

# 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:** HQ 114  
**Office hours:** please consult <https://calendly.com/mick-hunter>

**Course description/goals:** This course is an introduction foundational works of ancient Chinese thought, from the ideologies of the earliest historical dynasties through the writings of the Warring States masters (Confucius, Mencius, etc.) and including intellectual developments in early imperial period. We will approach our subject from a of perspectives, beginning with the “philosophical”—itself a problematic term whose relevance to the ancient Chinese context is somewhat controversial. What were the problems ancient Chinese thinkers grappled with, and what were solutions? The second perspective is the cultural or sociological: what can we glean from these texts about the the intellectual in ancient Chinese society? Finally, we will 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 profundity.

The core intellectual work of the course is the 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 written work.



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26 pts discussion posts, 24 points for papers, 25 pts for final, 15 points for midterm, 10 points for classroom participation

### ***Assignments & Grading:***

Your grade is determined by a 100-point scale. An A is at least 93 points, A- is 90 points, B+ is 88 points, B is 83 points, B- is 80 points, C+ is 78 points, C is 73 points, C- is 70 points, D+ is 68 points, D is 63 points, D- is 60 points, and F is less than 60 points.

- **Discussion posts—2 points/post, 26 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’ll check that you’ve submitted a post by the deadline 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?**
- **Four short papers—24 points.** Maximum of two pages. Two pages might sound easy but the short format demands a succinct and efficient writing style. I'll provide prompts for the papers but you're welcome to write about a topic you're more interested in, with my approval.
    - \* If your paper does not adhere to the required format, I won't accept it. [Click here to download the paper template](#). Papers must be written in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced with one-point margins, with no extra lines or white space between paragraphs.
- **Midterm exam—15 points.**
    - The midterm will include...
      - ◆ identifications of course readings. I'll give you excerpts from our readings and ask you to (1) identify the source and (2) explain your reasoning.
      - ◆ at least one short essay.
- **Final written exam or paper—25 points.** For your final assignment you can either take an in-person final exam or submit a longer paper (6–8 pages).
    - The final exam will include...
      - ◆ identifications of course readings. I'll give you excerpts from our readings and ask you to (1) identify the source and (2) explain your reasoning.
      - ◆ at least one short essay.
      - ◆ at least one short response to a new text. I'll give you a text you've never seen before and ask you to relate it to other texts we've read.
    - If you decide to submit a final paper...
      - ◆ You must me know by Monday, 7/21, at the latest.
      - ◆ I must approve your topic by Wednesday, 7/23.
      - ◆ You must submit an outline by Friday, 7/25.
      - ◆ Possible topics might include:
        - ⊗ Comparing two or more primary sources according to some theme.
        - ⊗ Tracing the development of an idea through the readings.
        - ⊗ Writing about a text not on the syllabus and relating it to texts we've read.
- **Class participation—10 points.** I expect you to contribute actively to your discussion sections. If at any point you feel like you're unable to contribute as much as you'd like, please come talk to me.

- **Attendance.** For every unexcused absence I will subtract 5 points from your final grade. You can't make up unexcused absences by doing additional work.

**Required texts:**

- Philip Ivanhoe & Bryan Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Hackett, 2023)

**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 —

class 1 (6/30): 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 (7/2): *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 Coffer,” and “Shao Announcement” (Classic of Documents.pdf) • a few Western Zhou bronze inscriptions (bronze inscriptions.pdf)

class 3 (7/4): 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 (7/7): Laozi and Kongzi (FIRST PAPER DUE)

- *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (hereafter *Readings*) chapter six • *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Robert Eno, books 1–11.

class 5 (7/9): Xunzi and Mengzi

- *Readings* chapters 4 & 9 • Roel Sterckx, "The Economics of Religion in Warring States and Early Imperial China" (optional)

class 6 (7/11): Mozi and Zhuangzi

- *Readings* chapter 2 & chapter 8, pp. 223–238 • a complete translation of the *Zhuangzi* (trans. Burton Watson) can be found [here](#).

— Week 3 —

class 7 (7/14): More Zhuangzi & Han Feizi (SECOND PAPER DUE)

- *Readings* chapter 8, pp. 239–265, and chapter 10

class 8 (7/16): More Han Feizi & IN-CLASS MIDTERM

- Additional selections from the *Han Feizi* ("Han Feizi selections.pdf") • "The Forest of Persuasions" ("Forest of persuasions.pdf")

class 9 (7/18): *The Art of War*

- "Art of War.pdf"

— Week 4 —

class 10 (7/21): *The Classic of Changes* (THIRD PAPER DUE)

- 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*.

class 11 (7/23): *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 12 (7/25): 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 (7/28): Sima Qian and the *Grand Scribe's Records* (FOURTH PAPER DUE)

- 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 (7/30): Writings by and about women

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

class 15 (8/1): FINAL EXAM / FINAL PAPER DEADLINE

The *Classic of Changes*

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