

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Division of Humanities

HUMA 5810
SEMINAR ON CONFUCIANISM:
CLASSICAL PERIOD

Spring 2019

CYTG002
Mondays 19:00-21:50

Instructor: Professor Charles Wing-hoi CHAN
Office hours: Wed 11:00-12:30 & Fri 11:00-12:30, or by appointment
Office: Rm. 3357; Tel: 2358-7765; E-mail: hmwhchan@ust.hk

Course Description:

This seminar course is about Confucianism in the pre-Ch'in period. Its primary objective is to guide students to an original and genuine understanding of the Confucian teachings formulated in their formative years.

To achieve such an understanding, what is requisite is a thorough survey of the thought of Confucius, the founder of the School that bears his name, and those of Mencius and Hsün Tzu, the two towering figures in the Warring States Period who, both coincidentally and unequivocally, claimed themselves defenders of the Confucian faith. The thoughts of these three masters had jointly, yet each distinctively, laid down the basic philosophical and spiritual frameworks within which Confucians of the subsequent ages were to perceive the world and to position themselves.

In investigating their thoughts, special attention will be given to the following questions:

1. Where from did they derive their source of inspiration? What did they aspire to? How did they relate themselves to the cultural and historical heritage from the ancient past? What actually was the substance of that heritage?

2. What an epoch were the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring State period? What problems did they consider to be as the most pressing and severe of their times? What proposals had they put forward as solutions? How distinct their proposals were from those of their contemporaries, including the Taoists, the Mohists and the Legalists?
3. What sociopolitical backgrounds did they come from? How did they understand their circumstances? What mission did they assign to themselves? How did they account for their failure to secure the patronage from the wealthy and the powerful? How should they be evaluated especially when they did not even fulfill their self-designated mission?
4. Despite the adversities they faced, what made them so perseverant and enthusiastic toward their mission? Why failure and disillusionment could never defeat them, nor disrupt in the slightest their serenity, equanimity and joyfulness? What actually was their ultimate concern? How did they envision human destiny?
5. What were their views on the transcendence and the phenomenal world? How did they see human nature and the heart/mind? What self-cultivation and educational program did they advocate? What intellectual endeavors and/or spiritual practices were involved in it?
6. What enduring impacts had their words and deeds had on the subsequent generations of Confucians? Will their legacies have anything significant to do with people nowadays?

Interpretations of Confucianism have always been diversified. In order to attain an authentic understanding of it, reading the texts that record its teachings, both intensively and extensively, is an absolutely “must”. Students taking this course should, thus, be prepared for devoting much of their time and efforts to studying the primary sources so as to decipher the messages behind.

While textual analysis, namely philological investigation and philosophical explication, will be the basic methodology employed in this course, such contextual approaches as placing early Confucianism against the economic, socio-political, religious, cultural and historical backgrounds from which it emerged will also be adopted, so as to foster on the part of the students a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the subject matter of the course.

Finally, to familiarize them with the state of art of Classical Confucianism, students will also be introduced to, and indeed expected to work on, those scholarly works considered to be most important in the area.

Schedule for Lectures and Students' Presentations:

WEEKS	DATES	SUBJECTS	PERSON/S IN CHARGE
1	Feb 4	Introduction: Subject Matters, Significance and Methodology	Professor
2	Feb 11	Backgrounds: The Cultural Heritage before Confucius, the Sociopolitical Upheaval, and the Rise of the <i>Shih</i>	Professor
3	Feb 18	Confucius	Professor
4	Feb 25	Confucius	Professor
5	Mar 4	Confucius	Professor
6	Mar 11	Presentations on Confucius	Students
7	Mar 18	Mencius	Professor
8	Mar 25	Mencius	Professor
9	Apr 1	Presentations on Mencius	Students
10	Apr 8	Hsün Tzu	Professor
11	Apr 15	Hsün Tzu	Professor
12	Apr 29	Presentations on Hsün Tzu	Students
13	May 6	Presentations on Comparing Confucius, Mencius and Hsün Tzu	Students

Grading Scheme:

1. Attendance (10%):
Students who need to take leave should send apology to the professor in advance, whenever it is possible. They may only be absent from class with good reason and evidence, such as a certificate issued by a medical doctor. Unexcused absence will result in a grade penalty.
2. Participation in class (10%):
Students are expected to have read the teaching materials before coming to class. They should also actively participate in class through raising sensible questions and engaging in discussions.
3. Presentation (30%):
In consultation with the professor, students are to select a topic of interest to them to present in class.
To make sure that they have sufficient time to prepare for their presentations, students should have their topics decided no later than February 18.
The presentation should have a clear focus. Its arguments should be solidly grounded on the primary sources, systematically organized and logically presented.
4. Final Paper (50%):
The paper will be approximately 6000 words in length. It should demonstrate not only a firm mastery of the primary sources involved, but also a good understanding of the scholarship related to the subject to be addressed.
The paper is due May 20. Penalty will be applied to late submission.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

After taking the course, students will:

1. Gain an overview of Classical Confucianism, discovering how pre-Ch'in Confucian thinkers made sense of the universe in which they lived, how they positioned themselves both as individuals and as members of the society, and what ideals were they committed to, on both personal and societal levels.
2. Familiarize themselves with both the primary and secondary sources fundamental to the study of Classical Confucianism.
3. Strengthen their ability to present their points of view and comment on those of others in front of an audience.

4. Learn how to think critically when conducting their research on the subject they choose and to write professionally when delivering their findings.

References:

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