



v. Comparative Philosophy: China & the West 2010 Global Summer Program Report

Peking University	
Brief description	<p>The focus of the course will be a careful reading of representative texts of the Confucian and Daoist lineages: the Analects of Confucius, the Zhong Yong, the Xiao Jing, the Daodejing, selections from Zhuangzi and the Huainanzi. The objective will be to struggle with imagination to take the Chinese philosophical tradition on its own terms.</p> <p>To this end, we will use several sources—the Book of Changes, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Tang Junyi on Chinese natural cosmology—to establish a lens through which to read these canonical texts. This lens provide us with an interpretive context, and will enable us to be sensitive to the presuppositions we are likely to bring to the texts. Over the tenure of the course, we will attempt to develop a nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of the basic vocabulary of Chinese philosophy.</p>
Course duration:	5 – 30 July (26 days)
Tuition fees:	USD\$1,476 (RMB10,000)
Accommodation:	USD \$400 - 589 (RMB2,700 - 4,050)
Field trip:	N/A
Course facilitator(s):	Prof AMES

2. Participant and teaching staff data

	University	Number of Students	Teaching Staff
IARU Partner Universities	Australian National University	2	
	ETH Zurich	0	
	National University of Singapore	2	
	Peking University	5	
	University of California, Berkeley	4	
	University of Cambridge	0	
	University of Copenhagen	1	
	University of Oxford	1	
	The University of Tokyo	1	
	Yale University	1	
		18	
Non-IARU Partner Universities	University of Hawaii		1
	TOTAL Non-IARU partner involvement		1
	TOTAL	18	1

3. Successful aspects of the course

Please outline the successful aspects of the GSP course, where possible, referring to feedback gained from students and/or staff involved in the course. Feel free to incorporate photos into this section of the report. (Est. 500 words)

Feedback for this course was overwhelmingly positive. Some students said this course has been the highlight of their university degrees. There was positive feedback related to the goals of the course, readings, assessment, structure of class, group work, relationship with “real life” China, the lecturer and the broader IARU program.

Students found the course wide enough to be interesting yet narrow enough to be covered in the scope of a four week summer course. Furthermore, the course accomplished what it set out to do - to provide students with the fundamental vocabulary to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese philosophy. Nevertheless, students who did have a background in philosophy thought the course was still thought-provoking and inspiring for them.

The reading were pertinent and interesting. The assessment and grading was fair, with 3 five-page essays due over the course of the program.

The lecturer was held in very high regard by his students because of his engaging, passionate style of lecturing. One student described it as “gripping (as in, more than interesting!)”.

Students found he was open to student feedback and questions during lectures which allowed for stimulating class discussions. This was further enhanced by the time given to discuss and analyze texts in smaller groups. Students found this was particularly useful and enjoyable.

Students loved that the course was taught in Beijing because the Chinese philosophical concepts brought out in class were particularly interesting in the context of being in China. Some students said that they even saw some of the concepts in action!

Professor Ames indicated that the group of students was particularly bright and interested. He noted the large percentage of overseas Chinese who were taking the course “so they are very interested in who they are”. Professor Ames said that in reading the classics with these students, he observes “they find something which is not only intellectually satisfying but something which also strengthens their identity. This program sends these students back to their home universities with a stronger understanding of their tradition and of who they are.”

Perhaps the most successful aspect of the GSP were the friendships that developed between the people involved. The IARU students who came for the Peking University Summer Program developed an intense bond over the four week course. The students studied together and participated in the broad range of activities organized through the program including visiting the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square, going to Chinese Opera, taking Gongfu lessons and participating in a Cultural Night. The students also organized many of their own activities, discovering Beijing almost every day after class, eating at all sorts of Chinese restaurants; going on excursions to the outer suburbs of Beijing; going to famous markets and art districts; making friends with local students.

One of the great strengths of the program is bringing together 16 curious, engaged students from all over the world to share their own experiences and learn from each other. The connections made here will undoubtedly last a lifetime.

4. Challenges and concerns for the future

Please outline aspects of the course and/or the wider GSP that presented difficulties for your University. (Est. 500 words)

Students expressed that their biggest concern for this course is that it might not be run in future years. They said it is a great class and a great opportunity to engage with texts that are often not taught in the philosophy departments of universities around the world. This course had philosophy majors from top universities around the world. After taking this course, many of these students expressed interest in writing their theses on Eastern philosophy however this might be impossible because many Philosophy Departments don't teach Eastern Philosophy. As such, this course has been invaluable to everyone, including philosophy majors who haven't had such an opportunity to study Chinese Philosophy before. Undoubtedly, Professor Ames is what made the course so special.

Some students indicated that it would be better if the course was longer and more spread out. Some students said that they found it hard to concentrate for 3 hour blocks, no matter how interesting the course material was. There was information overload which meant students forgot what they were learning. However extending the length of the course is obviously a problem for universities which are not on holidays such as the Australian National University. Perhaps a good compromise would be to have more 1 or 2 hours classes more frequently.

The option to hand in the last paper on the last day of class as opposed to the Monday would be nice because it would grant a better feeling of closure. Also the voluntary option of writing a longer paper would be nice. There's only so much you can say in 5 pages, and having the opportunity to tackle a larger issue might be appreciated by some students. One suggestion was to write one short paper for feedback and then spend the remaining time writing a longer paper.

Another piece of feedback received was that there was insufficient background information provided to answer the essay questions. One example was the class had an essay on Confucian politics due on Monday and after this was submitted, Professor Ames gave the class a thorough outline of Confucius. Students indicated they understood that he was encouraging students to learn themselves but arguably, students though more learning would have occurred if more background knowledge was provided.