

Classical Chinese Political Thought: States, Individuals, Communities

Course Meetings: Times/Location TBD
Office Hours: Times/Location TBD

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i. Course Overview and Objectives

What is a “state”? What is “human nature”? Does one have an obligation or responsibility to the state? Do rulers owe anything to their people? Is there a relationship between politics, government, and ethics? How ought a state relate to individual or communal ethics, if at all? What role does social custom play in politics? This course explores these questions and more through the history of pre-imperial (771-221 BCE) Chinese political thought. More specifically, this course foregrounds a range of classical Chinese thinkers including Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, Xunzi, Zhuangzi, and Han Feizi and asks what, if any, relationship ought to exist between political entities and the people they aspire to govern.

This discussion-based course is primarily geared toward students of political theory and the history of political thought, though it will likely be of interest to students in classics, philosophy, divinity, comparative politics, and East Asian studies. Through dialogue and writing, students will develop their ability to (1) compare and (2) critically (though charitably) assess disparate articulations of the relationship between the state, individuals, and communities across the history of classical Chinese political thought. This course ultimately aims to foster in students a greater comprehension of classical Chinese sources as well as the varied, and often contradicting, conceptions of the relationship between political entities and the people they aspire to govern.

ii. Required Texts

**Reading will be available on Canvas*

All texts are in translation. Prior exposure to classical Chinese or modern Mandarin is not required. With the exception of the readings posted on Canvas, physical copies of the following volumes will be available for purchase in the campus bookstore. If you have concerns obtaining these texts for whatever reason, please contact me. These texts provide valuable historical context, but the expectation is that you will primarily engage with the substantive claims of the texts. Historical context should be used to illuminate substantive arguments, not replace them.

Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. Annping Chin (New York: Penguin, 2014)

Mozi, *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*, trans. Ian Johnston (New York: Columbia UP, 2010)*

Mencius, *Mengzi*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008)

Xunzi, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. Eric L. Hutton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014)

Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009)*

Han Feizi, *Han Feizi: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia UP, 2003)

iii. Assignments, Grading, and Policies

Attendance and Participation

20 %

Regular class attendance and active participation facilitate the successful comparison and assessment of the concepts, schools of thought, institutions, and figures encountered in this course. Thus, attendance and participation in class is mandatory. Absences due to personal emergencies, illness, religious observance, or other legitimate causes will be excused with advanced notice and proper documentation, where applicable. Good participation reflects quantity *and* quality of in-class comments. Students are expected to come to class with texts readily available, having done the reading and having prepared for respectful and substantive discussion. Laptops are allowed only for course-related activities; other observed activities will result in a grade reduction. I am available for any student wishing to discuss methods for engaging more effectively in class discussion.

Minor Writing Assignments

30 %

Minor writing assignments serve as a written means for students to demonstrate their ability to compare aspects of an author's thought or to compare thinkers in the course on a given theme. They are also intended to help students develop the writing skills for the longer essays. There will be two assignments this term, each worth 15% of your grade. These assignments will typically involve reconstructions of arguments in the texts. A prompt will be sent out the class before it is due (i.e. it will be sent out on Tuesday if due Thursday and vice-versa). Assignments should be 400-500 words (doubled-spaced, 12pt font, normal margins) and should answer the prompt. See below for the plagiarism policy. Late assignments will be reduced by one-third a letter grade (e.g. from a B+ to a B) for every day past the due date and will no longer be accepted after three days.

Essays

50 %

Essays are intended to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to critically, yet charitably, assess the course material. This will involve substantial analysis of textual evidence for one's argument as well as engagement with contending evidence from other texts in the course. Assignments should be 12pt font, normal margins and should answer the prompt. The first essay should be 1000-1500 words; the second should be 1500-2000 words. The first paper (20%) will be due at the end of week 5; the final paper (30%) will be due at the end of week 10. Essays must be original work from the student; plagiarism is not tolerated under any circumstance and will result in failure on the assignment and possibly failure in the course or further University sanctions. Students should consult <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/Policies#Honesty> if they are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism. A one-page prospectus with a thesis paragraph and potential supporting evidence (with citations) will be due a week in advance. Students will bring these to class and review each other's developing arguments. I will provide paper prompts a week in advance of the prospectus class. Also, I will upload a sheet for the prospectus review on Canvas. Students may choose to use the sheet or write/type out their feedback on a separate sheet, but they must answer all parts on the sheet and give this to the student whose work they are reviewing. Final drafts of papers must be emailed to me by 5pm the day they are due with the prospectus review comments included at the end of the paper. I will not read drafts of papers. Late papers will be reduced by one-third a letter grade (e.g. from a B+ to a B) for every day past the due date.

If you have a documented disability and require a reasonable accommodation to complete the course, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible: <http://disabilities.uchicago.edu/>. If you already have an Accommodation Determination Letter, I am available to discuss how to implement the accommodation.

iv. Reading Schedule

Assignments listed under each day are **due for that day**. The suggested readings at the end are not mandatory, nor are they intended to replace *original* arguments in your written assignments. (See the plagiarism policy above.) They are meant to provide examples for you (as you think of your arguments) of how one might argue from these texts.

I. Core Disagreements

Week One

T: Introduction and Course Aims, Confucius I

Assignment: Background Probe and Basic Information Surveys, *Analects* pp. 1-42

H: Confucius II

Assignment: *Analects* pp. 43-96

Week Two

T: Confucius III

Assignment: *Analects* pp. 97-145

H: Confucius IV

Assignment: *Analects* pp. 146-195

Week Three

T: Confucius V

Assignment: *Analects* pp. 196-268

H: Confucius VI

Assignment: *Analects* pp. 269-327

Due: Minor Writing Assignment 1 (5pm CST by email)

Week Four

T: Mozi I

Assignment: *Mozi* pp. 1-52

H: Mozi II

Assignment: *Mozi* pp. 130-197, **Essay One Prospectus (in class)**

Week Five

T: Mozi III

Assignment: *Mozi* pp. 350-370

II. Battles Over Legacy

H: Mengzi I

Assignment: *Mengzi* pp. 1-62

Due: ESSAY ONE (5pm CST by email)

Week Six

T: Mengzi II
Assignment: *Mengzi* pp. 63-115

H: Mengzi III
Assignment: *Mengzi* pp. 116-198

Week Seven

T: Xunzi I
Assignment: *Xunzi* pp. 1-67

H: Xunzi II
Assignment: *Xunzi* pp. 68-174

Week Eight

T: Xunzi III
Assignment: *Xunzi* pp. 175-182, 201-217, 224-257
Due: Minor Writing Assignment 2 (5pm CST by email)

H: Zhuangzi I
Assignment: *Zhuangzi* pp. 1-54, **Essay Two Prospectus (in class)**

III. Alternative Political Visions

Week Nine

T: Han Feizi I
Assignment: *Han Feizi* pp. 1-72

H: Han Feizi II
Assignment: *Han Feizi* pp. 73-130

Week Ten

T: Essay Peer-Review Session (Optional)
Due: FINAL ESSAY (5pm CST by email*)

**Students who complete and send the course evaluation posted on Canvas to me by before our last class may have a 24-hour extension. No exceptions.*

Suggested Readings

- Loubna El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought: A New Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015)
- Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009)