

*Use Buddhism to rule the mind,
Daoism to rule the body
and Confucianism to rule the world.*
– Emperor Xianzong (r. 1163-89)

Religion as an “idea system” highlights not only the main components of a religion but also how they interrelate with one another. Religion is more than just a shopping list of ethics and rituals, of symbols and transcendent authority; it is ethics embodied in rituals that use symbolic logic to manufacture transcendent authority. But where do religious *texts* fit into that mix? What we know of religiosity – from the *Daode jing* to the *Vimalakirti sutra*, from the Confucian classics to Keraouac’s *Dharma bums* – is mostly limited to the media that religion leaves behind. (One Daoist likened such texts to the dregs of wine after the party is over.) Hence this course is as much about the relationship between text and religion as it is about religion’s idea systems. How do Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist ideas get shaped into texts, and how do we as later readers carefully lift those ideas from the page?

I. A peculiar methodology for exploring Chinese idea systems

If we assume that an idea has its own life cycle, from its birth as a revolutionary, inspired argument to its prime of achieving the status quo and then to its steady decline into banality and eventual oblivion, then how do you assess the actual meaningfulness of any particular idea mentioned in a text to its author, readers and hearers? Was the idea novel or subversive? Was it broadly accepted as true? Or was it so commonplace as not to be noticed even to the point that its survival is nothing more than a relic of language or custom, its original meaning dissipated?

Let me explain the problem differently. At this very moment, I have a round metal disk in my pocket that expressly states the idea “In God we trust.” Were I suddenly to fall into the La Brea Tar Pits only to have my remains excavated in two thousand years, would future students of the lost American Empire conclude that I was an extremely religious individual? Yet the coin’s engraved “In God we trust” has become banal, or so the Supreme Court has declared in *Lynch v. Donnelly* (1984) when it said the motto has “lost through rote repetition any significant religious content.” Indeed my father, grandfather, great grandfather and so forth back to the Civil War probably wouldn’t have taken a second glance at the phrase, and had we all fallen into the La Brea Tar Pits, weighed down by all the coinage in our pockets, those future Americana classicists might view the phrase on those coins differently and not necessarily conclude we’re all religious fanatics. They’d recognize that the phrase was just too ubiquitous. Yet twenty years from now, my son (for the sake of argument) probably won’t have any such religious medal in his pocket, his forehead fashionably tattooed with a QR code that will be scanned whenever he orders his latte at Starbucks. Should he also fall into the Pits – someone should really put a fence around that place – those future classicists might rightly conclude that my son indeed possessed a greater awareness of this particular ornamentation’s meaningfulness in part because his forefathers *lacked* such pretty squares on their faces.

What can we conclude from this silly narrative? *Change may be evidence of meaningfulness.* Thus to get at what is meaningful to the authors, readers and hearers of Text A, we ought to have a Text B – a text on the same subject but temporally or geographically somewhat removed from it – so that we can denote the differences and begin to understand what was meaningful versus what was merely *habitus*.

Examples of such movement from text to text (or artefact to artefact) might include the following:

- Zhou Dynasty Confucians greatly valued their ancestral bronze vessels, and we can perhaps understand what they found meaningful by comparing those vessels with their somewhat different Shang Dynasty predecessors.
- Preserved in the *Nidānakathā*, the Buddha’s first biography bore the hallmarks of Indian and Hindu culture, and we can better appreciate what a Chinese reader valued in it by reading Zhi Dun’s 4th-century retelling of the story.
- After Buddhism was firmly established in China, Daoists ambitiously modelled their monastic codes upon Buddhist ones, and so we can learn what mattered most to Daoist monks and their ritualized existence by reading

the Buddhist and then Daoist codes.

- A certain Liu Zhi in the 18th century translated Islam for a Chinese readership, and we can better understand his religious leanings by comparing his Chinese text with the Arabic.

All these cases are included in our agenda this semester.

Not surprisingly, our guiding metaphor this semester will be “translation” as an idea moves and gets repackaged for a new situation. Schematically, our translation methodology is as follows:

Text A and its situatedness Δ Text B and its situatedness
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Here “delta” (Δ) indicates the change we can decipher between the two texts, and the text’s “situatedness” refers to our knowledge of the who, what, where, when and why surrounding the text’s production and reproduction. Yet the scheme doesn’t quite end there and should be expanded as follows:

(Text A and its situatedness Δ Text B and its situatedness)
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Δ

The situatedness of Reader C (i.e. YOU!)

