



PY3901: Self-Cultivation in Chinese Philosophy

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Seminar Hours: Thursdays, 11-13

Venue: WINDSOR 102

Consultation & Feedback Hours: Thursdays, 14-15

Aims and Objectives: Self-cultivation (*xiu-shen* 修身) is an indispensable condition for the development of the subject in Chinese philosophy. Like the Stoic sages in the Greco-Roman antiquity who keep a diary or a manual, or the Buddhist monks who meditate in ancient India, Chinese warriors (i.e. martial arts practitioners) and men of letters in ancient times trained themselves as masters of self-cultivation. However, they did it on different grounds and with different methods. For instance, Mencius and Zhuangzi in the Warring States Period set up two preliminary models (*bu-dong-xin* 不动心 and *xin-zhai* 心斋) for self-cultivation in the Confucian and Daoist traditions, respectively. While this great tradition has evolved constantly throughout the course of history (integrating the Buddhist models), the 20th Century witnessed the most radical changes in its development, due to its interaction with other philosophies, primarily stemming from the West. The most visible evidence of this is *the rise of New Confucianism* as a response to the imported Western ways of philosophising. Therefore, a knowledge of Chinese self-cultivation helps to understand not only this tradition of thought in question, but also possible dialogues between philosophy in China and those from elsewhere.

This module aims to **introduce** students to key questions and arguments regarding the long-standing, ever-evolving and increasingly multiplied traditions of self-cultivation in Chinese philosophy. First, the module should lead students to appreciate chapters of Chinese texts (in translation) on self-cultivation. But more importantly, the module should help students to acquire a knowledge of the modern and contemporary development of Chinese thought, and more specifically, in New Confucianism. The emergence of New Confucianism through the course of the 20th Century in mainland China, Taiwan as well as Hong Kong is considered a response from Chinese traditional thought to Buddhism and Western philosophy, in particular, idealism, pragmatism, phenomenology, Marxism, and

(post-)Kantian critical theories in the German and French traditions. Given this historical context, the module aims to develop in students the ability to critically reflect upon the metaphysical, aesthetic, and ethical as well as political connotations underlying the recent debates about Chinese self-cultivation.

Moreover, in the second half of the term, each class will contain an interview and free discussion with an external professional who engages actively in scholarly, creative, or artistic projects of self-cultivation.

Course Requirements: There will be 10 two-hour seminars held weekly through the Spring Terms (**the week of 16 February is a reading week with no class**). In the first hour of the course, I will lecture on the reading, and in the second hour, you are supposed to ask questions and participate in discussions about the topic for the week.

You will be required to two essays, each with a word limit of 2,000 words and each worth 50% of your overall mark. For the essay topics, you could choose those that are set out in the course for each reading or think of questions that interest you in particular. The essays must be uploaded to the Turnitin system by **10 am** on the due date. The essay must be uploaded to the Turnitin system by 10 am on the due dates: Friday 17 March (week 9 of spring term) and Friday 5 May (week 2 of summer term). All essays should be double-spaced, with the proper citation of sources (i.e., FULL citation of quotations and ideas in the essay with a complete bibliography at the end).

Note: The School's generic marking criteria, which will be used for marking your essays, can be found at the end of this course outline.

Reading the texts: All required and selective readings can be found in the University library. But due to limited copies, I will provide scans for some of the readings. It is encouraged that you purchase the primary texts of the course, namely, *encius, Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming*, *A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* by Sébastien Billioud.

Lecture Schedule and Readings: Please find the lecture schedule and reading list below.

Self-Cultivation in Early Daoism

Reference: Zhuangzi. 2013. *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press.

Seminar 1 (12 January): Introduction: Self-Cultivation and Aesthetics (I)

Primary Reading: *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi, Chapter 2: Discussion on Making All Things Equal*

Seminar 2 (19 January): Self-Cultivation and Aesthetics (II)

Primary Reading: *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi, Chapter 4: In the World of Men*

Further Readings:

- Guanzi. 2021. *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*. Edited by W. Rickett. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jullien, François. 2007. *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness*. New York: Zen Books.
- Nelson, Eric S. 2004. “Responding to Heaven and Earth: Daoism, Heidegger, and Ecology.” In: *Environmental Philosophy* vol. 1 (2). pp. 65-74.
- Peters, M. A. et al. 2021. *Moral Education and the Ethics of Self-Cultivation. Chinese and Western Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.
- Tan, Mingran. “Wang Fuzhi’s Interpretation of Spirit/Shen in His Annotation on the Zhuangzi”. In: *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*. vol. 10 (2): 239-254.

