

**This is an unofficial copy of the HIST 3312 course syllabus.
The syllabus of record will be distributed to enrolled members of the course via
Canvas. Contents subject to change.
This unofficial syllabus is for informational purposes only.**

HIST 3312 EARLY CHINA

Fall 2026 | MW 4:00–5:15 PM

Prof. J. Michael Farmer
JO 5.612
farmer@utdallas.edu
Office Hours: By Appointment (in-person or virtual)

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

Prerequisite: Completion of a 060 core course. Knowledge of Chinese language is not required.

Course Description

Chinese civilization, like its Greek and Roman counterparts in the Mediterranean, is both ancient and far-reaching, influencing the political, economic, social, intellectual, religious, and cultural systems of a hemisphere for over five thousand years. Traditional Chinese civilization coalesced around the turn of the Common Era, reached its zenith during the mid-eighth century, and then began its descent into the early modern world. This course will examine the history of Chinese civilization from its neolithic beginnings to the end of the third century of the common era, focusing on political, social, economic, intellectual, and cultural developments of China's axial age (the late Zhou period) and the Qin-Han empire.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

The primary objective of this course is to increase your understanding of the history of early China, and introduce you to important scholarship in the field. Additionally, the course will provide opportunity for students to develop communication skills key to the practice of the discipline of history. Both of these SLOs (knowledge base and communication skills) will be regularly assessed through ongoing writing and discussion assignments, including in-class Write to Learn exercises, take-home primary source analyses, and participation. Brief descriptions of these assessment assignments are outlined below, and detailed guidelines will be provided to students in class and via Canvas.

Textbooks and Materials

Required Books:

Ivanhoe, Philip J. and Bryan W. Van Norden. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Additional materials available through Canvas.

Assignments

Primary Source Analyses [40% of final grade]

Students will prepare a one page primary source analysis paper (PSA) on an assigned primary document on assigned weeks. Most PSA eligible documents are located on Canvas; other documents are in Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy. Weekly reading assignments usually contain several PSA-eligible documents; write a PSA on only one (your choice). A total of 8 graded PSAs will be submitted over the course of the semester.

Article Captures [20% of final grade]

Students will write a 5–7 page “Article Capture” on each of four scholarly articles of your choice on China’s early and early imperial period.

Research Topic Statement [20% of final grade]

Students will prepare Research Topic Statement for a hypothetical research paper on an early China-related topic based on primary and secondary sources used in Primary Source Analysis and Article Capture exercises.

Discussion Board Activity [20% of final grade]

Students will actively participate in discussion of assigned readings on Canvas Discussion Boards. Weekly requirements include an Original Post, and Responses to posts by other class members.

Detailed guidelines for all assignments will be distributed via Canvas.

All assignments will be submitted via Canvas.

Note regarding Canvas’s Gradebook

The Canvas Gradebook is a basic record of raw scores for all scored course assignments. I do NOT use the Canvas Gradebook to calculate final grades for the class; I use a stand-alone program that allows me to weight assignment categories (as noted above) and make other calculations. Self-calculated grade estimates made from Canvas’s Gradebook are unlikely to be the same as on my gradebook. If you need to know your class average, please arrange an Office Hour session and I will happily give that information to you.

Tentative Schedule:

I will make every reasonable effort to follow this reading and discussion schedule, but sometimes changes must be made. Modification to this outline will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to be aware of the schedule and prepare the assigned materials.

Most items available on Canvas.

Items prefaced by a X are not PSA-eligible (background / textbook readings).

Items prefaced by a plus sign (+) are PSA-eligible.

Items prefaced by an asterisk (*) and set in bold italics indicate a due date.

WK	Date	Early China
1	8/24	Introduction to the Course
	8/26	General Introduction to Chinese History X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Introduction
2	8/31	Formations: Neolithic China <Yangshao, Banpo, etc>
	9/2	Formations: Anyang X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Ch. 1 X Ropp, <i>China</i> , Ch. 1 X Ten Things About Neolithic China/Early Bronze Age China + Oracle Bone Inscriptions
3	9/7	LABOR DAY: NO CLASS
	9/9	Formations: Zhou X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Ch. 2 X Ten Things About the Zhou + Metal-bound Box / Announcement of Shao + Milfoil / Heaven's Mandate
4	9/14	Formations: Literary Representations of the Zhou + Book of Songs + Songs of Chu
	9/16	Classical Age: The Crisis of the Eastern Zhou X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Ch. 3 + Ching K'o
5	9/21	Classical Age: Confucius X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Ch. 4 + <i>Philosophy</i> , Ch. 1
	9/23	Classical Age: Confucius, continued
6	9/28	NO CLASS
	9/30	Classical Age: Mozi + <i>Philosophy</i> , Ch. 2
7	10/5	Classical Age: Mengzi and Xunzi + <i>Philosophy</i> , Ch. 3, 6