Perhaps you assumed the future Americana classicists standing around the Tar Pits *still used money*? The difference between my world and that of my son is far smaller than the difference between my and my son’s world on one hand and that of those classicists in two thousand years’ time on the other.

We all possess basic ideas so engrained in our cultures and habituated from childhood within our selves that we don’t even know we possess them, ideas about the nature of the universe such as self, time, past, competitiveness and free will (just to name a few). We even have a name for them – “deutero-truths.” As we don’t know we possess them, the only means of questioning and examining them is reflecting upon the Δ between ourselves and a very different culture. In fact, it would be academically unsound if we simply approached Chinese religious idea systems without learning to see differences between our situatedness and theirs. While we don’t want to fall into the trap of extreme “Orientalism” of a bygone era that distinguished Eastern cultures with a particular kind of exoticism, we still need to develop an awareness that we as examiners are bringing a set of preconceived notions into our examination of historical China. We must recognize our situatedness for what it is – we must observe ourselves observing them.

II. Resources

Obviously this text-focused course will be rather heavy on reading – I do not treat introductory courses any easier than upper-division courses – and almost all the readings are primary sources in translation.

Required texts (all in the bookstore)

- Bokenkamp, Stephen. *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
- Broughton, Jeffrey L. *The Bodhidharma anthology: The earliest records of Zen* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).
- Hucker, Charles O. *China to 1850: A short history* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978).
- Kerouac, Jack. *The dharma bums* (New York: Penguin, 1986).
- Lau, D.C. *Mencius* (London: Penguin, 1970).
- Lopez, Donald. *The story of Buddhism*. San Francisco: Harper, 2002.
- Lynn, Richard John. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A new translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as*

interpreted by Wang Bi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Watson, Burton. *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

Reserves and e-reserves

All materials listed above are for purchase in the bookstore, and other readings are on **e-reserves** (accessed via Moodle) or, in one case, normal library reserves. Because this course is focused on close and comparative reading of primary sources, please **PRINT OUT ALL E-RESERVES**, mark them up with highlighters and with marginal notes, and bring them to conference so we can discuss relevant passages when necessary. The practice of simply reading the texts from a computer screen without the opportunity to mark them up is leading to a noticeably poorer conference quality, even when computers are brought to the classroom. There's also one book on normal library reserve (a.k.a. "Main reserves") that we'll use several times, namely *Religions of China in practice*, and I also suggest photocopying those sections. (To save time, I'd suggest doing it all in one go, and we'll be using it for conferences 9, 16, 24 and 33.)

