

DIVERSITY READING LIST PRESENTS:

# CHINESE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

A DRL READING GROUP BLUEPRINT BY XINTONG WEI

LEVEL: EASY - INTERMEDIATE

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## INTRODUCTION

Chinese philosophy has a long and distinguished history of development spanning over a period of more than two thousand years. The historical development of Chinese philosophy can be divided into three major periods: the classical period (6th century-3rd century BCE), the period of the independent growth of Chinese Buddhism (6th century-9th century CE) and neo-Confucianism (11th century-18th century). Chinese philosophy is mostly known for its moral and political thought. Questions concerning moral cultivation, good governance and how to live a good life occupy the centre of Chinese thought and consequently draw most of the contemporary Western scholarship. Topics in philosophy of mind are, in this sense, relatively marginal aspects of Chinese philosophy. However, ancient Chinese thinkers have made important contributions by developing distinctive concepts such as 'xin 心' (heart-mind), 'qing 情' (emotion) and 'zhi 知' (knowing), which play important roles in their accounts of moral epistemology and ethics. For example, in contrast to the Western conception of the mind which distinguishes between cognitive states (such as beliefs and perceptions) and affective states (such as desires and feelings), the Chinese concept 'xin' (heart-mind) denotes an entity that is not only the centre of cognition but also of emotion, understanding and intuition. Early Chinese thinkers endorsed a holistic view about the mind-body relationship, leading to the important concept of bodily recognition 'tiyan 体验' or 'tiren 体认', which is one of the fundamental methods of perception.

This blueprint aims to

1. introduce and trace the development of concepts such as 'xin' 'qing' and 'zhi' and
2. examine and address surrounding issues in mind, moral epistemology and ethics in major Chinese thinkers and schools throughout the three periods.

The readings will cover primary sources such as Mengzi, Xunzi, Zhuangzi, Chinese Buddhism and neo-Confucian texts as well as secondary literature.

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## CATEGORIES

- Philosophy of Mind
- Chinese Philosophy

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AVAILABLE ONLINE AT:

<https://diversityreadinglist.org/blueprint/chinese-philosophy-of-mind/>

## WEEK 1. CONFUCIAN THEORY OF MIND

During the Warring States period, the rulers of several powerful states began declaring themselves kings, a title traditionally reserved for the Zhou dynasty's ruler. The period culminated in 221 B.C.E. when the king of Qin unified China and declared himself the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty. This era was marked by constant conflict, with the general populace frequently facing threats of death and starvation. In their struggle for survival, state rulers sought out talented individuals and innovative solutions to address these problems. As a result, ancient Chinese philosophy emerged with a strong focus on solving social and political issues, leading to a flourishing of ideas and thoughts. One significant development during this time was the establishment of the Confucian School by Confucius, further advanced by thinkers like Mengzi (Mencius) and Xunzi. Confucianism, which emphasises pedagogy and includes several classical texts central to its study, became the dominant ideology during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.).

Confucians were concerned with restoring political order and achieving moral transformation in society through self-cultivation and the preservation of family relations. They advocated for top-down social reform, believing that the ruler should serve as a moral exemplar for the people. Socially and politically conservative, Confucians idealised the sage kings of antiquity and viewed history not as a progression but as a decline into degeneration and corruption. They believed the masses could be transformed through rites (codes of propriety that shape external behaviour) and music (which affects internal emotions and feelings). The ultimate goal was to cultivate the virtue of 'Ren' (humanity). The Confucian approach to the philosophy of mind must therefore be situated within this context of their broader concerns in cultivating moral virtues and transforming society. For Confucians, the human mind is primarily characterised not by cognitive or affective functions, but by aspects of the 'original mind' that are essential for making correct moral responses.

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### CHEN, XUNWU. *THE PROBLEM OF MIND IN CONFUCIANISM*

2016, *Asian Philosophy* 26 (2):166-181.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Abstract:** This essay explores the Confucian theory of mind. Doing so, it first examines the early Confucian concept of the human mind as a substance that has both moral and cognitive functions and a universal nature. It then explores the neo-Confucian concept of the human mind, the original mind, and the relationships between the human mind and human nature, as well as between the human mind and the human body. Finally, it explores the Confucian concept of cultivation of the mind.

