



# The Beijing Center

北京中国学中心

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## TBC 1500 Traditional Chinese Philosophy

*Please Note: This is a sample syllabus, and the course schedule is subject to change. Students will receive the updated syllabus prior to the start of first class.*

### 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 Daoism 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 inquiries 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 whole.

### **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.
- Home Work and Feedbacks (30%): It must be on some topic related to teaching materials. Its length: 5-6 pages, 1.5-double space.
- Final Paper (30%): 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:

<https://thebeijingcenter.org/academics/academic-integrity/>

## Required Texts

1. *Chinese Philosophy (WCP)*, by Haiming Wen, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

## References:

1. *Confucian Pragmatism as the Art of Contextualizing Personal Experience and World (CP)*, by Haiming Wen, Lexington Books, 2009.
2. *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism (ICP)*, by Jeeloo Liu, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
3. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, by Fung, Yu-lan, Tianjin Social Science Publisher, 2007.
4. *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, by Karyn L. Lai, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
5. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy (SB)*, tr. & compiled by Wing-tsit Chan, Princeton University Press, 1963.

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

## Class Schedule

### WK 1: The *Dao* of Heaven (*tian*): An Introduction to Chinese WorldViews

Specific topics:

1. Three Talents (*sancai*): the cosmological order of heaven, earth and human beings.
2. Precise meanings of “heaven (*tian*)”, “ancestor worship” and “virtues” in the ancient context
3. Confucianism and Daoist worldviews
4. The distinctive features of Chinese world views
5. Compare the features with Western ones

Readings:

1. *CP-WEN, Introduction: What is Chinese Philosophy?*
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 1: The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy
3. *ICP-LIU*, pp.1-26, Introduction: What is Chinese Philosophy?

### WK 2: *Yin-yang* and cosmological order: *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:

1. *CP-WEN* Chapter I The Source of Chinese Philosophy-*Zhouyi*
2. *ICP-LIU* pp.26-46, *Yijing: The Cosmological Foundation of Chinese Philosophy*;
3. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 12 *Theyin-yang* School and the Early Chinese Cosmology, Chapter 15 Confucianist metaphysics

### **WK 3: Generative-generating (*shengsheng*) and cultivating virtue: 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. *CP-WEN* Chapter II Confucius and Mencius
2. *ICP-LIU* pp.47-64, Confucius in the *Analects*;
3. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 4: Confucius, the First Teacher

### **WK 4: Benevolence and Appropriateness: Mencius as "Idealistic" Confucianism**

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

Readings:

1. *CP-WEN* Chapter II Confucius and Mencius
2. *ICP-LIU*, pp.65-85, Mencius;
3. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 7: The Idealistic Wing of Confucianism: Mencius

### **WK 5: Ritual and Music: Mozi andXunzi**

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. *CP-WEN* Chapter II Xunzi, Mozi
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 5: Mozi, the first Opponent of Confucius; Chapter 13 The Realistic wing of Confucianism: Xunzi
3. *ICP-LIU*, pp.86-130;

### **WK6: Acting without Self-Interest and the Self-soing (*ziran*): 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-WEN* Chapter II Laozi, Zhuangzi
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 6: The First Phase of Taoism: Yang-Zhu; Chapter 9: The Second Phase of Daoism: Laozi; Chapter 10: The Third Phase of Daoism: Zhuangzi
3. *CP* pp.131-151;

### **WK 7: State: *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* 勢) in *Hanfeizi*.
3. Is there some kind of ecological ethics in Machiavellism 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. *CP-WEN* Chapter II Hanfeizi
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 14 Hanfeizi and the Legalist School
3. *ICP-LIU* pp.152-205;

### **WK 8: Education and Classics: Studies on Confucian Classics in the Han Dynasty: 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. *CP-WEN* Chapter III Chinese Metaphysics: Chinese Cosmology in Han Dynasty; The Ontology of Being and Nothingness in Wei-Jin Dynasties
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 17 The Theorizer of the Han Empire: Dong Zhongshu; Chapter 18 The Ascendancy of Confucianism and Revival of Daoism

3. *CP*, Chapter 6, Chinese Metaphysical Creativity

### **WK 9: The Heavens and Earth are not Benevolent: 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. *CP-WEN* Chapter III Chinese Metaphysics: Buddhism in Sui and Tang Dynasties
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 21 The Foundation of Chinese Buddhism
3. *ICP-LIU* pp.209-219, pp.248-303;
4. *SB* 24, 21, 22, 25,

### **WK 10: Self-soing: 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. *CP-WEN* Chapter III Chinese Metaphysics: Buddhism in Sui and Tang Dynasties
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 22 Chan Buddhism: the Philosophy of Silence
3. *ICP-LIU* pp.220-247; pp.304-331;
4. *SB* 26,

### **WK 11: Family in the Neo-Confucianism (I): Zhou Dun-yi and Zhu Xi**

1. Identify the pre-Qin Confucian, Han Confucian and certain new elements in Zhou Dun-yi’s works.
2. What are Zhu Xi’s views on principle (*li*) and material force (*qi*)?
3. Is Zhu Xi’s philosophical thinking dualistic or not?
4. Can you find Daoist or Buddhist impacts on these two thinkers?

#### Readings:

1. *CP-WEN* Chapter IV Chinese Epistemology: Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 23 Neo-Confucianism: the Cosmologists; Chapter 24 Neo-Confucianism: The Beginning of the Two Schools; Chapter 25 Neo-Confucianism: The School of Platonic Ideas
3. *SB* 28, 34
4. *CP*, Chapter 4, Feelings (*Qing* 情) and the Importance of History, Particularity, and Emergence in Context

## **WK 12: The Individual in the Neo-Confucianism (II): Lu Xiang-shan & Wang Yang-ming**

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 Zhu Xi with Lu and Wang.
4. How far is the Neo-Confucianism from the original Confucianism in the *Analects*?

### Readings:

1. *CP-WEN* Chapter IV Chinese Epistemology: Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 26 Neo-Confucianism: The School of Universal Mind
3. *SB* 33; *SB* 35.
4. *CP*, Chapter 7, Chinese Epistemological Creativity

## **WK 13: All Under Heaven in 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. *CP-WEN* Chapter V The *Dao* of Chinese Philosophy; Chapter VI Modern Chinese Philosophy
2. *SHCP-Fung*, Chapter 27 The Introduction of Western Philosophy; Chapter 28 Chinese Philosophy in the Modern World
3. *SB* 36, 39, 42, 43, 44.
4. *CP*, Chapter 8, Confucian Pragmatism as a Post-modern Comparative Philosophy