

CIVIS-KF Korean Studies E-School Consortium

Intellectual History and the Circulation of Ideas in Korea

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Language: English

Course description:

This course aims at presenting and analyzing the evolution of Korean philosophical thought and major ideas, the conditions of their propagation and the transformation of intellectual patterns, with an emphasis on Confucianism.

The course will revolve around a series of key concepts in Confucianism, which will be identified in the works of major figures among the iconic Korean scholars and will be discussed within various theoretical frameworks inside the disciplinary areas of ethics, epistemology and knowledge, education and government, in order to understand their implication and impact on Korean society and its culture. The course will cover, but will not be limited to, the question of human nature and its implications for individuals and society, the concept of mind-heart, sage learning and self-cultivation. The lecture will also present the specific traits of the intellectual history of Korea by looking at the tradition of scholarly debates and at the theories of the orthodox value of Korean Confucianism, but also at the change of paradigm in Confucian ethics with the emergence of Confucian metaphysics.

The methods for creating the framework of the lecture will be inter-disciplinary, weaving together hermeneutics and text analysis with historical overviews of events and characters, and philosophical interrogations. The sessions will be interactive, constructed as a group dialogue based upon a corpus of reading materials which will mostly include primary sources.

At the end of this course the students will have become acquainted with the major stages of development in Korea Confucian thought, will be able to identify the main features of these stages of evolution, have an in-depth understanding of the defining concepts of Korean thought and be theoretically equipped to argue the relevance of Korean Confucian thought in today's world.

Syllabus:

Week 1.

Part 1. Introduction to the course: Structure, terminology, core texts.

Part 2. What is Confucianism? General considerations about Confucian views on man and society and the dual dimension of Confucian thought: governing and social order, personal cultivation and individual order.

Week 2.

An outline of Korean Confucianism – diachronic evolution, main changes of paradigm, key figures.

Week 3.

Superior man – ideal ruler – sage.

- Discussion of the structure of Confucian societies: five fundamental bonds, cardinal virtues and the role of self-cultivation.

Week 4.

Human nature and its implications for individuals and society.

- Discussion on the re-interpretation of human nature in Korean Confucianism.
Submission of the first short paper.

Week 5.

The mind-heart (*sim* 心) in Classical Confucianism.

- Discussion on the cognitive and emotional function of the mind-heart.

Week 6.

Confucian epistemology and the value of acquired knowledge (*ji* 知)

- Discussion on the idea of "embodied knowledge" and the "expansion of knowledge".
- The role of learning.

Week 7.

Hierarchy of governing principles.

- Discussion on the evolving role of *Do* 道 and *I* 理 in Joseon Confucianism
Submission of the second short paper.

Week 8.

Treasurers of Confucianism: Korean Confucianism of the 16th century.

- Presentation of the innovative readings and the of Confucianism by Korean scholars. Readings from Yi Hwang Toegye and Yi I Yulgok.

Week 9.

Sage learning revisited, metaphysics redefined – Confucian debates.

Discussion on the emergence of the debating tradition in Korean Confucianism: Four-Seven Debate (*Sachil Nonjaeng* 四七論爭, 1559–1572) and the Horak Debate (*Horak Nonjaeng* 湖洛論爭, 1712–1724)

Week 10.

New interpretations of Confucian social and moral values: *Silhak*.

- Introduction of 18th century Korean Confucianism and the school of practical learning. Readings from Park Se-dang, Park Ji-won, Jeong Yak-yong.
- The theistic turn in Korean Confucianism

Week 11.

Confucianism and contemporary issues.

- Discussion on Confucian intersections with major issues in the modern world: ecology, democracy, human rights etc.
- Readings from *Confucianism in Context: classic philosophy and contemporary issues, East-Asia and beyond*. Debate on one fundamental issue.

Week 12.

Ideas in context.

- Discussion on the relevance of Confucian thought today

Submission of the final report – two weeks after the last class.

Evaluation methods:

- Two short papers (about 3 pages) to be submitted throughout the semester.
- Two small quizzes (5 to 10 questions) during the lectures.
- One larger paper (6 to 7 pages) to be submitted in the end of the semester. The topic of this research paper will be decided by each student.

Recommended readings:

*This is an informative list, not the exhaustive amount of reading materials.

An, Yangmin. Bruya, Brian. eds. 2019. *New Life for Old Ideas. Chinese Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Berthrong, John H. 1998. *Transformations of the Confucian Way*, Boulder: Westview Press

Chang, Wonsuk. Leah, Kalmanson. eds. 2010, *Confucianism in Context*, SUNY: Albany

Gardner, Daniel K. 2014. *Confucianism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press

Ivanhoe, Philip J. 2000. *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Ivanhoe, Philip J. 2006. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Makeham, John, ed. 2010. *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer

Ro, Young-chan, ed. 2019. *Dao Companion to Korean Confucian Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer