

Confucius and His Interpreters

Instructor: Maddalena Poli
email: Maddalena.poli@pomona.edu
Drop-in hrs / office hrs: email me.

Overview

The legacy of Confucius in Chinese culture is overwhelming, inside and outside China. Within China, Confucius is presented as the father of the nation; Confucianism is described as a way of life, a philosophy, a religion, or all three combined. Outside China, “Confucius” is used as a synonym with “Chinese”, as in the culinary TV show “Confucius was a foodie.” Who was Confucius, and what did he really say? In this class, we will understand how the legend of Confucius was created. While the course focuses in particular on the texts associated with his figure, such as the *Analects*, the *Book of Odes*, and newly discovered manuscripts, we will also study depictions of Confucius and discuss the philosophical principles associated with him.

Structure of the course.....	1
Textbooks and course material	2
Course policies.....	2
Electronic devices:	3
AI writing tools	3
Accommodations.....	3
Grading and Assignments	3
On campus resources	3
The QSC.	3
SWIM – Center for Speaking, Writing & the Image	4
Schedule	4
Section I: the many lives of Confucius in 20 th century China.....	4
Section II: Confucius and his interpreters.....	5
Section III: The Confucian writings	7

Structure of the course

We meet on Monday nights, 7PM to 9:50PM, with a break halfway through the class. Room is Pearsons 101.

This class is speaking intensive, therefore in-class participation and quality of oral expression count a lot. Some of the assignments built in the syllabus are meant to learn and improve our oral skills.

We will explore what Confucianism is and who Confucius was starting from the present times, with questions such as “Why did Confucius become the image of China?”, to then move back in time to the last centuries before the Common Era, when Confucius lived. Finally, we will spend some time learning about the great books in the Chinese tradition most associated with Confucius: the *Analects*, the *Book of Odes*, and their manuscripts.

Textbooks and course material

All material will be made available on Sakai. You are welcome to purchase the books from which we will read. **Please note:** Whenever possible, I will ask you to download from the library electronic resources available. There is a guide on Sakai that shows you how to do so if you do not know already.

Why do I not just share PDFs in a folder? Because every resource comes at a cost. After talking with librarians who work for the Claremont Colleges, I realized how much their budget is continuously trimmed and cut down, year after year after year. Libraries are very important for education and the communities that can benefit from accessing them. Perhaps right now you do not make a large use of the library resources - but you may need them in two years' time, during a summer project, etc. Libraries also have so much more than just books for class! You can have access to magazines, newspapers, etc. You may find yourself using their website more than you think. The more we click, the more we borrow books, and the more we download material, the easier it is for librarians to avoid getting their funds cut off. So... let's give them some data.

This is **not** a history course, yet the historical background is always fundamental to contextualize what we are learning about. In class, I will at times give lectures to make up for this absence, or I will ask you to read 2-3 pages from a textbook as part of the readings. You also have a list of resources that you can consult here, <https://pressbooks.claremont.edu/onesource/chapter/historical-information/>, in this online textbook that I have been putting together for another course. See also links provided week by week. In general, any online resource is valid, as long as you can tell it's properly cited. E.g., a Wikipedia page with one citation only is not a strong source of information. While the source being cited may be one of the best study on the subject, the fact that there is only *one* means that not too many people contributed to that specific Wikipedia page, and Wikipedia operates on a crowd-sourced basis.

Course policies

Syllabi are live entities. It should work for all of us – students and instructors. We can modify it if we realize that what is tabled below does not work for us. If you have comments, you should share them. It may not be possible to accommodate all of them, but this should not prevent us from talking about what does and does not work.

Being in college can be intense, for different reasons. As an instructor, I want to balance flexibility with commitment. There are deadlines for the written assignments in this class, but there is some flexibility: submissions that come within 36 hrs from the deadline are perfectly fine (but please check each assignment instruction anyways). If you need a longer extension, contact me *ahead of time*. Do not submit 3 days late, and then email me saying that you needed an extension. Let's talk about it and find what works.

You have two “bonus cards” – you can use these if you do not have time to do the readings, but are coming to class. Let me know at the beginning of class if you are using a bonus card. No questions asked!

Electronic devices: I do not object to using laptops or other electronic devices to take notes, check dates and information being discussed in class, but please make sure to mute you’re your devices. You should also note that research has [shown](#) the use of note-writing more efficient to learning.

