

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology  
Division of Humanities

**HUMA 5810**  
**SEMINAR ON CONFUCIANISM:**  
**CLASSICAL PERIOD**

**Spring 2020**

Wednesdays 9:00-11:50

Room 5560

Instructor: Professor Charles Wing-hoi CHAN

Office hours: Tue 11:00-12:30 & Wed 13:00-14:30, or by appointment

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**Course Description:**

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

In order to achieve such an understanding, what is requisite will be 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, proclaimed themselves defenders of the Confucian faith, despite the divergence of their thoughts.

The thoughts of these three eminent masters had jointly, yet each distinctively, constructed the basic philosophical and spiritual frameworks within which Confucians of all 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 and what to did they aspire? How did they relate themselves to the cultural heritage from the ancient past? What actually was the substance of that heritage?

2. What historical backgrounds that gave rise to their thoughts? What epochs they were the so-called “Spring and Autumn” and the “Warring State” periods? What problems that were considered to be the most severe and pressing of the time? What blueprints that had been come up with as solutions to these problems and how distinct they 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 define their identity? What particular missions, on both the individual and communal levels, did they assign to themselves? How did they see their failure to secure the patronage from the wealthy and the powerful and look upon themselves when they could not even fulfill their self-designated missions?
4. Despite the adversities they faced, what made them so perseverant and enthusiastic toward their missions? Why disillusionment and failure could have never defeated them, nor in the slightest disrupted their serenity, equanimity and joyfulness? What actually was their ultimate concern? How did they perceive human destiny?
5. What were their perceptions of the relationship between transcendence and immanence? What views did they hold with regard to philosophical anthropology and philosophical psychology, that is, the human nature and the heart/mind? What self-cultivation and educational programs did they advocate? What spiritual practices and/or intellectual endeavors were being involved?
6. As exemplars, what enduring impacts had their words and deeds had on all the subsequent generations of Confucians? Will their legacies have anything significant to do with people nowadays?

Interpretations of Confucianism have always been varied. 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 tackling the relevant 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 its economic, socio-political, religious, cultural and historical backgrounds will also be adopted, so as to enable the

students to foster a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the subject matter of the course.

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

**Schedule for Lectures and Students' Presentations:**

WEEKS	DATES	SUBJECTS	PERSON/S IN CHARGE
1	Feb 12	Introduction: Subject Matters, Significance and Methodology	Professor
2	Feb 19	Backgrounds: Cultural Heritage, Sociopolitical Upheaval, and the Rise of the <i>Shih</i>	Professor
3	Feb 26	Confucius	Professor
4	Mar 4	Confucius	Professor
5	Mar 11	Confucius	Professor
6	Mar 18	Presentations on Confucius	Students
7	Mar 25	Mencius	Professor
8	Apr 1	Mencius	Professor
9	Apr 8	Presentations on Mencius	Students
10	Apr 15	Hsün Tzu	Professor
11	Apr 22	Hsün Tzu	Professor
12	Apr 29	Presentations on Hsün Tzu	Students
13	May 6	Presentations on Comparisons Concluding Remarks	Students Professor

## **Grading Scheme:**

### 1. Attendance (10%):

Students who need to take leave should send apology to the professor in advance, so far as it is possible. They may only be absent from class with good reason and evidence, such as a certificate issued by a medical doctor, has to be produced afterwards. Unexcused absence will result in a grade penalty.

### 2. Participation in class (10%):

Students are expected to have studied the teaching materials before coming to class. They should also actively participate in class through engaging in discussions or raising sensible questions.

### 3. Presentation (30%):

In consultation with the instructor, students are to select an area of interest to them to present in class.

To ensure that they have sufficient time to prepare for their presentation, students should have their area decided no later than February 26 and their specific topic no later than two weeks preceding their presentation.

The presentation should have a clear focus. Its arguments should be solidly grounded, systematically organized and logically presented.

The presentation should last for about 20 to 25 minutes, so that there will be time for discussion.

### 4. Final Paper (50%):

The paper will be approximately 6000 words in length. It should demonstrate not only a firm mastery of the relevant primary sources, but also a good understanding of the related secondary sources.

To write a good paper, one should choose a precise research topic, study all the relevant primary sources, write a literature review on the representative scholarly works, state one's own position, and argue for it solidly and convincingly on the ground of the sources available.

The paper is due two weeks after the semester ends, that is, May 20, 2020. A penalty of 5% per day 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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