

ANCIENT CHINESE THOUGHT

EALL S212, PHIL S203

Instructor: Mick Hunter (mick.hunter@yale.edu)

When/where: M/W/F 9–11:15; location TBD

Office: 114 HQ

Office hours: please consult <https://calendly.com/mick-hunter>

Course description/goals: This course is an introduction to the foundational works of ancient Chinese thought, from the ruling ideologies of the earliest historical dynasties through the writings of the Warring States masters (Confucius, Mencius, etc.) and including intellectual developments in the early imperial period. We will approach our subject from a variety of perspectives, beginning with the “philosophical”—itself a problematic term whose relevance to the ancient Chinese context is somewhat controversial. What were the problems that ancient Chinese thinkers grappled with, and what were their solutions? The second perspective is the cultural or sociological: what can we glean from these texts about the role of the intellectual in ancient Chinese society? Finally, we will also be concerned with what I call “the poetics of wisdom,” the rhetorical and literary strategies whereby ancient Chinese authors engaged audiences’ intellect and invested their texts with profundity.

The core intellectual work of the course is the critical analysis of primary sources and the articulation of those analyses in class and in writing. Students with a background in non-Chinese intellectual traditions are especially encouraged to pursue cross-cultural comparisons in their written work.

Assignments: In this class you have flexible a menu of grading options. Depending on your interests and goals for the course, you can submit whichever assignments you want and however many assignments you want (apart from the “mandatory assignments” listed below). Your grade will be determined by your final point total:

A: 93+

A-: 90-92

B+: 88-89

B: 83-87

B-: 80-82

C+: 78-79

C: 73-77



C-: 70-72
D+: 68-69
D: 63-67
D-: 60-63
F: 0-59

So if you score an 80% on an assignment worth 20 total points, you'll earn 16 points towards your grade. If you're dissatisfied with that result, you can either submit a rewrite or plan on submitting another assignment later on in the course.

Mandatory assignments (33 points)

- Discussion posts—2 points/post, 28 points total. For every reading assignment I'd like you to post one discussion question and one comment (which could be a tentative answer to your discussion question) to the class forum in Canvas by 8:00 a.m. the morning of class. I will check that you've submitted a post by the deadline and I will do my best to respond but I won't grade your posts for length or quality.
 - ◆As you read each primary source, you might ask yourself the following questions:
 - **Do I understand the surface level of the text?** If not, use whatever resources available to you (wikipedia, dictionaries, etc.) to look up problematic terms, references, proper names, etc. before class. Keep a running list of the questions you can't answer for yourself.
 - **What are the text's formal characteristics?** Can you say something about the language/imagery/style/format of the text? What is its genre? Was its author working under any formal constraints? To what extent does the form determine the message?
 - **Do I understand its content?** Is there a message? If so, what is it? Is there an argument? If so, how does it work? If it has a narrative, how does it develop? Can you summarize its message/argument/narrative? How would you explain it to a non-expert?
 - **Who is behind the text?** Is there a persona? Is the persona identical with the author? Do you have a sense of the intended audience? The context? The setting? What is the author trying to accomplish? Were they successful?
 - **What don't I understand about the text?** And is that my problem or does its opacity say something interesting about the text itself?
 - **Can I relate the text to other texts I've read and to the larger themes of the course?**
- Class attendance. For every unexcused absence I will subtract 4 points from your final grade. You can't make up unexcused absences by doing additional work.
- Class participation—5 points. I expect you to contribute actively to your discussion sections. If at any point you feel like you're not able to contribute as much as you would like, please come talk to me.

