

**TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY:  
ADVANCED INTRODUCTION TO NEO-CONFUCIANISM**

Instructor: Harvey Lederman      Contact: harvey.lederman@  
Time: M 3-5:50pm                      Place: Marx 201

**Overview.** This course is an advanced introduction to the movement in Chinese philosophy commonly called “neo-Confucianism” in English (in Chinese, *daoxue* (道學), *lixue* (理學), or *lixue* and *xinxue* (心學)). The course will focus on four major authors – Cheng Hao (程顥 1032-1085), Cheng Yi (程頤 1033-1107), Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130-1200), and Wang Yangming (王陽明 1472-1529) – with briefer looks at Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤 1017-1073), Zhang Zai (張載 1020-1077), Lu Xiangshan (陸象山, 1139-1192) and (as a kind of retrospect) Dai Zhen (戴震, 1724-1777). Each meeting will be spent close-reading a small selection of texts in translation. The aim is for students to gain a set of skills in philosophical close reading, as well as for them to acquire a body of knowledge about the key concepts and authors in this tradition. The course will be biased towards these authors’ views in metaphysics, the philosophy of mind and moral psychology, as opposed to their (equally important) views in normative ethics and political philosophy. It is also (inevitably) selective: I have opted for more in depth treatments of what I see as the most philosophically interesting authors, rather than making any attempt at a comprehensive discussion of authors who might deserve to be on a “greatest hits” list of the tradition.

Our aim in the seminar will be to understand what these historical thinkers thought. The questions we ask will lean philosophical, as opposed to cultural-historical. We will *not* focus on questions like: to what extent were these ideas an engine of social change in this period? Or: what broader social factors led to these thinkers’ espousing these ideas? We will focus rather on questions like: how did Zhu Xi understand the relationship between *li* (理) and *qi* (氣)? How did Wang Yangming understand the relationship

between knowledge and virtuous action? One cannot begin to give accurate answers to these questions without some understanding of the cultural forces at work in these thinkers' asking the questions they asked, and of the intellectual, social and political context in which they asked these questions. But the relationship between these thinkers' writings and the broader intellectual culture of their time will not be the focus of the course. This does not mean our investigation will be severed from the work scholars from other disciplines have done on these texts; our focused inquiry into the ideas of these thinkers should be seen as part of a larger project, conducted collectively by many scholars with many different approaches, of understanding these fascinating periods in Chinese history and the people who lived in them.

The seminar is designed to be accessible to students in philosophy who have no background in Chinese philosophy, as well as to students of Chinese history who have little or no background in contemporary philosophy. For the former group of students, the texts we are reading will be fresh, foreign and difficult. For the latter group of students, the approach we take to the texts will be equally fresh, foreign and difficult. I hope that both groups of students will benefit from learning the new material, and from dialogue with each other. If the history of Greek philosophy is any guide, the future for scholars of these texts both in East Asian Studies departments, and in philosophy departments will be one of close collaboration and learning from one another. The methods of philosophical close reading we'll be practicing in this class promise to bring a great deal of insight to these texts and problems, insights which we can hope will be useful for all who want a better understanding of Chinese intellectual history.

**Readings.** The readings for the classes are divided into those which are "in focus" (the ones which will be the subject of our close reading), the primary readings (mandatory readings for participating in the class), and secondary readings (essential introductory scholarship). Suggested readings for "enthusiasts" are also provided. Enthusiasts should consult me each week about which of the listed texts it would make sense for them to read, depending on their interests. All primary texts will be provided in photocopies on blackboard. The secondary readings will be on desk reserve. As you will see from the syllabus below, I assign as much of the possibly relevant translated primary sources on the first weeks we read an author as

it is reasonable to expect people could read. Subsequent weeks then sometimes have nothing new assigned for primary reading (I only list what is “in focus”). My expectation is that you will read the assigned texts in earlier weeks, marking passages that are of interest to you (and to the themes of the course). In subsequent weeks I expect you to go back over these primary texts in some way or other. Perhaps you will re-skim all of them, looking for new passages which are relevant to our discussion; perhaps you will reread the passages you marked as relevant the first time; perhaps you will look at passages discussed in relevant scholarship. I won’t guide you in this re-reading; you should experiment with what works for you. But the point is that you should still be dedicating time to thinking about the primary texts in these “off” weeks.

Unlike a typical graduate seminar in philosophy, I ask that you please do the reading if you intend to come to the seminar. I doubt that many graduate students in philosophy will have any antecedent familiarity with the authors or concepts to be discussed in the class. Familiarizing yourself with the basics of these before arriving will mean that our time can be spent jointly reading the texts (which is the whole point!), and not in starting from ground zero.

The following anthologies are used repeatedly for the translations in what follows. Students might wish to buy them:

- Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (“Chan”)
- Tiwald and van Norden edd. *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy* (“TvN”)

(Where available various translations of “In focus” passages will be circulated in class, along with copies of the original text for those who can read it.)

**Assessment.** The assessment will be based on participation and attendance entirely. Philosophy students wishing to do a unit on material in Chinese philosophy should approach me during the course, so that we can discuss how to relate the course to their work. Students in East Asian Studies will write a term paper for me as usual (pending approval of their home department).