III. Requirements

1. *Six exploratories (1 page, single-spaced)*. Exploratories are brief analyses that take the material at hand and go beyond mere description by formulating a short argument. (Appended to this syllabus are some suggestions as to how to construct an exploratory.) You will be divided into three exploratory groups, and when it is your turn to submit an exploratory, **I want you to address some issue of change – of delta Δ – between (or among) the texts we're handling that day**. I won't be more specific than that so as to give you freedom to pursue particular types of change that interest you. Unless otherwise noted, exploratories are *due at 7 p.m. the night before* conference (embedded in an e-mail, not as an attachment) because they help me set up the conference agenda by directing our discussion toward issues you found of interest. Yet conference will not privilege the exploratory writers, and I may even solicit discussion from everyone else before gradually drawing in the exploratories. That of course means you must be fully prepared every day even when you owe no exploratory.
2. *Three short formal papers (3-5 pages)*. Each annotated paper will derive from a focal text, namely the *Mencius*, the *Daode jing* commentaries, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the *Zhuan falun*. Why four texts but only three papers? You may choose which three you write. In the reading maps to come, I will pose a specific question for the first paper and a set of parameters for devising a question in the second, but if you find a particular issue in the text of interest, you can pursue it if you clear it with me in advance. Please note that the papers are required *in class* on the due dates, namely 19 September (*Mencius*), 8 October (*Daode jing* commentaries), 12 November (*Vimalakirti sutra*) and 8 December (*Zhuan falun*). Please give me your papers as hardcopies in conference, and please don't turn them in late because we'll be devoting those particular days to discussing your findings. (It of course wouldn't be fair to write the paper only after you've heard how all your colleagues answered the question.)
3. *The "Situatedness archive" option*. Back when I took an undergraduate humanities course akin to our Hum 210 – back when the La Brea Tar Pits were still the La Brea Tar Puddles – I had to write a journal responding to the ideas tackled during the course. It seemed dorky at first, but we were given free reign to discuss books we'd read, movies we'd watched, conversations we'd had that could be related to the texts we were reading in class. It was the teacher's way of getting us to think beyond the confines of the course, and as it happens, one of the three or four things I've kept from college (besides my books) was that journal. I want to give you the chance to do something similar, namely creating a semester-long informal ledger in which you take the ideas and incorporate them into your own thinking, recognizing your situatedness when something appears strange or resonating with their trajectories when something appears familiar. This journal is how we will address " Δ the situatedness of Reader C" outlined above, and I will give you another handout about it this week. If you choose this option, you are exempt from the group project requirement below.
4. *Non-traditional projects*. In the past, Reedies have very much enjoyed creative challenges that have a serious educational side to them. For example, poetic discourse and Chinese religious thought are closely intertwined. Near the end of the semester, I will ask you to take up a theme that you found of interest and manifest it in your own poetry, and as you do, I ask you to consider why poetic expression is akin to religious expression. (Many philosophers have pondered this relationship.) Other non-traditional projects may include an explication of an

attempted kōan experience, contributing to the "Reed ledgers of merit and demerit" begun by your predecessors and visits to the Portland Art Museum or Chinese Garden downtown if we can find a convenient date.

5. *Active and informed conference participation.* Please note that I expect active participation every day. Please be fully prepared for each conference, preparation consisting of both reading *and* thinking about the materials. At the very least, endeavour to find one well-developed point of comparison between the texts or artefacts at hand. Appended are some suggestions on conference dynamics. If conference does not seem to be going well in your opinion, please talk to me, and we will endeavor to remedy the situation.
6. *Final group project.* The content of this project, due **12 December** at noon, is not yet determined, and I am open to suggestions. It may take the form of a creative timeline to give more emphasis to the diachronic approach to Chinese religions. As noted above, those who have built up a "Situatedness archive" across the semester are exempt from this requirement.

IV. Incompletes, absences and extensions – the draconian stuff so PLEASE READ

As the great Warring States legalist Han Feizi warned, indulgent parents have rowdy kids and overly lenient rulers have inefficient subjects; by extension, a permissive teacher can't maximize his students' learning potential. By laying down the law now, we'll also never need to raise it again in the future, and I can pretend to be a kindly Confucian rather than a draconian legalist.

"An Incomplete [IN] is permitted in a course where the level of work done up to the point of the [IN] is passing, but not all the work of a course has been completed by the time of grade submission, for reasons of health or extreme emergency, and for no other reason," according to the Reed College Faculty Code (V A). "The decision whether or not to grant an IN in a course is within the purview of the faculty for that course." Like many of my colleagues, I read this as restricting incompletes to acute, extreme emergencies and health crises that have a clear beginning date and a relatively short duration only, that are outside the control of the student, and that interrupt the work of a student who was previously making good progress in a course. Incompletes will not be granted to students unable to complete coursework on time due to chronic medical conditions or to ongoing situations in their academic or non-academic life. Accommodation requests need to go through established channels and must be brought to my attention right away.

Regular, prepared, and disciplined conferencing is intrinsic to this course, and so at a certain point when too many conferences have been missed – specifically more than five – it would logically be advisable to drop or withdraw and to try again another semester. There's no shame in that. Longer-term emergencies indeed happen, and you ought to make use of Student Services when they do. Yet a notice from Student Services that one is ill or is taking a formal emergency absence never automatically exempts one from course requirements such as regular, informed conference participation. In sum, I'll help you out as much as I can to get you across the finish line, but it's the same finish line for everyone and to be fair to your colleagues I need to have you there in the race. To that end, **I would ask that you please e-mail me whenever you are absent** just to let me know you're okay. (More and more students seem to be doing this without prompting anyway, perhaps because we've all become increasingly dependent upon virtual connectivity.)