AI writing tools: tools such as [Chat GPT](#) and [Writefull](#) can be useful, and even fun. Play with them, by all means, but remember that anything they can do relies on the fact that it has already been done. While they may help with the writing, they do not produce anything original, and while you are not asked to come up with new arguments, you do have to give your input. Furthermore, because of the redundant nature of these tools, it is easy to spot them in written assignments. Use them at your own risk. Nondisclosure of their usage may result in plagiarism.

Accommodations: please reach out to me via email if you want to discuss any accommodations you require, and check the College’s [accessibility resources](#). Information on wellness at Pomona is listed here, <https://www.pomona.edu/students/wellness>

Please note that any conversation between you and me, especially on sensitive topics, will be treated as confidential.

Grading and Assignments

As mentioned, this is a [speaking intensive](#) class. Your participation in class is necessary to obtain a good grade. During our discussions, we will encourage each other to improve our delivery, paying attention to avoiding general claims (e.g., starting sentences with undefined subjects such as “they”, or “The Chinese”); eliminating utterances such as “like” when they interrupt the flow of the sentence; slowing down to choose the words that best convey what we mean). I will give also individual comments by email or during office hours.

The second major component of this course is doing the readings. This means more than reading what is in front of you: you will pay attention to style, content, wording, etc. The questions below will help you go through the readings.

Finally, we will have a few exercises to practice writing skills and comprehension. Failure to complete the weekly assignments listed below will affect your final grade.

Extra-credit assignments: you have the chance to do extra-credit assignments to balance out an assignment that did not go as expected, or simply to increase your grade. Possibilities for extra-credit assignments are marked below. **Be careful though:** extra-credit assignments will count against you if you do not put effort in it. For example, doing a write-up of a talk without editing the final product and showing that you have reflected on the content of the talk will not give you a +; if the submission shows carelessness, it will count as a minus in your final grade.

On campus resources

The QSC.

The **Quantitative Skills Center (QSC)** provides academic support to Pomona College students in

courses that feature a large degree of quantitative and/or scientific reasoning through our QSC Partners Program. QSC partners meet one-on-one with students to provide support for a variety of Pomona courses for course specific help. The QSC also offers non-course specific help in general quantitative skills and offers consultations for projects and theses involving quantitative methods. Additionally, Dr. Travis Brown, Director of the QSC, and Dr. Dylan Worcester, Associate Director of the QSC are available to meet with you regarding your success in STEM at Pomona College. To make an appointment at the QSC, please visit pomona.mywconline.com, or contact us at qsc@pomona.edu. The QSC is located in SCC (Smith Campus Center) 228.

SWIM – Center for Speaking, Writing & the Image

The **Center for Speaking, Writing, and the Image** (formerly The Writing Center) is one of the most widely-used academic resources on campus and is a fantastic, free resource for all students. We open at **full capacity by the end of September**, but we will be holding **limited appointments and drop-in hours as soon as classes begin**. Writing, Speaking, and Image Partners meet one-on-one with students to talk about their work and provide feedback at any stage of their preparation process. Trained to think deeply about written, oral, and visual rhetoric and communication, these student peers facilitate conversations about everything from ID1 papers to senior theses, lab reports to creative writing, giving presentations to developing strategies for reading and engaging more deeply and confidently in class discussion. The CSWIM also offers specialized writing and speaking support for multilingual students navigating English as an additional language (email Jenny.Thomas@pomona.edu for more information.) To make an appointment with a Writing, Speaking, or Image Partner, please **log onto the Portal and go to Academics > Writing Center**. We can also pair you with a regular Writing or Speaking Partner for weekly or bi-monthly appointments over the course of the semester. Contact us at writing.center@pomona.edu. We offer both in-person and virtual appointments, and we have regular drop-in hours in Smith Campus Center 148.

Schedule

Section I: the many lives of Confucius in 20th century China

Monday August 28th:

- 1) course overview, reading of the syllabus.
- 2) In-class assignment. No preparation needed.
- 3) **read first** “Diary of a Madman,” by Lu Xun (In Sakai, PDF name: Lu Xun_diary_Lovell translation). When doing the reading, pay attention to what is mentioned. See questions in Sakai.

Now, read the introduction to the volume, about Lu Xun 鲁迅, the author of the short story you just read. It also provides a bit of the historical background to this moment in China. Now that you know more about author and historical context, has your understanding of the story changed? Use your notes to be prepared to discuss this in class.

Monday Sept 4th: Labor Day. No class. Have fun!

Monday Sept 11th: More bashing on Confucius.

Please note: There are also female voices that took on the legacy of Confucius. We will read one of them next week, and we will return to the question of the relationship between Confucianism and feminism

later in the semester.

In this class, we learn about different views on Confucius and Confucianism from 1895 to the 1980s.