Optional assignments (for the remaining 67 points). You're free to turn in any combination of assignments with the following caveats:

- ◆ All assignments are due by the last day of Summer Session A.
 - ◆ In the interest of receiving some mid-session feedback, you must submit your first writing assignment by the end of week 2 (class #6) at the latest.
 - ◆ You can't submit more than one written assignment within a three-day period so you'll have to plan ahead. Saving everything until the very end of the session won't work. (This is for my sanity as well as yours.)
 - ◆ For every writing assignment, you're entitled to submit an outline and a rewrite so long as the rewrite is submitted within three days of receiving your essay grade.
 - ◆ Yale college guidelines state that I can't give you an assignment worth more than 40% of your grade. That means you can't submit an assignment of more than 10 pages. If you give me a paper longer than 10 pages, I'll only grade the first 10.
- Comparative or analytical essays of variable number and length (minimum of two pages) — **4 points per full page**. You get to decide how many essays you write and how long they are. **HOWEVER**, if you plan on writing a paper of more than five pages, I **HIGHLY** recommend that you submit a shorter paper beforehand so that you're familiar with my grading. Possible topics include:
 - Put two primary sources in conversation and then compare and contrast their approaches to a particular theme or problem.
 - Choose one or more texts and write about how the text's format affects its message and vice versa.
 - Ask me for an essay question and then develop your own answer to it.
 - Develop a close reading of a particular passage and then relate your reading to the text or tradition as a whole.
 - Connect an ancient Chinese text to something else you're interested in. Please talk to me first before getting started.
 - Write about a text not on the syllabus — **points will vary but will be at least 4 points per full page of argumentation**. Interested in something I haven't assigned? Write a paper on that "new" text and how it relates to texts that are already on the syllabus. I'm happy to give you some suggestions.
 - Improve the syllabus — **points will vary but will be at least 4 points per full page of argumentation**. Introduce a new text or theme and then discuss its relevance and how it should be taught. What topics or readings should be swapped out and why?
 - A shorter final exam — **10 points**. This is an exam you can finish in under an hour. It'll consist primarily of identifications (with justifications) of primary sources from the syllabus.
 - A longer final exam — **25 points**. This is an exam that will take you 2-3 hours. It'll consist of identifications (see above) plus a number of short essay questions.
 - Creative writing — **points will vary so talk to me before getting started**. In lieu of an analytical paper, you might invent a new "ancient" source on the model of something we read for class and then annotate your creation.

- Surprise me! — **points will vary so talk to me before getting started**. Come up with an assignment idea if your own or adapt a pre-existing assignment to a different medium or angle.

Possible grade configurations (assuming you've earned 33 points from the mandatory assignments):

- You score an A- on the longer final exam (22.5 points) and write two five-page papers for which you earn full points (20+20). $33+22.5+20+20=95.5$
- You write a 10-page paper for which you get a grade of 80%, earning you 32 points, which you rewrite up to a 92% (36.8 points). Then you write a four-page paper for which you get a grade of 95% (15.2 points). $33+36.8+15.2=85$.
- You turn in a three-page essay every week (11+10+12+11+10). $33+11+10+12+11+10=87$.

Required texts:

- Philip Ivanhoe & Bryan Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Hackett, 2006; \$24 through amazon)

Online resources:

- Chinese Text Project (<http://ctext.org>)

Academic integrity: All written work must be your own. If you borrow someone else's words and/or ideas you must explicitly acknowledge their source, whether you are directly quoting or loosely paraphrasing. Failure to do so amounts to plagiarism, which is a severe violation of the university's policy on academic integrity. For additional information, see <http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/academic-honesty>.

You are encouraged to discuss the readings and other course content outside of class. However, collaboration on written assignments and exams is not permitted.

Accessibility: I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine any design adjustments or accommodations. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. You are also welcome to contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. If you have registered a disability with Student Accessibility Services, please submit your official accommodation letter sooner rather than later.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging: I am committed to creating an inclusive learning environment in which people with different backgrounds and beliefs can engage in open and honest conversation. Such conversations depend on everyone treating other participants with respect and exhibiting a willingness to learn and listen.

Class schedule:

— Week 1 —

Unit 1: The Zhou classics

class 1: Course guidelines • defining “ancient” “Chinese” “thought” • introducing the *Classic of Poetry*.

