

HIS 295 History of Asian Thought

M, W, F, 01:00 – 01:50 pm

Prof. Weiwei Luo

luoweiwei@grinnell.edu

Office hours in Mears 312: M,W,TH. 2-3pm, and by appointment

Course description and learning goals:

This course examines the historically specific ways in which Asian thinkers have sought to know and order the worlds around them. At its heart, it is an introduction to learning how to read, and simultaneously, a study of the changing ways in which people have read (books, people, situations, the world) in the past. This course provides an opportunity to study how two sets of conversations that at first operated in parallel (one conducted among societies living in the Yellow River basin, the other around the northern Indian Ocean,) eventually overlapped and collided as people inhabiting these regions read about and traded with one another.

This course is also an introduction to some of the major thinkers and texts from the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods of what has come to be called (retrospectively) “Asian Civilization.” We will be asking how those conversations took place, and what was said in them. In confronting each text and author, we have the opportunity to reconstruct the values and patterns of thought that circulated in a set of strange and vanished worlds, each of them deeply removed and different from the one we live in today. We will also see whether these texts can speak across temporal, spatial, and historical divides to our own concerns as twenty-first century humans.

Finally, we will learn how to think and write critically, clearly, and precisely, about challenging ideas and concepts. Some of the texts we will encounter in this course are incredibly difficult. The reading, at times, will feel confusing and demanding. Entire year-long seminars could be devoted to some of these texts. Thus, there is a limit to how well we can understand them in the short time allotted. But by careful reading, active participation in class discussions, engaged and clear writing, and a willingness to take risks and learn from mistakes, we will likely find our own collective and individual capacities for knowledge considerably enhanced by the end.

Required Books:

Please pay attention the authors and editions required. Please do NOT buy other editions or similar titles translated and annotated by different authors.

The Analects (Penguin Classics Paperback 2014) Translated with an introduction by Annping Chin

The Bhagavad Gita (Nilgiri Press 2nd Edition Paperback 2007) Translated with an introduction by Eknath Easwaran

Siddhartha (any edition) Hermann Hesse

The Tao of Pooh (any edition) Benjamin Hoff

Other readings will be made available as PDFs (marked by @.)

Assignments

Attendance and Participation 20%

You are expected to attend class and participate actively throughout the semester. Lectures and discussions are essential to learning in this class. All readings are to be completed prior to the class period for which they have been assigned. You should come to class prepared to discuss them in detail, with questions and points for discussion prepared. Attendance (10%) will be taken at every meeting. Participation (10%) includes taking part in discussions, completing assignments, and other learning activities associated with the class. This includes the mandatory meeting with me in the first 2 weeks of the semester (see below.)

Concept memos 30% see *Assignment Sheet* (under Assignment on PWeb) for details.

Concepts (in their historical contexts) are the “muscles” of this class. The better you can strengthen them, the better you can learn in this class. In this exercise, you should examine how the texts we have read so far have implicitly or explicitly defined the following notions, and strategically put these definitions together into your own statements. * These memos will be posted on the PWeb, discussed in class, and revised under my supervision. Successful completion of the 3 memos of satisfying quality, and the active participation in the revision process will constitute 10 percent of the final grade. You will choose 2 of the 3 revised memos to submit for grading, each of which will count for an additional 10 percent of the final grade. This exercise also prepares you for the final paper by training your ability to synthesize ideas and articulate your own argument at the same time.

*Although the examples in the prompts are from European thought, you are to only draw from readings in this class (Asian thought) for your definitions.

Memo 1: Self

As Descartes explains, “when I consider my mind—that is, myself, given that I am merely a thing that thinks—I can identify no distinct parts to it, but conceive of myself as a single and complete thing.” Your first concept memo asks you to formulate a definition of “self”, drawing on readings from this class.

Memo 2: Virtue

According to the scholar-poet Cristoforo Landino, citing Plato, “virtue is the only and unique giver of true nobility,” a kind of “health-bringing constellation and the highest support of the state.” Your second concept memo asks you to synthesize a definition of “virtue”, drawing on readings from this class.

Memo 3: Politics

Aristotle indicates that “politics” is a practical knowledge that produces, operates, maintains a system according to universal principles, in order to ensure the good life for the citizens. Your third concept memo asks you to formulate a definition of politics, drawing on readings from this class.