Self-Cultivation in Early Confucianism

Reference: Mencius. 2003. *Mencius: A Bilingual Edition*. Translated by D. C. Lau, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Seminar 3 (26 January): Self-Cultivation and Morality (I).

Primary Reading: *Mencius, Book II*.

Seminar 4 (2 February): Self-Cultivation and Morality (II).

Primary Reading: *Mencius, Book VII.*

Further Readings:

- Xunzi. 2014. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Translated with an Introduction by Eric L. Hutton. Chapter II. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sung, W., 2016. *Mencius and Xunzi on Xing (Human Nature)*. *Philosophy compass*, 11(11), pp.632–641.
- Tan, Charlene. 2021. “Confucian Self-Cultivation and the Paradox of Moral Education,” in Peters, M. A. et al. 2021. *Moral Education and the Ethics of Self-Cultivation. Chinese and Western Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.
- Sung, W., 2019. Bu Ren 不忍 (Cannot Bear to Harm) in the Mencius. *Philosophy east & west*, 69(4), pp.1098–1119.
- Liu, S.-hsien & Shun, K.-loi, 1996. Some Reflections on Mencius' Views of Mind-Heart and Human Nature. *Philosophy east & west*, 46(2), pp.143–164.
- Ni, P., 2021. Theories of the Heart-mind and Human Nature in the Context of Globalization of Confucianism Today. *Dao : a journal of comparative philosophy*, 20(1), pp.25–47.
- Pengwei, Z.H.A.N.G. & Qiyong, G.U.O., 2008. New insight into Mencius' theory of the original goodness in human nature. *Frontiers of philosophy in China*, 3(1), pp.27–38.

Self-Cultivation in Neo-Confucianism

Reference: Wang, Yangming. 1963. *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming*. Translated with Notes by Wingtsit Chan. New York and London: Columbia University Press.

Seminar 5 (9 February): The Original Substance of the Mind and the Original Knowledge

Primary reading: *Instructions for Practical Living, No. 30-60.*

Seminar 6 (23 February): Bodily Experience in Neo-Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist Self-Cultivation: A Comparison

Primary reading: *Instructions for Practical Living, No. 81-100, No. 111-120.*

***Interview and Discussion with Lynn Hyeong**

Further Readings:

- Li, Minghui, & Jones, D. 2017. *Confucianism Its Roots and Global Significance*.

- Lee, M.-huei, 2018. Wang Yangming's Philosophy and Modern Theories of Democracy: A Reconstructive Interpretation. In *Confucianism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 79–91.
- Kern, Iso. 2018. “The ‘Wirkungsgeschichte’ of Wang Yangming’s ‘Teaching in Four Propositions’ up to Liu Zongzhou and Huang Zongxi”, *Concepts of Philosophy in Asia and the Islamic world*, Vol. 1 China and Japan. Edited by Raji.C. Steineck et al. Leiden: Brill.
- Israel, G.L., 2018. The transformation of the Wang Yangming scholarship in the West, ca. 1960–1980: a historical essay. *Asian philosophy*, 28(2), pp.135–156.

Self-Cultivation in Neo-Daoism

Reference: Owen, Stephen and Swartz, Wendy. 2017. *The Poetry of Ruan Ji and Xi Kang*. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Inc.

Seminar 7 (2 March): Self-Cultivation, Artistic Practice, and Intercultural Dialogue

Primary Reading: “Rhapsody on the Zither” in *The Poetry of Ruan Ji and Xi Kang*.

***Interview and Discussion with Orlando Daga**

Further Readings:

- Tian, Xiaofei and Warner, Ding Xiang. 2017. *The Poetry of Ruan Ji and Xi Kang* (Ji Kang). Translated by Stephen Owen and Wendy Swartz. Göttingen: De Gruyter.
- Chai, David. 2017. “Ji Kang on Nourishing Life”. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 12 (1): 38-53. DOI 10.3868/s030-006-017-0004-9.
- Chai, David. 2020. *Dao Companion to Xuanxue 玄學 (Neo-Daoism)*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
- Chang, Chiung-Ying 張瓊霽. 2017. “The Ruist and Taoist Spectrum in Xi Kang’s and Xiang Xiu’s Last Choices on Matters of Life and Death 從嵇康與向秀的儒道光譜看兩人的出路”. *Jiedi* 33 (July): 37-69.