- “Classic of Odes, Part 1” (includes a “Foreword” by Stephen Owen and the “Major Odes,” trans. Arthur Waley); focus especially on #235 & #245

class 2: *Classic of Poetry*, continued • The *Classic of Documents* • a Western Zhou bronze inscription

- “Classic of Odes, Part 2” (includes selections from the “Airs of the States” and “Minor Odes,” trans. Waley); a few more *Odes* (Classic of Odes, part 3.pdf) • The *Classic of Documents*: the “Canon of Yao,” “Canon of Shun,” “Metal-bound Coffin,” and “Shao Announcement” (Classic of Documents.pdf) • a few Western Zhou bronze inscriptions (bronze inscriptions.pdf)

class 3: The *Annals* classic and the *Zuo Tradition*

- The stories of Chong’er (“Story of Chong’er.pdf”) & Zichan (“The exploits of Zichan of Zheng”) • *optional reading*: Yuri Pines, “Chinese History Writing Between the Sacred and the Secular”

— Week 2 —

class 4: The *Classic of Changes*

- A good place to start is the wikipedia page on the “I Ching” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yijing>), also accessible via pdf in Canvas) • next read Richard Lynn’s introduction (pp. 1–5, 19–22) and translations of “Explaining the Trigrams” (pp. 119–126) and the first two hexagrams (pp. 129–150) (this is the “Classic of Changes” file on Canvas) • The “Commentary to the Appended Phrases,” trans. Lynn • (optional:) Willard Peterson, “Making Connections” (59 pp., but focus on pp. 69ff) • (optional:) “The Yijing and Yin-Yang Way of thinking,” which is a philosophical treatment of the ideas of the *Classic of Changes*

Unit 2: The Warring States period

class 5: The *Annals of Lü Buwei*

- *The Annals of Lü Buwei* (trans. John Knoblock & Jeffrey Riegel): read the “*Annals of Lü Buwei* introduction” and “*Annals of Lü Buwei* almanac” files available on Canvas. The introduction is rather long so feel free to focus on the table of contents (pp. xiii–xviii)

and the “Major points” (pp. 46–55). The story of the composition of the *Annals* is pretty salacious (1–26) so you might also enjoy that. The second file contains the first sections of the first 12 chapters of the text (also known as the “Monthly Ordinances”) together with an excerpt from chapter 13 that contextualizes chapters 1–12.

class 6: The *Annals of Lü Buwei*, continued

- the "Annals of Lü Buwei on learning," "music," and "warfare" files (chapters 4–8)
- **deadline for submitting your first writing assignment**

— Week 5 —

class 7: Laozi and Kongzi

- *Readings* chapter four (beginning on p. 161) • *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Robert Eno, selections TBD

class 8: Xunzi and Mengzi

- *Readings* pp. 115–159 • *Readings* pp. 255–309 • Roel Sterckx, “The Economics of Religion in Warring States and Early Imperial China” (optional)

class 9: Mozi and Zhuangzi

- *Readings* pp. 55–109 • *Readings*, pp. 207–224 • a complete translation of the *Zhuangzi* (trans. Burton Watson) can be found [here](#).

— Week 4 —

class 10: Zhuangzi, continued • Han Feizi

- *Readings* pp. 207–224 • additional selections from the *Zhuangzi*

class 11: Han Feizi continued

- a few more selections ("Han Feizi selections.pdf") • “The Forest of Persuasions” ("Forest of persuasions.pdf") •

Unit 3: The Early Empire

class 12: The Qin conquest

- The “Basic Annals of the First Emperor of the Qin” & “Reflections on the Rise of the Qin” (52 pp., trans. Burton Watson)

— Week 5 —

class 13: Sima Qian and the *Grand Scribe's Records*

- chapter 47, the biography of Confucius (Confucius_biography.pdf) • chapter 130, the concluding chapter to the Grand Scribe's Records ("Sima Qian's Self-Narration.pdf")

class 14: Writings by and about women

- selections from *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, by Liu Xiang • "Lessons for Women," by Ban Zhao

class 15: Wang Chong

- Wang Chong's *Balanced Discourses* (trans. Alfred Forke): chaps. 16 ("Falsehoods in Books"), 22 ("On Dragons"), 56 ("The Equality of the Ages"), 62 ("On Death"), 80 ("A Definition of Worthies"), and 84 ("Replies in Self-Defense") • feel free to scan the table of contents and read any other chapters that look interesting!
- **all writing assignments due**