

The Evergreen State College

Reflections on Symposium and this quarter

Silk Roads, Spring 2021

Andrew Britton

Silk Roads: Culture, History, and Philosophy of China

Hirsh Diamant

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My Reflection Summarized

This quarter has been a tough one for me and to some extent everyone, this year has not been the easiest academically for anyone. This class has not been my favorite. I have found it to be too non academic, too artistic in nature for my brain which is better suited to analysis and synthesis than spontaneous creation. For symposium projects however, I was a main contributor in my group: Cultural norms and views, this is a thing that happens quite often to me on group projects, I often don't put enough stock in my own academic health but fret over being a detriment to that of others and thus I always find myself working harder on group projects, the core group working on the project were Aarati, Genevieve, and I, with Sean contributing as well as Jojo who had a definite and self-explanatory limited involvement due to our limited access to her because of Chinese censorship laws banning a majority of ways to connect with people in the country. This became seemingly one of the greatest problems with doing the project as the deadline grew closer but overall we were able to finish and Genevieve and Aarati delivered an insightful presentation in my opinion.

In depth reflections of the quarter as a whole

For me This quarter as a whole has had two sides to it, there was the art side of which I could only participate begrudgingly, to me things like painting, calligraphy or Tai Chi do not stimulate intellectual, they only leave me With crappy paintings, misshapen characters and a back that hurts. The other side of it was more academic in nature, I got more out of this. When studying Chinese history I found myself enjoying it as I often do when I read history, and while I found some of the philosophical ideals presented to be outdated and often aloof they led me down rabbit holes into some Eastern philosophy that I actually do like. The most valuable

experience to be had in this program was undoubtedly the cross cultural aspect, there were a couple more philosophical conversations that I had with students from outside america that were very enlightening. I wish I had been given more time to explore more deep subjects with international students, questions of morality, of epistemology, or even of metaphysics, these conversations would be something I think a full class could be structured around if the full involvement of international students could be guaranteed, the big problem is that half of the class periods were Evergreen students only, and half of the international classes seemed like filler with different artsy things and exercises it felt like actual cultural understanding and deeper learning often took a back burner too whatever else there was to do, if we had been given the entire thursday period every week to talk to students from other backgrounds rather than having sometimes as little as 30 minutes I feel I would have had more time to explore in depth more complex philosophical concepts both western or eastern, one of the students I talked to had a very utilitarian philosophy about Wu Zeitian, one that i shared and was very interested in how common such a thing was, I was unfortunately cut off by the end of the class but I feel I got good insight about the moral philosophy of some chinese people and wanted to learn more and integrate it in my learnings about public philosophies, foreign policy and international politics as a shared moral philosophy is often nothing more than a better explained political theory.

I found it hard making connections when it came to chinese philosophy as well, as a philosophy student I assumed that i would have a basic understanding but the things we read were ancient, I no doubt would have made connections easier with more contemporary philosophy, I understand however, that that is not what the class is about. It almost feels like reading medieval philosophy in that the meaning of many things has been lost to time or is hard to gauge, like reading a thomas aquinas or any other philosopher from the dark age of philosophy

when it could not lose itself from religion and thus mostly ceased to exist in any meaningful capacity.

As the quarter went on however, I burnt out nearly completely. There have been a lot of things going on in my life for months, i pretty much halted my work completely for a few weeks, work i still have to make up but also work i intend to do so soon and am halfway done with, the Wu Zeitian essay is done and the other two will be done in the next two or three days, I fully intend to have no stone left unturned by the time I enter my evaluation.

One thing I can say with pride is that I did not forgo my obligations towards cultural norms and views as some students did. We got our work done by doing meetings when we could and we got our stuff done in time to give our presentation. I do not feel like I got what was intended from the symposium, I didn't feel like many of the topics interested me, most of the intellectual stimulation I experienced from the symposium came from working with my work group which was great. The quarter as a whole was the hardest i have ever dealt with but i look forward to talking to you during evaluations!