

PIA2405: INTRODUCTION TO CONFUCIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Introduction to Confucian Political Philosophy

Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

Course Number

2405

Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

POL2405 Introduction to Confucian Political Philosophy

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course aims to introduce the formation, development, and contemporary relevance of Confucian political philosophy. It examines (1) what Confucian virtue ethics looks like; (2) what kind of a political paradigm Confucianism supports; (3) what are the core stipulations of “Confucian virtue politics” and how it is distinct from Legalism; (4) how later Confucian thinkers during the Warring States period such as Mencius and Xunzi further developed Confucian virtue politics in a way corresponding with their distinctive account of human nature; (5) whether Mencius’ s and Xunzi’ s political theories can be captured in terms of “constitutionalism” ; (6) the distinction between moral virtue and civic virtue in Confucian constitutionalism; (7) what implications can be drawn from classical Confucian constitutionalism for contemporary Confucian political theory; and (8) how to evaluate recent debate between Confucian meritocrats and Confucian democrats in light of Confucian constitutionalism.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if DEC-A1 DEC-A2 DEC-A3 app.)			
1	Discover and critically assess the relationship between ethics and politics in the paradigm of Confucian virtue politics.		x	x	x
2	Acquire analytical skills to critically evaluate core ethical and political arguments by classical Confucians as well as by contemporary Confucian political theorists with regard to good government and moral leadership.		x	x	x
3	Discover various sources for and modes of Confucian politics and how it can be at once constrained and enabled; acquire a critical perspective on why classical Confucians stressed the importance of the apposite socioeconomic conditions in relation to development of virtues.		x	x	x
4	Develop and acquire abilities to critically assess various proposals on Confucian political meritocracy and Confucian democracy—their theoretical and practical attractions and limitations.		x	x	x
5	Discover the implications of Confucian virtue politics for public-policy making in areas such as just war and migrant workers’ rights.		x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs	Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures	To acquire a deep understanding of philosophical concepts and ethical and political theories regarding the relationship between politics and ethics and moral virtue and civic virtue; to critically evaluate and analyse different modes of Confucian virtue politics as well as different contemporary Confucian political proposals; to acquire and develop analytical skills and critical reasoning about the tension between good man and good politician in Confucian virtue politics and what a good political leadership consists of in both classical and contemporary Confucianism	1, 2, 3, 4
2	Group Presentations and Discussions	To empower students with skills for conceptual analysis and ethical reasoning through small group discussions, group presentations and critical application of theoretical concepts to real life practical problems	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
3	Audio-visual Materials	To help students to discover the practical meaning of philosophical concepts and theories through the use of film excerpts or documentaries, or news clippings and critically evaluate them	2, 3

4	Class Test 1	To acquire and develop clear understanding, and analytical reasoning; to critically assess core arguments by classical and contemporary Confucians regarding good government, good leadership, and the different modes of Confucian constitutionalism	1, 2, 3, 4	
5	Class Test 2	To master key concepts and theories in contemporary Confucian political theories; critically assess them with special attention to their philosophical coherence and political practicality under the circumstances of modern politics; assess the relevance of Confucian political theories in light of East Asian political developments and social conditions	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Group Presentation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	20	Students are expected to belong to one group and make a group presentation once. Students are expected to present a material clearly and present their interpretation and critical assessment to the class.	Yes

2	Class Participation and Discussions	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	20	Students are expected to participate actively in the group/class discussions and discover core ethical questions, raising intelligent questions and making constructive comments on critically respond to the views of other students. Test students' ability to explain and critically different proposals of classical and contemporary Confucian political theories as well as to evaluate their relevance in modern East Asian societies.	Yes
3	In-Class Test 1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	30	Test students' ability to explain and critically assess the core tenets of different versions of Confucian political theories; to make sure that students can critically evaluate the contemporary relevance of Confucian virtue politics and discuss how different modes of government can be derived from them.	No

4	In-Class Test 2	1, 2, 3	30	Test students' ability to explain and critically assess the core tenets of different versions of Confucian political theories; to make sure that students can critically evaluate the contemporary relevance of Confucian virtue politics and discuss how different modes of government can be derived from them; to test students' ability to critically evaluate the relevance of contemporary Confucian political theories in the context of modern China and beyond.	No
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Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. Class participation and discussions

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of, self-discovery of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Excellent research, writing and communication skills and critical reasoning.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Fairly good understanding and critical assessment of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Good research, writing and communication skills.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

Marginal (D)

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

Failure (F)

Failure to discover and understand ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Failure to develop an ability to identify key challenges. Inadequate research, writing and communication skills.

Assessment Task

2. In-Class Test 1

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of, key concepts, theories, and self-discovery of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Excellent research, writing and communication skills and critical reasoning.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Fairly good understanding and critical assessment of key concepts, theories, and ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Good research, writing and communication skills.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Rudimentary understanding of key concepts, theories, and ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

Marginal (D)

Rudimentary understanding of key concepts, theories, and ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

Failure (F)

Failure to understand key concepts and theories; complete failure to understand and resolve ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Failure to develop an ability to identify key challenges. Inadequate research, writing and communication skills.

Assessment Task

3. In-Class Test 2

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of, self-discovery of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Excellent research, writing and communication skills and critical reasoning.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Fairly good understanding and critical assessment of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Good research, writing and communication skills.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

Marginal (D)

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyse key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

Failure (F)

Failure to discover and understand ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Failure to develop an ability to identify key challenges. Inadequate research, writing and communication skills.

Assessment Task

4. Group Presentation

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of the key arguments, clear presentation of findings, and effective communication.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Fairly good understanding, critical assessment of the key arguments, clear presentation of findings, and effective communication.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Rudimentary understanding, reasonably good assessment of the key arguments, clear presentation of findings, and effective communication.

Marginal (D)

Rudimentary understanding; difficulty shown in critically assessing key arguments. Ineffective presentation and communication.

Failure (F)

Failure to present the material clearly as well as communicate effectively.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Confucianism, ethics, politics, Confucian virtue politics, Confucian virtue ethics, Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, moral virtue, civic virtue, Confucian constitutionalism, positive Confucianism, negative Confucianism, political perfectionism, service conception of political authority, Confucian democracy, Confucian meritocracy, civil society, virtue monism, tempered virtue monism, ritual

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Benjamin I. Schwartz, <i>The World of Thought in Ancient China</i> (Belknap, 1986)
2	Loubna El Amine, <i>Classical Confucian Political Thought</i> (Princeton UP, 2015)
3	Sungmoon Kim, <i>Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics</i> (Cambridge UP, 2019)

4	D. C. Lau (trans.), <i>Analects</i> (Penguin, 1979)
5	Irene Bloom (trans.), <i>Mencius</i> (Columbia UP, 2008)
6	Eric L. Hutton (trans.), <i>Xunzi</i> (Princeton UP, 2014)
7	Joseph Chan, <i>Confucian Perfectionism</i> (Princeton UP, 2014)

Additional Readings

	Title
1	Eric L. Hutton (ed.), <i>Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi</i>
2	Stephen C. Angle, <i>Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy</i> (Polity, 2012)
3	Sungmoon Kim, <i>Confucian Democracy in East Asia</i> (Cambridge UP, 2014)
4	Daniel A. Bell, <i>Beyond Liberal Democracy</i> (Princeton UP, 2006)
5	Daniel A. Bell, <i>The China Model</i> (Princeton UP, 2015)
6	Jiang Qing, <i>A Confucian Constitutional Order</i> (Princeton UP, 2012)