



Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism: A Philosophical Introduction

Instructor:

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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to Chinese philosophy. We will examine a range of philosophical traditions, in particular from the Spring and Autumn (722-476 BCE) and Warring States period (475-221 BCE). We will consider key-concepts, themes, and argumentative methods developed by thinkers like Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Mozi, and Han Feizi. What are the basic teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, and Legalism? How did these thinkers justify their ideas? How did they understand morality and what was their conception of the world? We will investigate the meaning of key-concepts like *Dao* 道 (commonly translated as “path“ or “way“), *Qi* 氣 (“material energy“, “life force“, Qi), and *wan wu* 萬物 (the “ten-thousand things“). And we will also explore how relevant these ancient texts are to our modern life and whether they can provide us with guidance in answering the urgent questions of our global present.

Course format:

The classes will have both a lecture element and a discussion element.

Class participation and preparation:

You are expected to be prepared for each lecture. This means minimally that you have finished reading the relevant required reading. More important still is that you develop the habit of assessing for yourself whether you have understood the text (make notes!). In case the obstacle is lack of understanding of the argument, you should try to identify exactly where it arises, so that you can ask specific questions during class. This will make it much easier for me to help you progress.

Attendance Policy:

If you are unable to attend class for a very important reason such as illness or family emergency, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If you need to leave a class early or arrive late, again you should tell me in advance.

Meetings:

In case you have questions in relation to the course, you are encouraged to discuss them with me. You can make an appointment with me.

Grading:

Your final grade will be determined by the marks you attain for your essay, presentation, and class participation. The breakdown of the contribution to your final grade is as follows: 50% for the essay, 25% for your presentation, and 25% for class participation (including attendance).

Essay:

There is one essay. This essay will allow you to examine topics in depth. If necessary I may discuss your essay with you before awarding you a mark for your essay.

Presentation:

This will involve you making and delivering a presentation on a topic discussed in class.

Class Participation:

Class participation is awarded on the basis of attendance and contribution to class discussions.

Course readings:

During each session we will discuss a topic covered in the corresponding readings. The readings will be made available on Moodle. I have assigned an absolute minimum of required readings. You are strongly encouraged to read more than what is minimally required.

Course Overview:

- Session 1: Karyn L. Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 1 (Chinese Philosophy); David Wong, "Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western";
- Session 2: Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 2 (Confucius); chapter 3 (Mencius and Xunzi);
- Session 3: Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 4 (Early Mohist Philosophy); chapter 9 (Legalist Philosophy);
- Session 4: Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 5 (Early Daoist Philosophy); chapter 8 (Zhuangzi);

Session 5: Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 10 (The Yijing and Its Place in Chinese Philosophy);

Session 6: Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 11 (Buddhism);

References

Goldin, Paul. *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020;

Lai, Karyn L. *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008;

Li, Chenyang, Perkins, Franklin, eds., *Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015;

Wong, David, “Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western,” see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comparphil-chiwes/> (August 2020);