	10/7	Classical Age: Laozi + <i>Philosophy</i> , Ch. 4
8	10/12	Classical Age: Zhuangzi + <i>Philosophy</i> , Ch. 5
	10/14	Classical Age: Han Feizi + <i>Philosophy</i> , Ch. 7
9	10/19	Empire: Legalism and Qin X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Ch. 5 X Ropp, <i>China</i> , Ch. 2 X <i>Routledge Handbook</i> , Ch. 1 X Ten Things About Qin
	10/21	Empire: Qin , continued + Legalist Theories
10	10/26	Empire: The Han Founding X Gernet, <i>Civilization</i> , Ch. 6 X <i>Routledge Handbook</i> , Ch 2–3 X Ten Things About the Han + Kao-tsu + Faults of Qin
	10/28	Empire: Han Political and Economic Institutions + Governing by Nonaction + Salt and Iron + Han Social Structure, pt. 1
11	11/2	Empire: Han and the World + The Xiongnu + The Southwest Barbarians
	11/4	Gentry and Crisis: Han Society + Han Social Structure, pt. 2
12	11/9	Gentry and Crisis: Women in the Han + Lessons for Women + Biographies of Women
	11/11	Han Civilization: Life and Death in Han Thought + Summoning the Soul
13	11/16	Han Civilization: Han Confucianism and the Canon + Codifying the Canon + Wen Weng
	11/18	TBA
14	11/23	FALL BREAK: NO CLASS
	11/24	FALL BREAK: NO CLASS

15	11/30	Han Civilization: Han Literature + Zhang Heng, "Western Metropolis" + Han Poetry
	12/2	Han Civilization: Writing History in the Han + Bio of Sima Qian + Shiji, 111: Wei Ch'ing et al.
16	12/7	Fall of the Han + Han Social Structure, pt. 3 + Uprisings
	12/9	TBA
Final		<i>N/A: There is no final exam for this class.</i>

Course & Instructor Policies

Grading Policy

Percentages for the course assignments have been noted above. The following gradescale will be used: 0–59 [F]; 60–62 [D-]; 63–66 [D]; 67–69 [D+]; 70–72 [C-]; 73–76 [C]; 77–79 [C+]; 80–82 [B-]; 83–86 [B]; 87–89 [B+]; 90–92 [A-]; 93–100 [A]. In narrative form, [F]=failing; [D]=below average; [C]=average; [B]=above average; [A]=exceptional. The professor reserves the right to curve, round, or otherwise adjust grades at his sole discretion.

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Attendance, Participation, and Discussion

Attendance is mandatory! Please consult the university calendar before scheduling vacations, weddings, or other extra-curricular events that may keep you from your responsibilities in this class. You are responsible for the material and any assignments regardless of whether you were in a given class meeting or not. Any extended absence (two or more consecutive sessions) should be reported to me via email as soon as possible. Every student is expected to actively participate in the discussion of the assigned readings. While there may be no set percentage of the course grade dedicated to this requirement category, students who do not regularly attend and actively participate in class will not fare well in the course.

Allowances will be made in accordance with University policy to students who must miss class due to Covid infection and/or exposure. I will extend this allowance to other students who may be ill with other communicable illnesses. Please contact me directly to arrange accommodations.

Late work

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Late work will not be accepted. For all work not completed by the due date, the student will receive a grade of 0 (zero) for the assignment. Exceptional circumstances may be taken into account. If you feel your circumstances merit special consideration, please notify me via email or in person as soon as possible.

All assignments will be submitted via Canvas.

Written assignments (PSAs, Article Captures) must be uploaded in either Word or PDF formats.

These assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in a 10–12 point serif typeface (Times, Palatino, Garamond, Gentium, etc.). Pages must have one-inch margins and contain your name and page number in the upper right-hand corner of each page.

Discussion Board assignments are submitted directly in Canvas (no file attachments).

Assignments not meeting these technical specifications will not be accepted.

