

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Division of Humanities

HUMA 5810
SEMINAR ON CONFUCIANISM:
CLASSICAL PERIOD

Spring 2021

Thursdays 15:00-17:50

Instructor: Professor Charles Wing-hoi CHAN
Office hours: by appointment

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Course Description:

This seminar course is an in-depth investigation into Confucianism in pre-Ch'in China. Its primary objective is to guide students to an original and genuine understanding of the Confucian teachings formulated in their formative years.

For such an understanding to be achieved, what is requisite will be a thorough survey of the thought of Confucius, the founder of the School that bears his name, and those of Mencius and Hsün Tzu, the two towering figures in the Warring States Period who, both coincidentally and unequivocally, proclaimed themselves defenders of the Confucian faith, despite the divergence of their philosophical inclinations.

The thoughts of these three eminent masters had jointly, yet each distinctively, constructed the basic philosophical and spiritual frameworks within which Confucians of all the subsequent ages were to perceive the world and position themselves.

In investigating their thoughts, special attention will be given to the following questions:

1. From where did they derive their source of inspiration and to what did they aspire? How did they relate themselves to the cultural legacy inherited from the ancient past? What was the core of that legacy?

2. What were the historical backgrounds that gave rise to their thoughts? What epochs the so-called “Spring and Autumn” and the “Warring State” periods were? What were considered to be the most severe and pressing problems of their times? What blueprints had they put forward as solutions to these problems and how distinct they were from those of their contemporaries, including the Taoists, the Mohists and the Legalists?
3. What sociopolitical backgrounds did they come from? How did they define their identity? What specific missions, on both the individual and communal levels, did they assign to themselves? How did they see their failure to secure the patronage from the wealthy and the powerful and look upon themselves when they could not even fulfill their self-designated missions?
4. Despite the adversities they faced, what made them so perseverant and enthusiastic toward their missions? Why disillusionment and failure could have never defeated them, nor in the slightest disrupted their serenity, equanimity and joyfulness? What actually was their ultimate concern? How did they see human destiny?
5. What were their perceptions of the relationship between transcendence and immanence? What were their philosophical anthropology and psychology, that is, the ways they saw human nature and the heart/mind? What self-cultivation and educational programs did they advocate? What spiritual practices and/or intellectual endeavors were being proposed?
6. As exemplars, what enduring impacts had their words and deeds had on subsequent generations? Will their legacies have anything significant to do with people nowadays?

Interpretations of Confucianism have always been varied. In order to attain an authentic understanding of it, reading the texts that record its teachings, both intensively and extensively, is absolutely a “must”. Students taking this course should, thus, be prepared for devoting much of their time and efforts to tackling the relevant primary sources so as to decipher the messages behind.

While textual analysis, namely philological investigation and philosophical explication, will be the basic methodology employed in this course, such contextual approaches as placing early Confucianism against its economic, socio-political, religious, cultural and historical backgrounds will also be adopted, so as to enable the students to foster a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the subject matters involved.

Schedule for Lectures and Students' Presentations:

WEEKS	DATES	SUBJECTS	PERSON/S IN CHARGE
1	Feb 4	Introduction: Subject Matters, Significance and Methodology	Professor
2	Feb 11	Backgrounds: Cultural Legacy, Sociopolitical Upheaval, and the Rise of the <i>Shih</i>	Professor
3	Feb 18	The <i>Shih</i> as the Cultural Vanguard: Identity and Character	Professor
4	Feb 25	Confucius	Professor
5	Mar 4	Confucius	Professor
6	Mar 11	Presentations on Confucius	Students
7	Mar 18	Mencius	Professor
8	Mar 25	Mencius	Professor
9	Apr 8	Presentations on Mencius	Students
10	Apr 15	Hsün Tzu	Professor
11	Apr 22	Hsün Tzu	Professor
12	Apr 29	Presentations on Hsün Tzu	Students
13	May 6	Presentations on Comparisons Concluding Remarks	Students Professor

Grading Scheme:

1. Attendance (10%):

Students who need to take leave should send apology to the professor in advance, so far as it is possible. They may only be absent from class with good reason and necessary document, such as a certificate issued by a medical doctor, has to be produced afterwards.

Attendance will be counted right after the add-drop period. 1 % will be deducted every time when students are found absent without any reasonable excuse.

Students who do not turn on their video will only receive 0.5% per lecture even if Zoom records their attendance of the meeting.

2. Participation in class (15%):

Students should show enthusiasm towards the course and are expected to have studied the teaching materials before coming to class.

To ensure their active participation in classroom discussions, every lecture, a few of them will be randomly selected, at various times, to either read the texts and explain them, answer questions, give comments, or offer their thoughts or reflections on subjects or materials that have just been lectured on and discussed about.

These selected students are to give their responses through the microphone. Those who fail to do so will have their participation score (1%) for that lecture forfeited.

On the other hand, those taking the initiative to raise good questions, provide sensible answers, or contribute meaningfully toward classroom discussions will be rewarded with 1% each time they participate, to a maximum of 5%.

3. Presentation (30%):

In consultation with the instructor, students are to select an area of interest to them to present in class.

To ensure that they have sufficient time to prepare for their presentation, students should have their area decided no later than March 4 and their specific topic no later than two weeks preceding their presentation.

Likewise, to enable their fellow classmates to have the time to study the presentation materials beforehand, students should have them submitted to the instructor two days before their presentation.

Any delay in submitting topic or presentation materials will affect the final scores of their presentation.

The presentation should have a clear focus. Its arguments should be solidly grounded, systematically organized and logically presented.

The presentation should last for about 20 to 25 minutes, so that there will be time for discussion.

4. Final Paper (45%):

The paper should be approximately 6000 words in length. It should demonstrate not only a firm mastery of the relevant primary sources, but also a good understanding of the related secondary sources.

To write a good paper, one should choose a precise research topic, study all the relevant primary sources, write a literature review on the representative scholarly works, state one's own position, and argue for it solidly and convincingly on the ground of the sources available.

The paper is due two weeks after all the classes are over, that is, May 20, 2021.

A penalty of 5% per day will be applied to late submission.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

After taking the course, students will:

1. Gain an overview of Classical Confucianism, discovering how pre-Ch'in Confucian thinkers made sense of the universe in which they lived, how they positioned themselves both as individuals and as members of the society, and what ideals were they committed to, on both personal and societal levels.
2. Familiarize themselves with the primary sources fundamental to the study of Classical Confucianism.
3. Strengthen their ability to present their points of view and comment on those of others in front of an audience.
4. Learn how to think critically when conducting their research on the subject they choose and to write professionally when delivering their findings.

References:

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