

華東師範大學



Early Chinese Philosophy of Education
《中国教育哲学》

A Joint Course between East China Normal University and the University of Iceland

Sponsored by:
全球深度合作推进计划
In-Depth Global Cooperation Promotion Plan
跨文化中心
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Syllabus

Course Title: Early Chinese Philosophy of Education 《中国教育哲学》
Course Number(s): ----
Language of Instruction: English
Term: Fall 2024-Spring 2025
Course Meeting Time: Mondays, 18:00-19:30 Beijing Time
Course Meeting Place: Skype: paul.d.ambrosio / Zoom?
Instructors: Professor Geir Sigurðsson and Professor Paul J. D'Ambrosio
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Course Format

This course will run for two semesters. Each semester will be treated as a standalone course. Students should take both semesters if able, but may take one semester and not the other. Any student taking the Spring 2025 classes are strongly encouraged to watch all the recordings for classes from Fall 2024 if they did not attend them.

All classes will take place online (via Skype/Zoom?) and will be recorded.

Course Description

Fall 2024:

Content

This course elucidates the early Chinese philosophy of education in the broadest sense of the term. During the fall semester, the focus will be on Confucian philosophy, beginning with the discussion of education and personal cultivation in the Confucian *Analects*. We will then move to selected parts of other important Confucian writings, such as the *Zhongyong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*), *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*), the *Xueji* (*Records of Learning*), the *Mengzi* and the *Xunzi*. Primary notions of the Chinese philosophy of education will be introduced and explained, including *jiao* 教 (teaching), *xue* 学 (study/emulation), *xiuji* 修己 and *xiushen* 修身 (cultivating oneself), *li* 礼 (rituals), *xing* 性 (natural dispositions), and *junzi* 君子 (exemplary people), among others. We will also investigate the importance of role models in Confucian education.

In addition to these positive notions, we will explore some of their opposites as well, including phrases such as “rotten wood cannot be carved” (*xiumu buke diao ye* 朽木不可雕也), and descriptions of “petty people (*xiao ren* 小人),” or those who have not learned much. We will also look at descriptions of people who merely imitate but do not cultivate themselves, or pretenders. Exploring those who do not educate themselves properly helps define the contours of what education means.

Goals

Some of the main questions that will be raised (and possibly answered) are: How is education understood in early Chinese culture? What are its primary aims? What happens when education fails? Can education be bad or dangerous? What social and what “individualist” aspects do education and personal cultivation entail? How does one’s education influence others? What role do others play in education? Are role models necessary? What sort of roles do tradition and emulation play as methods of learning in Confucianism? And, can tradition and emulation be overemphasized? What status does education generally play in Confucian philosophy?

Course Materials

We will mainly focus on the primary texts, namely, *Analects*, *Zhongyong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*), *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*), the *Xueji* (*Records of Learning*), the *Mengzi* and the *Xunzi*. Students may follow along with any translation (in English or their native language) of these classics. During the class we will likely read directly from the original, students may refer to ctext.org all the abovementioned texts.

Spring 2025:

Content

Daoist thinkers, notably the authors of the *Daodejing* 道德经 and the *Zhuangzi* 庄子, reacted critically to some aspects of the Confucian philosophy of education, often arguing that it is likely to lead to dogmatism and hypocrisy. Instead, they suggest a less socially bound and more independent kind of learning or cultivation that takes seriously the “way of the world,” or the general cosmological tendency and how to align with it. They speak, for instance, of unlearning and diminishing the self. As an alternative to concentrating on learning from classics and others, Daoist texts advocate being more natural, acting in *ziran* 自然 (self-so) and *wuwei* 无为 (non-action) manners.

