Traditional Chinese Philosophy

Course: PHIL 191  
Term: Fall 2015  
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Course Description

Many people wonder how China’s history of thought can be identified as “philosophical.” Professors and students, both in China and the West, wonder whether it is proper to claim there are philosophical ideas in the Chinese tradition. Given Western definitions of philosophy, are the Chinese classical works really philosophical? My answer is yes. China has her own philosophical system which has evolved through history, independent of other philosophical systems. However, it is not enough to just claim that Chinese philosophy can be described in its own self-sufficient jargon, especially when there are many Chinese terms which are not prima facie compatible with Western philosophical categories. I will teach this introduction to Chinese philosophy by applying western philosophical categories – such as metaphysics, epistemology – in order to reconstruct Chinese traditional thought. In answering the question, “what is the Chinese philosophical sensibility,” I try to construct Chinese philosophical systems as solid “philosophical” counterparts of Western philosophy. We can claim that the Chinese are “philosophical” in their own way, and at the same time see that the Chinese provide different answers to familiar western philosophical issues.

Ever since the origin of “Chinese philosophy” as a discipline in modern era, researchers have made great efforts and achieved much. However, there is very little special study or discourse by scholars on the “Chinese philosophical sensibility.” The Chinese philosophical sensibility is built out of the shared assumptions of traditional Chinese philosophers throughout a long historical development. From the perspective of academic research, Chinese philosophical sensibility is the theoretical agreements of Chinese philosophers based on the sense of Chinese philosophy as “philosophy.” Therefore, “Chinese philosophical sensibility” is not only a new direction of thought and a theoretical focus based
on the traditional horizon of Chinese philosophical problems, but also the researchers’ basic theoretical starting-point and self-awareness when exploring traditional Chinese philosophical problems.

The relationship between human beings and the world is the central concern of Chinese philosophers. Chinese philosophical sensibility encompasses the use of wisdom in regard to human life, and various arguments regarding the perception of the world. Most Chinese philosophies, such as The Book of Change (Zhouyi 周易), Confucianism, and Daosim pursue the meaning of life through revealing the relationship between tian (tian 天/heavens) and human beings. This focus leads to philosophical reflection on a human being’s place and role in the world.

We might say that traditional Chinese thinkers try to help people live good lives so they could enjoy their single journey of living existence. In the eyes of traditional Chinese philosophers, people naturally have puzzlement about life and world, but this confusion comes from their misunderstanding of dao (dao 道/way-making). Dao is the road we walk in life, which is analogous to a person’s behavior and development. Throughout this life journey, we remain unclear of its direction because we lack understanding of our nature, or xing (xing 性/nature). Thus, the basic philosophical inquires of Western philosophers, such as social, political, and cosmic problems concerning life and knowledge, are also those of Chinese philosophers. It is in the process of answering these fundamental philosophical problems that Chinese philosophers develop a unique “Chinese philosophical sensibility.”

In this course I explore the characteristics of different philosophers in Chinese history and distinguish the “Chinese philosophical sensibility” motivating their thoughts. Employing Western philosophical categories to describe significant issues in the history of philosophy, I examine Chinese political philosophy in the pre-Qin era, Chinese metaphysics from the Han to Tang Dynasties, Chinese epistemology from the Song to Ming Dynasties, and modern Chinese-Western comparative philosophy. I try to provide a clear, accessible conception of the Chinese philosophical sensibility and its evolution throughout history.

**Course Outcomes**

Lectures, student presentations, discussions in classes, and paper assignments are designed to enable students to catch the unique features of Chinese ancient philosophical thinking, especially to comprehend its specific ways of dealing with the ultimate issues concerned by other traditions as well. Furthermore, the relations and historical developments of the various schools in ancient Chinese philosophy - Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, etc. - should be known and expressed in papers at the end of this course. With these achievements, students will attain a much more advanced position in understanding Chinese culture as a
Course Requirements and Form of Assessment

- **Presentation (20%)**: You will choose a topic from the class schedule below and present your understanding of it in class and be prepared to answer questions.
- **Participation (20%)**: 12% for attendance (coming late and leaving earlier will affect the attendance records), 8% for discussion participation.
- **First Paper (20%)**: It must be on some topic related to your presentation (due middle of Oct.). Its length: 5-6 pages, 1.5-double space.
- **Final Paper (40%)**: Topic options will be approved by the instructor and the paper length is 8-10 pages, 1.5-double space.

