

Autumn 2022

University of Iceland, School of Humanities, Faculty of Philosophy,
History and Archeology

HSP418G Introduction to Asian Philosophy



Providing an overview of the fundamental streams of thought in classical Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean philosophy, this course starts off with considerations of some of the particular features of Asian philosophy that distinguish it from its Western counterpart, asking questions such as whether it makes sense to speak of “Asian” philosophy as such and how much the traditions of Asian philosophy have in common. We shall also be discussing the field and designation of comparative philosophy and related notions. Professor Shilpa Khatri Babbar will then join us to discuss some of the foundations of Indian and Buddhist philosophy, and in the following weeks we move to

the Buddhist Dhammapada as well as the Mahayana and Madhyamaka versions of Buddhism. The following four sessions will be taught by Jón Egill Eypórsson, a specialist on the Classic of Changes, a foundational work for all East Asian Philosophies, as well as on Korean philosophy. After the teaching break, we will then move to the origins of philosophical activity in ancient China that were to form the influential and still operating schools of Confucianism and Daoism, while briefly introducing some other ancient Chinese schools of thought. The final week is dedicated to Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen, which are influenced by a number of Chinese philosophical insights. The primary aim is to explicate the main ideas and notions making up these traditions, in part by making comparisons with Western philosophy, but also by giving some consideration to their religious manifestations.

Teachers:

Dr. Geir Sigurðsson (GS), philosopher and Professor of Chinese Studies, University of Iceland (course supervisor). Contact: geirs@hi.is; tel. 525 5457.

Dr. Shilpa Khatri Babbar (SKB), Visiting Professor, University of Iceland. Contact: shilpa@hi.is.

Jón Egill Eypórsson, MA (JEE), Instructor, Contact: jonegill@hi.is.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be capable of: a) explicating seminal notions of classical Indian and East Asian philosophy; b) making a distinction between the dominant tendencies inherent in Indian and East Asian philosophy; c) clarifying the relationship between philosophy and religion in these cultures and thus; d) providing an account of their unique characteristics.

Course arrangement:

We convene twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tuesdays are generally intended for lectures, where topics and notions are explained and sometimes compared with Western approaches. Three special group sessions will be held on Thursdays, during which some primary materials will be analyzed and discussed. However, discussions are encouraged at all times.

Course evaluation:

Philosophical diary (40%), two quizzes (30%), three textual analysis group sessions (peer evaluation or short essays) (30%).

Course material:

The main textbook, **an absolute compulsory reading**, is by Puqun Li: *A Guide to Philosophy Classics* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012). However, it must be supplemented by a number of primary readings, in most if not all cases made available electronically on the course website or, if necessary, by other means. These are the following:

Chan, Wing-tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

Dhammapada. *The Way of Truth*. Trans. Sangharakshita. Windhorse Publications.

Eno, Robert (trans.). *The Analects of Confucius*. An Online Teaching Translation. 2015.

[The Analects of Confucius](#)

- “Four Seven Debate” 四端七情. In *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern*, ed. Peter H. Lee. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Jung, Carl. *Introduction to Wilhelm/Baynes translation of the Yijing*.
- Garfield, Jay L. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna’s Mulamadhyamakakarika*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- “Introduction to Exposition of the Adamantine Absorption Scripture” 元曉. In *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern*, ed. Peter H. Lee. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. og Bryan W. Van Norden (eds.). *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Second edition. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2001.
- Waddell and Masao Abe. *The Heart of Dogen’s Shobogenzo*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Watson, Burton (trans.). *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Some other secondary readings (more might be added during the semester):

- Ames, Roger T. “East Asian Philosophy”. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 31 July 2022 from [East Asian philosophy - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#).
- Li, Chenyang. “Comparative Philosophy and Cultural Patterns”. *Dao: Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 4 (2016).
- Moeller, Hans-Georg. “On Comparative and Post-Comparative Philosophy”. In *Appreciating the Chinese Difference. Engaging Roger T. Ames on Methods, Issues, and Roles*, ed. Jim Behuniak, 2018, pp. 31-46.
- Tu Weiming. “Chinese philosophy: a synoptic view”. In *A Companion to World Philosophies*, eds. Eliot Deutsch og Ron Bontekoe. Blackwell: Oxford, 1999.
- Tze Ki Hon. “Being and Non-Being: A Comparison of the Yijing Commentaries”.
- Zhang, Yunyi. “Philosophy’s predicament and Hegel’s ghost: Reflections on the view that there is ‘no philosophy in China’”. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 2007 2(2), pp. 230-246.

Syllabus (subject to change)

Week 1 (GS) 30 Aug./1 Sept.	Course introduction; on intercultural (comparative) philosophy; specifics of Asian thought. Readings: Li Chenyang; Hans-Georg Moeller; Yunyi Zhang.
Week 2 (SKB) 6/8 Sept.	Indian philosophy and the Upanishads Readings: PL, 1.
Week 3 (GS) 13/15 Sept.	Buddhism: fundamental teachings. Readings: PL, 2. Dhammapada
Week 4 (GS) 20/22 Sept.	Buddhism: Mahayana and Madhiyamaka. Readings: PL, 3. Textual analysis group session 1.
Week 5 (JEE) 27/29 Sept.	<i>Yijing (Classic of Changes)</i> Readings: Carl Jung, Tzeki Hon.

Week 6 (JEE, GS) 4/6 Oct.	Korean philosophy Readings: “Introduction to Exposition of the Adamantine Absorption Scripture”, “Four Seven debate”. Textual analysis group session 2.
Week 7 13 Oct.	Quiz 1
Week 8 (GS) 18/20 Oct.	Early Confucianism: basic notions and orientations. Readings: PL, 4. Roger T. Ames, Tu Weiming.
Week 9 (GS) 25/27 Oct.	Early Confucianism Readings: PL, 4 and 5.
Week 10 (GS) 1*/3 Nov.	Confucianism (on tradition and li 禮) and Daoism: <i>Daodejing</i> Readings: Conf. Tradition, Textual analysis group session 3.
Week 11 (GS) 8/10 Nov.	Daoism: <i>Daodejing</i> and <i>Zhuangzi</i> Readings: PL, 6 and 7.
Week 12 (GS) 15/17 Nov.	Zhuangzi and Xunzi. Readings: PL, 7 and 8
Week 13 (GS) 22/24 Nov.	Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen. Readings: PL, 9 and 10.
29 Nov.	Quiz 2

*Note online class, we begin at 11:40 and join a larger group at 12:15 until 13:45.