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### MENGZI. *CHAPTER FOUR: MENGZI (MENCIUS)*

2023, In Ivanhoe, Philip and Van Norden, Bryan (eds.), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 3rd edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary text for referencing

**Abstract:** The third edition of Ivanhoe and Van Norden's acclaimed anthology builds on the strengths of previous editions with the addition of new selections for each chapter; selections from Shen Dao; a new translation of the writings of Han Feizi; selections from two texts, highly influential in later Chinese philosophy, the Great Learning and Mean; and a complete translation of the recently discovered text Nature Comes from the Mandate. Each section of this volume begins with a brief Introduction and concludes with a lightly annotated Selective Bibliography. Also included are four appendices: Important Figures, Important Periods, Important Texts, and Important Terms.

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XUNZI. CHAPTER NINE: XUNZI

2023, In Ivanhoe, Philip and Van Norden, Bryan (eds.), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 3rd edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary text for referencing

**Abstract:** The third edition of Ivanhoe and Van Norden's acclaimed anthology builds on the strengths of previous editions with the addition of new selections for each chapter; selections from Shen Dao; a new translation of the writings of Han Feizi; selections from two texts, highly influential in later Chinese philosophy, the Great Learning and Mean ; and a complete translation of the recently discovered text Nature Comes from the Mandate . Each section of this volume begins with a brief Introduction and concludes with a lightly annotated Selective Bibliography. Also included are four appendices: Important Figures, Important Periods, Important Texts, and Important Terms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the Confucian understanding of the human mind?
2. How do you understand the Confucian approach to a theory of mind from the perspective of moral self-cultivation? How does this approach differ from Western philosophy of mind?
3. According to Mengzi, all human beings share the same original mind (Benxin 本心) (which is the cause of four sprouts of goodness). How do you understand the original mind? What is Mengzi's argument in 6A1-3 6A8?
4. For Mengzi, the four fundamental aspects of the original mind are inherent capacities that enable us to make correct moral judgments and act accordingly. How does it differ from a Western understanding of the mind? Why does Mengzi think that such capacities are inherent rather than acquired?
5. Another important Confucian thinker Xunzi opposed Mengzi's understanding of the original mind. For Xunzi, the original human mind is not inherently good. The moral capacities characteristics of Mengzi's original mind are products of moral cultivation. What are the implications of the two conceptions of mind on how we should cultivate the mind?

## WEEK 2. MIND-BODY IN EARLY CHINESE THOUGHT

While many have argued that early Chinese thinkers endorsed a holistic view about the mind-body relationship, there is also evidence that they distinguish the mental from the body. One important notion in Confucian ethics is the idea of the extension of one's mind. To cultivate one's mind is to extend and deepen it so that it 'can embrace the ten thousand things and the whole universe' (Mengzi 7A4). To make sense of this idea, Chen (2017) suggests that we should interpret Confucians as endorsing substance dualism: the mental and the body as two distinct substances. He traces the idea of extension the mind in classic Confucian texts and neo-confucian writings such as that of Wang Yangming.

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### SLINGERLAND, EDWARD. *BODY AND MIND IN EARLY CHINA: AN INTEGRATED HUMANITIES-SCIENCE APPROACH*

2013, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 81(1): 6–55.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** pp. 6-18

**Abstract:** This article argues against the strong “holist” position that the early Chinese lacked any concept of mind–body dualism, and more broadly against a “neo-Orientalist” trend that portrays Chinese thought as radically different from Western thought. In the first half, it makes the case against strong mind–body holism by drawing upon traditional archeological and textual evidence. In the second, it turns to resources from the sciences, arguing that large-scale quantitative–qualitative analyses of early Chinese texts suggest that they embrace a quite vigorous form of mind–body dualism, and further that a huge body of evidence coming out of the cognitive sciences suggests that this is not at all surprising. In this section, the role that deep humanistic knowledge can, and should, play in scientific approaches to culture is also explored. The article concludes by suggesting that a mutually informed, humanities–scientific approach to religious studies is the best way for our field to move forward

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### CHEN, XUNWU. *MIND AND SPACE: A CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVE*

2017, *Asian Philosophy* 27 (1):1-15.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Abstract:** This essay explores the Confucian concept of the space of the mind and the Confucian view on cultivation of the space of mind. It then argues that the distinction between the mind as a mental substance and the body as a material substance is that the mind can be infinitely extended while the body can only extended to a certain limit.

