

Taoism

Postgraduate Seminar - Spring 2025

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

HUMA5850

Syllabus (Tentative)



“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 (hmihung@ust.hk)

Course Schedule: Fridays 12:00 – 14:50 (Room 5506, Lift 25-26)

Office hours: Fridays 15:00 – 18:00

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 20 mins): 20% (each group consists of 2 students)
Please choose one piece of reading material to present.
- Midterm paper (max. 2000 words in Chinese or max. 1500 words in English): 30% (by **25 March**)
- Final paper (max. 3000 words in Chinese or max. 2500 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 (counting starts right after the add-drop period) unless there is sick leave documentation.

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 20 minutes. For example, you can summarize (15 mins) an essay and tell us what you think about it (5 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.

Textbook:

- All readings will be uploaded to canvas.

Tentative Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings / Activities	Activities
Feb 7	Introduction	The Book of Changes (selected)	Lecture
Feb 14	Qi, Yin Yang	Liu, JeeLoo, "In defense of Chinese qi naturalism"	Lecture
Feb 21	Laozi's Dao	Daodejing (selected), Ch 5, Karyn Lai (2008)	Lecture
Feb 28	Laozi: Self-cultivation	Daodejing (selected), Ch 6, Karyn Lai (2008) Debate 1: Is Laozi an anti-intellectualist?	Lecture
Mar 7	Zhuangzi freedom	Zhuangzi: Inner Chapters	Lecture
Mar 14	Zhuangzi ontology	Zhuangzi: Outer chapters (selected)	Lecture
Mar 21	Zhuangzi self and emotions	Hung, "Is Zhuangzi a Wanton?" Debate 2: Does a True Man have emotions?	Lecture
Mar 28	Presentations	Presentation topic: Any paper in the reading list	Student presentations
Apr 4	No class	No class (Ching Ming Festival)	No class
Apr 11	Presentations	Presentation topic: Any paper in the reading list	Student presentations
Apr 18	No class	No class (Good Friday)	No class
Apr 25	Liezi	Liezi (selected)	Lecture
May 2	Yang Zhu	Yangzhu (selected) Debate 3: Is Yang Zhu an egoist?	Lecture
May 9	Summary	Developments of Daoism	Lecture

Optional Reading List

Introduction:

- Lai, Karyn (2008). *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Translations:

1. Wilhelm, Richard; Baynes F. Cary (1950). *The book of Changes*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
2. Wu, Charles Q. (2016). *Thus Spoke Laozi. A New Translation with Commentaries of Daodejing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
3. Watson, Burton (trans.) (2013). *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. New York: Columbia University Press.
4. Graham, A. C. (trans) (1990). *The Book of Lieh-tzu: A Classic of the Tao*. New York: Columbia University Press.

The *Daodejing*:

1. Cheung, Leo K. C. (2017). The Metaphysics and Unnamability of the Dao in the Daodejing and Wittgenstein. *Philosophy East and West* 67 (2):352-379.
2. Garfield, Jay L., Priest, Graham (2021). Knots in the Dao. In: *What Can't Be Said*. Yasuo Deguchi, Jay L. Garfield, Graham Priest, and Robert H. Sharf (Eds). Oxford University Press, pp. 13-41.
3. Heilbrunn, Dan (2009). Hermann Hesse and the daodejing on the wu 無 and you 有 of Sage-leaders. *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 8 (1):79-93.
4. Lai, Karyn (2000). The daodejing: Resources for contemporary feminist thinking. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27 (2):131-153.

5. McDonough, Richard (2017). The Dao that Cannot be Named. *Philosophy East and West* 67 (3):738-762.
6. Michael, Thomas (2023). Original Nothingness and Wu- Compounds: Re-interpreting the Daodejing's Discourse on Nothingness. *Philosophy East and West* 73 (3):698-717.
7. Yan, Hektor K. T. (2009). A paradox of virtue: The Daodejing on virtue and moral philosophy. *Philosophy East and West* 59 (2):173-187.
8. Zappulli, Davide Andrea (forthcoming). The Metaphysics of Creation in the *Daodejing*. *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy*.

The Zhuangzi:

1. Fraser, Chris (2014). Wandering the Way: A Eudaimonistic Approach to the Zhuāngzǐ. *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13 (4):541-565.
2. Fung, Yiu Ming (forthcoming). Zhuangzi's Idea of Oneness with Special Reference to the Story of Happy Fish.
3. Fung, Yiu Ming (forthcoming). Skill and Dao in the Zhuangzi.
4. Huang Yong (2010). Respecting Different Ways of Life: A Daoist Ethics of Virtue in the "Zhuangzi" Source: *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 4: pp. 1049-1069.
5. Hung, Jenny (2020). Is Zhuangzi a Wanton? Observation and Transformation of Desires in the Zhuangzi. *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 19 (2): 1-17.
6. Hung, Jenny (2019). The Theory of the Self in the Zhuangzi: A Strawsonian Interpretation. *Philosophy East and West* 69:2, 376-394.
7. Møllgaard, Eske (2005). Zhuangzi's notion of transcendental life. *Asian Philosophy* 15 (1):1-18.
8. Northoff, Georg & Cheng, Kai-Yuan (2019). Levels of Time in the Zhuangzi: A Leibnizian Perspective. *Philosophy East and West* 69 (4):1014-1033.
9. Sturgeon, Donald (2015). Zhuangzi, Perspectives, and Greater Knowledge. *Philosophy East and West* 65 (3):892-917.

The Liezi:

1. Littlejohn, Ronnie & Dippmann, Jeffrey (eds). (2011). *Riding the Wind with Liezi: New Perspectives on the Daoist Classic*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
2. Dippmann, Jeffrey. (2017). Residing in De: contentment, home & finding one's place in the Liezi & Zhuangzi. *International communication of Chinese culture*, (2017) 4(1):65–73

Yangzhu:

1. Hung, Jenny (forthcoming). A Study of Yang Zhu: The self, egoism, and egoistic concern. In *What Am I? Personal Ontology in Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Zhao, Yanxia (2014). Yang Zhu's "Guiji" Yangsheng and Its Modern Relevance. *Philosophy Study* 4 (3).

Others:

1. Liu, JeeLoo (2015). In defense of Chinese qi-naturalism. In *Chinese metaphysics and its problems*. Li, C. Y., Perkins, F. (eds.). pp. 33-53. Singapore: Cambridge University Press.
2. Liu, JeeLoo (2003). The Daoist Conception of Truth: Laozi's Metaphysical Realism vs. Zhuangzi's Internal Realism. In *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*, (ed.) Bo Mou, Ashgate Publishing Ltd: pp. 278-93.
3. Mou, Bo (2004). On becoming-being complementarity: From the point of view of the Yin-Yang metaphysical vision of the Yi-jing's metaphysics. *Filozofia* 59 (2):88-99.