

Comparative Philosophy I: Classical Readings

Midterm Exam

Wednesday, March 29, 9:00-12:00, Lipsius 0.19

- **Top of every page:** Full Name + Student Number + Page Number
- Open-book with laptops and everything
 - You must answer the **mandatory questions** (25p * 2 = 50p) and the required amount of **selective questions** (15p * 2 + 20p = 50p)
 - **Bonus questions** (10p + 15p = 25p): you do not have to answer them, but can earn extra points to add to your basic score if you do (you will *not* be punished for mistakes here)
 - Total points: 50p + 50p + 25p = **125p**
- Clearly indicate the **numbering** of the question (A1, A2, etc.)
- Write in a **clear and legible** manner like the shining sun and moon. Obscured handwriting and answers don't shine, so perform your active moral-ontological duty and have mercy on your instructor!
- Write **complete sentences and paragraphs** instead of "Yes" or "No" or fragmented phrases

Abbreviations are allowed when referencing for convenience.

When applicable, please follow the suggested format of reference to primary sources:

Abbreviation+standard book number.section number. E.g. A 6.3 = *The Analects*, Book 6, Section 3

Key Abbreviations:

A	<i>Analects</i>	<i>Lunyu</i> (LY)	論語
M	<i>Mencius</i>	<i>Mengzi</i> (M)	孟子
GL	<i>Great Learning</i>	<i>Daxue</i> (DX)	大學
DM	<i>Doctrine of the Mean</i>	<i>Zhongyong</i> (ZY)	中庸
DDJ	<i>Daodejing</i> / Laozi	<i>Daodejing/Laozi</i> (DDJ)	道德經/老子
ZZ	<i>Zhuangzi</i>	<i>Zhuangzi</i> (ZZ)	莊子
C	<i>Book of Change</i> / <i>I Ching</i>	<i>Yiching</i> (YC)	易經
EY	<i>Erya</i>	<i>Erya</i> (EY)	爾雅
SW	[<i>Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters</i>]	<i>Shuowen Jiezi</i> (SW)	說文解字

Reference to specific part of the *Great Learning*: e.g. GL T1, or GL C3.

A. History: Story Time!

Mandatory (25p)

A1 – *The Basic Story*

In this course, we focus on the classical Chinese text *Great Learning*. But what is this text and where was it from? In 1~2 pages (in your answer book), tell a history story about this text as if telling someone who knows nothing about it and Chinese history. In your story, please consider (but not limited to) the following questions:

- There were many different schools of thought in the Chinese traditions. Which school was GL associated with? And what general theme is the text about?
- Has it always been an independent volume? If not, which classical book was it from? And what topic and which historical period was that classical book about? Do we know the author(s) or compiler(s)/editor(s) of this classical book?
- How important was that classical book? e.g. Was it ever part of a standardized academic-education system of classical works? If yes, when (i.e. which dynasty and roughly which centuries) was that system formed, and what other works were in it? And who was the central figure that was associated with all of these works?
- Under what intellectual movement, around what time, and by whom, did the *Great Learning* take up the independent form we see today? And was it part of a system also, and along with which texts? How important have these books been? (Make an intercultural effort in answering this last question: If you are explaining to Westerners or an audience from a culture that you are familiar with, how would you describe that importance?)

Bonus Question (10p): Pick *one* from A2 and A3

Some people believe that the entire Chinese civilization in general is stagnated and there have been little to no changes or complications throughout its history in millennia. Give examples to show why this is far from true.

A2 – *Challenging Legacy*

In 1 page, please explain: Had China always been an empire? What cultural and political legacy from previous historical periods did the scholars face when they set up the first standardized academic-education system of texts we talked about?

A3 – *Diversification*

In 1 page, please explain: after the first standardized academic-education system of text was set up, had it remained the same? What changes were there? Was there a new system that replaced its central role in Chinese education? What intellectual movement(s) and thoughts took place / were introduced and may of contributed to this development?

B. Textual Study: Philology and Philosophy

Mandatory (25p)

B1 – The Title

The core text we are reading is titled the *Great Learning*. What does this title mean, and what does it tell us about its content? In 1~2 pages, as if to someone who knows nothing about the text and Chinese, give your best explanation by elaborating the philological-linguistic (what they might mean literally) and philosophical connotations of “greatness” and “learning” in the Chinese language and philosophy of culture.

Selective (15p): Pick one from B2~B4

The first few lines of the *Great Learning* are often referred to as “the Three Guidelines”. What do they mean?