Readings:

- "Confucius in the May Fourth Era," by Edward Wang, in *A Concise Companion to Confucius*, link to library resource [here](#) (19 pages).
- "the Road to Revolution" and "The Rise of Confucian Radicalism," in *China in War and Revolution 1895-1949* (29 pages)
- The Cultural Revolution. Online Resource, by Britannica, see [here](#).

Monday Sept 18th: reading and understanding primary sources.

Readings:

- YE Dehui, "The Superiority of China and Confucianism," circa 1899
- HE Zhen (or He-Yin Zhen), among the first Chinese feminists and anarchists, "Women's Revenge", published circa 1907
- CHEN Duxiu, "Confucianism and Modern Life," written in 1916 (PDF in Sakai)
- YANG Jung-kuo, "Confucius. The Thinker who Stubbornly Defends the Slavery System," published 1973 (see PDF in Sakai).
- The introduction and the section "Fight a people's war of Criticizing Lin Piao and Confucius," in *Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius*, published in 1976. Available online [here](#) (9 pages).

See questions to prepare for in-class discussion in Sakai.

Monday Sept 25th: Confucius get rehabilitated. + the rebirth of Confucianism.

Readings:

- "Jiaohua: the Confucian revival in China as an educative process", in *The Sage and the People*, Billioud & Thoraval. Forthcoming.
- Confucius Comes Home, Evan Osnos for *The New Yorker*. **Assignment via Hypothes.is on this reading:** leave at least two comments, one where you engage with the reading (comment on something that struck you, or that you did not know, or that you knew but reading the article made you change your mind about), and one comment where you engage with what is said by a colleague of yours. See questions & assignment to prepare for in-class discussion in Sakai.

Section II: Confucius and his interpreters

So far, we have explored how Confucius and Confucianism were perceived in the last circa 100 years in China. We learned how the figure of Confucius went from representing all the problems the new China had to get rid of to become a "modern" nation to being the essence of the modern PRC.

As you may imagine, Confucius and Confucianism were reinvented several times throughout history, long before the 20th century. In this second section of this course, we will follow a more traditional historical approach, starting with what we know of Confucius from an historical point of view, and moving forward in time.

Monday Oct 2nd: Who was Confucius? What are the *Analects*? How did Confucianism begin?

Readings:

- "What are we reading?" & "Confucius", in *The Art of Chinese Philosophy*, by Paul R Goldin. Available via [library catalogue](#).
- Mark Csikszentmihalyi (translator), "The Hereditary House of Kongzi" in *Readings in Han Chinese*

Thought (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), 89-93. The primary source is a section of the *Shiji* 史記 *Records of the Historian*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Records_of_the_Grand_Historian Book 1 to 4 of the *Analects*, translated by Slingerland

Monday Oct 9th: Two more pivotal moments in the history of Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism, and the Jesuits' reading of Confucius. Is Confucianism a philosophy?
In the first section of this course, we have been discussing several moments when "Confucianism" and "Confucius" were re-invented. Last week, we looked back at the moment when, in a sense, Confucianism was invented for the first time: when it emerged during the Warring States era, and the idolization of Confucius already during the Han dynasts (think of Sima Qian's description of it). We learned some of the basic values attributed to Confucius as presented in the *Analects*, if we believe that the *Analects* faithfully represents his ideas.

This week, we see two more pivotal moments in the history of Confucianism:

- first, when Confucianism is refashioned into Neo-Confucianism. Zhi Xi 朱熹 is the main actor in this, even though several intellectuals participated, it was his edition of the *Four Books* that became prevalent after his death. Slingerland often recurs to his interpretations to explain the *Analects*.
- A second major moment is when the Jesuits are in East Asia, working with Chinese scholars, and begin to interpret once again Confucianism.

Readings:

- Chapter 5 of *Confucianism - a very short introduction* (it's short) by Daniel Gardner
- Chapter 1 "Learning", of *Zhu Xi's reading of the Analects* by Daniel Gardner. Last week we discussed learning in the *Analects*, which is believed to be the common theme in Book 1 學而. You may have noticed that the name of Zhu Xi appeared in the explanations provided by Slingerland sometimes. Let's comment this together with the hypothes.is tool (linked below)
- Overview of who the Jesuits are, and what they do in East Asia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesuit_missions_in_China. Have clear what their mission is.
- Jensen, Lionel M. "The Invention of 'Confucius' and His Chinese Other, 'Kong Fuzi.'" *Positions: Asia Critique*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993, pp. 414–449. Online resource via library catalogue
- A response to Jensen's claim that Confucianism was invented by the Jesuits, Standaert, Nicolas. "The Jesuits Did NOT Manufacture 'Confucianism.'" *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*, no. 16, 1999, pp. 115–32. *JSTOR*. (Linked below)
- books 5 to 8 of the *Analects*.