I'm happy to give paper extensions for medical problems and emergencies when I get verification from Student Services to that effect. Otherwise late papers will still be considered, but the lateness will be taken into account and no comments given. Ken's Subjectivity Curve: The later it is, the more subjective Ken becomes. It's a gamble. I'm not a legalist like Han Feizi, but even the Confucians regretfully resorted to hard law when their ritualized conduct and exemplary leadership failed.

**Karmic retribution
for missing a conference**



V. Syllabus

Introductory week

1. Introductory remarks: The “Great departure” 27 Aug	
2. The translation metaphor 29 Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theories of translation: An anthology of essays from Dryden to Derrida</i>, 11-16, 32-54, 60-63, 68-82, 93-112, 239-43. (E-reserves)
3. The historical frame 31 Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hucker, <i>China to 1850: A short history</i>. (Text)

The Confucian idea system 儒家

4. The Confucian baseline 5 Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yao Xinzhong, <i>An introduction to Confucianism</i>, 16-67. (E-reserves)
5. Shang and Zhou ritual vessels 7 Sep (Exploratory groups A-C)	5. Shang ritual vessels Δ 5. Zhou ritual vessels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rawson, “The ritual bronze vessels of the Shang and the Zhou,” 248-65. (E-reserves) • Selections from the Sackler collection. (On-line)
6. Confucian ritual texts 10 Sep (Exploratory group A)	5. Shang and Zhou ritual vessels Δ 6. Confucian ritual texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from the <i>Analects</i>. (Handout) • Selections from the <i>Ritual records (Li ji 禮記)</i> and <i>Songs canon (Shi jing 詩經)</i>. (E-reserves) • Fingarette, <i>Confucius: The secular as sacred</i>, 1-36. (E-reserves)
7. Confucian ethical texts	5. Shang and Zhou ritual vessels Δ 7. Confucian ethical texts

12 Sep (Exploratory group B)	6. Confucian ritual texts · Gardner, <i>The four books</i> , xiii-xxx, 3-8, 107-129. (E-reserves)
8. A Legalist contrast: <i>The Han Feizi</i> 14 Sep (Exploratory group C)	7. Confucian ethical texts Δ 8. <i>The Han Feizi</i> · Ivanhoe and van Norden, “Han Feizi” in <i>Readings in classical Chinese philosophy</i> . (E-reserves)
9. The Neo-Confucian rewrite 17 Sep	6. Confucian ritual texts Δ 9. The Neo-Confucian rewrite 7. Confucian ethical texts · Sommer, “The writings of Chu Hsi [Zhu Xi]” in <i>Chinese religion: An anthology of sources</i> , 189-96. (E-reserves) · Gardner, “Zhu Xi on spirit beings,” in <i>Religions of China in practice</i> , 106-19. (Main reserves)
10. A Confucian anchor text: <i>The Mencius</i> (Text) 19 Sep – Paper due in conference.	

The Daoist idea system 道家

11. The Daoist baseline 21 Sep	· Robinet, <i>Taoism: Growth of a religion</i> , 1-77, 265-68. (E-reserves)
12. Mythic origin and cosmogony texts 24 Sep	12. Mythic origin texts Δ 12. Cosmogony texts · Birrell, “Origins” and “Culture bearers,” in <i>Chinese mythology: An introduction</i> , 23-66. (E-reserves) · Major, Queen, Meyer and Roth, “Originating in the Way,” in <i>The Huainanzi</i> , 41-76. (E-reserves)
13. <i>The Laozi</i> 26 Sep (Exploratory group A)	12. Mythic origin and cosmogony texts Δ 13. <i>The Laozi</i> · Lynn, <i>The Classic of the Way and Virtue</i> . (Text)
14. <i>The Zhuangzi</i> 28 Sep (Exploratory group B)	13. <i>The Laozi</i> Δ 14. <i>The Zhuangzi</i> · Three versions of Zhuangzi’s “Qiwulun.” (E-reserves [among the reading maps, not in the e-reserve list])
15. The earliest Daoist scriptures 1 Oct (Exploratory group C)	13. <i>The Laozi</i> Δ 15. The earliest Daoist scriptures 14. <i>The Zhuangzi</i> · Bokenkamp, “Commands and admonitions for the families of the Great Dao,” in <i>Early Daoist scriptures</i> , 165-85. (Text) · Bokenkamp/Nickerson, “Scripture of the inner explanations of the three heavens,” in <i>Early Daoist scriptures</i> , 204-229. (Text) · Bokenkamp, “The great petition for sepulchral complaints,” in <i>Early Daoist scriptures</i> , 261-74. (Text)

16. Scriptures on the Daoist	13. <i>The Laozi</i> Δ 16. Scriptures on the Daoist body
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body 3 Oct	14. <i>The Zhuangzi</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Kroll, “Body gods and inner vision: The scripture of the yellow court,” in <i>Religions of China in practice</i>, 149-55. (Main reserves) · Bokenkamp, “The upper scripture of purple texts inscribed by the spirits,” in <i>Early Daoist scriptures</i>, 275-372. (Text)
17. Traditional Chinese medicine 5 Oct	16. Scriptures on the Daoist body Δ 17. Traditional Chinese medicine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Unschuld, <i>Medicine in China</i>, 263-328. (E-reserves)
18. A Daoist anchor text: Competing commentaries on the <i>Laozi</i> (Text) 8 Oct – Paper due in conference.	

The Buddhist idea system 佛家

19. The Buddhist baseline 10 Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lopez, <i>The story of Buddhism</i>, 1-102. (Text)
20. The Buddha 12 Oct	20. The <i>Nidānakathā</i> version of the Buddha’s biography Δ 20. Zhi Dun’s version of the Buddha’s biography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Jayawickrama, <i>The intermediate period</i>, 63-101. (E-reserves) · Zürcher, <i>Appendix</i>, 177-79. (E-reserves)
21. The Heart sutra 22 Oct	20. The Buddha’s biography Δ 21. <i>The Heart sutra</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lopez, <i>The story of Buddhism</i>, 103-129. (Text) · Teiser, “Heart sutra: Xin jing,” 113-18, 130-45. (E-reserves)
22. The Lotus sutra 24 Oct (Exploratory groups A-C)	21. <i>The Heart sutra</i> Δ 22. <i>The Lotus sutra</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Watson, <i>The Lotus sutra</i>, 3-79, 143-53. (E-reserves)
24. The Bodhidharma anthology I 29 Oct	21-23. <i>The sutra tradition</i> Δ 24. <i>The Bodhidharma anthology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Broughton, <i>The Bodhidharma anthology: The earliest records of Zen</i>, 1-52. (Text)

25. The Bodhidharma anthology II 31 Oct	21-23. <i>The sutra tradition</i> Δ 25. <i>The Bodhidharma anthology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Broughton, <i>The Bodhidharma anthology: The earliest records of Zen</i>, 53-118. (Text) · Scharf, “The scripture in forty-two sections,” in <i>Religions of China in practice</i>, 360-71. (Reserves)
NOTE SWITCH POST-F12 23. The Pure land sutras 26 Oct	21. <i>The Heart sutra</i> and Δ 23. <i>The Pure land sutras</i> 22. <i>The Lotus sutra</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lopez, <i>The story of Buddhism</i>, 206-53. (Text) · Gomez, <i>Land of bliss</i>, 125-43. (E-reserves) · Inagaki, <i>The contemplation sutra</i>, 75-113. (E-reserves)
26. The Dazu carvings:	NN. The Pure land sutras Δ NN. The Pure land images

Seeing the Pure Land 2 Nov (Exploratory groups A-C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Howard, <i>Summit of treasures</i>, 108-119. Dazu and Dunhuang image database
27. The Buddhist monastic code 5 Nov	21-25. Buddhist texts Δ 27. The Buddhist monastic code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lopez, <i>The story of Buddhism</i>, 130-66. (Text) Shohei, <i>The Baizhang Zen monastic regulations</i>, 23-45, 225-48, 286-319. (E-reserves)
28. The Daoist monastic code 7 Nov	27. The Buddhist monastic code Δ 28. The Daoist monastic code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kohn, <i>The Daoist monastic manual: A translation of the Fengdao kejie</i>, 73-129, 148-70. (E-reserves)
29. Lingbao Daoism's "Wondrous scripture" 9 Nov	21-25. Buddhist texts Δ 29. Lingbao Daoism's "Wondrous scripture" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bokenkamp, "The wondrous scripture of the upper chapters on limitless salvation," in <i>Early Daoist scriptures</i>, 373-438. (Text)
30. A Buddhist anchor text: <i>The Vimalakirti sutra</i> (Text) 12 Nov – Paper due in conference.	