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### RAPHALS, LISA ANN. *A TRIPARTITE SELF: MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT IN EARLY CHINA*

2023, New York: Oxford University Press.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Chapters 1 & 4

**Abstract:** Chinese philosophy has long recognized the importance of the body and emotions in extensive and diverse self-cultivation traditions. Philosophical debates about the relationship between mind and body are often described in terms of mind-body dualism and its opposite, monism or some kind of "holism." Monist or holist views agree on the unity of mind and body, but with much debate about what kind, whereas mind-body dualists take body and mind to be metaphysically distinct entities. The question is important for several reasons. Several humanistic and scientific disciplines recognize embodiment as an important dimension of the human condition. One version, the problem of mind-body dualism, is central to the history of both philosophy and religion. Some

account of relations between body and mind, spirit or soul is also central to any understanding of the self. Recent work in cognitive and neuroscience underscores the importance of our somatic experience for how we think and feel.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the myth of strong mind-body holism in Early Chinese thought? What is the Early Chinese monistic conception of the universe that lends support to this interpretation?
2. What are Slingerland's (2013) reasons for being sceptical about the strong mind-body holism? Which reason he offers is the most convincing in your view?
3. What according to Slingerland, distinguishes the heartmind (xin) from other organs in the body? If heartmind has those special features, does it support some form of mind-body dualism?
4. Does it make sense to say that a mind can occupy a space? What is the Confucian conception of the space of mind? When Confucians talk about the space of the mind, should we take it metaphorically or literally?
5. Chen (2017) argues that in Confucianism, space is constitutive of the mind. What does he mean by this claim? Which Confucian theorist's (Mengzi, Lu, Zhu, Wang) elaboration of the idea of extending one's mind is the most plausible?

## WEEK 3. EMOTION (QING 情) IN ZHUANGZI

The Daoist school was a loosely affiliated group of thinkers, with the legendary figure Laozi as its first notable proponent. Laozi is attributed with writing the *Daodejing*, a foundational metaphysical treatise. Daoist philosophy further developed and matured through the writings of Zhuangzi. Early Daoist thinkers proposed radical departures from the ideals and practices of their contemporary society, rejecting the narrowly human concerns of other philosophical schools, as well as their views on government and conventionality. Daoist philosophers advocated for spiritual elevation, freedom, and a life of tranquility, creating a mental utopia for Chinese intellectuals. Unlike many of their contemporaries, who focused primarily on good governance and moral cultivation, Daoist philosophers were also deeply interested in cosmology, ontology, the nature of language, and epistemology.

Little is known about Zhuangzi's life. He was a contemporary of Mengzi (Mencius), the prominent Confucian philosopher. The book "Zhuangzi" is a compilation of his writings, along with contributions from other authors, collected over a period from the 4th to the 2nd century B.C.E. (Graham 2003:58). There is ongoing debate about the dating of specific sections. Zhuangzi's prose is distinct and regarded as a literary masterpiece, characterized by the use of parables—stories that are often fanciful, featuring imaginary creatures or historical figures. These tales are typically pithy, witty, and amusing, making them accessible and attractive while also challenging readers to interpret the underlying philosophical ideas.

Zhuangzi's philosophy is grounded in this-world concerns, aiming to help people cope with suffering and misery. According to Zhuangzi, while one must learn to navigate the human world and recognize human distinctions as they are, one can always embrace the perspective of the Dao, which transcends all human distinctions. By doing so, one sets one's spirit free, allowing it to roam at ease in the world of Dao. The wise person (智者) which occupies an important place in Zhuangzi's thought is characterized by their emotional state. Understanding emotion is therefore crucial to understand Zhuangzi's conception of the good life.

