

# PHIL 6312 Chinese Philosophy

Spring 2026 Syllabus

Time: Tuesday, 4pm-6:45pm

Location: CB 1.223

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Instructor: Songyao Ren

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Office: JO 4.634

Office Hours: Thursday, 3:45pm-4:45pm

## Course Description

This course will be an exploration of three major philosophical traditions in early China: Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism. These thinkers developed a complex and rich debate about ethics, human nature, moral psychology, and self-cultivation. We shall see how the advocates of these different philosophies debated and borrowed ideas from each other. We will also view these philosophies from a comparative perspective, addressing questions such as: “To what extent does Chinese philosophy touch on problems and issues that appear in different cultural and philosophical traditions?” and “To what extent can its insights be appreciated and incorporated into our own lives?” Texts will be read in English translations, with some reference to Chinese terms and phrases that does not presuppose familiarity with the language.

This course fulfills the ancient philosophy historical distribution requirement for the PHIL MA program.

## Course Materials

There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be provided electronically through *eLearning*. You can also find translations of classical Chinese texts here: <https://ctext.org>

## Learning Outcome

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify and explain the central ideas and arguments of major Chinese philosophical traditions.
- Critically evaluate the views presented by key figures in these traditions.
- Engage in cross-cultural philosophical reflection by comparing Chinese philosophical ideas with those from other traditions.
- Critically reflect on how these philosophical insights might be relevant to contemporary ethical questions and personal self-cultivation.

## Course Requirements and Grading

### Discussion Leading (25%)

You will lead discussion in one class session of your choice. You should plan to spend the first 15 to 20 minutes presenting the main ideas of the assigned text. Afterward, you will pivot to the role of facilitator by posing questions to the class for discussion.

**If you prepare handouts, please email them to me by noon on Tuesday so that I have time to print them for the whole class.**

### Final Presentation (25%)

You will be asked to do a presentation on your final paper during the last two weeks of class. Your presentation will be judged on 1) clarity, and 2) quality of your argument.

### Term Paper (50%)

Please submit a term paper of approximately 15 double-spaced typescript pages by **May 8<sup>th</sup>**. I will give you suggested topics for the paper. If you choose to write about something else, please confer with me about the topic.

\*If you use AI tools in the preparation of your paper, you must clearly disclose how and to what extent they are used.

Grading Scale	A+ 98-100
	A 93-97
	A- 90-92
	B+ 87-89
	B 83-86
	B- 80-82
	C+ 77-79
	C 73-76
	C- 70-72
	D+ 67-69
	D 63-66
	D- 60-62
	F 00-59

## Tentative Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings
01/20	Course Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Reading</li> </ul>
01/27	Confucius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Analects</i>, selections (Introduction, 1.1-1.8, 1.11, 1.15, 1.16, 2.1, 2.3-2.8, 2.19-2.21, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7-3.8, 3.20, 3.22, 3.26, 4.1-4.6, 4.10, 4.14, 4.17-4.18, 4.26, 5.5, 5.7-5.10, 5.12, 5.19, 5.26-5.28, 6.3-6.5, 6.11-6.12, 6.18, 6.20, 6.23, 6.27, 6.30, 7.5, 7.16, 7.22, 7.30, 8.7, 9.3, 9.11, 9.18, 9.29, 10.1, 10.9, 10.14, 10.19, 10.22, 11.4, 11.7-11.13, 11.22-11.23, 12.1-12.5, 12.7, 12.10-12.12, 12.16-12.17, 12.19-12.20, 12.22, 12.24, 13.3, 13.18, 16.4, 17.21)</li> </ul>
02/03	Confucius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Olberding, “Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism in the <i>Analects</i>”</li> <li>Wong, “Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion,” sections 1 &amp; 2.1</li> </ul>
02/10	Confucius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gilligan, “Images of Relationship”</li> <li>Li, “The Concept of <i>Jen</i> and the Feminist Ethics of Care”</li> </ul>
02/17	Mozi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Mozi</i>, selections</li> </ul>
02/24	Mozi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Inclusive Care” in the <i>Mozi</i></li> <li>Fraser, “Inclusive Care”</li> </ul>
03/03	Mencius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bloom’s Translation of Mencius, Books 1A (entire), 1B1-2, 1B5, 1B8, 2A2-3, 2A6, 2A8-9, 2B3, 3A3, 3A5, 3B1, 3B3, 3B9, 4A7, 4A17, 4A18-19, 4A26-28, 4B13-14, 4B26, 4B28, 5A1-2, 5A5, 6A (entire)</li> </ul>
03/10	Mencius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wong, “Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion,” sections 2.2 &amp; 2.3</li> <li>Tomasello, <i>Why We Cooperate</i>, selections</li> </ul>
03/17	Spring Break, No Class	

03/24	Xunzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Xunzi” in <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i> (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 9, 17, 19, 23)</li> </ul>
03/31	Xunzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berkson, “Xunzi as a Theorist and Defender of Ritual”</li> <li>• “Wong, “Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion,” section 3</li> </ul>
04/07	Movie Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kim Ki-duk, <i>Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring</i></li> </ul>
04/14	Zhuangzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Zhuangzi” in <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i></li> </ul>
04/21	Zhuangzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wong, “The Meaning of Detachment in Daoism, Buddhism, and Stoicism”</li> <li>• Lai, “Model of Knowledge in the <i>Zhuangzi</i>”</li> </ul>
04/28 05/05	Final Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Reading</li> </ul>

## Course Policies

### Grading Policy

The final grade that you get for this class is non-negotiable (except for arithmetic errors) and will not be rounded up under any circumstances.

### Academic Integrity

The instructor requires students to uphold strong standards of academic integrity and will not accept any form of plagiarism or cheating. Any breaches will be reported. Please review UTD’s academic dishonesty policy: <https://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/dishonesty/>

### Be Prepared for Class

In order to be successful, please read the assigned readings, ideally two or three times, and come to class prepared to discuss questions pertaining to the readings.

### Accommodation Policy

Students may have varying needs that affect how they engage with course materials and requirements. If you anticipate any barriers to your participation or performance, please contact the instructor during the first week of class to discuss how this course can best support your learning.

Under UTD policy, for an accommodation to be officially considered, a student must register with Student AccessAbility. Please contact their office here: <https://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess/>