Note-taking duty: 10%

Along with one of your classmates, you will be responsible for taking class notes 3 times during the semester. Please see sign-up sheet for the dates of responsibility for each group. Completed notes are to be posted on the Discussion Board thread on PWeb within a week of the class (after instructor's review of the notes). Combining the notes from each group, we will have a composite conversational record of the class, which will be a resource for everyone. Please keep in mind that your notes are a service for the class, so clarity and coverage are important. But please follow your natural note-taking strategies, because these could be useful or even inspiring for your fellow classmates.

Midterm exam: 15%

An exam based on weekly readings, written preparations, and class discussion are scheduled before the fall break.

Final paper: 25%

Your final paper will allow you to research a subject matter of your choosing. This can take a number of different shapes. Feel free to go into depth on something we have encountered in class readings or mentioned in discussions that intrigues you, or pursue something that interested you from additional sources on themes similar to what we have touched on in class. We will discuss details of this assignment during the first half of the semester.

Components of this paper:

1) Source annotation (1 page:) (5%)

In addition to the primary sources we use in this class, make sure to include at least 3 pieces of secondary literature (monographs, book chapters, academic journal articles.) You may use as many sources as you need. You will submit source annotations for the sources you plan to use in this final paper. This should include the following:

- Bibliographical details
- Contextual information (what kind of scholarly conversation was this source a part of?) This will be discussed as part of the "Research Literacy" session with Megan at the Library Computer Lab on November 9th (see Schedule.)
- Summary (summarize what is important about this source for your project and how you plan to use it.)

2) A short 10 min presentation in class. (5%)

This is a great opportunity for you to share your knowledge and discuss the ideas of your paper with your fellow classmates. We will discuss the details of this assignment during the first half of the semester.

3) A 6-8 double-spaced page paper. (15%)

See *Rubric for Evaluation* (under Assignment on PWeb) for details

Grading Scale:

93-100%	A	83-86%	B	70-76%	C
90-92%	A-	80-82%	B-	60-69%	D

87-89% B+

77-79% C+

below 60% F

Class Policies

Laptop policy:

Each class is divided into “**lecture**” and “**discussion.**” Laptops are strongly discouraged with the following exceptions:

- 1) Laptops are allowed during **lectures** for note-taking purposes.
- 2) Great discussions are facilitated by everyone’s full attention including eye contact. If you have good reasons to use laptops during **discussions**, please come to talk to me at the beginning of the class. Otherwise, please put laptops away during discussions.
- 3) Even if you have my approval to use a laptop in the course, if I find that you are using it in ways that are distracting for you or the class I will ask you to put it away.

Student Accessibility Services:

If you need and want accommodations in this class, please contact Autumn Wilke, in Academic Advising (wilkeaut@grinnell.edu, (641) 269-3124, 311-C Joe Rosenfield '25 Center). She will work with you to specify the accommodations and give you a letter outlining these for me. This process ensures your equal participation in the class while protecting your privacy. If your access needs have already been specified, please provide me with the letter.

Mandatory meetings with the instructor:

Please sign up to meet with me during the first 2 weeks of the semester, so I can get to know your individual interests and needs (<https://doodle.com/poll/xabhe9eg38fiuzwp>).

Religious holidays:

Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe holy days. Please contact me within the first 2 weeks of the semester if you would like to discuss a specific instance that applies to you.

Academic honesty:

In all assignments written for this course, you must abide by the College’s rules on plagiarism. (http://catalog.grinnell.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=2537#Honesty_in_Academic_Work) Do not submit someone else’s work as your own, quote from a source without citing it, or provide inappropriate help to a classmate on exams and assignments. If you paraphrase or quote any text from another you must indicate where the text comes from. Failure to comply with the requirement of academic honesty may result in receiving no credit for the assignment in question or even failing the course in cases of serious academic dishonesty. If you are in doubt about any of the rules, please consult with me, or the professionals in the Writing Lab, *before* submitting your class materials and assignments.

Study tips:

There are many ways to read a text; even a single method of reading will generate multiple meanings for different readers. When doing the readings for this class, it is helpful to always hold a few questions in your mind (like the ones I give at the end of each class.) Having a set of focusing questions is like viewing the night sky with a telescope; it puts you in control of the relationship between the object viewed and your field of vision, giving you a sense of mastery over the text. While reading, take notes within the book/article as well as writing out more detailed notes by hand. On the day of the meeting, it is helpful to reread the notes and parts of the text to refresh your memory. Everything in this course is cumulative, meaning that you will have difficulty understanding the texts later in the semester if you have not kept pace with the syllabus. So do not skip any of the reading assignments and read everything on time.