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### REN, SONGYAO. *THE ZHUANGIST VIEWS ON EMOTIONS*

2018, *Asian Philosophy* 28 (1):55-67.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Abstract:** In this article, I will look into the Zhuangist views on emotions. I will argue that the psychological state of the Zhuangist wise person is characterized by emotional equanimity accompanied by a general sense of calmness, ease, and joy. This psychological state is constitutive of and instrumental to leading a good life, one in which one wanders the world and explores the plurality of daos. To do so, I will first provide an overview of the scholarly debate on this issue and unveil the disconcerting disagreement that underlies it. Then, I will survey some passages in the Zhuangzi and sketch my interpretation of the Zhuangist views on emotions. Next, I will examine the theoretical foundation for this interpretation by referencing the Zhuangist pluralism and their conception of the good life. Finally, I will look into some potential objections to the Zhuangist views on emotions and attempt responses to them.

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OH, SANGMU. *TWO LEVELS OF EMOTION AND WELL-BEING IN THE ZHUANGZI*

2021, *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 20 (4):589-611.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** Emotion is an essential component of human nature, and therefore it is necessary to explore the issue of a desirable emotional state if we want to properly discuss human well-being. This article examines the issue by advocating a new understanding of the Zhuangzi's 莊子 ideas on emotion. In terms of the Zhuangzi's ideas on the desirable emotional state, scholars have presented various interpretations to date, even arguing that the ideas themselves are mutually contradictory or inconsistent. This article shows that the Zhuangzi's ideas about emotions are in fact consistent by dividing emotions into two types: "conventional knowledge-dependent emotions" and "true knowledge-dependent emotions." It then examines the characteristics of a desirable emotional state and the conditions necessary to reach it and explores the implications of the Zhuangzi's ideas for discussions on well-being in modern times.

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ZHUANGZI. *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG TZU*

1968, Columbia University Press.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary texts for referecing

**Abstract:** This is one of the most justly celebrated texts of the Chinese tradition - impressive for both its bold philosophical imagination and its striking literary style. Accepting the challenge of translating this captivating classic in its entirety, Burton Watson has expertly rendered into English both the profound thought and the literary brilliance of the text

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is Zhuangzi's main disagreement with Confucians on the nature of emotions?
2. What are the three interpretations of Zhuangzi's view on emotion discussed by Ren (2018)?
3. Zhuangzi was a master storyteller. What is the moral of the story of the death of Zhuangzi's wife, Zi Gao seeking advice from Confucius, Ai Tai Tuo the ugly, and Master Yu's illness? Do these passages support Ren's moderate interpretation of Zhuangzi's view on emotions?
4. How does Zhungzi's view on emotion fit with his pluralism and his conception of the good life?
5. What is the nature of emotions? Can emotions be right or wrong? Why does Zhuangzi think that ordinary emotions should be extirpated? How would a Confucian respond to Zhuangzi? Do you think ordianry emotions are valuable?

## WEEK 4. MIND IN CHINESE BUDDHISM I: THE CONSCIOUSNESS-ONLY (WEI SHI) SCHOOL

Buddhism is founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (meaning the enlightened/awaken one). After Guatama Buddha passed away, the questions about Buddhahood split his followers into two strands: Theravada (the way of the elders) Buddhism, (which is also called disparagingly as Hinayana) and Mahayana Buddhism (the greater vehicle). Theravada Buddhism focuses on individual salvation and one's own efforts in understanding the Buddha's teaching. They believe that only a special group of people have the potential to reach Buddhahood as such it did not completely cut off its root in the Indian caste system. Mahayana Buddhism, by contrast, is characterized by its altruism and compassion, which is embodied in the doctrine of bodhisattvas. And it is this brand of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism that spread northwest and entered China around 1st C.E. It met Daoism and Confucianism and around 5/6 C.E Chinese Buddhism emerges and spread further northeast to Japan and Korea.

This ethical teaching of Mahayana Buddhism sits well with the idea of Sagehood in Chinese philosophy, which is also an ideal achievable by everyone. It resonates with the Confucian ethical outlook, which promotes humanity and benevolence. Buddhism also introduces many philosophical ideas such as the concept of mind, ideas of space and time, consciousness, self-awareness to the Chinese thought.

It is not until the sixth century that Chinese Buddhism began to take its distinctive shape. When Xuanzang (596-664) return from 10 years' study and travelling in India, he brought back with him 657 Buddhist texts and devoted the rest of his time to translating Sanskrit texts into Chinese. The translation school he founded and the consequent systematic translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese set the foundation for the development of Chinese Buddhism. Scholastic interpretations, classifying and ranking of of Buddhist teachings and texts became the basis of competing schools of Buddhism, the foremost being the Consciousness-Only (Weishi zong), Heavenly Terrace (Tiantai zong), Pure Land (Jingtu zong) Flower Ornament (Huayan zong) and the Chan school. This blueprint focuses on the Consciousness-only (Weishi) and the Chan School (also known to the west as Zen Buddhism through Japan).