Students with their texts before their teacher (Eastern Han, Sichuan)

Syncretism in Chinese religious idea systems 三教

31. The poetry of Hanshan 14 Nov	21-25. Buddhist texts Δ 31. The poetry of Hanshan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Henricks, <i>The poetry of Han-Shan</i>, 31, 34, 44, 57, 66-67, 80-81, 99, 101-102, 112, 114, 118, 120, 122, 131, 133, 135, 139-42, 148-52, 154, 161, 169-70, 204-205, 211, 220-21, 223-26, 228-33, 238-40, 245-47, 265-66, 275-76, 280-81, 283-87, 292-94, 296-98, 300, 310-11, 316-24, 326-30, 332-36, 338, 345, 348, 350, 352-54, 356-57, 365, 371-77, 382-84, 389, 396-97, 399, 401-403, 406-14. (E-reserves)
32. Chinese hell 16 Nov (Exploratory group A)	21-25. Buddhist texts Δ 32. Chinese hell <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mair, "Transformation text on Mahamaudgalyayana rescuing his mother from the underworld, with pictures, one scroll, with preface (Anonymous)," in <i>The Columbia anthology of traditional Chinese literature</i>, 1093-1127. (E-reserves)



**A Buddhist monk
with his text
(Tang Dynasty mural,
Dunhuang)**

VI. Consciousness of conference technique

Much of our educational system seems designed to discourage any attempt at finding things out for oneself, but makes learning things others have found out, or think they have, the major goal.

– Anne Roe, 1953.

At times it is useful to step back and discuss conference dynamics, to lay bare the bones of conference communication. Why? Because some Reed conferences succeed; others do not. After each conference, I ask myself how it went and why it progressed in that fashion. If just one conference goes badly or only so-so, a small storm cloud forms over my head for the rest of the day. Many students with whom I have discussed conference strategies tell me that most Reed conferences don't achieve that sensation of educational nirvana, that usually students do not leave the room punching the air in intellectual excitement. I agree. A conference is a much riskier educational tool than a lecture, and this tool requires a sharpness of materials, of the conferees and of the conference leader. It can fail if there is a dullness in any of the three. Yet whereas lectures merely impart information (with a "sage on the stage"), conferences train us how to think about and interact with that information (with a "guide on the side"). So when it *does* work....

The content of what you say in conference obviously counts most of all, so how do you determine in advance whether you've got something worthwhile to say? The answer is simple if you don't just quickly read the assigned materials and leave it unanalyzed. So how do you analyze it? A colleague and friend at Harvard, Michael Puett, writes, "the goal of the analyst should be to reconstruct the debate within which such claims were made and to explicate why the claims were made and what their implications were at the time." A religious or philosophical idea doesn't get written down if everyone already buys it; it's written down because it's news. As new, we can speculate on what was old, on what stimulated this reaction. **Think of these texts as arguments and not descriptions**, and as arguments, your job is to play the detective, looking for contextual clues and speculating on implications. I will give you plenty of historical background, and if you look at these texts as arguments, you will get a truer picture.

In addition to content, there are certain conference dynamics that can serve as a catalyst to fully developed content. I look for the following five features when evaluating a conference:

1. Divide the allotted time by the number of conference participants. That resulting time should equal the leader's ideal speaking limits. (I talk too much in conference. Yet when I say this to some students, they sometimes tell me that instructors should feel free to talk more because the students are here to acquire that expertise in the field. So the amount one speaks is a judgment call, but regardless, verbal monopolies never work.)
2. Watch the non-verbal dynamism. Are the students leaning forward, engaging in eye contact and gesturing to drive home a point such that *understanding* is in fact taking on a physical dimension? Or are they silently sitting back in their chairs staring at anything other than another human being? As a conference leader or participant, it's a physical message you should always keep in mind. Leaning forward and engaging eye contact is not mere appearance; it indeed helps to keep one focused if tired.
3. Determine whether the discourse is being directed through one person (usually the conference leader) or is non-point specific. If you diagram the flow of discussion and it looks like a wagon wheel with the conference leader in the middle, the conference has, in my opinion, failed. If you diagram the flow and it looks like a jumbled, all-inclusive net, the conference is more likely to have succeeded.
4. Determine whether a new idea has been achieved. By the end of the conference, was an idea created that was new to everyone, including the conference leader? Did several people contribute a Lego to build a new thought that the conferees would not have been able to construct on their own? This evaluation is trickier because sometimes a conference may not have gone well on first

glance but a new idea evolved nonetheless. The leader must be sure to highlight that evolution at conference end.

5. Watch for simple politeness. "Politeness" means giving each other an opportunity to speak, rescuing a colleague hanging out on a limb, asking useful questions as well as complimenting a new idea, a well-said phrase, a funny joke.

If you ever feel a conference only went so-so, then instead of simply moving on to the next one, I would urge you, too, to evaluate the conference using your own criteria and figuring out how you (and I) can make the next one a more meaningful experience.

Preparation is not just reading the assigned pages; it's reading and then thinking through something in that reading, developing a thought and getting it ready to communicate to someone else.

In the end, as long as you are prepared and feel passionate about your work, you should do well, and if passion ever fails, grim determination counts for something.

VII. The exploratory

Sometimes conferences sing. Yet just when I would like them to sing glorious opera, they might merely hum a bit of country-western. After my first year of teaching at Reed, I reflected upon my conference performance and toyed with various ideas as to how to induce more of the ecstatic arias and lively crescendos, and I came up with something I call an "exploratory."

Simply put, an exploratory is a one-page, single-spaced piece in which you highlight one thought-provoking issue that caught your attention in the materials we are considering. This brief analysis must show thorough reading and must show *your own* thoughtful extension –

- Your own informed, *constructive* criticism of the author (and not just a bash-and-trash rant);
- Your own developed, thoughtful question (perhaps even inspired by readings from other classes) that raises interesting issues when seen in the light of the author's text;
- Your own application of theory and method to the primary source;
- Your own personal conjecture as to how this data can be made useful; or (best of all)
- Your own autonomous problem that you devised using the same data under discussion.

I am not here looking for polished prose or copious (or any) footnotes – save all that for our formal papers. (I do not return exploratories with comments unless a special request is made.) Exploratories are not full, open-heart surgeries performed on the text. Instead, exploratories tend to be somewhat informal but focused probes on one particular aspect in which you yourself can interact with the text and can enter into the conversation.

What is *not* an exploratory? It is not merely a topic supported by evidence from the book, nor is it a descriptive piece on someone else's ideas, nor is it a general book report in which you can wander to and fro without direction. Bringing in outside materials is allowed, but the exploratory is not a forum for ideas outside that day's expressed focus. (Such pieces cannot be used in our conference discussions.) It is instead a *problematique*, an issue with attitude.

The best advice that I can give here is simply to encourage you to consider *why* I am requesting these exploratories from you: I want to see what ignites your interest in the text *so I can set the conference agenda*. That is why they are due the evening *before* a conference. Thus late exploratories are of no use. (Being handed a late exploratory is like being handed your salad after you've eaten dessert and are already leaving the restaurant.) I base roughly a third to half my conferences on exploratories, and I will use them to draw you in, parry your perspective against that of another, and build up the discussion based on your views. Exploratories help me turn the conference to issues that directly interest you. They often lead us off on important tangents, and they often return us to the core of the problem under discussion. So if you are struggling with finding "something to say," simply recall why I ask for these exploratories in the first place. Is there something in the text you think worthy of conference time? Do you have an idea you want to take this opportunity to explore? Here is your chance to draw our attention to it. Your perspectives are important, and if you have them crystallized on paper in advance, they will be easier to articulate in conference.

Since I began using exploratories, most students have responded very favorably. Students like the fact that it is a different form of writing, a bit more informal and more frequent, somewhat akin to thinking aloud. It forces one not just to read a text but to be looking for something in that text, to engage that text actively. And it increases the likelihood that everyone will leave the conference singing Puccini.