Personal Electronics

Any non-class related use of personal electronics in the classroom will result in the immediate confiscation of the device. Confiscated devices will be returned at the end of the class period. Repeat offenses will result in a failing grade in the course.

Class Recordings

Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Class Materials and Intellectual Property

The instructor may provide class materials that will be made available to all students registered for this class as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. These materials may be downloaded during the course, however, these materials are for registered students' use only. Classroom materials may not be reproduced or shared with those not in class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Office Gun Policy

All persons entering my office (JO 5.612) will be given oral notice indicating that my office is an exclusion zone.

Sharing Confidential Information

Students considering sharing personal information in email, in person, or within assignments or exams should be aware that faculty members and teaching/research assistants are required by UT Dallas policy to report information about sexual misconduct to the UT Dallas Title IX Coordinator. Per university policy, faculty have been informed that they must identify the student to the UT Dallas Title IX Coordinator. Students who wish to have confidential discussions of incidents related to sexual harassment or sexual misconduct should contact the Student Counseling Center (972-883-2527 or after hours 972-UTD-TALK or 972-883-8255), the Women's Center (972-883-8255), a health care provider in the Student Health Center (972-883-2747), the clergy person (or other legally recognized religious advisor) of their choice, or an off-campus resource (i.e., rape crisis center, doctor, psychologist). Students who are sexually assaulted, harassed, or victims of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, or stalking, are encouraged to directly report these incidents to the UT Dallas Police Department at 972-883-2222 or to the Title IX Coordinator at 972-883-2218. Additional information and resources may be found at <http://www.utdallas.edu/oiec/title-ix/resources>.

Course and Instructor Amendments to the University Policies

Email Use

Email is the preferred method of communication for this course. I generally reply to messages that require a response (and not all messages require or merit a response from the professor!) within two business days. You may also reach me via Teams chat.

Academic Support Resources

The information contained in the following link lists the University's academic support resources for all students.

Please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/academic-support-resources>.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

Your Responsibility

Students are responsible for all information contained in this syllabus and schedule, as well as any amendments or changes announced by the professor or Teaching Assistant(s) in class. Changes to the course schedule or syllabus will also be announced in class and/or by email. It is your responsibility to regularly check your UTD email account.

Failure to abide by the policies contained in the syllabus and any amendments or changes announced by the professor may result in a failing grade in the course.

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

[revised 6 April 2026]

History, Writing, and this Class

Most of you are enrolled in this class because at some level you have developed an interest in history. To this point your interests have likely been passive; that is to say, you have enjoyed reading books, watching documentaries, or playing video games about historical topics. In this course you will shift from being consumers of history to producers of history. You will learn how to “do history.”

“Doing history” might be summed up by three interrelated acts: reading, thinking, and communicating your ideas about the past. The written word lies at the heart of the historical enterprise. Many of the surviving artifacts from the past are written documents, and most of the scholarship that attempts to make sense of these artifacts is also in written form. As such, you will be regularly engaged with writing. You will read the documents from the past. You will read ancient and modern historians’ attempts to organize the artifacts into meaningful representations of different times and places. You will think about both the primary and secondary documents at your disposal and offer your own representation of the past. You will do this through a variety of written assignments; that is how the professional historian works.

Although the creation of original ideas (or critical examinations of old ones) is the most significant act that the historian performs, for ideas to be tested and accepted they must first be shared. These ideas are shared in the form of books, articles, and short essays presented orally at conferences. Audiences will vary. At times historians write for each other. Other times they write for non-specialist or lay readers. And at other times they write for students. Depending on the audience, historians adopt a variety of voices—some formal, others informal. It is important to know how to present your ideas to each specific audience.

The format of historical writing is not simply to satisfy the whims of senior historians (or history professors). Rather, proper presentation of your ideas in writing adds credibility to your argument. Correct style, tone, format, documentation of evidence, etc. tell the reader that you have “sweated the small stuff,” and therefore your big ideas can be taken seriously. Conversely, failure to follow the conventions of the discipline signals to your reader that you have not mastered the simple matters of style, causing them to possibly doubt your ability to handle the more complex issues of content. While the viewpoint expressed above (“bad writing = unintelligence”) is most likely unfair and untrue, the perception remains. Thus it is your responsibility to demonstrate a competency in the craft of historical writing if you want your ideas to be taken seriously.

In this course you will have ample opportunity to examine primary and secondary documents, formulate your own ideas about them, and express those ideas in clear and concise essays. You will not only learn the “facts” about the history of early China, you will “do history.”