If attending to the primary texts, also look at Vasubandhu's Thirty Stanzas.

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LIU, JEELOO. *AN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE PHILOSOPHY: FROM ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY TO CHINESE BUDDHISM*

2006, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** Chapter 9

**Abstract:** "An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy" unlocks the mystery of ancient Chinese philosophy and unravels the complexity of Chinese Buddhism by placing them in the contemporary context of discourse. Elucidates the central issues and debates in Chinese philosophy, its different schools of thought, and its major philosophers. Covers eight major philosophers in the ancient period, among them Confucius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. Illuminates the links between different schools of philosophy. Opens the door to further study of the relationship between Chinese and Western philosophy.



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LI, JINGJING. *THROUGH THE MIRROR: THE ACCOUNT OF OTHER MINDS IN CHINESE YOGĀCĀRA BUDDHISM*

2019, *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 18 (3):435-451

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** This article proposes a new reading of the mirror analogy presented in the doctrine of Chinese Yogācāra Buddhism. Clerics, such as Xuanzang 玄奘 and his protégé Kuiji 窥基, articulated this analogy to describe our experience of other minds. In contrast with existing interpretations of this analogy as figurative ways of expressing ideas of projecting and reproducing, I argue that this mirroring experience should be understood as revealing, whereby we perceive other minds through the second-person perspective. This mirroring experience, in its allusion to the collectivity of consciousness, yields the metaphysical explication of mutual interdependence and the prescription of norms for compassionate actions.

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XUANZANG. *CHAPTER 23: BUDDHIST IDEALISM - HSÜAN-TSANG OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS-ONLY SCHOOL*

1963, In Chan, Wing-tsit (ed.), *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.  
Princeton University Press

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary text for referencing

**Abstract:** A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy covers the entire historical development of Chinese philosophy from its ancient origins to today, providing the most wide-ranging and authoritative English-language anthology of Chinese thought available. This superb book brings together key selections from all the great thinkers and schools in every period—ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary—and presents these texts in their entirety. Each selection is accompanied by explanatory aids and scholarly documentation that shed invaluable light on all aspects of Chinese thought. Featuring elegant and faithful translations of some of the most important classical writings, some translated here for the first time, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy is an indispensable resource for students, scholars, and anyone interested in Chinese philosophy and culture.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the 8 forms of consciousness? What is the storehouse consciousness?
2. How do you make sense of the idea that the world is the creation of intersubjective minds of all sentient beings? How is the world created through the three stages of transformation of consciousness?
3. If the world consists of the consciousness of all sentient beings, does it mean that sentient beings are more real than non-sentient beings?
4. How can we make sense of the interaction between 'our' body and 'our' consciousness if no self exists? If the physical body and hence sense organs do not exist, how do the first five forms of consciousness arise?
5. To what extent does the problem of other minds pose a challenge to the consciousness-only thesis?

## WEEK 5. MIND IN CHINESE BUDDHISM II: THE CHAN SCHOOL (ZEN BUDDHISM)

Chan Buddhism is a radical break from this scholastic approach—an explicit rejection of language, conceptualization and advocate for a kind of authentic Buddhist teachings that can only be found in the immediate, face-to-face encounters of Buddhist masters and their students. Chan Buddhism is heavily influenced by Daoism and has a deep influence on neo-Confucian Wang Yangming's development of his theory of mind. One central tenant of Chan Buddhism is the claim that all sentient beings have buddha-nature, which is the mind, the source of enlightenment.

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LIU, JEELOO. *AN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE PHILOSOPHY: FROM ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY TO CHINESE BUDDHISM*.

2006, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** Chapter 12

**Abstract:** "An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy" unlocks the mystery of ancient Chinese philosophy and unravels the complexity of Chinese Buddhism by placing them in the contemporary context of discourse. Elucidates the central issues and debates in Chinese philosophy, its different schools of thought, and its major philosophers. Covers eight major philosophers in the ancient period, among them Confucius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. Illuminates the links between different schools of philosophy. Opens the door to further study of the relationship between Chinese and Western philosophy.

