

# Taoism

Postgraduate Seminar - Spring 2023

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

HUMA5850 Syllabus



“Walking on Path in Spring” by Ma Yuan 马远 c.1190 - 1279

Downloaded from <https://www.chinasage.info/daoism.htm> 3/1/2023

**Instructor:** Prof. Jenny HUNG ([hmjhung@ust.hk](mailto:hmjhung@ust.hk))

Course Schedule: Thursdays 10:30 – 13:20 (Room 5508, Lift 25-26)

Office hours: Tues 14:00 – 17:00

## Course Description:

This course introduces the students to the Taoist tradition through guiding them to the major Taoist texts, their representative commentaries, and the important scholarly works in the field.

## Learning Outcomes

### Students will learn to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the philosophies of some important schools of Taoism;
2. Analyze some key philosophical claims and concepts related to themes in Taoism;
3. Critically evaluate some of the original texts, commentaries and secondary literature in Taoism

## **Prerequisites**

- MA, MPhil, and PhD students are all welcome.
- Chinese language is not required. The course will be conducted in (simple) English. We read translated texts with commentaries.
- Prior knowledge of philosophy, Chinese history, or religion will be helpful though not necessary.

**Co-requisites, and Cross-lists:** none

## **Course Requirements**

- In-class Participation and Discussion: 10%
- One Presentation (each group about 40 mins): 20% (each group consists of 1-3 students)  
*Please choose one piece of reading material to present.*
- Midterm paper (max. 2500 words in Chinese or max. 2000 words in English): 30% (by **25 March**)
- Final paper (max. 3500 words in Chinese or max. 3000 words in English): 40% (by **20 May**)
- Debates: 1 bonus mark will be added to the final grade for every participant in a debate

## **Methodologies:**

The class will be conducted in a hybrid lecture-seminar format. I will provide background information about Daoism and introduce the four main texts: the Book of Changes, the Daodejing, the Zhuangzi, and the Liezi. I will review the main arguments and explain the structure of thought of the assigned reading(s) and will introduce arguments for different views proposed by the ancient Taoist philosophers. We will also watch selected parts of documentaries, movies of Chinese thinkers, exciting videos of psychology experiments. There will be space for students to raise questions. I expect active participation with questions and comments. We will also have discussions of ideas and debates among students with opposite views. Students are encouraged to share thoughts. We will explore the metaphysical views with their practical implications, ethical consequences, and potential difficulties of thoughts by each of the Taoist thinker and make comparisons between them.

### *In-class participation:*

Your participation in class will be evaluated based on how well you are prepared for each class and the quality and frequency of your contributions.

### *Absence:*

Attendance is expected at all sessions. 1.5 marks will be deducted from the final grade for each absence from class (starting from the third absence) unless there is medical support.

### *Consultation:*

I will arrange private meetings with each student to discuss the ideas and plans for the assignments. In addition, you can send your midterm and final paper to me early. I will try to give comments before the deadline such that you can revise it and then officially submit a revised version.

*Presentation:*

You can select any readings or topics in the syllabus to give a short presentation for about 40 minutes. For example, you can summarize (25 mins) an essay and tell us what you think about it (15 mins). We will discuss the paper afterward. Other students are welcome to give comments.

*Midterm and Final papers:*

Identify a question from the reading materials, videos, documentaries, or optional readings from this course and analyze it in depth. You can either (1) provide a critical assessment to an argument or idea you encountered in the course or (2) make a comparison between thoughts of two ancient Taoist philosophers, or between that of Taoist philosopher and a thinker in a different tradition. You may also (3) formulate an argument or set of arguments for a position in support of, or opposing to, that of a Taoist philosopher. You will be expected to read and cite several articles or books pertinent to your topic and include a bibliography in the paper.

*Debates:*

We will have short debates in class on controversial issues in Taoism. I will invite students with different positions to speak aloud and provide justifications for their thoughts. Students are encouraged to help each other in formulating arguments and replying to opponents. Debate topics and dates are listed in the tentative schedule; you are welcome to prepare for them if you like. I hope you enjoy the process and learn from the activity.

*Cameras:*

If you attend the classes online, you are required to have your camera turned on and directed toward your face during class meetings so that your fellow students and I can see you. Keeping your camera off (or keeping yourself out of view) will result in a reduction of your participation grade. If you have a special reason to keep your camera off and believe that you should be exempt from this requirement, please email me immediately to discuss your situation.

**Textbook:**

- All readings will be uploaded to canvas.