See questions to prepare for in-class discussion in Sakai.

Monday Oct 16th: Fall Break. No Class. Please take a look at next week's assignments!

Monday Oct 23rd: No Class. Instructor at a conference. You have to complete at least one of the two make-up assignments, you can choose which one. If you complete both, one will count as extra-credit assignment. **Since this is the second week without class in a row, the assignments are longer to complete than usual. But they are not harder!**

See make-up assignments in Sakai.

Monday Oct 30th: Confucianism, Feminism, & Presentism.

In this class, I want to talk about the relationship between the values promoted by Confucianism and the idea that these values were anti-feminist. Later in this course, when we read sections of the *Analects*, we will resume this discussion. I want in particular to focus on the phenomenon of footbinding, since it is often, incorrectly, associated with Confucianism.

Readings:

- "Admonitions for Women," by Ban Gao, an elite woman who lived in the Han dynasty (translated by Paul Godin). Resource available [via library catalogue](#).
- Sections from *Cinderella's Sister*, see PDF in Sakai
- "Beyond the End of History", by Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins (PDF in Sakai)
- "Two Cheers for Presentism" (PDF in Sakai)
- "Against Presentism" Lynn Hunt, online [here](#).

Extra reading: "The Censorship Machine Erasing China's Feminist Movement" *The New Yorker*. PDF in Sakai

Monday Nov 6th: This week, we sum up all that we have learned, and briefly return to the role of Confucianism in 20th China, in preparation for next week's talk by Shao-cheng Sun. **Review your notes & previous readings, and write a two to three page (i.e., at least 2, no more than 3. 3 + one paragraph is fine. 4 full pages are not fine) reflection on one of the topics that we mentioned in class.**

See detailed instructions in Sakai.

Monday Nov 13th: talk by Shao-cheng Sun on the Confucius Institutes. Attendance is mandatory. **Please mark it in your calendars already.** 4:15Pm, Pearsons 101

Prof. Sun will also give a talk at 12pm, as part of the Oldenbord Luncheon Colloquium. Come get free lunch while listening to his first talk of the day. A write up of 2 pages counts as extra credit for this class.

Section III: The Confucian writings

In this final section, we look at the primary sources. Briefly, primary sources are immediate accounts of a topic, from people who had connections with it. It's important to note that there is no implication of authorship according to this definition. E.g., *the Analects* 論語 is **not** written by Confucius. It's a collection of sayings put together by people who knew him first or second-hand. It's a primary source to learn about Confucius, but it's not *by* Confucius.

Monday Nov 20th: Workshop on writing & speaking skills. As many of you are already off campus for the Thanksgiving break, with today's class I will do some exercises to hone skills that are always handy with those who are still on campus. No preparation needed.

Monday Nov 27th: Confucius, his peers, and Ancient Chinese manuscripts (and why they matter today). Back in week 6, we read the life of Confucius as narrated by Sima Qian 司馬遷, a very important historian in the Western Han dynast (the piece was translated by Mark Csikszentmihalyi). In the same week, we also read “Confucius” from *The Art of Chinese Philosophy*, which introduced us both to the philosophy in the *Analects* and also the nature of the text itself. This week, we return to these topics to learn more who Confucius was, or was said to have been, and what is the text that since its formation, has been at the center of each empire.

In the second part of class, I want to go back to the *Analects* itself that by now you should have read in its entirety. If not, go back to it and do your best. I want to discuss both the overall structure, as well as its philosophical messages.

Readings: “Kongzi, in Sima Qian’s *Shiji* and the *Analects*” and “Kongzi and his critics” in Nylan, Michael, and Thomas A. Wilson. *Lives of Confucius: Civilization’s Greatest Sage through the Ages*. 1st ed. New York: Doubleday, 2010.

Also, Go back and read again Csikszentmihalyi's translation of Confucius's life (from week 6).

See questions to prepare for in-class discussion in Sakai

Monday December 4th: last day of class.

Assignment for class: last week, you were returned the card with your answer to the very broad “what is Confucianism?” question. Look at it now: after all that we learned in this class, would you change your answer? If so, how?

Prepare a short presentation. You have 10 mins each, including Q&A. Which means you have to talk for 6 mins max, and then answer questions.

See detailed instructions in Sakai.