

China 300.1x

Chinese Thought: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Science

Part 1: Introduction and Early Warring States (5th-4th c. BCE)

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This course is designed to give students a thorough introduction to early (pre 221 BCE) Chinese thought, its contemporary implications, and the role of religion in human well-being. Important themes to be discussed include the ideal of wu-wei or “effortless action,” the paradox of how one can consciously try not to try, mindfulness techniques and self-cultivation, models of the self and society, rationality versus emotions, trust and human cooperation, and the structure and impact of different spiritual and political ideals.

This period of Chinese history witnessed the formation of all of the major indigenous schools of Chinese thought (Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism and Legalism), which in turn had an impact on the development of East Asian cultural history that is still felt today. We will also explore parallels with Western philosophical and religious traditions, the relevance of early Chinese thought for contemporary debates in ethics, moral education, and political philosophy, and the manner in which early Chinese models of the self anticipate recent developments in the evolutionary and cognitive sciences.

This course provides a full university semester’s worth of material broken into two parts. Each part of the course will last 5 weeks with a week-long break in between. For each part, there will be four weeks worth of new material. The fifth week will be reserved for review and completion of the final exam.

Part 1 introduces the basic philosophical, religious and scientific concepts that will be drawn upon throughout the course, and then goes on to cover early Shang and Zhou religious thought, the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Daodejing* (a Daoist text attributed to Laozi), the utilitarian thinker *Mozi*, the newly discovered and very exciting Guodian texts, and the momentous philosophical changes that occurred in the mid Warring States period.

See also:

Chinese Thought: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Science - Part 2

Duration

The MOOC will run for 4 weeks, covering one full module per week, with a 5th week for review and taking of the final exam. Each module consists of 8-10 short (approx. 15-20 minutes) videos.

Estimated Student Time Commitment per Week

Each week will include approximately 2.5 hours of video content. Students can be expected to spend 4-6 hours per week watching the videos, taking the quizzes, completing the class reading (30-50 pages a week) and participating in the online discussions.

What Will You Learn From This Course?

Students will gain a comprehensive introduction to early Chinese thought and strategies for engaging with alternative cultural models of ethical training, models of the self, and self-other relations. You will learn about the role of religious worldviews in orienting human beings in a space of meaning and values, as well as what it means to study human thought and human cultural history in an empirically-grounded manner. Close readings of English translations of early Chinese texts will help you to parse and interpret philosophical argumentation, assumptions and logic, and you will gain experience working through ethical dilemmas. You will learn how to approach historical materials in a responsible manner, gleaning contemporary insights without oversimplification or inaccurate appropriation. Looking at early Chinese thought through the lens of modern science will also give you an understanding of the basics of human cognition and evolutionary theory. You will learn how the “paradox of wu-wei”—the tension of how one can consciously try not to try—played a central role in driving the development of early Chinese thought, and how it is still relevant to us today. Students will learn about:

- an empirically-grounded framework for studying other cultures and cultural history
- the origins of early Chinese culture and religion
- early Confucianism, Daoism and Mohism
- the mid-Warring States “language crisis” and “physiological turn
- how to analyze philosophical and religious arguments and debates
- alternative models of ethics, the self, and the individual-society relationship
- the universality and contemporary relevance of basic ethical dilemmas
- the power of spontaneity, and the tensions involved in attaining it
- religion or spirituality and the role of meaning in human well-being

Readings

The primary recommended text for the class is:

Ivanhoe, P.J. and Van Norden, Bryan (eds.). *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Hackett Publishing Company, 2001)

Hackett Publishing Company has agreed to provide a sample chapter (Confucius' *Analects*, our first reading from the text), as well as a discount for students who wish to purchase the paperback; the ebook version is also quite affordable.

For each Module where we are recommending chapters from *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, we will also provide edition/translation-neutral passage or chapter references, so students can use their own translations, and where possible we will recommend adequate open-source translations. However, students should be aware that translations from classical Chinese vary *wildly* in quality, so we strongly recommend that they acquire the Hackett edition.

In addition, recommended readings will include some posted pdfs (open source). For most modules we'll also refer students to supplementary readings from a secondary source that covers much of the same material as the MOOC:

Slingerland, Edward. *Trying Not to Try: Ancient China, Modern Science, and the Power of Spontaneity* (Crown/Random House, 2014).

