

PH3C7-15 Early Chinese Philosophy

24/25

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Curie Virag

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module is an introduction to classical Chinese philosophy through its foundational early texts – the Analects of Confucius (Kongzi), Mozi, Mencius (Mengzi), Xunzi, Daodejing, Zhuangzi, and Han Feizi, among others. Situating these texts within their shifting historical and conceptual landscape, we will study the key issues of debate that animated early philosophers in China and learn about the diverse ways in which they confronted basic questions of ethics, epistemology, and politics: What are the norms and patterns that should guide human life, and how do we come to know them? What are the means and ends of self-cultivation? How should we order our relations with each other and with the world? We will be engaged in close reading of source texts (in translation) and in the critical analysis of the scholarly literature. We will also pay attention to methodological problems involved in the study of Chinese and cross-cultural philosophy.

Module aims

The module aims to introduce students to the diverse range of philosophical approaches that emerged in early China and to provide the necessary background and tools for engaging with these approaches critically and productively. It also aims to invite reflection on how the ideas and texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition might be brought to bear on topics of broad philosophical concern.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1. Introduction: Conceptual and Historical Background

Week 2. Confucius

Week 3. Mozi

Week 4. Mencius (Mengzi)

Week 5. Laozi (Daodejing)

Week 6. Reading week (no classes)

Week 7. Zhuangzi

Week 8. Xunzi

Week 9. Han Feizi and Legalism

Week 10. Philosophy in the Age of Empire: the Annals of Lu Buwei and the Huainanzi

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Have an understanding of the main concepts, concerns and positions found in the key early texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition, and of the debates within which they emerged.
- Appreciate the philosophical significance of the ideas and positions forwarded by early thinkers and be able to bring these ideas and perspectives into engagement with broader philosophical discussions and debates.
- Be familiar with the contours of the scholarly literature on the texts we have studied and be able to critically assess this literature.
- Have developed skills in the analysis and interpretation of early Chinese philosophical texts and be able to effectively communicate one's ideas about them in writing and in class discussions.

Indicative reading list

PRIMARY SOURCES

Confucius, Analects (Lun yu)

Mozi

Mencius (Mengzi)

Laozi (Daodejing)

Zhuangzi

Xunzi

Han Feizi

The Annals of Lu Buwei

Huainanzi

SECONDARY SOURCES

Irene Bloom, 'Human Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius.' *Philosophy East and West* 47.1

(1997): 21–32.

Scott Cook, 'The 'Lushi Chunqiu' and the Resolution of Philosophical Dissonance'. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 62.2 (Dec 2002): 307–345.

Mark Csikszentmihalyi and P. J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.

Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as the Sacred*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Chris Fraser, 'Moism and Self-Interest.' *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (2008): 437–54.

Chris Fraser, *The Philosophy of the Mozi. The First Consequentialists*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

Chris Fraser, 'Wandering the Way: A Eudaimonistic Approach to the Zhuangzi.' *Dao* 13, no. 4 (Dec 2014): 541–565.

Jonardon Ganeri, 'Taking Philosophy Forward'. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Aug. 20, 2018.

Jonardon Ganeri, 2016. 'A Manifesto for Re:emergent Philosophy,' *Confluence. Journal of World Philosophies* 4: 134–43

J. Garfield and Bryan W. Van Norden, 'If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is'. *The Stone*, New York Times. May 11, 2016.

Romain Graziani, 'The Subject and the Sovereign: Exploring the Self in Early Chinese Self-Cultivation'. In J. Lagerwey and M. Kalinowski eds., *Early Chinese Religion. Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*. Brill: Boston, 2009, pp. 459–517.

Eric L. Hutton, 'Moral Connoisseurship in Mengzi', in: Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds.), *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2002, pp. 163–186.

Eric L. Hutton, 'Han Feizi's Criticism of Confucianism and Its Implications for Virtue Ethics.' *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (2008): 423–53.

Philip J. Ivanhoe, 'Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Tao.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64.4 (1993): 639–54.

Philip J. Ivanhoe, 'A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi's Ethical Thought.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.2 (1991): 309–22.

Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Third edition. Cambridge: Hackett, 2023.

D.C. Lau, trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*. Penguin 1963.

Andrew Meyer, 'Root-Branches Structuralism in the Huainanzi.' In Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett eds., *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*. Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2014, pp. 23–39.

Nathan Sivin, 'State, Cosmos, and the Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55. 2 (1995): 5–37.

Edward Slingerland, 'Effortless Action. The Chinese Spiritual Ideal of Wuwei'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68.2 (2000): 293–327.

Curie Virág, *The Emotions in Early Chinese Philosophy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Curie Virág, 'Rituals Create Community by Translating our Love into Action.' *Psyche* (29 Jul 2021)

Brook Ziporyn trans., *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*. With Selections from Traditional Commentaries.

Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett 2009, pp. 3–54, 68–76.

Research element

Students will be engaged in the close reading and analysis of primary and secondary literature as part of their preparatory work for both class discussions and for their essays.

Interdisciplinary

Sources studied cross modern disciplinary boundaries of philosophy, textual/literary studies, history and religion.

International

Sources studied consist of translations of texts that were written in classical Chinese and that emerged out of cultures quite distinct from the Anglo-European traditions that students are usually familiar with.

Subject specific skills

Understanding of the key philosophical ideas and contributions of the major texts of the early Chinese philosophical tradition, as well as the debates in which they emerged; familiarity with the positions and approaches taken in the scholarly literature on these texts; and an ability to bring the ideas and approaches found in these texts into engagement with issues of general philosophical concern.

Transferable skills

Development of ability to read, analyse and think critically about a wide range of texts, to draw out their philosophical significance, and to write clearly about them; broadening of perspectives and resources for approaching foundational questions of ethics, knowledge, and politics; and the cultivation of new and alternative ways of thinking about how philosophy might be done.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Private study	124 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Private study and reading.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
2200 word essay	70%		Yes (extension)
Essay			
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
1000 word essay	20%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Seminar Participation	10%		No

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
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Reassessment component			
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Written response			Yes (extension)
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Written response to one of the seminar questions.			
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Feedback on assessment

Feedback on essays will be provided on the feedback form for the essay, addressing standard areas of evaluation and individual content.

Availability

There is currently no information about the courses for which this module is core or optional.