

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Division of Humanities

HUMA3810: Taoism and the Chinese Tradition

Spring 2026

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Course Description:

Taoism is a major philosophical tradition in China. It plays an important role in the shaping of the minds of the Chinese people and has great impact on the formation of Chinese culture. It is still a living tradition influencing the way of life of many people, regardless of whether it is being practiced consciously or being submerged into the unconscious of the Chinese mass.

This course aims to introduce Taoism as a philosophy of life. Emphasis, however, is on Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, the two most significant figures of Taoism. While some scholarly research on them will be introduced, the primary texts of the *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu* are the foci for explanation and discussion in class. It is believed that an understanding of these basic materials will provide students with a solid foundation to comprehend Taoist philosophy in its originality.

If there is sufficient time, some basic knowledge of Neo-Taoism, as the development of early Taoism, will be briefly introduced.

Intended Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will: 1. have basic knowledge of the spirits and philosophies of the *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*; 2. acquire basic technique of writing an academic paper; 3. be able to evaluate and apply the Taoist philosophy they have learnt to reflect upon their lives and behavior.

Tentative Schedule of Lectures:

Week 1 Introduction

- Taoism in the context of Chinese philosophy
- Historical background of Taoism

Weeks 2-13 Philosophical Taoism

- Lao Tzu and the text of the *Lao Tzu*
- Important Chapters of the *Lao Tzu*
- Chuang Tzu and the text of the *Chuang Tzu*
- Important Chapters of the *Chuang Tzu*

Grading Scheme:

1. Essay 40%

- An essay about 3,000 words in length, neatly typed and double-spaced, or clearly hand-written, should be submitted by the end of the semester. Students should hand in an essay outline for comment on March 6, an additional draft document for specific revision on April 10, and a final essay on May 8.
- Marks will be deducted for late submission of the assignments.

2. Final Examination 40%

- Students will usually be given several essay questions to be selected and answered. These questions are aimed at testing how well the students understand the subject matter of the course.

3. Attendance, participation and discussion 20%

- 1% will be deducted each time a student is found absent from class.
- 20-30 minutes every week will be spent on discussion of the content of the course.

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.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in

		thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

Course AI Policy:

Generative AI is permitted as a tool to help you develop your own essay (e.g. finding and evaluating sources of information or brainstorming). You are NOT allowed to compose your essay, in part or whole, with GenAI (both direct copy or paraphrase) or cite GenAI as an author.

Communication and Feedback:

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback, including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Textbooks:

余培林. 《新譯老子讀本》. 台北: 三民書局, 1973

張松輝. 《新譯莊子讀本》. 台北: 三民書局, 2005

Reference:

D.C. Lau. *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*. New York: Penguin Groups, 1963.

Burton Watson. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.