Dr. Richard John Lynn  
Thursday, April 14  
1:00-2:30pm  
Kirkhof Center | KC 2215/2216

Reception of the Zhuangzi in the West: The Early Years

"Oh, the mountains and forests. Oh, the wetlands and hinterlands. Filling me with joy, how they delight me!"

- Zhuangzi -

The Zhuangzi, “Sayings of Master Zhuang” (4th century B.C.E.) with the Yijing (Classic of Changes) and Dao de jing (Classic of the Way and Virtue) or the Laozi (Sayings of Master Lao) is one of the three foundational texts of Daoism and thus a major source of a major philosophical and religious tradition that profoundly shaped the Chinese East Asian cultural sphere. Reception of the Zhuangzi in the West during the 17th – 19th centuries both contributed significantly to Western acquaintance with Chinese thought and greatly encouraged the expansion of its world view to include perspectives from outside its own cultural tradition. This extensively illustrated PowerPoint Presentation will provide (1) a brief outline of the essentials of Daoist thought and the place of the Zhuangzi in it, (2) an account of the discovery of that and other Chinese philosophical texts by Jesuits in China during the 17th and 18th centuries and their transmission by them to Europe, (3) the contribution of Chinese thought to the Age of Enlightenment in Europe prompted by circulation of translations and interpretations of Chinese texts by Jesuits and other savants associated with them, (4) an account of how “Master Zhuang” became known in the West and how the reputation of this eccentric and iconoclastic thinker has grown through the ages, (5) a survey of early translations and studies of the Zhuangzi and their impact on Western thought and letters. As such, the presentation will serve both to increase the depth and range of understanding of an essential aspect of early modern Western intellectual history as well as to introduce one of the great East Asian masterpieces of thought and literature.


If you require special accommodations or would like more information about this program, please contact Professor Peter Zhang at zhangp@gvsu.edu or the Area Studies office at 616/331-8110 or areastudies@gvsu.edu.