Self-Cultivation in Zen Buddhism

Reference: Lopez, Donald S. *The Heart Sūtra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*. SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988.

Seminar 8 (9 March): Self-Cultivation and Art Therapy

Primary Reading: *The Heart Sūtra Explained. Chapters 1, 2 and 3.*

*Interview and Discussion with Yihong Liu

Further Readings:

- Waley, Arthur. 1922. *Zen Buddhism and its Relation to Art*. London: LUZAC.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/43273>
- Watts, Alan W. 1936. *The Spirit of Zen*. New York: DUTTON.

Self-Cultivation and Modernity

Reference: Mou, Zongsan. 2015. *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy: A Brief Outline of Chinese Philosophy and the Issues It Entails*. Translated by Esther Su. Foundation for the Study of Chinese Philosophy and Culture.

Billioud, Sébastien. 2011. *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity. A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. Lopez, Donald S. *The Heart Sūtra Explained : Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*. SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988.

Seminar 9 (16 March): Self, Subjectivity, and Abstract Art

Primary Reading: Billioud, Sébastien. 2011. “**Subjectivity and the Variety of Confucian Traditions.**” In *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity. A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics*.

*Interview and Discussion with Hui Zhang

Secondary Reading:

- Xu Fuguan. 徐復觀. 2022. *The Chinese Liberal Spirit. Selected Writings of Xu Fuguan*. Translated and edited by David Elstein. Albany: State University of New York.
- Xu, Fuguan. 徐復觀. 1998. *Zhongguo yishu jingshen*. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju.

Seminar 10 (23 March): *Gongfu*, Emptiness, and Mindful Practice

Primary Reading: Billioud, Sebastien. 2011. “**Chapter 6. Self-Cultivation.**” In *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity. A Study of Mou Zongsan’s Moral Metaphysics*.

***Interview and Discussion with Thomas Jackson**

Secondary Reading:

- *The Heart Sūtra Explained*. Chapters 5 and 6.
- Mou, Zongsan. 牟宗三. 2015. Lecture 18 “An Outline of Song and Ming Confucianism.”

Further Readings:

- Heubel, Fabian. 何乏筆. 2011. “Kant and Transcultural Critique: Toward a Contemporary Philosophy of Self-Cultivation.” In: *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. vol. 38 (4). pp. 584-601.
- Mèlès, Baptiste. 2009. “Experience and Subjectivity: François Jullien and Jean François Billeter.” In : *Personality and Subjectivity, East and West*. Clermont-Ferrand: hal-01224181. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01224181>.
- Li, Zehou 李澤厚. 1994. *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics*, translated by Gong Lizeng. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- T. Sernelj, “Different Approaches to Chinese Aesthetics,” *Azijske študije (Spletna izd.)*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 161–182, 2020, doi: 10.4312/as.2020.8.3.161-182.
- T. Sernelj, “The Problem of the Authenticity of the Aesthetic Concept qiyun shengdong,” *Azijske študije (Spletna izd.)*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 159–180, 2021, doi: 10.4312/as.2021.9.1.159-180.

Questions for the First Essay

1. Critically discuss the original goodness in Mencius.
2. To what extent is the Mencian moral philosophy compatible with his ideal for governance?
3. Critically evaluate the notion of mind-fasting in Zhuangzi.
4. Critically evaluate the following quote from Wang Yangming (No.28 in *Instructions for Practical Living*).
 “One should never mind whether one is at peace and tranquil. If he depends on that peace and tranquility, not only will there be the fault of gradually becoming fond of quietness and tired of activity, but there will be many defects latent in that state of mind.”

Questions for the Second Essay

1. Discuss the relation between self-cultivation and subjectivity in one of the Neo-Confucian thinkers from the Song-Ming period of your choice.
2. Analyze the relation between self-cultivation and artistic or creative practice.
3. What role does bodily experience play in self-cultivation?
4. Explain how the concept of emptiness is useful for self-cultivation.

