

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Chinese Symbols and Icons

Course Number and Section:

CHINESE

1651F 550

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

Symbolism is central to Chinese culture, shaping its worldview, philosophy, and artistic expression. Ancient cosmology and mythic thinking laid the foundation for symbolic imagery, intertwining with astronomy and inspiring intellectual and artistic traditions. From language and ritual objects to social institutions, symbolic meaning remains deeply embedded in Chinese consciousness. The principle of “expressing meaning through symbolic representation,” drawn from The Book of Changes, reflects a Chinese preference for metaphor and layered meaning over direct explanation. Even the Chinese writing system originated as a reflection of nature, embodying cosmic order and human experience. In this tradition, objects are not merely physical—they are carriers of moral and philosophical ideas. This entry-level, essay-based course explores the origin, development, and meaning of key Chinese symbols found in art, literature, and daily life. Topics include “yin-yang,” the Chinese zodiac, “double happiness,” “the Three Stars,” the “Laughing Buddha,” and “Avalokitesvara” (Guanyin). We will examine how symbolic traditions have shaped Chinese ways of thinking and how familiar symbols reflect deeper cultural concepts. The course provides an accessible overview of Chinese culture for students with a general interest in China, while also developing critical thinking and cross-cultural awareness for further university study. Taught in English.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students are expected to

1. gain a general understanding of Chinese culture;
2. recognize important symbols and icons in Chinese culture;
3. understand the role of symbols and icons in cultural interactions,
4. demonstrate basic critical thinking skills for observing cultural phenomena.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

Reading materials will be on OWL Brightspace and there will be no cost for textbooks.

Methods Of Evaluation:

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Attendance		10%
Discussion and participation		10%
In-class Exercises		10%
Midterm exam	11/05/25	20%
Argument Outline	11/26/25	5%
Essay	12/03/25	35%

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.

Thursday, August 14, 2025