

The one source of all things

ASIA 80

When MW 2.45-4 pm.

Where Pearsons 102.

Instructor: Maddalena Poli

Office: Pearson 205; drop in hours: Wed after class

Course description

What is human nature? Chinese philosopher Zhang Zai (1020-1077) defined it as "the one source of all things." This is one of many definitions given by Chinese intellectuals, who emphasized different aspects of human nature to present arguments on moral behavior, political philosophy, affection theories, human interactions, etc. This course explores how the question of what human nature has been answered by philosophers from the fourth century BCE (when the debate first emerged) to the end of the imperial era, in the 19th century CE, including the challenges presented by the arrival of traditions foreign to the Chinese context, such as Buddhism. We will consider why the topic of human nature became a central one in philosophical expressions, and how varying cultural contexts brought out innovative redefinitions. By taking this course students will also learn to navigate major historical phases of Chinese premodern history.

Table of Contents

<i>In class policies</i>	2
<i>Covid Safety Awareness</i>	2
<i>Grading</i>	2
Build-your-own grade credits	3
<i>Textbooks, resources, methodology</i>	3
Textbooks	3
Online resources	3
<i>Schedule</i>	5

In class policies

Electronic devices: I do not object to using laptops or other electronic devices to take notes, check dates and information being discussed in class, but please make sure to mute you're your devices. You should also note that research has [shown](#) the use of note-writing more efficient to learning.

Accommodations: please reach out to me via email if you want to discuss any accommodations you require, and check the College's [accessibility resources](#). Information on wellness at Pomona is listed here, <https://www.pomona.edu/students/wellness>

Bonus cards: Semesters are busy. In my classes, you get **two** bonus "cards". A bonus card allows you not to be penalized for not having done the readings. You are still required to class and pay attention the discussion. Please let me know if you would like to use your card right before class starts.

Covid Safety Awareness

The College [response to COVID](#) aligns with those of Los Angeles County Department of Public Health According guidance. As such:

- All members of our community who are up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines are encouraged but not required, to wear masks in indoor public spaces.
- Members of our community who are not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines must wear a mask at all times in indoor public spaces.
- As always, members of the Pomona College community can choose to wear masks at any time.

For classrooms, masks are strongly recommended. Even if you feel confident being fully vaccinated and not wearing a mask, others may appreciate the you do. Furthermore, the beginning of the year is one of the busiest moments in terms of movement of people. I suggest that we start by wearing masks, properly covering nose and mouth, for the first three weeks of class. Starting Sept 12, we can monitor the situation with the [Case Dashboard](#).

Class attendance is required, but if you are experiencing symptoms, please stay home and get tested at the College's facilities. You can find location and hours [here](#). Email me, and I will work with you to ensure smooth continuity in class.

COVID may not be the only challenge. At any point, if you or your family members are experiencing any hardship that takes away from your health (physical and mental), safety and overall wellness, remember that there Pomona College provides support for you. Some of these resources are linked above; if you need help, email me and we will work together towards a solution.

Grading Participation 50% (this includes the in-class debates); Poster presentation 25%; weekly assignments 25% (Note: all assignments on Sakai, please post by 11AM of the day they are due). Most of the assignments will be in form of discussion on Sakai.

Build-your-own grade credits

The syllabus lists extra-credit assignments, but you can also take control of your grade by getting credit for in-class activities. For example, if there is a topic that you are particularly attracted to and/or relates to your major, we can organize a presentation in class. Other possibilities include, being discussion leader for one class; edit a discussion on human nature that does not include any perspective from Chinese philosophers (I can give some examples); make a short video like those linked in the syllabus.

Textbooks, resources, methodology All readings for this course will be available online. This course is organized by topics as opposed to chronological developments. However, this does not mean that historical circumstances are irrelevant, we will review them briefly. Here I provide textbooks and resources that you can use, some with some caution. Not all the resources listed here will be necessary for this course; I put them here for your reference.

Textbooks

Always get the newest edition of textbooks. All the following are good options. You are welcome to purchase them if you so wish; I have asked the library to put them on course reserve. They will also be put on course reserve in the library in Pearsons; one copy of Ebrey's book is also in my office, feel free to come get it for scans if you need.

- Patricia Ebrey. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*. 2nd ed. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Conrad Schirokauer and Miranda Brown, *A Brief History of Chinese Civilization* ISBN-13: 978- 0495913238
- Victor H. Mair et al., eds., *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), ISBN 9780824827854. This has brief introductions to the primary sources that can come in handy.

Online resources

- <https://ctext.org> for premodern Chinese sources. Some have also translations, now a bit outdated, but still reliable. Do not quote in academic writing, however, since the primary sources include errors. We can discuss research methods if needed later in the course.
- China Biographical Database <https://projects.ig.harvard.edu/cbdb> a database with information about individuals from the 7th to the 19th century.
- Modern China Biographical database <https://heurist.huma-num.fr/h6-alpha/?db=ModernChinaBiographicalDatabase&website&id=109237> Another bios database, focusing on 20th century.
- China Knowledge, <http://www.chinaknowledge.de> an excellent site that provides reliable information, with annotations on where this information was taken. Wikipedia is equally useful IF footnotes and references are provided.