## Week 1: Overview, Background (Feb 3)

**In focus:** *Great Learning, Mencius* (2A6, 6A1-6, 7A15).

**Primary:** Plaks tr. *Ta Hsueh and Chung Yung*; Lau tr. *Mencius* (selections); Slingerland tr. *Analects* (selections).

**Secondary:** Gardner, Daniel. "Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History".

**Enthusiasts:** Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*.

## Week 2: Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and Cheng Hao (Feb 10)

**In focus:** *Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate, Western Inscription, Cheng Hao on Nature* (*xing* 性).

**Primary:** Chan, 460-80, 495-543; TvN, 134-151; Selections from Chan, tr. *Reflections on Things at Hand*.

**Secondary:** Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction*, Ch. 1-3; Graham, "What was New in the Ch'eng-Chu Theory of Human Nature?", in Chan ed. *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*.

**Enthusiasts:** Kasoff, *The Thought of Chang Tsai*.

## Week 3: Cheng Brothers II (Feb 17)

**In focus:** Cheng Yi on Nature (*xing* 性) and *li* (理).

**Primary:** Chan, 544-571; TvN, 152-167; Selections from Chan tr. *Reflections on Things at Hand*.

**Secondary:** Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers* Part I, Chapters 1-4, Part II, Chapter 5.

## Week 4: Cheng Brothers III (Feb 24)

**In focus:** Cheng Brothers on Mind (*xin* 心), Knowledge (*zhi* 知) and Emotions (*qing* 情).

**Primary:** Selections from Chan tr. *Reflections on Things at Hand*

**Secondary:** Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers* Part I, Chapters 5-8; Part II Chapters 1-4; Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism*, Chapters 4-6.

## Week 5: Zhu Xi I (March 2)

**In focus:** Zhu Xi on *li* (理) and *qi* (氣).

**Primary:** Chan, 588-653; TvN, 168-230; Ivanhoe ed. *Zhu Xi: Selected Writings*, 1-65; 138-186.

**Secondary:** Peterson "Another Look at Li"; Chan, *Chu Hsi, New Studies* (selected chapters).

**Enthusiasts:** Berthrong, "Zhu Xi's Cosmology" in *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucianism*; Kim, Yung Sik, 2000, *The Natural Philosophy of Chu Hsi 1130-1200*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.

#### Week 6: Zhu Xi II (March 9)

**In focus:** Zhu Xi on Nature (*xing* 性) and Mind (*xin* 心)

**Primary:** Wittenborn, *Further Reflections on Things at Hand* 1-96; Gardner *Learning to be a Sage*, 86-127.

#### Week 7: Zhu Xi III (March 23)

**In Focus:** Zhu Xi on Knowledge (知), Emotions (*qing* 情) and *yi* (意)

**Primary:** \*(Primary readings are optional here) Wittenborn, *Further Reflections* pp. 98-178; Gardner, *Learning to be a Sage*, pp. 128-196.

**Secondary:** Yü Ying-shih, "Morality and Knowledge in Zhu Xi's Philosophical System"; Shun, "Zhu Xi's Moral Psychology" in *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*; Shun, "Zhu Xi on the 'Internal' and the 'External,'" ; Angle "Buddhism and Zhu Xi's Epistemology of Discernment" in Makeham ed. *The Buddhist Roots of Zhu Xi's Philosophical Thought*.

#### Week 8: Zhu Xi IV (March 30)

**In focus:** Zhu Xi on the *Great Learning*

**Primary:** \*(First selection is optional) *Zhu Xi: Selected Writings*, 72-137; 187-204.

**Secondary:** Gardner, Daniel, 1986, *Chu Hsi and Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon*.

**Enthusiasts:** Gardner, Daniel K. "Principle and Pedagogy: Chu Hsi and The Four Books."

#### Week 9: Lu Xiangshan, Wang Yangming I (April 6)

**In focus:** *Instructions for Practical Living* Sections 1-8; *Inquiry on the Great Learning*

**Primary:** Ivanhoe, tr. *Readings from the Lu-Wang School*.

**Secondary:** De Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Heart-and-Mind*, Chapters 1-2. Shun, “Wang Yangming on Self-Cultivation in the Daxue”.

**Enthusiasts:** Lederman, *Introspective Model of the Unity of Knowledge and Action* Lederman; *Perception and Genuine Knowledge in Wang Yangming*

Week 10: Wang Yangming II (April 13)

**In focus:** Wang Yangming on *li* (理), Things (*wu* 物), and *yi* (意)

**Primary:** Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living*.

**Secondary:** Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, Chapters on Wang Yangming, plus appendices.

Week 11: Wang Yangming III and his successors (April 20)

**In focus:** Wang Yangming, Wang Ji, Qian Dehong, Luo Hongxian, Nie Bao on *liangzhi*

**Primary:** Primary selections from Wang Ji, Luo Hongxian, Nie Bao, provided by the instructor.

**Secondary:** Ching, tr. *Records of Ming Scholars*, pp. 100-138; Mou Zongsan, “The Immediate Successor of Wang Yangming”; T’ang Chün-i, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yangming to Wang Ji” in de Bary ed. *Self and Society in Chinese Thought*; T’ang Chün-i, “The Criticisms of Wang Yangming’s teachings as raised by his contemporaries”.

Week 12: Dai Zhen (April 27)

Justin Tiwald to Present.

**Primary:** Selections.

**Secondary:** Tiwald, “Dai Zhen on Human Nature and Moral Cultivation” in *Dao Companion*