

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
HUMA 4801 Classical Chinese Philosophy Syllabus

Classical Chinese Philosophy

HUMA 4801

3 Credits

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Course Description

This course aims to provide an in-depth exploration of Chinese philosophy, enabling students to gain a comprehensive understanding of its core traditions, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, as well as their historical development and intellectual contributions. Students will critically reflect on the value of Chinese philosophical thought and its relevance to contemporary issues. Special emphasis will be placed on the foundational texts, key thinkers, and enduring influence of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophies on ethical, social, and metaphysical perspectives

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Explain the main concepts in Chinese philosophy
2. Describe and appreciate the intellectual development of Chinese culture
3. Address and incorporate the variety of metaphysical and ethical questions and insights developed by ancient Chinese thinkers
4. Develop the ability to formulate arguments in the format of an academic essay

Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment are provided below, outlining the criteria used for evaluation.

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Participation	10%	/
In-class Discussion	15%	/
Film Reviews	25%	23/02/2026 09/03/2026 30/03/2026
Mid-term test	25%	20/03/2026
Final Paper	25%	08/05/2026

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

Class Timetable for Chinese Philosophy Course (Semester 2, 2025-26)

Week	Topic	Date
1	Introduction: What is Chinese Philosophy?	Monday, 2 February 2026
1	Chinese Philosophical Thought (1): Confucianism	Friday, 6 February 2026
2	Chinese Philosophical Thought (2): Confucianism	Monday, 9 February 2026
2	Chinese Philosophical Thought (3): Confucianism	Friday, 13 February 2026
3	Chinese Philosophical Thought (4): Confucianism	Monday, 16 February 2026
3	Chinese Philosophical Thought (1): Taoism	Friday, 20 February 2026
4	Film Review	Monday, 23 February 2026
4	Chinese Philosophical Thought (2): Taoism	Friday, 27 February 2026
5	Chinese Philosophical Thought (3): Taoism	Monday, 2 March 2026
5	Chinese Philosophical Thought (4): Taoism	Friday, 6 March 2026
6	Film Review	Monday, 9 March 2026
6	Chinese Philosophical Thought (1): Buddhism	Friday, 13 March 2026
7	Chinese Philosophical Thought (2): Buddhism	Monday, 16 March 2026
7	Mid-term Test	Friday, 20 March 2026
8	Chinese Philosophical Thought (3): Buddhism	Monday, 23 March 2026
8	Chinese Religion (1): Heaven and Fate	Friday, 27 March 2026
9	Film Review	Monday, 30 March 2026

Week	Topic	Date
9	Chinese Religion (2): Heaven and Fate	Friday, 10 April 2026
10	Chinese Society (1): Community and Individual	Monday, 13 April 2026
10	Chinese Society (2): Community and Individual	Friday, 17 April 2026
11	Chinese Art (1): Technique	Monday, 20 April 2026
11	Chinese Art (2): Technique	Friday, 24 April 2026
12	Chinese Art (1): The Way	Monday, 27 April 2026
13	Chinese Art (2): The Way	Monday, 4 May 2026
13	Conclusion	Friday, 8 May 2026

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Participation	ILO1, ILO4	Students are expected to participate actively in class. They should ask questions, involve enthusiastically in various discussions and debates.
Group Discussion	ILO1, ILO3, ILO4	Students are required to engage in discussions on assigned topics to demonstrate their understanding of the issues and their ability to articulate well-formulated ideas and arguments.
Film Reviews	ILO1, ILO3, ILO4	Students are required to view a film relevant to the course topics and write a critical review, applying the concepts and theories learned in class.
Mid-term test	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3, ILO4	It is an in-class closed book midterm examination with a duration of 1 hours. Students are required to answer short and long questions that test understanding and their ideas.
Final Paper	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3, ILO4	<p>Students are expected to write a written essay on a topic I will assign related to the respective section of the course. These assignments are designed as critical commentaries on the material in the form of a thoughtful critique or interpretation of the readings.</p> <p>The goal of this exercise is for students to develop an analytic facility in understanding sophisticated texts from a range of disciplines and traditions and to improve their ability to write clearly.</p>

