

Chinese Philosophy

PHIL 3670 • Fall 2026 • Class location and time provided to enrolled students via the syllabus in Canvas.

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**People say that reading should be relaxing or entertaining—
this is said by people who really neglect themselves.**

人言讀書當從容玩味，此乃自怠之一說。

—Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200)

This class introduces the spiritual and scholarly traditions of China with a focus on the Warring States period to the Song and Ming dynasties. Students explore multiple facets of Chinese philosophies: moral theory, political science, ritual system, and spiritual self-cultivation.

Required Texts

- Ivanhoe, Philip J. and Bryan W. Van Norden, editors, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 3rd. edition (Hackett, 2023).
- Keenan, Barry C., *Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).
- Other texts provided via Canvas.

Goals

- Read key primary sources from Chinese philosophies with attention to historical and cultural context.
- Engage firsthand in the teaching and learning practices central to institutions of Chinese philosophical education.
- Produce original philosophical work informed by the theories and methods of Chinese discourse.

Outcomes

- Students who come to see education as an opportunity for self-cultivation may find renewed energy to invest in their own college experience.
- Students who gain a longer view of history may gain insight into present socio-political conditions in the world around us.
- Students who cultivate curiosity regarding diverse spiritual practices will be able to engage intelligently on issues of religious diversity outside the classroom.

All class goals, assignments, and policies are designed to enhance your learning experience in this course. You are expected to engage the class material with active interest, thoughtful attention, and critical reflectiveness. If you are having trouble engaging in this course, you should meet with me.

Grades

Letter grades are assigned as follows: F = 54.99% or below, D = 55–69.99%, C = 70–79.99%, B = 80–89.99%, A = 90–100%. All assignments are worth 100 points. They are distributed into weighted categories in the gradebook as follows:

Reading / 40% The homework readings are the backbone of the course—they are the foundation for everything else that we learn. Frequent reading quizzes help to ensure that you complete the readings *before* class. **These are due in Canvas before class starts.**

(Quizzes are open book and open note, you can work on them together, and you can redo them repeatedly until you get 100%. Think of them more like reading guides—the point is just to learn the material.)

Engagement / 20% Historically, Chinese learners engaged with texts through various memorization, recitation, and reflection activities. We will incorporate versions of such activities into this class.

Writing / 20% Developing your own ideas in your own voice comes after a long process of reading and engagement. Your final project will present an opportunity to add your own perspective to the commentarial tradition of Chinese philosophical discourse.

Exams / 20% Two exams (midterm and final) are worth 10% each. These cover core vocabulary terms, important texts and thinkers, key historical episodes, and pivotal philosophical discourses, which we'll cover in class. **If you have 93% attendance at the midterm and/or the final, you can skip one or both exams, and I will give you an automatic 100% for your exam grade. If you have 92% or lower attendance, then you must take the exam to earn the grade. No exceptions to this policy.**

Attendance Policies

Your presence is valued and your absence is noted. Attendance is taken daily. Your attendance score will appear in the grade book but is **not** calculated into the course grade. The score is used to determine the following:

- Students whose attendance scores are below 70% will have their course grades capped at a B. This means you have 9 excused absences before this policy takes effect.
- Students whose attendance scores are above 93% can skip the midterm and/or final exam. This means you have 2 excused absences before you would be required to take the exams.

There are no exceptions to the above policies and no additional excused absences. However, you *may* have opportunities to earn back attendance credit by attending approved departmental and/or campus events, but this is subject to availability.

Preparation Policies

You are responsible for attending all class sessions and coming to class prepared, having read (or watched) the assigned material, taken time to reflect on it, completed assigned study questions (if any), and in general having gathered your thoughts for class discussion. You are responsible for being an active, not a passive, reader. This means paying attention to what you are reading, looking up vocabulary that you don't know, and taking notes as you read, especially when you have questions. You are asked to invest your time in this class—not because I am making you, or because I am giving you a grade, but because you are here in college to do valuable and meaningful things.

Participation Policies

Together, we foster a culture of openness and understanding in the classroom. It is our responsibility, together, to make sure that everyone feels comfortable speaking in class, raising questions, and having conversations. All students are expected to come to class prepared, having read the assigned readings and having reflected on topics for class discussion. Your participation will be assessed by short in-class or post-class review and reflection activities assigned on a regular basis. Your participation will be also assessed by the attention that you pay to your peers. When your peers are speaking, you are expected to listen, be engaged, and respond where relevant. **I reserve the right to lower your course grade by up to one full letter grade, if your lack of participation in class becomes a persistent problem.**

See the note regarding [discussing sensitive content](#) in participation and engagement activities.

Late Assignment Policies

Quizzes, discussions, and other assignments: Even if you need to miss class, you can still plan ahead to complete your reading quizzes and other assignments on time. Canvas automatically deducts 5% per day for each day an assignment is late until the deductions equal 70% of the assignment's point value. You can continue to make up late assignments for 70% credit thereafter. **There are no exceptions to this policy.**

(Note, there are no exceptions to this policy, because you can *routinely* be *one* or *two* days late and still be making 95% and 90% on your assignments and maintaining an A-average for the course. You would have to be three+ days late on numerous occasions before this policy would affect your course grade.)

Exams: If you need to reschedule an exam, let me know in advance. I will work with you to ahead of time to accommodate your schedule, but I will not hold a make-up exam if you miss the test without warning.

Extra Credit Policies

There is no guarantee of extra credit in this class. If there is an event relevant to class that occurs outside the class, I may offer extra credit to attend. This can be used to reverse one class absence, which may help you maintain eligibility to skip the exams.

Integrity Policies

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic zero. Students who plagiarize or otherwise violate UNT's policies on academic integrity may also, at my discretion, be referred to the administration for disciplinary action. Students are responsible for reading, understanding, and knowing UNT's Academic Integrity Policy that can be found at: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>. As stated there: "According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University."

Technology Policies

Do not EVER use your computer, cell phone, or tablet in class for social media, texting, or any other communications not relevant to class activities. You may use these to take notes, or view class readings, or to utilize software or technologies that meet your learning needs.

Under no circumstances should you EVER complete assignments using ChatGPT or any AI or other software or technological tool that generates content on your behalf.

I reserve the right to lower your course grade by one full letter grade, if you persistently violate the technology policy.

Accommodations

I am committed to making it possible for all student in this class to achieve their learning goals, whatever these may be. Please share with me any information that will help me do this, including any circumstances for which you may need specific accommodations. Per the UNT Office of Disability Access: "The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323."

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

In the event of an emergency, the UNT Office of Emergency Management and Safety Services has a [table for a variety of situations](#), including active shooter, inclement weather, medical emergencies, etc. You may wish to bookmark above site, as well as the [Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness webpage](#) with a list of contacts for a variety of emergency situations.

Schedule

The schedule below is subject to change. Please listen in class regarding schedule changes.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1	8/18: Where do you do your best thinking?	8/20: How to read: Zhu Xi, "On Reading," I & II
2	8/25: How to learn: Keenan, p. 1–34.	8/27: Background on Chinese cosmology: Kalmanson, excerpts from <i>Local Gods</i>
3	9/1: From the classics: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 11 (<i>Learning and Mean</i>)	9/3: Introduction to the voices of the <i>Analects</i> with Zechen
4	9/8: Master Kong: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 1, p. 3–37	9/10: Master Kong: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 1, p. 37–53
5	9/15: Empress Renxiaowen and Madame Liu (plus He Zhen) (from Ann Pang-White, ed.)	9/17: Master Meng: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 4, p. #–#
6	9/22: Master Meng: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 4, p. #–#	9/24: Master Xun: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 9, p. #–#

7	9/29: Keenan, p. 35–72	10/1: Zhu Xi's commentary on the <i>Daxue</i>
8	10/6: Master Mo: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 2, p. #–#	10/9: Master Han Fei: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 10, p. #–#
9	10/13: Midterm exam	10/15: Master Guan: <i>Nei Ye (Inner Work)</i>
10	10/20: Master Lao: <i>RCCP</i> , Ch. 6, p. #–#	10/22: Daoist meditation: Livia Kohn, "Sitting in Oblivion"
11	10/27: Master Zhuang:	10/29: Master Zhuang:
12	11/3: Background on Buddhism: Selections from the Pāli canon	11/5: Chinese Buddhism: Huineng, <i>Platform Sūtra</i>
13	11/10: Poems of Chan nuns	11/12: Background on Buddhism: <i>Contemplation Sutra of Queen Vaidehi</i>
14	11/17: Chinese Buddhism: The story of Miaoshan	11/19: Buddhist recitation: <i>Heart Sūtra</i>
15	11/24: Commentary project Wang Yangming's commentary on the <i>Daxue</i>	11/26: Commentary project Gardner, "Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History."

16	12/1:	12/3: Review and wrap-up
17	12/7: Final exam (3:30pm-5:30pm)	