B2 – “Manifesting the clear character”

In 1 page, please explain this to your audience by elaborating on “manifesting” and “clear” in both philological and philosophical manners, including what it could tell us about the kind of philosophy of culture and ontological assumption(s) about human nature that is implied.

B3 – “Loving/Renovating the People”

In 1 page, please explain this to your audience by elaborating on the possible differences between the two different readings (i.e. “to love” and “to renovate”), how we may reconcile them, and what this reconciliation may tell us about Confucian ethics.

B4 – “Abiding in the highest good”

In 1 page, please explain this to your audience with a focus on the notion of “abiding” and its possible relation with “the rites”.

Selective (15p): Pick one from B5~B10

B5 – “The Way”

The “Way” is arguably the most central yet illusive idea in Chinese philosophies. Albeit rather criminally, but still, in 1 page, please try your best to explain concisely the term and its connotations to your audience, and point out at least one resonance it has with another term or concept we have discussed. (Possible candidate: “Clear”, “Sage”, “Rites”, and “Pattern/law”.)

B6 – “The Sage”

Although the term “sage” is not explicitly used in the passages we have read, it is believed that the idea is heavily implied. In 1 page, please explain the idea of “the sage”. What kind of a person is it? And how it may relate to other terms and concepts we have read? Please refer to at least one other term of concept.

B7 – “Roots and Branches”

In the passages that follow from the “Three Guidelines”, we encounter these lines: “Things have their roots and branches. Affairs have their beginnings and their ends. To know what is first and what is last will lead one near the Way.”

In 1 page, please explain the notions of “roots and branches” to your audience by elaborating on their meanings, their relations, and what this set of metaphors may be telling us about the relation between cultivating oneself and the enterprise of “becoming great”.

B8 – “Native Substance” and “Cultural Refinement”

In the *Analects* 6.18, we hear Confucius say:

“When native substance [or uncultivated raw texture] overwhelms/exceeds cultural refinement, the result is a crude rustic [or wildly uncultured]. When cultural refinement overwhelms/exceeds native substance[or uncultivated raw texture], the result is a foppish pedant [or exceedingly manneristic]. Only when culture and native substance [or uncultivated raw texture] are perfectly mixed and balanced do you have a gentleman [or a noble/great person].”

How do we make sense of this? Please explain in 1 page by including the notion of “rites” (*li*).

B9 – Confucius’ Advice to His Son

In the *Analects* 16.13, we hear Confucius give advice to his son that “If you do not learn ritual [*li*], you will lack the means to take your place.”

How do we make sense of this? Please explain in 1 page by elaborating the notion of “taking your place” and relating it to the notion of “greatness”.

B10 – Yan Hui’s Account

Yan Hui was Confucius’ favorite student. In the *Analects* 9.11, he describes Confucius and his teaching. Among many features, Yan Hui said Confucius “broadens [or enriches] me with culture (*wen*) and restrains me with the rites (*li*).” How do we make sense of this? Please explain in 1 page, and in your answer, elaborate the notions of “culture” and how it relates to the notion of “rites”.

C. Opinions

Selective (20p): Pick *one* from C1 and C2

C1 – Cultural Inferiority?

In this course, we have seen that almost every Chinese character or term does not have a definite and absolutely clear definition, and there have been debates throughout millennia about not just how to read a particular word, but also how to arrange and interpret a sentence if not entire passages. How would you suggest we understand this phenomenon? In 1~2 pages, tell people what you think. In your answer, you may consider (but not limited to) responding to the following questions:

Is this because early Chinese civilization did not care about preservation of texts? What material challenges might there be?

Is this because the Chinese language is inherently inferior so it cannot convey its ideas clearly?

Is this because Chinese thinkers were poor and arbitrary readers so they could not accurately understand the written texts and always imposed their own subjective reading?

C2 – Filial Piety

During this course, we heard the story of one of Confucius' students, Zengshen, specifically how he responded to his father's violent punishment and how Confucius disapproved his deeds. How do we understand this story, and what do you think about it? In 1~2 pages, please do your best to reconstruct Confucius' thinking process and underlying ethical-philosophical reason, and whether you agree with him and why.

D. Reflection

Bonus Question (15p)

D1 – Reflection

Intercultural philosophical encounters can be messy and challenging. Which aspect of this course strikes you with the strongest impression about such challenges and difficulties? And does this course inspire you to reflect upon any aspect of (supposedly) your own culture? Please explain in 1~2 pages.