Grading Rubrics

Group Discussion

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Fail	Mapping to Course ILOs
Engagement and Contribution	Actively engages in discussions on assigned topics, demonstrating exceptional understanding of Chinese philosophy (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism) through insightful contributions, comprehensive examples, and connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture. Consistently articulates well-formulated ideas and arguments with clarity.	Participates effectively in discussions on assigned topics, showing strong understanding of Chinese philosophy with clear examples and relevant connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture. Articulates coherent ideas and arguments.	Contributes adequately to discussions on assigned topics, demonstrating basic understanding of Chinese philosophy with some examples and connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture. Articulates ideas and arguments with moderate clarity.	Contributes minimally to discussions on assigned topics, showing limited understanding of Chinese philosophy with few examples or connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture. Articulates ideas and arguments with minimal clarity.	Fails to engage in discussions or demonstrate understanding of Chinese philosophy, with no clear ideas or arguments.	ILO 1, ILO 2, ILO 4
Critical Thinking and Analysis	Provides an in-depth analysis (Evaluation level) by critically exploring metaphysical and ethical questions from Chinese philosophy, synthesizing new insights with clear references to ancient thinkers and their texts.	Offers a clear analysis (Analysis level) by exploring metaphysical and ethical questions from Chinese philosophy, showing an understanding of relationships among ancient thinkers' ideas.	Presents a basic analysis (Application level) by exploring metaphysical and ethical questions from Chinese philosophy, demonstrating the ability to apply concepts with some insight.	Demonstrates limited analysis (Comprehension level) with minimal exploration of metaphysical and ethical questions, showing basic understanding.	Lacks analysis (Knowledge level), with no exploration of metaphysical and ethical questions or reference to ancient thinkers.	ILO 3

Film Reviews

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Fail	Mapping to Course ILOs
Interpretation and Relevance	Insightfully interprets a film relevant to course topics, demonstrating exceptional understanding of Chinese philosophy by applying advanced concepts (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism) with comprehensive examples and nuanced connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Effectively interprets a film relevant to course topics, showing strong understanding of Chinese philosophy by applying key concepts with clear examples and relevant connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Adequately interprets a film relevant to course topics, demonstrating basic understanding of Chinese philosophy by applying concepts with some examples and connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Minimally interprets a film relevant to course topics, showing limited understanding of Chinese philosophy with few examples or connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Fails to interpret the film or demonstrate understanding of Chinese philosophy, with no relevant examples or connections.	ILO 1, ILO 2
Critical Thinking and Analysis	Provides an in-depth analysis (Evaluation level) with a well-developed argument in the review, critically evaluating the film's portrayal of metaphysical and ethical questions, synthesizing new insights with clear references to ancient Chinese thinkers.	Offers a clear analysis (Analysis level) with a coherent argument in the review, evaluating the film's portrayal of metaphysical and ethical questions, showing an understanding of relationships among ancient thinkers' ideas.	Presents a basic analysis (Application level) with a simple argument in the review, evaluating the film's portrayal of metaphysical and ethical questions, demonstrating the ability to apply concepts.	Demonstrates limited analysis (Comprehension level) with a weak argument in the review and minimal evaluation of metaphysical and ethical questions, showing basic understanding.	Lacks analysis (Knowledge level), with no clear argument or evaluation of the film's portrayal of metaphysical and ethical questions.	ILO 3, ILO 4

Mid-term Test

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Fail	Mapping to Course ILOs
Conceptual Accuracy	Thoroughly demonstrates exceptional understanding of Chinese philosophy by accurately articulating advanced concepts (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism) and their historical context, supported by comprehensive examples and insightful connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Effectively demonstrates strong understanding of Chinese philosophy by accurately articulating key concepts and their historical context, supported by clear examples and relevant connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Adequately demonstrates basic understanding of Chinese philosophy by articulating concepts and their historical context, supported by some examples and connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Minimally demonstrates limited understanding of Chinese philosophy by articulating fundamental concepts, with few examples or connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Fails to demonstrate understanding of Chinese philosophy, with inaccurate or absent articulation of concepts and no connections to their historical context.	ILO 1, ILO 2
Critical Thinking and Analysis	Provides an in-depth analysis (Evaluation level) by critically examining metaphysical and ethical questions from Chinese philosophy, synthesizing new insights with clear references to ancient thinkers and their texts.	Offers a clear analysis (Analysis level) by examining metaphysical and ethical questions from Chinese philosophy, showing an understanding of relationships among ancient thinkers' ideas.	Presents a basic analysis (Application level) by examining metaphysical and ethical questions from Chinese philosophy	Demonstrates limited analysis (Comprehension level) with minimal examination of metaphysical and ethical questions, showing basic understanding.	Lacks analysis (Knowledge level), with no examination of metaphysical and ethical questions or reference to ancient thinkers.	

Final Paper

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Fail	Mapping to Course ILOs
Argument Structure and Clarity	Articulates advanced concepts in Chinese philosophy with exceptional clarity in an academic essay format, structuring a compelling argument supported by comprehensive examples and insightful connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Clearly articulates key concepts in Chinese philosophy in an academic essay format, structuring a coherent argument supported by clear examples and relevant connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Adequately articulates basic concepts in Chinese philosophy in an academic essay format, structuring a simple argument supported by some examples and connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Minimally articulates fundamental concepts in Chinese philosophy in an academic essay format, structuring a weak argument with few examples or connections to the intellectual development of Chinese culture.	Fails to articulate concepts in Chinese philosophy or structure a clear argument in an academic essay format, with no relevant examples or connections.	ILO 1, ILO 2, ILO 4
Critical Thinking and Analysis	Provides an in-depth analysis (Evaluation level) with a well-developed argument in the essay, critically evaluating metaphysical and ethical questions, synthesizing new insights with clear references to ancient Chinese thinkers.	Offers a clear analysis (Analysis level) with a coherent argument in the essay, evaluating metaphysical and ethical questions, showing an understanding of relationships among ancient thinkers' ideas.	Presents a basic analysis (Application level) with a simple argument in the essay, evaluating metaphysical and ethical questions, demonstrating the ability to apply concepts.	Demonstrates limited analysis (Comprehension level) with a weak argument in the essay and minimal evaluation of metaphysical and ethical questions, showing basic understanding.	Lacks analysis (Knowledge level), with no clear argument or evaluation of metaphysical and ethical questions in the essay.	ILO 3, ILO 4

Final Grade Descriptors

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Chinese philosophy, including its core traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, their foundational texts, and key thinkers. Exhibits exceptional critical thinking in analyzing the value and contemporary relevance of Chinese philosophical thought. Communicates complex philosophical ideas with clarity and sophistication, consistently applying insights from Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist perspectives to enhance ethical, social, and metaphysical analysis.
B	Good Performance	Shows a strong understanding of Chinese philosophy, including the key principles of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, their historical development, and intellectual contributions. Demonstrates good critical thinking in evaluating the value and modern significance of Chinese philosophical thought. Communicates effectively about the ethical, social, and metaphysical implications of these philosophies and applies their insights to support analysis and problem-solving.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses an adequate understanding of Chinese philosophy, including the main ideas of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and their historical context. Displays satisfactory critical thinking in assessing the value and contemporary relevance of Chinese philosophical thought. Communicates about philosophical implications and applies insights from these traditions to analysis and problem-solving, but may lack depth or consistency.
D	Marginal Pass	Has basic knowledge of Chinese philosophy, including the core concepts of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Shows limited critical thinking in evaluating the value and modern relevance of Chinese philosophical thought. Communicates about philosophical implications at a basic level and applies insights from these traditions to analysis and problem-solving with limited effectiveness.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of Chinese philosophy and its core traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Lacks critical thinking skills in evaluating the value and contemporary significance of Chinese philosophical thought. Struggles to communicate about philosophical implications and fails to effectively apply insights from these traditions to analysis and problem-solving.

Textbook/Required Learning Materials

- 1 IC: Van Norden, Bryan. (2011). *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- 2 RC: Ivanhoe, Philip J. & Van Norden, Bryan. (2006). *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. 2nd Ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- 3 Liu, JeeLoo (2006). *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*: FrLiu, JeeLoo (2006). *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- 4 Fingarette, Herbert (1966). Human Community as Holy Rite: An Interpretation of Confucius' *Analects*. *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jan., 1966), pp. 53-67
- 5 Liu, Xiaogan (1998). On the Concept of Naturalness (Tzu-Jan) In Lao Tzu's Philosophy. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 25 (4):423-446.
- 6 Hansen, Chad (2003). The relatively happy fish. *Asian Philosophy* 13 (2 & 3):145 – 164.
- 7 Fraser, Chris (2009). Skepticism and Value in the Zhuāngzi. *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (4):439-457.
- 8 Siufu, Tang (2012). Self and Community in the Xunzi. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7 (3):455-470.
- 9 Martinich, Aloysius P. (2014). Political Theory and Linguistic Criteria in Han Feizi's Philosophy. *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13 (3):379-393.
- 10 Ivanhoe, Philip J. (2011). Hanfeizi and moral self-cultivation. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38 (1):31-45.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include comments on strengths and areas for improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Course AI Policy

The use of AI tools for drafting, or writing papers is strictly prohibited.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to Academic Integrity | HKUST - Academic Registry for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.