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ZEUSCHNER, ROBERT. *THE UNDERSTANDING OF MIND IN THE NORTHERN LINE OF CH'AN (ZEN)*.

1978, *Philosophy East & West* 28(1), 1978: 69-79.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** This article investigates Northern School's understanding of the relationship between the defiled mind and the pure mind. The defiled mind seems to correspond roughly to the Western notion of mind, but the notion of the pure mind is less clear. How is the pure mind related to the defiled mind? Are they two different minds or two aspects of the same thing? Are they separable? Is one more fundamental than the other? If so, in what sense? These tended to be the kinds of questions which the Chan Buddhists were concerned with. Furthermore, the realization of the pure mind was considered an essential part of the goal for the Ch'an Buddhist.

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THE CHAN SCHOOL. *CHAPTER 26: THE ZEN (CH'AN) SCHOOL OF SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT*

1963, In Chan, Wing-tsit (ed.), *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.  
Princeton University Press

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary text for referencing

**Abstract:** A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy covers the entire historical development of Chinese philosophy from its ancient origins to today, providing the most wide-ranging and authoritative English-language anthology of Chinese thought available. This superb book brings together key selections from all the great thinkers and schools in every period—ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary—and presents these texts in their entirety. Each selection is accompanied by explanatory aids and scholarly documentation that shed invaluable light on all aspects of Chinese thought. Featuring elegant and faithful translations of some of the most important classical writings, some translated here for the first time, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy is an indispensable resource for students, scholars, and anyone interested in Chinese philosophy and culture.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is Chan Buddhism's understanding of the pure mind and the defiled mind? How does Chan Buddhism's analysis of the mind depart from the consciousness-only school that we encountered in the previous session?
2. What are the main theoretical differences between the Southern and Northern School?
3. Is enlightenment, the transformation from consciousness to wisdom, a worthwhile goal to pursue?
4. Do you think having a non-discriminatory mind is valuable?
5. How do you understand the motto 'This mind is the Buddha?' Can Chan Buddhism's teaching on non-discrimination transform society?

## WEEK 6. PHILOSOPHY OF MIND IN NEO-CONFUCIANISM I: THE CONCEPT OF HEARTMIND (XIN 心)

Neo-Confucianism refers to the revival of classical Confucianism developed between 11th and 18th centuries in China, spanning over four dynasties in Chinese history, Song Yuan Ming and Qing dynasties. This is a period of relative stability and prosperity. The population grows from estimated 90 million to 200 million by the time of the Ming Dynasty and to 300 million by the end of 18th century in the Qing Dynasty. With the expansion of population there was a growth of cities, commerce, the flourishing of art and the emergence of a national economy. Neo-Confucianism was a new form of Confucianism resulting from the challenge and influence of Daoism and Buddhism within Chinese literati circles.

One prominent neo-Confucian school, the School of Mind was founded by Wang Yangming. He contends that morality is grounded in the individual's moral reflection; emphasises cultivation of 'Liangzhi', the innate faculty of pure knowing or moral consciousness. The school of mind contends that morality is grounded in the individual's moral reflection and cultivation of the human mind.

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ANGLE, STEPHEN C. *NEO-CONFUCIANISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION*.

2017, Cambridge, UK: Polity.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** Chapter 4: Heartmind

**Abstract:** Neo-Confucianism is a philosophically sophisticated tradition weaving classical Confucianism together with themes from Buddhism and Daoism. It began in China around the eleventh century CE, played a leading role in East Asian cultures over the last millennium, and has had a profound influence on modern Chinese society. Based on the latest scholarship but presented in accessible language, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction* is organized around themes that are central in Neo-Confucian philosophy, including the structure of the cosmos, human nature, ways of knowing, personal cultivation, and approaches to governance. The authors thus accomplish two things at once: they present the Neo-Confucians in their own, distinctive terms; and they enable contemporary readers to grasp what is at stake in the great Neo-Confucian debates.