This book provides more detail for students who want to delve more deeply into the class material. Crown/Random House has provided a sample free of charge on the class site.

Students are also referred to my Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/slingerland3), which includes links to newspaper articles, on-line and radio interviews, magazine columns, etc. relevant to course themes. On the course site we will also provide semester-appropriate links to Facebook pages set up by students, which are another good source of links to relevant material and venues for discussion of course material.

Assessments

There will be four (4) weekly multiple-choice quizzes, one at the end of each module, testing the student's knowledge of that particular module. No make-ups or rescheduling of the quizzes will be allowed. There will also be a multiple-choice final exam. The final grade will be calculated as follows:

- 4 quizzes @ 15 points each: 60%
- Final Exam: 40%

Students who choose to receive a Verified Certificate of Achievement are required to achieve a minimum overall grade of 60%.

Course Schedule

Module 1: Introduction, Theoretical Issues, Introduction to Early China

This module will introduce students to what it means to study religious or philosophical thought from an academic perspective, what we mean by “religion” or “philosophy,” what different models of ethics and ethical reasoning exist, why studying Chinese thought in particular might be helpful, what some of the unique perspectives that we will confront in the course will be, and how all of this will connect to contemporary issues and modern scientific models of the self. We will also get an introduction to early Chinese history and the first historical dynasties in China, those of the Shang and Zhou.

VIDEO LESSONS

Intro video: Why (and How) Do We Study Other Cultures?

Lecture 1: Nuts and Bolts: Course description, mechanics

Lecture 2: What Does it Mean to Study “Thought”?

Lecture 3: Human Thought: Mind vs. Body, Reason vs. Emotion, Cold vs. Hot Cognition

Lecture 4: Human Nature and Civilization: Institutions, Commitments, and Different Models of Ethics

Lecture 5: Wu-wei 無爲 (ooo-way), De 德 (duh) and the Paradox of Spontaneity

Mid-week Announcement: Hot/Interesting Discussion Threads

Lecture 6: (Very) Early China

Lecture 7: Beginnings of Written History in China: The Shang Dynasty

Lecture 8: Themes in Shang Dynasty Thought

Lecture 9: Introduction to the Zhou Dynasty

Lecture 10: Zhou Dynasty Thought

Bonus Material: Full interview with Prof. Ken-ichi Takashima (UBC)

Concluding Video: Module 1 Q&A with Prof. Slingerland

READINGS

Videos 1-5:

Trying Not To Try

Introduction, pp. 1-17 (provided for free on class site)

Supplementary: *Trying Not to Try*,

Chapter 1

Chapter 7, pp. 172-178

Videos 6-9:

PDF1: Excerpts from *Book of Odes*, *Book of Documents*

ASSESSMENTS

Quiz #1

Module 2: Carving and Polishing With Confucius

This module explores the first great philosopher of China, Confucius, and the task he faced of rescuing what he saw as a profoundly degenerated age—one that reflected a sharp decline from the spiritual and political harmony of the ancient. His proposed solution was to reshape human beings into perfected sages through ritual, classical texts, and the arts. What Confucius has much to say about the role of cultural forms, the relationship of the individual to society, and the inextricably social nature of human beings serves as an important corrective to some of excessively individualist aspects of our modern self-conceptions.

VIDEO LESSONS

Intro video: Becoming civilized

Lecture 1: Confucius and the Analects

Lecture 2: “I transmit but do not innovate.” (Not quite.)

Lecture 3: Ritual: Acquiring a behavioral language

Lecture 4: Learning: Acquiring the Ability to think

Mid-week Announcement: Hot/Interesting Discussion Threads

Lecture 5: Holistic Education: The role of the arts in morality

Lecture 6: Building cold into hot: Moral skill, flexibility and autonomy

Lecture 7: At Home in Virtue: Harmonizing our nature with civilized life

Lecture 8: “Like the wind over the grass”: Non-coercive order in the Analects

Lecture 9: Beware the village poseur! The paradox of wu-wei in the Analects

Bonus Material: Full interview with Dr. Brandon Konoval (UBC)

Concluding Video: Module Q&A with Prof. Slingerland

READINGS

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Analects

(Provided for free on the class site, compliments of Hackett Publishing Company)

Supplementary: *Trying Not to Try*,
Chapter Three, “Try Hard Not to Try: Carving and Polishing the Self”

ASSESSMENTS

Quiz #2

Module 3: Laozi and the Uncarved Block

In this module we encounter the Daoist backlash against Confucianism in the form of Laozian “primitivism,” the world’s first documented counter-cultural movement. Laozi advocated rejecting learning, technology and society and a return to a natural, simple life in small agricultural villages. He has much to teach us about the dangers of hypocrisy, the potentially corrupting influence of social norms, and the value of simplicity.