Attendance Policy

Only valid medical or family emergencies qualify as an absence, and documentation of the same must be presented to the professor no later than the next class meeting. All other absences are considered to be unexcused. Unexcused absences will affect your grade (see below).

Penalties for unexcused absences:
1. absence – class participation grade drops one full letter grade (example: A- to B-)
2. absences – class participation grade drops two full letter grades
3. absences – class participation grade drops three full letter grades
4. or more absences – class participation grade is a failing grade

Academic Honesty

Please refer to the following web link for policies on academic honesty:
http://www.luc.edu/cas/pdfs/CAS_Academic_Integrity_Statement_December_07.pdf

Required Texts

References:


   (Almost all books listed above are available in the library of TBC)

Class Schedule

**WK 1: Confucianism Pragmatism: An Introduction to Chinese World Views**

Specific topics:
1. Modern Confucianism and its dialogue with American pragmatism
2. The distinctive features of Chinese world views
3. Compare the features with Western ones
4. Precise meanings of “heaven (tian)”, “ancestor worship” and “virtues” in the ancient context.

Readings:
3. *CP*, Chapter VIII

**WK 2: Yijing (I Ching): The Classic of Changes**

1. Basic structure: eight trigrams
2. A constant changing universe
3. A universe with moral attributes: the foundation for human morality
4. Moral philosophy: contextual prescriptivism
5. Philosophy of action: causal efficacy or fatalism?

Readings:
3. *WCP* Chapter I The Source of Chinese Philosophy—*Zhounyi*

**WK 3: Confucius and his Analects**

1. The outline of Confucius’ biography.
2. Basic characters of Confucius as a person and a thinker.
3. Ren (co-humanity), li (ritual propriety), zhong (loyalty), shu (empathy), junzi (exemplary persons).
4. Compare Confucius with Jesus and Socrates.

Readings:
1. *ICP* pp.47-64, Confucius in the *Analects*;
3. *WCP* Chapter II Confucius and Mencius

**WK 4: Mencius: “Idealistic” Confucianism**

1. What is Mencius’ view of human nature? How does it differ from Yang Zhu and Mozi’s?
2. Relation between Mencius’ ideas of humanity (ren), righteousness and Confucius’.
3. Mencius’ political views (government and revolution).
4. Is Mencius democratic or not? Why?

Readings:
1. *ICP*, pp.65-85, Mencius;
2. *SB* 3;
3. *SCT* 6 (Mencius);
4. *WCP* Chapter II Confucius and Mencius

**WK 5: Mozi and Xunzi**

1. Universal love vs. love with distinctions
2. Deontological rightness vs. utilitarian benefits
3. Mozi’s political philosophy: pragmatic authoritarianism
4. Philosophy of religion: heaven, ghosts and spirits, fate
5. A naturalistic view of heaven  
6. On human nature and social control  
7. The significance of rituals and rules of propriety (li)

Readings:  
1. ICP, pp.86-130;  
2. SB 6, 9.  
3. WCP Chapter II Xunzi, Mozi

**WK 6: Daoism: Laozi and Zhuangzi**

1. The meanings of Dao and its manifestations (including the political one).  
2. with that of Laozi, reflect our contemporary life.  
3. Identify the distinctive features of Zhuangzi’s Daoism.  
4. the role of qi气, with its various manifestations in Zhuangzi

Readings:  
1. CP pp.131-151;  
2. SCT 5 Laozi, Zhuangzi;  
3. SB 7;  
4. WCP Chapter II Laozi, Zhuangzi

**WK 7: The Art of Warfare (Sunzi) and Hanfeizi (Legalism): The Ways of Leading Changes**

1. The relations of Hanfeizi’s Legalism to Daoism and Confucianism.  
2. Find out and that of potential power (shi势) in Hanfeizi.  
3. Is there some kind of ecological ethics in Marchiavellism in Hanfeizi?  
4. With the perspective of Sunzi, evaluate American military experiences; How can a general, according to Sunzi, become undefeatable in wars? [Pay attention to the role of shi (positional and strategic power)]