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LIU, JEELOO. *THE METAPHYSICAL AS THE ETHICAL: A PRAGMATIST READING OF WANG YANGMING'S "THE MIND IS THE PRINCIPLE"*

2024, *Asian Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1):1-29.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** This paper explores a late-Ming Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming's (1472–1529) philosophical assertions showcasing the pivotal role that human mind plays in shaping our worldview. Wang Yangming's view—especially his declaration that the Mind is the Principle—emphasizes that the human mind is the sole foundation of moral principles and that worldly affairs are identified with human ethical practices. This position has been contentious both in his times and among contemporary scholars. While some critics, notably Chen Lai, find Wang's synthesis of the ethical and the metaphysical realm problematic, others like Wing-tsit Chan view Wang Yangming's philosophy as verging on subjective idealism. Both Chen and Chan argue that Wang Yangming commits the fallacy of the conflation of fact and value. In this paper, I defend Wang Yangming's ethics-oriented metaphysics against such criticisms. I will engage a comparative study between Wang Yangming's perspective and pragmatist metaphysics—a modern philosophical stance which sees metaphysics as intertwining with human ethics and practices. Building upon this comparative study, this paper aims to highlight the intrinsic bond between metaphysics and ethics and to advocate for the centrality of ethics in shaping the very foundation of metaphysical thinking. The conclusion of this paper is that Wang Yangming's metaphysics aligns with

commonsense realism, rather than with subjective idealism. His metaphysics is not a confused worldview that conflates fact with value, nor is it subjective idealism. Instead, it is a metaphysics with the ethical grounding of human engagements and humanistic concerns.

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**XIANGSHAN, LU. *RECORDED SAYINGS***

2009, In Ivanhoe, Philip (ed.), *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary text for referencing

**Abstract:** This volume provides selected translations from the writings of Lu Xiangshan; Wang Yangming; and the Platform Sutra, a work which had profound influence on neo-Confucian thought. Each of these three sections is preceded by an introduction that sketches important features of the history, biography, and philosophy of the author and explores some of the main features and characteristics of his work. The range of genres represented—letters, recorded sayings, essays, meditations and poetry—provide the reader with insights into the philosophical and stylistic themes of this fascinating and influential branch of neo-Confucian thought.

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**YANGMING, WANG. *INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRACTICAL LIVING***

2014, In Tiwald, Justin and Van Norden, Bryan (ed.), *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century*. Cambridge: Hackett

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary texts for referencing

**Abstract:** An exceptional contribution to the teaching and study of Chinese thought, this anthology provides fifty-eight selections arranged chronologically in five main sections: Han Thought, Chinese Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, Late Imperial Confucianism, and the early Twentieth Century. The editors have selected writings that have been influential, that are philosophically engaging, and that can be understood as elements of an ongoing dialogue, particularly on issues regarding ethical cultivation, human nature, virtue, government, and the underlying structure of the universe. Within those topics, issues of contemporary interest, such as Chinese ideas about gender and the experiences of women, are brought to light.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the neo-confucian understanding of the heartmind (xin)? What is the connection between heartmind and the Pattern (li)?
2. What are neo-confucians' main criticisms of Xunzi and Buddhist conception of the heartmind?
3. Some neo-confucians hold the identity thesis that heartmind is Pattern. What are the arguments in favour of the identity thesis? Explain the difference between this view and that of Zhu Xi's.
4. What are the implications of the identity thesis? Identify some potential worries for the identity thesis.
5. How do neo-confucians address the worry about lacking an independent standard of assessment? Do they have a plausible response?

## WEEK 7. PHILOSOPHY OF MIND IN NEO-CONFUCIANISM II: MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Zhu Xi was the most influential neo-Confucian in China. Zhu researched and reflected on the received Five Classics (The Book of Change, Odes, History, Rites, and Spring and Autumn Annals), and compiled, edited, and commented on a compendium of essential Confucian texts, the Great Learning (Daxue), the Analects (Lunyu) of Confucius, the Book of Mencius (Mengzi), and the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong), titled the Four Books (Sishu). His editing and commentaries to Confucian classics became the orthodox and served as the curriculum of the civil service exam from 1313 to 1905.