**Tentative Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Activities</b>
9 Feb	Historical Context, The Book of Changes	1.The Book of Changes (selected) 2.Ch 1, Karyn Lai (2008)	Lecture
16 Feb	Qi, Yin Yang	3.Liu, JeeLoo, "In defense of Chinese qi naturalism"	Lecture

		4. Mou, "On Becoming-Being Complementarity: An account of the Yin-Yang Metaphysical Vision of the Yi-Jing"	
23 Feb	Laozi: What is Dao? Dao and Language	5. Daodejing (selected) 6. Ch 5, Karyn Lai (2008)	Lecture
2 Mar	Laozi: The Self, Self-cultivation, Social Ills and its solution	7. Daodejing (selected) 8. Ch 6, Karyn Lai (2008) 9. Hung, "Dao and the self: A study of the Daodejing, Heshanggong's commentary, and the Xiang'er commentary"	Lecture
9 Mar	Zhuangzi: Freedom Being useless	10. Zhuangzi: Inner Chapters (all)	Lecture <b>Debate 1:</b> Is Laozi an anti-intellectualist?
16 Mar	Zhuangzi: the self and social responsibilities	12. Hung, "The Theory of the Self in the Zhuangzi: A Strawsonian Interpretation"	Lecture
23 Mar	Zhuangzi: Relativism Observation and Desires	13. Zhuangzi: Outer chapters (selected) 14. Hung, "Is Zhuangzi a Wanton? Observation and Transformation of Desires in the Zhuangzi"	Lecture <b>Shin's presentation</b> (30 minutes) <b>Debate 2:</b> Does a True Man have emotions?
30 Mar	Zhuangzi: spirituality	15. Fraser, "Wandering the Way-A Eudaimonistic Approach to the Zhuangzi" (Liu Qi, Shao Jinyi, Xiao Yao) 16. Møllgaard, "Zhuangzi's notion of transcendental life" (Chen Nanjun, Zhang Jiayuan) 17. Fung, "Zhuangzi's Idea of Oneness with Special Reference to the Story of Happy Fish" (Ren Xinmeng, Yang Xinru) 18. Chad Hansen, "Relatively Happy Fish" (Sun Wenhan, Liu Siqi, Shen Yun)	Student presentations 1,2,3,4
6 Apr	Zhuangzi: ontology & epistemology  <b>Make up class</b>  <b>(Zoom and in person)</b>  <a href="https://hkust.zoom.us/j/2339946015">https://hkust.zoom.us/j/2339946015</a>	19. Northoff & Cheng, "Levels of Time in the Zhuangzi-A Leibnizian Perspective" (Hua Jinhua, Du Yongxin, Zhou Huilin) 20. Sturgeon, "Zhuangzi Perspectives and Greater Knowledge" (Zhang Ping, Luo Guohan, Wang Muqi) 21. Huang, "Respecting Different Ways of Life: A Daoist Ethics of Virtue in the Zhuangzi" (Bao Liusi, Chen Jiaoyang, Wang Xuelin) 22. Pengbo Liu, "Philosophy and the good life in the Zhuangzi" (Zhang Ruihan, Li Jiahui, Zhang Jiaxin)	Student presentations 5,6,7,8
13 Apr	Comparing Zhuangzi and Laozi  Introducing Liezi	23. Fung, "Skill and Dao in the Zhuangzi" (Wang Jiawen) 24. Liu, "The Daoist Conception of Truth: Laozi's Metaphysical Realism VS Zhuangzi's Internalism" (Huang Yaxin, Wang Yiyao) 25. Longenecker, "On Becoming a Rooster" (Yang Shiyu) 26. Liezi (selected)	Student presentation 9, 10, 11 <b>Debate 3:</b> Which proposal about social responsibility is better, Laozi's or Zhuangzi's?

20 Apr	Liezi Yangzhu	27. Ivanhoe, "The Theme of Unselfconsciousness in the Liezi" (Jin Yuhan) 28. Yangzhu (selected)	Lecture Student presentation 12
27 Apr	No class	No class	No class
4 May	Yang Zhu	29. Zhao, "Yang Zhu's Guiji Yangsheng and Its Modern Relevance" (Zhang Yi, Ma Xinyin, Zhu Jichuan) 30. Hung, "A Study of Yang Zhu: The self, egoism, and egoistic concern"	Lecture Student presentation 13

#### References:

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- Wilhelm, Richard; Baynes F. Cary (1950). *The book of Changes*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
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😊 Enjoy! 😊