Course Schedule Online readings marked by @

Date	Topic	Assignments
8/31 F	Krishna and the A-Bomb: Why Study the History of Asian Thought?	Syllabus @
9/3 M	“Eastern” vs. “Western” classics	J.M. Coetzee @
9/5 W	How to read a text? Guided sample reading	Quentin Skinner @
9/7 F	Human and universe in Vedic thought	The Rig Veda @ “Vedic thought” @ “Origins of Existence” @
9/10 M		
9/12 W	The Hindu epical tradition	Gita, part 1
9/14 F	Dharma and early Indian social structure	Gita, part 2
9/17 M	What is yoga? [<i>in-class exercise: concentration</i>]	Yoga Aphorisms @; the Yoga Sutra @
9/19 W	The historical Buddha	Siddhartha, pp. 3-42 “The Buddha” @
9/21 F	The social world of the early Buddhist <i>Sangha</i>	Siddhartha, pp. 43-85 “The Buddha’s Teachings” @

9/24 M	Justice of the holy man	Siddhartha, pp. 87-152 Concept memo 1
9/26 W	Why enlightenment? [<i>in-class exercise: mindful communication</i>]	Dhammapada @; "The Art of Communicating" @
9/28 F	<i>Workshop for concept memo 1</i>	Review and annotate your classmates' memo drafts. Please bring them to class.
10/1 M	Confucius and the age of "power consultants"	Analects, "introduction"
10/3 W	Confucian view of human relationships [<i>in-class exercise: "as-if" rituals</i>]	Analects, books 1-4
10/5 F	Benevolence, humaneness, and governance	Analects, books 5-13
10/8 M	Heaven, earth, and human	Analects, books 14-20
10/10 W	Decisions in a capricious world	Mencius @; "yin-yang way of thinking" @; "consulting the Yijing" @ Concept memo 2
10/12 F	The mysterious Tao	The Tao of Pooh, pp. 1-90 Tao Te Ching @
10/15 M	The Tao of the ruler	The Tao of Pooh, pp. 91-158 Tao Te Ching @
10/17 W	<i>Workshop for concept memo 2</i>	Review and annotate your classmates' memo drafts. Please bring them to class.
10/19 F	Midterm exam	
10/22-26	Fall Break	
10/29 M	Spontaneous actions [<i>in-class exercise: endless flux</i>]	Zhuangzi @ The Te of Piglet @
10/31 W	Patterning the world	Xunzi @

11/2 F	Universal love and “sprouts of democracy”	Mozi @
11/5 M	Legalism and the rise of the state	Han Feizi@ Concept memo 3
11/7 W	Review session: key concepts in classical Asia Overview: transmission and transformation in the history of ideas; translation of ideas into institutions	Quentin Skinner @
11/9 F	Research literacy training with Megan Adams at the Library Computer Lab	TBA
11/12 M	<i>Workshop for concept memo 3</i>	Review and annotate your classmates’ memo drafts. Please bring them to class.
11/14 W	Buddhist transformation in China	Kuan-yin’s transformation @ Mu-lian’s story @
11/16 F	Buddhist thought in Japan [<i>in-class exercise: zen koan</i>]	Zen flesh, Zen bones @
11/19 M	Neo-Confucianism in China and Japan	Wang Yangming @ Zhuxi@ Sushi school @
11/21 W	Man, woman, and the cult of the family	Xiaojing @ Liu Xiang and Ban Zhao@ Bhagavata Purana @
11/22-23	Thanksgiving	
11/26 M	Asian thought in Western imaginations	“The Chan’s Great Continent” @; “The Story of Guatama Buddha and his Creed” @
11/28 W	Modernizing Asian thought I	Ghandi @; Susan Bayly @
11/30 F	Modernizing Asian thought II	Mao @; Rebecca French @
12/3 M	Asian thought and contemporary social justice in Asia	Thich Nhat Hanh @ the Dalai Lama @

12/5 W	Asian thought and contemporary social justice in America	Charles Johnson@ Alice Walker@ Source annotation due
12/7 F	Student presentations and feedback	
12/10 M	Student presentations and feedback	
12/12 W	Review session--final paper preparations (no meeting)	Collective notes compilations and review
12/14 F	Conclusion and evaluations (extra time for presentations if necessary)	
12/20, 10am	Full final paper due	