HISTORY OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY: ANTIQUITY TO 1200

Tracing its beginnings back to the time of the pre-Socratics, the Chinese philosophical tradition is marked by a diversity and sophistication that makes it interesting not only in its own right, but also as a point of comparative reference: it offers an alternative conceptual and moral space from which to think about basic concepts and questions, and to interrogate the very foundations of philosophical inquiry itself. This course introduces the major texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition from its beginnings c. 6th century BCE to around 1200 CE. The first half will be devoted to key texts of the early philosophical tradition – those connected to the figures of Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, Xunzi, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Han Feizi and others. We will learn about the distinctive concerns and approaches of each of these texts, and the positions they represented within the cosmological, ethical and political debates that ensued during the period of the Warring States (4th-3rd centuries BCE). In the second half of the course, we will learn about new styles of inquiry that accompanied the rise and consolidation of the first empires in China, as well as those that emerged in the wake of imperial collapse in the 3rd century CE. In this part we will study texts connected to the cosmological synthesis of the Han empire; Buddhist hermeneutics and metaphysics; the “Learning of the Mystery”; medieval Daoist self-cultivation; literary theory; and Neo-Confucianism. Source texts will be read in English translation.

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E-mail policy
I will try to respond to e-mails within 24 hours. E-mails arriving over the weekend will be answered by the following Monday.

E-Learning
On the e-learning site you will find handouts, readings, and announcements. We will also use the website for discussions outside the classroom and for posting short assignments.

I will post, for most weeks, readings (labeled as “recommended” or “optional”) pertaining to the source texts.

Learning outcomes

1. To achieve an understanding of the main concepts, concerns and positions of major early and medieval thinkers.

2. To understand the distinctive features of the Chinese philosophical tradition, and to develop ways in which Chinese perspectives and ideas could be brought to bear on philosophical inquiry more generally.

3. To gain new perspectives and frameworks for critically examining, and reevaluating, prevailing categories and ways of thinking about philosophical problems and issues.
To develop skills in the analysis and interpretation of texts and to communicate them effectively in writing and in class discussions.

Course requirements and assessment

1. Participation (25%)
2. 2 presentations of readings + corresponding questions for discussion (2 x 5%)
3. Final paper presentation (5%)
4. 2 short papers (2 x 10%)
5. 2 long papers (2 x 20%)

1. **Participation**: Attendance, preparation, and active engagement in class discussions. Students may miss up to two classes without penalty. Further absences should be cleared with instructor and made up with a written synopsis and critical reflection on readings.

2. **Presentations of readings**: Each student will select 2 or 3 class meetings (depending on the size of the class) in which to give short presentations on
   a) major points covered in the texts and their significance
   b) issues of particular interest/value in these texts
   c) 2-3 questions for further discussion in class

   Please distribute a 1-2 pp handout at the beginning of the class covering the above.

3. **Final paper presentations (8-10 mins.)**

4. **Short paper** (1000-1200-words) on a topic of your choice, due on the e-learning site by 5 pm on Monday, 1/30 (in hard copy, on Tuesday 1/31) and on Monday 3/13 (in hard copy on Tuesday 3/14). You may do a close analysis/reconstruction of a text or set of texts discussed in class, or else compare the positions of a number of texts or thinkers as responses to shared intellectual predicaments. Alternatively, your paper might try to answer an open-ended question that has come up in class, or resolve a conceptual/historical puzzle raised by your chosen text(s).

5. **Long paper** (c. 2000 words): Similar description as the short paper but here you are expected to go beyond the summary and reconstruction of positions articulated in the texts, and to articulate an argument that can contribute to our understanding of the texts/thinkers/views more broadly, and their larger significance. In this paper you are welcome (but not required) to engage some secondary sources as well as conduct a more full-fledged comparative analysis based on relevant issues and works you may be familiar with in western philosophy. **These are due by 5 pm on Monday 2/20 (hard copy Tues. 2/21)** and on Monday

**Successful papers will contain the following elements:**
1. Clear and methodical presentation
2. Thoughtful use and analysis of relevant source material
3. Persuasive and compelling argument
4. Engagement of issues of broader conceptual/historical significance
5. Correct grammar and syntax
# Schedule of Topics

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1/10</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
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* Short paper #1 due 5 pm on Monday March 30 (electronic submission)*

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Excavated Manuscripts

* hard copy of paper due in class *


Guanzi


Laozi (Daodejing)


Zhuangzi


Xunzi


Han Feizi


* Long paper #1 due 5 pm on Monday Feb. 20 (electronic submission)*

Han cosmological Synthesis I:

* hard copy of paper due in class *


16 3/1 The Learning of the Mystery Selections from Wang Bi (Wang Pi) and Guo Xiang (Kuo Hsiang in *Source Book*: 318-324, 326-335.


* Short paper #2 due Monday, March 13 (electronic submission)*

2. Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Wenxin Diaolong/Wen-hsin Tiao-lung), trans. V. Shih:

XXVI. Spiritual Thought or Imagination  
XXVII. Style and Nature”  
XXX. On Choice of Style”  
XXXI. Emotion and Literary Expression  
XLVI. The Physical World

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>20/3/15</td>
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| 20/3/15 [TBD] | Reinventing Antiquity: Han Yu  
Selections from Han Yu in J. Tiwald and B.W. Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy* |
| 21/3/21 | The Neo-Confucian World picture  
Selections from de Bary et al eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. |
| 22/3/22 | Zhu Xi and Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation  
1. Selections from Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi) in *Source Book*: 588-604.  
| 23/3/28 | Connections and Intertexts  
Readings TBA |
| 24/3/29 | Final Presentations |

*Long paper #2 due Wed. April 5*