Chinese Thought and Culture
2016 Spring. Rutgers University
Syllabus

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1 Course Description

This course will survey the topics in classical Chinese philosophy. We will read
through primary texts from the influential thinkers of the pre-Qin period and some
documents from the modern period.

We will begin by discussing how to approach historical texts from other cultures.
Next, we will encounter our first major figure—Confucius—and try to understand
the Confucian ideals of Ru, Ren, Yi, De and Junzi. Much of the rest of the course
will be about various discussions of Confucius by other Chinese thinkers: we will
read through the major Confucian classics (which have shaped much of the Chinese
worldview and societal system), the insightful criticisms by Mozi, and the careful
development of Confucian thought by Mencius and Xunzi. To provide a sharp
contrast to the Confucian thought, we will read Laozi—the author of The Tao Te Ching,
and Zhuangzi. Since the Rutgers Workshop on Chinese Philosophy is taking place
in April 2016, we will invite some guest lecturers from the conference to talk about
their cutting-edge research on Chinese philosophy and history. We will finish the
course with some discussions on the modern China—its history, culture, thought,
and future.

2 Course Information

• Meeting times: Monday & Thursday 9:50 - 11:10 am
• Class location: Scott Hall (SC) 219, College Ave Campus
• Office hours: TBD
• Prerequisites: one course in philosophy.
• Required texts:
• Optional texts:

3 Chinese Thought and Culture

Why study Chinese thought and culture? I shall offer three reasons, but I am sure there are more.

First, it is an important part of one’s college education. Very often, much of the college education in this country focuses on Western traditions and schools of thinking. There have been and continue to be interesting and important intellectual developments in other places in the world, such as Africa, Latin America, the Mideast, and Asia. In so far as a college education aims to broaden one’s horizons, one would benefit from learning about the ideas from those traditions. A course in Chinese thought and culture aims to offer an in-depth overview of a distinctive perspective. It also complements one’s philosophical education.

Second, it is useful knowledge for engaging in the global economy. China has become an important player in the global economy and politics (after two centuries of sleep). It has championed a national strategy of cultural “rejuvenation.” The implicit message (familiar to anyone who has studied Chinese history) is to recall the glorious past where China led the world in pioneering science, culture, and societal harmony. To understand the global economy requires a solid understanding of China. However, to understand China requires a solid understanding of its history and its philosophies. What are the philosophical ideas underpinning China’s past? What are the cultural trends from ancient China to contemporary China? To answer these questions, we need to understand the philosophical schools of thinking rooted in Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and many others.
Last but not least, it is fun! In this course, we will look at many philosophical ideas that not only have profoundly influenced the Chinese society but also are interesting in their own rights. For example, we will read about Zhuangzi’s dream about becoming a butterfly, the Mohists’ logical and semantic paradoxes, etc.

4 About Me

I am a third-year graduate student in the department of philosophy at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. I am also pursuing a Master in mathematical physics and a graduate certificate in cognitive science. My research interests include: philosophy of physics, philosophy of science, metaphysics, and decision theory. I am also interested in philosophy of language and cognitive science, philosophy of religion, meta-ethics, and Chinese philosophy.

In Chinese philosophy, I have done research on the Mencian concept of “Tian.” Recently I have been thinking about the relationship between normative freedom and the Xunzian concept of “Xin.” In the summer of 2011, I traveled in Hubei, Shanghai, and Shandong, China to study the recently discovered Guodian bamboo slips of Confucian and Daoist texts.

5 Learning Goals

Our main goal is to gain an understanding and appreciation of the classical Chinese philosophy in particular and Chinese thought and culture in general. Through reading and writing about Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Mozi, Banzhao, Laozi and Zhuangzi, students will also learn to engage in the historical texts from other cultures. Through attending guest lectures, students will learn to engage in professional philosophical discussions. Through the oral presentations, students will learn to articulate their research to their peers. Through the term paper project, students will learn to deepen their philosophical research and practice their analytical writing skills.

6 Work and Grading

• Presentations: 25%

I think the best way to learn something is to teach it to others. So we will have several student presentations in class. Students will be assigned into groups of 2. The presentations will be based on a particular primary or secondary text.

• Class Contributions: 15%

I expect lively discussions. However, if you are usually quiet in class, you can choose to email me your thoughts or reflections before or after class.

• Short Response Papers: 15%
There will be weekly one-page response papers based on the readings. These are supposed to help you engage with the text. You can choose to summarize the readings or focus on one particular passage. You should raise two questions for discussion.

- Midterm Paper: 20%
  There will be two midterm papers. You should aim for about 4-6 pages (double spaced).

- Term Paper: 25%
  There will be a final paper. You should aim for about 8-10 pages (double spaced).

- Bonus: attendance at the Rutgers Workshop of Chinese Philosophy and a 2-page reflection paper +8%

7 Accessibility

I would like to make sure that everyone in the class feels safe and respected. If you have any particular need, please contact the Rutgers Office of Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. They will forward the necessary information to me. We can work out the details in person.

*From the website of the Rutgers Office of Disability Services:*

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus’s disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form.

8 Course Plan

- Week 1. Introduction; historical and cultural context; how to read an ancient text from another culture.
  Bryan W. Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*
  Chapter 1. The Historical Context
  Appendix A: Hermeneutics, or How to Read a Text
• **Week 2. Confucius. The Analects; key terms.**

• **Week 3. The Confucian four books and five classics.**
  Handouts:
  The other two books: *Great Learning; Doctrine of the Mean*.
  Five classics: *Shujing, the Book of History; Shijing, the Book of Poetry; I Ching, the Book of Changes; Liji, the Book of Rites; Chunqiu, the Spring and Autumn Annals; Yuejing, the Book of Music (Lost due to the Burning of Books)*
  Film (if time permits): Hero.

• **Week 4. Mozi. Criticisms of Confucianism; the “School of Names”; Logic and language.**
  Bryan W. Van Norden. Chapter 4: Mohist Consequentialism. Chapter 7: Language and Paradoxes in the “Schools of Names.”
  First midterm paper due.

• **Week 5. Mengzi. Development of Confucianism; is human nature good or bad?**

• **Week 6. Xunzi. Xin, Dao, and human nature.**
  Handouts on Xin, Dao, Li, De, and Xing.

• **Week 7. Banzhao. Women in Confucianism; women in ancient China.**
  Handouts: Ban Zhao: Lessons for a Woman and The Four Books for Women.

• **Week 8. Laozi. Daoism. The Tao Te Ching.**
  Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden. Chapter 4: Laozi.
  Second midterm paper due.

• **Week 9. [The Rutgers Workshop on Chinese Philosophy; guest lectures by workshop speakers]**
  Daoism – continued
• **Week 10. Zhuangzi.**
  Bryan W. Van Norden. Chapter 9: Zhuangzi’s Therapeutic Skepticism and Relativism

• **Week 11. Modern Chinese thought; history of modern China.**
  Handouts: The May Fourth Movement
  Film: “Raise the Red Lantern”

• **Week 12. The future of Chinese thought and culture.**
  Handout: The future of Chinese thought and culture
  Guest Lecture [speaker TBA]: Chinese Political Philosophy

• **Weeks 13 and 14. Buffer time.**
  Review and Final Paper Discussions
  Final paper due.