

## **Interest Report Prompt**

**Due Date: April 13th, 11:59pm**

**Length: 2 - 3 pages**

**10 points - 10% of final grade**

**Citations page required**

For this assignment, I want you to do a little research into how philosophical (/religious) systems can influence cultural and political practice. I want you to do this in the following steps:

**Step one:** pick a philosophical system that we have covered in class (I will also allow Hinduism as an option), and then pick a country in which that system has been influential, and then pick a *single* cultural practice or government policy (in your chosen country) that is influenced or explained by your chosen philosophical system.

**Step two:** now that you made your selections, I want you to write and answer the following questions in order, which should take about one page each:

Tell me what your chosen country is, your chosen philosophical system is, and what cultural practice or governmental policy you will be discussing. Give me a little context regarding the history of the philosophical system in your chosen country, and tell me about the practice or policy you will be discussing.

Explain how much your chosen philosophical system influences your chosen cultural practice or governmental policy. Which parts of the practice are informed by the philosophical system?

What is the purpose of the practice/policy?

Evaluate the practice/policy: Does the practice/policy achieve its purpose? If it does, how does it do that? If not, what causes it to fail? **Finally, the hard question:** Does the success/failure of the cultural practice/policy show the philosophical theory to be true or false? Why?

Here is a miniature example of what I am looking for: Say I chose Japan, Buddhism, and the practice of *Mizuko Kuyo*, which is a funerary practice for aborted children.

**First page:** I would first briefly explain the relevant history of Buddhism in Japan, discuss the relevant parts of Buddhism (Buddhist ethics and abortion in this case), and then explain the practice of *Mizuko Kuyo*, where parents who aborted a child go to a shrine, have a priest repeat mantras, and present offerings and decorate a statue of a particular bodhisattva.

**Second Page:** The practice of *Mizuko Kuyo* is entirely influenced by Buddhist beliefs. First, the practice takes place in a Buddhist shrine or temple, and the bodhisattva whose statue is decorated and given offerings is the patron of the unborn, and is believed to guide them through rebirth. The Buddhist priest who is engaged in prayer invokes the names of exclusively Buddhist deities (although some may have been imported from Shinto), and asks them to place the child in a better position for their rebirth. One might argue that the practice has two aims: comforting parents who had to abort a child, and guiding the child to a better position for escaping samsara.

**Third Page:** Arguably, the practice does comfort the grieving parents, given its prevalence and popularity. On the question of guiding the child to a more fortunate rebirth, the question is harder to answer. One reason is that this practice is not obviously consistent with canonical Buddhist practice, since Buddhism is very clear about its prohibition on abortion. However, this might be a case where a practice is one the Buddha would endorse and the clerical community lags behind,

since the practice helps parents to let go, avoiding the suffering that is attachment. In this case, on a Mahayana Buddhist view, the practice is in fact achieving its latter aim in an indirect way. Does the success of this practice show Buddhism to be true? By a Buddhist's own lights, this question is somewhat misguided, since the relevant question should be whether the practice has the therapeutic and soteriological effects that Buddhism is primarily concerned about. Since it arguably does have those (at least given some Buddhist assumptions), we can say that the success of the practice shows Buddhism to be an effective philosophical system. Insofar as we think an effective system of belief is indicative of its truth, we can say that this gives us reason to think Buddhism true.

#### **Grade Breakdown:**

<b>Goal/Points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>
<b>Explains history of the philosophical system in country.</b>	Gives a brief, concise, and clear history of the relevant parts of the philosophical system and practice/policy in the country.	Gives a meandering, but connected, history of the philosophical system and practice/policy in the country.	Barely gives a clean, coherent history, if at all. Irrelevant details are included.
<b>Explanation of how your philosophical system influences practice/policy</b>	Is able to give a clear explanation of how the philosophical system influences and informs the practice/policy; it is clear how the policy is Buddhist/Confucian/Mohist/etc...	Does an adequate job explaining the practice/policy, and it is clear with some work on the reader's part what makes the practice/policy Buddhist, Confucian/Mohist/etc ...	Gives a schlocky explanation of the practice, makes it less than obvious how the practice is influenced by the chosen philosophical system.
<b>Evaluation of Practice/Policy</b>	Gives a nuanced, interesting, and thoughtful answer	Occasionally makes an attempt at a nuanced, and	Gives a completely thoughtless and flatfooted analysis of

	about the connection between the aims of the practice/policy, the philosophical system that informs it, and connects up the practice/policy's success or failure with the question of whether or not we should think the system is true.	thoughtful answer, but rarely fully executes the nuance. Is either able to give a clear, and thoughtful, explanation of the success/failure of a practice/policy, or the connection of truth to the success or failure of a practice/policy, but does not do both.	the practice, cannot give a nuanced explanation of whether or not the practice or policy is successful, and thinks that the failure of a practice obviously implies falsity without giving much reason to think so.
<b>Citations Page</b>	N/A	N/A	Has a citation page.