- A visual sourcebook of Chinese Civilization
<https://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/>
- An online resource to contextualize geographically some of the topics discussed, such as <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/history/chinese-dynasty-map.cfm>
- The Database of Religious History, DRH, <https://religiondatabase.org/landing/> this is a great resource with entries by scholars, that are very accessible. Several of the primary sources discussed during the semester have been reviewed here (see links below).
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/index.html>. Good entries with references to explore more the topic.
- Pinyin vs. Wade-Giles conversion table. <https://libraries.indiana.edu/chinese-studies-pinyin-wade-giles-conversion-table> Read about these two different transcription systems [here](#), it's a comprehensive entry

Schedule

Week #1

- Aug 29 What is human nature? Course introduction
Readings: "[The moral animal. Virtue, vice, and human nature.](#)"
- Aug 31 Human nature in ancient China
Readings: *Xunzi's* "Human nature is bad" 性惡; *Mengzi* passages on human nature. Chapters by Goldin's *The Art of Chinese Philosophy* for context.

Week #2

- Sept 5 LABOR DAY. No class.
- Sept 7 Human nature in ancient China
Readings: "Natural dispositions come from endowment" (S. Cook's translation); *Zhuangzi's* passages (translated by Watson); watch "The butterfly dream" <https://youtu.be/2sg5zVch0Yw>
Goldin's *The Art of Chinese Philosophy* chapter 7 for background.

Week #3

- Sept 12 Guest talk.
- Sept 14 **Readings:** *Xunzi's* chapter on music; *Mozi's* chapter on music; "early discussions on music" by Paul Goldin (focus especially on the Great Preface to the *Book of Odes* 詩經序 and the passage from *Zhuangzi*).
NB: read *Mozi's* chapter first.

Fun assignment: Post one of your favorite pieces of music! Youtube link or song title will suffice. Let's listen to some music outside our tastes. Leave a comment to your peers after you have listened to the music their shared.

Week #4

Human nature and creativity in early China

- Sept 19 **Readings:** read the pomes from the *Lyrics of Chu* and *Book of Odes* (two Word docs in Sakai). None of these poems mentions directly human nature; yet it is expressed. How does it come through? How would you describe the poems?
- Sept 21 Go back to "Natural disposition comes from endowment," and identify those passages about emotions. The same goes for *Xunzi's* chapter on human nature and music, and chapter "The Way of Heaven" from *Zhuangzi*. Read also the additional passages from *Zhuangzi* uploaded on Sakai.

Listen to Robert Solomon, a famous scholar of philosophy who was among the first to develop a cognitive explanation for emotions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqLoMlz2PjU>

Week #5

Human nature and emotions in early China

Sept 26 **In class debate:**

As we have seen in the *Mengzi*, one of the ways in which rulers and philosophers were communicating during the Warring States was through dialogue. We do not know the details of the forms in which these dialogues took place, since all those that we can read seem embellished: the ruler is often asking really simple questions, and the philosophers talk uninterruptedly and always almost always win the argument. But discussions were very much a way through which they perfected and promoted their ideas, in similar ways to what we do in class today.

For this assignment, we will divide the class into three groups. One group will represent Xunzi; the second, Mencius; the third one will play the ruler. The “Xunzi group” and “Mengzi group” have the same task: go back to the writings of the person you are representing, and study what they argue about human nature. Consider the metaphors, the ideas, etc. In class, you will be asked to represent these ideas to convince the “Ruler group” that you are right.

The central question that should guide you is “How should one live?” The answer depends on the conception of human nature you are arguing for.

“Xunzi group”: use anything written by Xunzi that we have studied so far. His chapters are “Man’s nature is evil” and “on music”.

“Mengzi group”: use anything written by Mengzi that we have studied so far. The passages I selected, as well as the passages in Goldin’s chapter on Mengzi.

Both groups: You can use points made in other primary sources as well, if these are helpful to make your case. E.g., you can say

“the manuscript “Human nature” argues that... but if this were the case, it would not be possible to... so Xunzi is correct in saying that...”

“According to Zhuangzi... we agree, but this is not sufficient...”

“King group”: you get to review all readings, but you do not have to prepare an oral exposition of an argument. You do have to prepare a few questions, both to keep the discussion going. Needless to say, the questions have to be based on the readings (e.g., you cannot ask about prisons, of female nature,

since we have not discussed these topics so far).

This assignment evaluates 1) speaking 2) close reading of primary sources and usage of secondary sources.

Sept 28 Library tour. Learn to use library resources.

Week #6

Human nature and the law

Oct 3 The *Submitted Book of Doubtful Cases* 奏獻書, sections 4.4. “A mutilated man unwittingly marries an absconder”; 4.21 “A scribe of the commandant of the court overturns a sentence for illicit intercourse;” 4.22 “A cunning scribe solves a robbery and attempted murder” from volume two of *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China a study with critical edition and translation of the legal texts from Zhangjiashan tomb no. 247*, by Barbier-Low and Yates.

