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## **Confucius Confusion: Finding Yourself by Finding Your Philosopher**



Image generated by DALL-E

### **Project's Central Theme**

The central theme of this project is self-reflection and philosophical exploration through the lens of Classical Chinese Philosophy. The plan is a web-based application designed to engage users with Classical Chinese Philosophy by determining their alignment with key philosophers, such as Confucius, Laozi, Mozi, Mencius, Xunzi, and others. By asking a series of questions that are carefully crafted from a rigorous analysis of the ethical, societal, and metaphysical insights presented in all the readings we have covered in class, we will compile the questions and put them in a user interface, and users will answer the questions, and the result would be the Chinese philosopher they are most aligned with. In case of tie(s), the website will display users' level of agreement with each philosopher (as a barchart).

### **Our Artistic Form and Why We Chose This**

The artistic form of this project is a computer program, particularly helpful because it transforms abstract philosophical ideas into an interactive and visual experience. The challenge would be choosing questions that clearly define, as much as possible, the philosophers discussed in class; this will be done through deliberations among group members, discussions with the teaching staff, and high-level engagement with course materials.

This artistic form was chosen for several key reasons:

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1. **Interactivity and Engagement:** The original ideas, as they are presented in the writings, can often feel very abstract. The interactive questions will gamify the exploration of the philosophical insights.
2. **Modern Accessibility:** A web-based platform is available for everyone and users can engage from any device.

### **Texts We'll Use**

Our project will draw quotes from texts that show the philosopher's perspective on a given scenario to inform our choice of questions and how our system decides the alignment.

### **Philosophical Argument(s), Concept(s), and Message(s) We'll Convey**

Key themes include:

1. Ethical Dilemmas: How should we treat others? Inspired by Confucius's ren (benevolence) and Mozi's jian ai (universal love).
2. Governance and Power: Examining philosophies on leadership and societal order, from Xunzi's structured hierarchy to Laozi's minimalist governance.
3. Human Nature: Reflecting on Mencius's belief in the innate goodness of people with Xunzi's view of inherent human selfishness.
4. The Way (Dao): Reflecting on the Daoist principle of living in harmony with the natural order, as discussed in the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi.
5. Practicality vs. Idealism: Balancing pragmatic approaches to morality (Mozi) with more abstract and spiritual ideas (Zhuangzi).

Through these questions and their results, users will reflect on their values and how they align with these philosophers and they can decide to dive deeper into the teachings of the philosopher(s).

### **Each Team Member's Task**

Each member will participate in deliberations on the perspective of each philosopher, prepare questions collaboratively, and contribute their coding skills to building the website. In particular, each of us will come up with eight questions, one per philosopher. On the technical side, Sam will set up the infrastructure (github and codebase), Eric will work on the UI/UX design and implementation of the website, and Dagim will focus on the ranking algorithm that determines the philosopher they mostly align with.