoking both continuity and change throughout China’s history; at the same time, as Stanley Murashige stressed in his talk on pre-modern Chinese art, the translation of *long* into the English “dragon” immediately suggests meanings and associations for western students that are very different from the Chinese sense. *Long* therefore can provide a productive ground for cultural encounters between western students and China, as well as for the investigation of cultural difference and the interrogation of cultural perspectives.

Chinese Perspectives:

* Dragon as associated with water and cloud;
* Configuration/combination of parts from various animals;
* Transformative potential;
* Cosmological processes;
* Centrality and emergence from interiority (heart/mind)
* Associations with sovereignty

Helpful Source:

Hay, John. “The Persistent Dragon.” *The Power of Culture: Studies in Chinese Cultural History*. Ed. Willard Peterson, Andrew Plaks and Ying-shih Yu.

* *Jia*, the family, is a central organizing concept in many – arguably all – Chinese philosophical traditions and cultural practices. It is also a category which has great potential appeal for UTEP students, 80% of whom are Latino/a and a vast majority of whom hail from the U.S./Mexico borderlands, a region historically rich in its own family cultures and traditions. By focusing on relationality and the family in Chinese culture we hope this course will resonate with UTEP students in productive ways.

Helpful Source:

Howard Giskin and Bettye S. Walsh, eds. *An Introduction to Chinese Culture through the Family*. Albany: SUNY P, 2001.

**Course Description**

With the longest unbroken history among the nations of the world, China has experienced seismic political and cultural changes over the centuries, marked by extraordinary diversity. To encounter “China” as a student from another culture is to encounter a “dragon” (*long*) in the Chinese sense: an endlessly creative, transforming, and life-giving symbol of not one but many Chinas. To help introduce students to the multiplicities of China, this course will look at various thematic threads that weave throughout China’s cultural and humanistic history, including philosophical/religious traditions, literature, and art. Throughout the course students will be encouraged to engage in the question of what constitutes Chinese identity at various stages of world history. How do traditional Chinese philosophies envision the relationship between people, culture, and the cosmos?; how is the Chinese world reflected in literature, food, and art?; how are gender roles and sexuality conceived in Chinese culture?; in what ways do Chinese language, calligraphy and writing relate to China’s humanistic history?; and, perhaps most importantly, how does the concept of *jia,* or family, help to ground and organize Chinese life and thought? Students will be encouraged throughout the course to practice basic Chinese vocabulary and accurate pronunciation. Course readings will include both representative texts and films.

**Course Goals/Student Outcomes**

After completing the course students should be able to:

* Recognize key aspects of Chinese philosophical thought;
* Understand China’s diversity and be sensitive to the dangers of “essentializing” an “eternal” China;
* Feel comfortable with and demonstrate competence in applying a cultural studies approach to the study of China;
* Demonstrate a basic knowledge of a variety of artistic and literary forms, both traditional and modern, from China;
* Understand the importance of roles and relationships/family in Chinese culture;
* Gain a vocabulary of critical terms through which to think about and analyze Chinese history and culture.

**Possible Units/Readings/Activities**

* Selections from *The Analects, Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* coupled with Ames and Nylan introductions. Examples: Confucius on Good Government and Rectification of Names; Zhuangzi and the fish; Cook Ding; focus on students working through the texts, reading as co-creative activity; bringing Yang Laoshi in to talk about key characters/translation issues;
* Brief lessons in Mandarin language and calligraphy (Yang Laoshi);
* Kisagotami and Buddhism: how Buddhism becomes Chinese;
* Gender: *Mulan* as example of different concepts of gender; stressing that gender roles in China are shifting and poorly understood through western rubrics; selected short stories: comparing Pu Songling (short fiction woman warrior trope) and Maxine Hong Kingston’s, “The Woman Warrior”
* Films: *Pushing Hands*; *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman;* *The Treatment; Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring* (Korean film, but superb depiction of Buddhist practice); Yang Laoshi discussion of translation/subtitle issues;
* Food: “Courtesans Do Not Eat Crabs” – lesson in writing but also talks about Chinese gastronomy, history (Northern Jin Dynasty poem), gender and the culture of courtesan-ship; Chinese cooking (jiaozi!); getting the most out of your ingredients;
* Chinese Art: Calligraphic demonstration by Albert Wong and Yang Jing; class discussion of Zhang Huan, “Form” (family in the mouth) and “Lineage”; Ai Wei Wei, “A Map of China”; Zhang Xiaogang, “Bloodline” series; Song Dynasty landscapes;
* Tang Poetry and Chinese landscape painting: the cultural representation of nature.