Oct 5 **MID TERM EVALUATION electronic! Bring your laptop**
Shuihudi manuscripts, from Remnants of Ch'in Law. Available via the Claremont Libraries, see link below. We go back in time slightly, as these reflect the legal system of the Qin dynasty, which preceded the Han Dynasty. We will focus on the section labeled as GROUP D, pages 120-182. Each translated passage begins with the letter D and is followed by a number. E.g., at page 120 you have D1 in bold. Read the following: D3, D4, D5, D7, D8, D9, D10, D11, D13, D14, D15, D16, D17, D24, D31, D35 TO D39, D42, D53, D59, D64, D80.

Week #7

Human nature and poetry in Medieval China

Oct 10 Poetry is a most important aspect of Chinese culture and elite social life. It also ties to human creativity. We have already discussed some readings about ideas about poetry, and its relationship to human nature. This week we jump to the 6th century, reading the *Literary Mind of the Carving Dragon* 文心雕龍. This is one of the few treatises on literary production from early on in Chinese history, authored by Liu Xie 劉勰. You will find references to the “Great Preface” to the *Book of Odes*, in particular the idea that emotions / feelings / affections are incredibly important in literature. Language, Liu Xie argues, is just the medium.

Readings: Paul Goldin, “what is *qi* and why was it a good idea?” from *The Art*

of *Chinese Philosophy* 2020. (Read **first** this chapter.)

“The nourishing of vitality” from the *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. By Liu Xie, translated by Vincent Yuchung Shih (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press/NYRB, New York Review Books, 2015).

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Note: *yang qi / yan c’hi* is 養氣 is “nourishing *qi*” or “nourishing vitality” – if you agree that “vitality” is a good translation for *qi*!

Octo 12 **Readings** “Emotions and literary expression 情采” from the *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. By Liu Xie, translated by Vincent Yuchung Shih (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press/NYRB, New York Review Books, 2015).

“Style and Nature 體性” from the *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. By Liu Xie, translated by Vincent Yuchung Shih (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press 2015).

Week 8

What makes us human? Human nature, language, and identity

Oct 17 No class. Fall break.

Oct 19 **Readings:** S. Yang, “‘Their Lands are Peripheral and Their Qi is Blocked Up’: The Uses of Environmental Determinism in Han and Tang Chinese Interpretations of the ‘Barbarians.’” In *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, 390 – 412
Watch this video, <https://www.youtube.com/embed/3-son3EJTrU?wmode=opaque> think about language, role of language in explicit knowledge (including the formation of cultural identity, political identity propaganda, and so on).

Week 9

Poster presentations by students

Week 10

Human nature and Buddhism

Oct 31 **Readings** 1) “Introduction” in *Chinese Buddhism*, by Chun-fang Yu. I will present on this one in class, but please focus on sections “early Buddhism” “Mahayana and the Spread of Buddhism;” feel free to skim other pages.
2) Unknown, “The impure natures of the Buddhas”, translated by Feng Yulan

- 3) Han Yu, "On human nature"
- 4) Han Yu, "A Memorial on the Relic of the Buddha," *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* pages 355-358.
- 5) Zhongmi, "On Humanity"

Extra reading: ["Is the self an illusion?"](#)

- Nov 2 "Buddhist doctrines and practices," in Ebrey's Chinese Civilization (stop at first column page 102; file in resource folder)
"Kamma, rebirth, and the non-self doctrine" in Gowans's Philosophy of the Buddha, pages 104-115 (link to library resource)

Week 11

Human Nature and Gender

- Nov 7 **Readings:** Ban Zhao, "Admonitions for Women", in *Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, pages 185-189.
"Women's virtues & vices", from Ebrey's *Chinese Civilization. A Sourcebook* (read "The mother of Mencius" and "letter from Feng Yang" only)
extra reading: "women & the problems they create".
- Nov 9 **Readings:** CHENG, HSIAO-WEN. 2018. "Before Sexual and Normal: Shifting Categories of Sexual Anomaly from Ancient to Yuan China." *Asia Major* 31 (2): 1-39.

Week 12

Human Nature and Neo-Confucianism

- Nov 14 **Readings:** 1) Wang Anshi, "On the origin of human nature"
2) Chapter 2 of Jiyan Qiao's dissertation *Human Nature and Governance*.
3) "Sima Guang's account of a debate at court", from *Chinese Civilization - a sourcebook*
- Nov 16 **Readings:** 1) Qiao's chapter 4, "Human Nature and the Limits of Government"
2) Su Shi's "Debating Yang Xiong"

Week 13

- Nov 21 IN-class debate.

Week 14

Women, Gender, and Human Nature in the Qing dynasty

Nov 28 **Readings:** Sommer, Matthew Harvey. 2013. "The Gendered Body in the Qing Courtroom." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22 (2): 281–311.

Nov 30 **Reading:** Liang Qichao, "On Women's Education."

Week 14

Concluding thoughts

Dec 5 E Machery, "A plea for Human nature" *Philosophical Psychology* 2008.
In *Metaphysics and the Origin of Species*, M Ghiselin refers to human nature as a superstition. Machery defends instead the notion of human nature. In doing the readings, think about the criticism raised towards the concept of human nature.

Dec 7 Coruse review.