Readings:  
1. ICP pp.152-205;  
2. SB 8, 12  
3. SCT 7 (Han Feizi), Basic Writings: Third Part (Han Fei Tzu);  
4. WCP Chapter II Hanfeizi  
5. SCT 7 (The Military Texts: The Sunzi); The Art of Warfare

**WK 8: Han Cosmology and Neo-Daoism: The Yin-yang School and Yin-yang Confucianism**

1. The structure of yin-yang and five-agents theory and its philosophical significance.  
2. Dong Zhongshu's view on the ways of relating man to heaven (nature).
3. Find out the implications of timeliness in Dong’s discourses.
4. What are the consequences of having philosophical gender difference? Can you find such difference in western philosophy?

Readings:
1. SB 11, 14;
2. SCT, pp.347-352; SCT, pp.292-310; Book of Changes.
3. WCP Chapter III Chinese Metaphysics: Chinese Cosmology in Han Dynasty; The Ontology of Being and Nothingness in Wei-Jin Dynasties
4. CP, Chapter 6, Chinese Metaphysical Creativity

WK 9: Neo-Daoism and Chinese Buddhism (I): Hua-yen & Tian-tai

1. How does Neo-Daoism differ from traditional Daoism?
2. Tian-tai inherit and develop the Buddhist doctrine of Middle Path;
3. What philosophical reasons can be found in the two schools that account for the Buddhist success in China?
4. The features of Hua-yen School. Are nowadays sciences going toward a Hua-yen dimension?

Readings:
1. ICP pp.209-219, pp.248-303;
2. SB 24, 21, 22, 25,
4. WCP Chapter III Chinese Metaphysics: Buddhism in Sui and Tang Dynasties

WK 10: Chinese Buddhism (II): The Consciousness-Only (Weishi) School and the Chan School (Zen Buddhism)

1. How did Chan understand “meditation” (dhyana, chan, zen) in its own terms?
2. The role of language in Chan.
3. Identify the explicit and implicit indebtedness of Chan to ancient Chinese thoughts.
4. Do you feel that Chan is useful in dealing with the dilemmas in human life?

Readings:
1. ICP pp.220-247; pp.304-331;
2. SB 26,
3. SCT, pp.491-522; The Platform Sutra.
4. WCP Chapter III Chinese Metaphysics: Buddhism in Sui and Tang Dynasties

WK 11: Neo-Confucianism (I): Zhou Dun-yi and Zhu Xi

1. Identify the pre-Qin Confucian, Han Confucian and certain new elements in
1. Lu Xiang-shan's views on mind and principle.
2. What is “the extension of the innate knowledge of the good (zhi liang-zhi)” for Wang Yang-ming?
3. Compare Chu Xi with Lu and Wang.
4. How far is the Neo-Confucianism from the original Confucianism in the Analects?

Readings:
1. *SB* 28, 34
3. *WCP* Chapter IV Chinese Epistemology: Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi
4. *CP*, Chapter 4, Feelings (Qing 情) and the Importance of History, Particularity, and Emergence in Context

WK 12: Neo-Confucianism (II): Lu Xiang-shan & Wang Yang-ming

1. Lu Xiang-shan’s views on principle (li) and material force (qi)?
2. Is Zhu Xi’s philosophical thinking dualistic or not?
3. Can you find Daoist or Buddhist impacts on these two thinkers?

Readings:
1. *SB* 28, 34
3. *WCP* Chapter IV Chinese Epistemology: Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi
4. *CP*, Chapter 4, Feelings (Qing 情) and the Importance of History, Particularity, and Emergence in Context

WK 13: Modern Chinese Philosophy and Chinese Philosophical Sensibility in A Comparative Context: Its History and Direction

1. The dao of Chinese philosophy
2. Modern Chinese philosophy as a discipline
3. The challenge of Western philosophy
4. Confucian Pragmatism and Sino-US Cultural Exchange

Readings:
1. *SB* 28, 34
4. *WCP* Chapter V The Dao of Chinese Philosophy; Chapter VI Modern Chinese Philosophy
5. *CP*, Chapter 8, Confucian Pragmatism as a Post-modern Comparative Philosophy
WK 14 Finishing Final Papers and Presentations