After focusing on Daoism for the approximately first half of the spring semester, we will move to Xuanxue 玄学 philosophy, sometimes translated as “Neo-Daoism,” where the relationship between the Daoism and Confucianism is critically reimagined. Neo-Daoist thinkers often found creative ways to intertwine the arguments of early Confucian texts with Daoist ones. Here we find new meanings of important terms such as *xing* 性 (human nature) and *xue* 学 and reimagined understandings of role models. While early Daoist classics such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* might be read as coming down very harshly on any form of imitation or study of past models favoring being self-so and practicing non-action instead, Xuanxue thinkers find an alternative way to think about learning. According to prominent Xuanxue thinkers Daoist ideas of self-so and non-action are actually commensurable with studying. Rather than learn the content of what others have done, one can learn how to do what they do, which involves being self-so and practicing non-action. This is a third perspective on learning, which critically reimagines the relationship between classical Confucian and Daoist views on education.

Learning Objectives for both courses

As a result of meeting the requirements of this course, students will be able to:

1. Outline the basic foundation of Confucian philosophy of education.
2. Explain the seminal Confucian notions related to learning and cultivation, such as *jiao* 教, *xue* 学, *xiushen* 修身, *xing* 性, and other related terms.
3. Discuss the importance of others and role models in early Confucian philosophy of education.
4. Describe how the Confucian education project can go wrong (i.e. when people are insincere or pretenders).
5. Summarize the pre-Qin Daoist responses to Confucian moral and educational arguments.
6. Present the major debates between Confucian and Daoist texts with reference to cultivation and learning.
7. Give an account of the Xuanxue 玄学 school’s application of Confucian and Daoist approaches.

Course Prerequisites

None.

Students with no background in philosophy, and no background in Chinese thought or Chinese language are heartily welcome.

Methods of Instruction

This course combines an instructor-led method with rigorous self-study. We will do a close reading of selected passages from Chinese philosophical classics. Students are expected to prepare in advance the passages covered each week.

The course will be co-taught. In addition to close readings of selections from the classics, the professors will engage in dialogue aimed at concentrating on aspects related to education. Students are encouraged to ask questions, and to participate. Readings of the classics will always include discussion with students, and dialogue between professors is aimed at answering students' queries.

Course Material

(Students do not need to purchase all books, details will be given during the course)

1. The *Analects (Lunyu)* on the Chinese Text Project database (ctext.org).
2. The *Laozi/Daodejing* on the Chinese Text Project database (ctext.org).
3. The *Zhuangzi* on the Chinese Text Project database (ctext.org).
4. Ni, Peimin. 2017. *Understanding the Analects of Confucius: A New Translation of the Lunyu with Annotations*. SUNY Press.
5. Chen, Guying. 2020. *The Annotated Critical Laozi: With Contemporary Explication and Traditional Commentary*. Trans. Paul J. D'Ambrosio, Ouyang Xiao, et al. Boston, MA: Brill.
6. Ziporyn, Brook. 2020. *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.
7. Lynn, Richard. 2004. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-Te-Ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press.
8. Lynn, Richard. 2023. *Zhuangzi: A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted by Guo Xiang*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Assessment and Final Grade

The term paper will determine the majority of each student's final grade. (One paper per term the student attends. Those who attend the full year may incorporate material from the first semester, and their first paper, in the second paper.) Attendance and participation will also be taken into account. No rubric for participation is given as each student is evaluated on an individual basis.

Course Requirement (Fall 2024)

The following requirement for the first half of the course (Fall 2024). Only one (1) final paper is required for this course (Fall 2024). A separate paper will be required for the second half, in Spring 2025.

Students will turn in one paper at the end of the semester. The paper is expected to be 3,000-5,000 words and written in a format resembling a professional article. The topic should be pre-approved

by at least one of the instructors. Students are not encouraged to make extensive use of secondary literature or dive into contemporary debates. References to the traditional Chinese commentaries, especially in exploring possible readings of passages, however, are always encouraged. The best papers are those that explore a classic issue and clearly explicate its importance. The goal is to demonstrate that the student has a firm and deep grasp of a specific issue. At this point topics are expected to reflect students' own interests. They are vehicles to explore the classics.

Attendance and participation

Students are expected to attend every class. If they cannot attend, they must inform the instructor prior to the class time. Any absent students are expected to watch the recorded class before the next class meeting.