



Australian
National
University

ANU Literary Chinese Language Program



Why study Literary Chinese?

Classical and Literary Chinese are written forms of the language that began developing long before China was unified under the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). China's governing and elite cultures continued to use these forms of the language for over two millennia, until the early twentieth century.

Studying Literary Chinese lays the foundations for our critical engagement with Chinese worlds, both past and present. We gain unmediated access to those worlds and meet their inhabitants on their own terms. Through Literary Chinese we encounter people of the past with the fullest possible understanding of their own language and modes of expression. But studying Literary Chinese also urges us to assess our own assumptions in two important ways. First, we face dramatic differences. These demand that we step outside the terms of our own experiences and instead open ourselves to other ways of thinking about the world and acting in it. Second, we recognise points of continuity. Since many of the legacies of traditional Chinese culture given weight in the present have been transmitted through Literary Chinese, its influence on modern and contemporary Chinese languages, thought, and cultural discourse is pervasive, though the relationship between past and present is often complex. Texts written in Literary Chinese have also played an important role in shaping the literary and scholarly traditions of other East Asian cultures, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

“Its influence endures in the present, as the great legacies of Chinese culture have been largely preserved in this medium.”

— MICHAEL SCHIMMELPFENNIG, SENIOR LECTURER, LITERARY CHINESE PROGRAM



Study Literary Chinese at ANU

The Australian National University offers the most comprehensive program of Classical and Literary Chinese in Australia, one on a par with leading institutions worldwide. After two courses at the elementary and intermediate levels, our Literary Chinese program offers an advanced-level sequence that explores different types of Literary Chinese texts.

- ANU students: Choose to study Classical and Literary Chinese as an elective or as a minor (24 units/4 courses) as part of your ANU degree.
- Open Universities Australia (OUA) / Non-Award: Enrol in individual courses for professional development or personal interest without pursuing a full degree.
- Advanced offerings: Courses on Anecdotal Literature, Buddhist, Historical, and Philosophical texts as well as Excavated texts and texts on Women and Gender. The program and its research-led advanced offerings are the pathway to conduct research on traditional and early modern China.


Students with prior language experience must take a Language Proficiency Assessment (LPA) for proper level placement. For details, see the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific (CAP) language proficiency assessment site or contact the course convener


Study Literary Chinese language and culture at the Australian National University.

Further Information

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