

Contestation of Values in Classical Chinese Thought

01:090:295:01 Index# 18516
Professor Tao Jiang, SAS - Religion
T 9:50a-12:50p
Honors College Rm N106
College Ave Campus

This course will count towards the Religion Major and Minor

What makes us human? What is a good life? What is proper relationship with others, from family, friends, strangers and spirits? Is our relationship with others contingent to or constitutive of us as humans? What should one do when one's parent or child commits a crime? Is political office a higher calling that is worth sacrificing one's life or, rather, is it just an expression of our egoism and hence a waste of life? What is the source of political legitimacy? Is the state the solution to the ethical, social and political malaise of human society or is it the very culprit of human suffering? These are some of the questions classical Chinese thinkers were grappling with.

The classical period from the time of Confucius in 6th century to the unification under the first emperor in 221 BCE has always been considered the single most creative and vibrant chapter in Chinese intellectual history. Works attributed to Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Han Feizi and many others have laid the foundation of Chinese thought. The answers by classical Chinese thinkers to the questions listed above are sometimes familiar but often surprising and unexpected. The classical debate is consequential in shaping the Chinese identity and the subsequent development of Chinese intellectual discourse all the way to the present with serious implications on the contemporary Chinese project of democracy and rule of law. As testimony to their enduring lure, in recent decades many Chinese intellectuals, and even leading politicians, have turned to those classics, especially Confucian texts, for alternative sources of moral authority and political legitimacy.

In this course we will closely examine major philosophical texts, traditionally categorized as Confucian, Mohist, Daoist (Taoist) and Legalist. We will see how three core values, namely humaneness, justice and freedom, were debated among the classical thinkers and how the contestations shaped the subsequent development of Chinese thought; we will also explore the implications of the classical debate on the modern Chinese project of democracy and rule of law within a changing material and intellectual landscape as we moved deeper into the 21st century.

DR. TAO JIANG is an associate professor in the Department of Religion. He specializes in classical Chinese thought and Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy. He is the author of *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind* (University of

Hawaii Press) and the lead editor in *The Reception and Rendition of Freud in China: China's Freudian Slip* (Routledge). He is finishing a monograph on classical Chinese thought. For more information visit: religion.rutgers.edu/tao-jiang