VIDEO LESSONS

Intro video: Back to Nature

Lecture 1: The World’s First Hippies

Lecture 2: Laozi and the Daodejing

Lecture 3: The Unhewn Wood and the Desires of the Belly

Lecture 4: The Desires of the Eye: Madison Ave. and the Hedonic Treadmill

Lecture 5: “He Who Speaks Does Not Know”: Getting Beyond Language

Mid-week Announcement: Hot/Interesting Discussion Threads

Lecture 6: Samsara: The Cycle of Reversion

Lecture 7: Do Nothing, Be Natural: Laozi’s Golden Age

Lecture 8: New Insights from the Earth: The Guodian Laozi

Lecture 9: Instrumentalism and the Challenges of “Being Natural”

Bonus Material: Full interview with Prof. Jonathan Schooler (UC Santa Barbara)

Concluding Video: Module Q&A with Prof. Slingerland

READINGS

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Daodejing

Daodejing chapters: Entire text (received Wang Bi version)

Alternative open source translations:

Recommended

Robert Eno's translation, available on his website:

<http://www.iub.edu/~g380/Readings.html>

Alternatively, the website below provides the complete Dao De Jing (in Pinyin) with these three different English translations side by side for comparison:

- James Legge's translation, 1891, provided by Project Gutenberg;
- D.T. Suzuki & Paul Carus' translation, 1913, provided by Internet Sacred Text Archive;
- Dwight Goddard and Henri Borel's translation, 1919, Internet Sacred Text Archive

<http://www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit/daodejing.php>

Supplementary: *Trying Not to Try*,

Chapter Four, "Stop Trying: Embracing the Uncarved Block"

ASSESSMENTS

Quiz #3

Module 4: Maximizing Benefit: the Consequentialism of Mozi; The Mid-Warring States Linguistic and Physiological Turns; Guodian Confucianism

Impatient with both the Daoist primitivists and the Confucians, Mozi was the world's first great utilitarian or consequentialist thinker, arguing that rational calculation of social benefits should drive our behavior and that we should strive to practice "impartial caring." His viewpoints echo those of modern utilitarians such as Peter Singer, sharing the same strengths and weaknesses. In this module we will also explore two important shifts in Warring States thought, the Linguistic and Physiological turns, and also explore a previously lost school of Confucianism, only recently rediscovered in the so-called Guodian manuscripts.

VIDEO LESSONS

Intro video: Confronting Social Inequality

Lecture 1: Mozi and Materialist State Consequentialism

Lecture 2: Honor the Worthy: Job Performance and Ideological Unity

Lecture 3: Others' Fathers are Your Father: The Doctrine of Impartial Caring

Lecture 4: Against Music and Funerals: The Anti-Elite Chapters

Lecture 5: On Ghosts and Heaven's Will: Mozi's Religious Fundamentalism and Activism

Mid-week Announcement: Hot/Interesting Discussion Threads

Lecture 6: Later Mohist Logic and the Mid-Warring-States Linguistic Turn

Lecture 7: The Discovery of the Body: Yang Zhu and The Mid-Warring-States Physiological Turn

Lecture 8: Inward Training: Qi and Self-Cultivation

Lecture 9: Gaozi? The Guodian School of Confucianism

Bonus Material: Full interview with Profs. Constance Cook and Mark Csikszentmihalyi

Concluding Video: Module Q&A with Prof. Slingerland

Part I Wrap Up Video

READINGS

Lectures 1-5

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Mozi

Mozi, Chapters 8, 11, 16, 17, 20, 25, 26, 31, 32, 35

Alternative open source translations:

W.P. Mei on ctext.org: <http://ctext.org/mozi>

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Lectures 6-8

PDF2: The Logicians, Yang Zhu and *Inward Training*

Lecture 9

PDF3: Excerpts from Guodian Confucian texts

ASSESSMENTS

Quiz #4