

A New Interpretation of Chinese Philosophy

Taught by: Prof. Xiangchen Sun

Credits:

Term:

Course Content:

The Chinese intellectual tradition reveals aspects of the structure of human existence that are distinct from those revealed by the Western philosophical tradition. Western philosophy, rooted in its own languages and intellectual tradition, has constructed a line of thinking that connects ontology and subjectivity, establishing a pre-established paradigm for philosophical discourse. It is thus implied that the teachings of Confucius cannot be considered as a form of philosophy. But is that true?

This course aims to interpret Chinese philosophy by demonstrating how the traditional philosophical frameworks embedded in Chinese thought are fundamentally different from their Western counterparts. These differences encompass areas such as ontology, existence, and ethics. This course will not take the usual approach of studying specific Chinese philosophers such as Mencius and Chuang Tzu but seek to extract the underlying frameworks from classical texts. The goal is to better understand the tradition of Chinese thought, find its basic premises, and compare with its Western counterpart.

The essential materials of this course constitute three classical texts of Chinese philosophy: *The Book of Changes (Yi Jing)*, *The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong)* and *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence (Xiao Jing)*. This course will recommend specific editions of translated texts, but students are encouraged to explore editions interpreted and translated by other scholars to aid with their comprehension.

Students are expected not just to “respect diversity” but actively listen to the voice of the “other”, in the case of this course. It is crucial for students to understand the differences between the fundamental intellectual frameworks they are accustomed to and those that belong to a somewhat alien civilisation. Such understanding will enable them to explain Chinese philosophy in a relevant and meaningful way. By the end of this course, students are expected to be able to generate their own thoughts on the significance of Chinese philosophy in today’s world.

Schedule	Module	Essential Readings
Week 1	“Chinese + Philosophy? A New Interpretation of Chinese Philosophy” “The Departure Points of the Two Philosophical Traditions”	Richard John Lynn, trans., <i>The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching</i> (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), p. 1-15. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, trans. <i>Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong</i> (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 1-18.

		Henry Rosemont, Jr. and Roger Ames, trans., <i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing</i> (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 1-22.
Week 2	<p>“Words vs. Beyond Words”</p> <p>“The State of Equilibrium and Harmony vs. Aristotle’s Wisdom”</p>	<p><i>The Classic of Changes</i>, p. 15-24. <i>Focusing the Familiar</i>, p. 19-25. <i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence</i>, p. 22-34.</p> <p>Further Reading: R. Sterckx, <i>Chinese Thought: From Confucius to Cook Ding</i>, Pelican Books (Penguin Books Limited, 2019), chapter 2.</p>
Week 3	<p>““Transmitting the Spirit” vs. Imitation”</p> <p>“Metaphors of Senses: Ocularcentralism vs. Taste Metaphor”</p>	<p><i>The Classic of Changes</i>, p. 25-34. <i>Focusing the Familiar</i>, p. 19-25. <i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence</i>, p. 34-63.</p>
Week 4	<p>“Affection for Kin, Filial Piety, and Family: The Existential Structure in Chinese Philosophy”</p> <p>“Family and ‘Generational Growth’”</p>	<p><i>The Classic of Changes</i>, p. 34-39. <i>Focusing the Familiar</i>, p. 26-38. <i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence</i>, p. 64-80.</p> <p>Further Reading: R. Sterckx, <i>Chinese Thought</i>, chp. 4.</p>
Week 5	<p>“‘Learning’ and ‘Teaching’: Projection of Dasein within the Existential Structure of ‘Generational Growth’”</p> <p>“The Formation of Historicity of Existence in Difference-Between-Generations”</p> <p>“Death within Generations: How to Understand Death of Others?”</p>	<p><i>Focusing the Familiar</i>, p. 38-53. <i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence</i>, p. 81-91.</p> <p>Further Reading: R. Sterckx, <i>Chinese Thought</i>, chp. 4.</p>
Reading Week		<p><i>The Classic of Changes</i>, p. 47-68. <i>Focusing the Familiar</i>, p. 89-115. <i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence</i>, p. 105-116.</p>
Week 7	<i>Xici</i> , Part One	<i>The Classic of Changes</i> , p. 75-96.

	Note: Please pay attention to some key concepts: <i>Dao</i> , <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> , <i>Xiong</i> and <i>Ji</i>	
Week 8	<i>Xici</i> , Part Two Note: While reading, please think about how <i>The Classic of Changes</i> explain the birth as well as the generation of the universe and the origin of history	<i>Focusing the Familiar</i> , p. 89-99.
Week 9	<i>Zhongyong</i> Note: Reflect on what we have read in Week 6, 7 and 8 and think about the correlation between “The Way of Heaven” and “The Way of Men”	<i>Focusing the Familiar</i> , p. 99-115
Week 10	<i>Zhongyong</i> Note: Please pay attention to two key concepts: <i>Cheng</i> (诚) and <i>Xiao</i> (孝), and think about how the former can lead to the latter	<i>The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence</i> , p. 105-116.
Week 11	<i>Xiaojing</i> , Q&A In this week we will discuss some key topics from <i>Xiaojing</i> : “Our bodies - to every hair and bit of skin - are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them.” From Ethics to Politics	