PIR & Philosophy UG MARKING CRITERIA

	86+ (First) Essays Marked on Step at: 88, 92, 95, 98	70-85 (First) Essays Marked on step at: 72, 75, 78, 982, 85	60-69 (Upper Second [2:1]) Essays Marked on step at: 62, 65, 68	50-59 (Lower Second [2:2]) Essays Marked on step at: 52, 55, 58	40-49 (Third [3]) Essays Marked on step at: 42, 45, 48	30-39 (Narrow Fail) Essays Marked on step at: 32, 35, 38	0-29 (Clear Fail) Essays Marked on step at: 28 and below
Knowledge and understanding	Exceptional knowledge and understanding of subject with expert grasp of material	Excellent knowledge and understanding of subject with no or only the most minor errors of fact and/or interpretation	Good knowledge and understanding of subject with only a few minor errors of fact and/or interpretation	Adequate knowledge and understanding of subject with some errors of fact and/or interpretation	Limited knowledge and understanding of subject with significant errors of fact and/or interpretation	Very poor knowledge and understanding of subject with many glaring errors of fact and/or interpretation	No knowledge or understanding of subject
Clarity and strength of answer	An extremely clear, focused and convincing response to the question	A very clear, focused and convincing response to the question	A clear and focused response that directly answers the question	A generally clear response but weakened by some inconsistencies and omissions	An unclear and unconvincing response to the question	A inadequate answer that fails to address the question	No recognisable answer to the question
Structure and organisation	Outstanding structure and organisation of material with successive sections sustaining an exceptionally clear argument	Excellent structure and organisation of material with successive sections sustaining a very clear argument	Good structure and organisation of material with the flow between sections sustaining a clear argument	Adequate structure and organisation with the clarity of argument weakened by some gaps, repetition, irrelevant material and/or the ordering of points	Weak structure and organisation with the argument greatly weakened by some significant gaps, repetition, irrelevant material and/or the ordering of points	Little discernible structure and organisation with no clear argument or order to the points being made	No discernible structure or organisation and barely recognisable content

Critical thinking and analysis	Exceptional independent critical thinking and analysis of relevant material	Excellent independent critical thinking and analysis of relevant material	Good independent critical thinking and analysis of relevant material	Some independent critical thinking and analysis of relevant material, but more descriptive	Little independent critical thinking and analysis of relevant material	Very patchy or misguided thinking and analysis of material	No critical thinking or analysis
Engagement with relevant literature	Exceptional breadth and depth of reading with complete mastery of the relevant and wider academic literature	Excellent breadth and depth of reading with very good knowledge of and insight into the relevant academic literature	Good breadth and depth of reading with clear knowledge of the relevant academic literature and only a few omissions and/or misunderstandings	Adequate discussion of the relevant academic literature but with some notable omissions in reading and/or misunderstandings	Little reading with significant gaps and limited understanding of the relevant academic literature	Very little reading on the topic and little understanding of the relevant academic literature	No reading on the topic and no understanding of the relevant academic literature
Use of evidence and/or methods	Exceptional awareness and use of evidence, and/or methodologically extremely sophisticated	Excellent awareness and use of evidence, and/or methodologically sophisticated	Good awareness and use of evidence, and/or a good grasp of methods with only minor gaps in understanding	Some awareness and use of evidence, and/or some grasp of appropriate methods but with some significant gaps in understanding	Limited awareness and use of evidence, and/or poor grasp of appropriate methods	Very limited awareness and use of evidence, and/or very poor grasp of appropriate methods	No awareness or use of evidence, and/or no grasp of appropriate methods
Quality of writing	Exceptionally fluent and authoritatively written in academic English with correct use of technical terms and stylistically outstanding	Fluent and convincingly written in academic English with correct use of technical terms and stylistically excellent	Clearly written with appropriate use of technical terms, but may contain a few minor grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and infelicities of expression	Adequate level of academic but undermined by a number of misunderstandings of technical terms and/or grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and infelicities of expression	Poorly expressed and unclear prose with significant misunderstandings of technical terms and/or grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and infelicities of expression	Very poorly expressed and unclear writing with many significant misunderstandings of technical terms and/or grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and infelicities of expression	Virtually unintelligible writing
Presentation and referencing	Faultless presentation and referencing consistent with professional standards	Excellent presentation and referencing with no or only the most minor errors	Good presentation and referencing with a few minor errors	Acceptable presentation and referencing but some errors	Poor presentation and barely adequate referencing	Very poor presentation and inadequate referencing	Unacceptably poor presentation and referencing