Central to Zhu's moral psychology is the idea of Li and Qi. Li is the principle or pattern that is in everything and governs the universe. Each person's heartmind contains a perfect li. As such, individuals are capable of acting in perfect accordance with morality. However, while li is the underlying structure, qi is also part of everything. Qi obscures our perfect moral nature. The task of moral cultivation is to clear our qi. If our qi is clear and balanced, then we will act in a perfectly moral way. Zhu thinks human desires obstruct us from following the principle and should be eliminated. Contrary to Zhu's view, Wang Fuzhi believes that natural emotions and desires play an important role. He develops an account of moral psychology that has been characterized by commentators as moral sentimentalism. Moral sentiments under reflection lead an agent to act in accordance with the heavenly principle.

For the primary texts of Zhu Xi, focus on the following sections: "The Mind" and "The Mind, The Nature, and The Feelings", pp. 628–32.

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### LIU, JEELOO. *NEO-CONFUCIANISM: METAPHYSICS, MIND, AND MORALITY*

2017, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Fragment:** Chapters 5 and 7

**Abstract:** Solidly grounded in Chinese primary sources, *Neo Confucianism: Metaphysics, Mind, and Morality* engages the latest global scholarship to provide an innovative, rigorous, and clear articulation of neo-Confucianism and its application to Western philosophy. Contextualizes neo-Confucianism for contemporary analytic philosophy by engaging with today's philosophical questions and debates. Based on the most recent and influential scholarship on neo-Confucianism, and supported by primary texts in Chinese and cross-cultural secondary literature. Presents a cohesive analysis of neo-Confucianism by investigating the metaphysical foundations of neo-Confucian perspectives on the relationship between human nature, human mind, and morality. Offers innovative interpretations of neo-Confucian terminology and examines the ideas of eight major philosophers, from Zhou Dunyi and Cheng-Zhu to Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi. Approaches neo-Confucian concepts in an penetrating yet accessible way.

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### XI, ZHU. *CHAPTER 34 PART B: THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHU HSI*

1963, In Chan, Wing-tsit (ed.), *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.  
Princeton University Press

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

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### FUZZHI, WANG. *CHAPTER 36: WANG FUZZHI*

1963, In Chan, Wing-tsit (ed.), *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.  
Princeton University Press

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Fragment:** Primary texts for referencing

**Abstract:** A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy covers the entire historical development of Chinese philosophy from its ancient origins to today, providing the most wide-ranging and authoritative English-language anthology of Chinese thought available. This superb book brings together key selections from all the great thinkers and schools in every period—ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary—and presents these texts in their entirety. Each selection is accompanied by explanatory aids and scholarly documentation that shed invaluable light on all aspects of Chinese thought. Featuring elegant and faithful translations of some of the most important classical writings, some translated here for the first time, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy is an indispensable resource for students, scholars, and anyone interested in Chinese philosophy and culture.

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WANG, KAILI. *ON SELF-DECEPTION: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ZHU XI'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY*

2021, *Asian Philosophy* 31 (4):414-429

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** In order to construct a satisfactory theory of cheng-yi 誠意, Zhu Xi 朱熹 develops an account of how self-deception is possible—a profound problem that has puzzled many philosophers. In Zhu's opinion, zhi 知 can be divided into two categories: a priori knowing and empirical knowing. The further division of empirical knowing defines three sorts of self-deception: the self-deception caused by one's ignorance, the self-deception caused by one's superficial knowing, and the self-deception that may occur when one acquires genuine knowledge. In this paper, I will construct a theoretical model of self-deception that follows Zhu's criterial definition of self-deception in *Daxue Zhangju* 大學章句, thereby accounting for the possibility of these three sorts of self-deception. Better understanding of Zhu's conception of self-deception could, moreover, open fruitful avenues for further work on his metaphysics and moral psychology.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What roles do emotions play in Zhu Xi's moral psychology? How does his view differ from that of Mengzi's?
2. What is the standard for assessing emotions? Do you find the standard of evaluation plausible?
3. Liu labels Wang Fuzhi as a moral sentimentalist. What does she mean by that? What are the differences between emotions and sentiments according to Wang?
4. Wang famously argues against Zhu Xi's doctrine of 'preserving the principle (pattern), extirpating desires' (存天理, 灭人欲). What are his reasons?
5. If our actions are guided by moral sentiments which can be inappropriate or misapplied, how then are we supposed to distinguish the right actions from the wrong ones and act accordingly?