

The PHI BETA KAPPA Society

VISITING



SCHOLAR
PROGRAM

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**PUBLIC LECTURE
OFFERINGS**

WHY CLASSICAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY STILL MATTERS

What is the best way to live a flourishing life? How does one make ethical choices? And what should we concretely do to live in a fuller and more inspiring way? Questions such as these were at the heart of philosophical debates in China. The answers that classical Chinese thinkers developed in response to these questions are among the most powerful in human history. The goal of this talk will be to ask what we can learn if we take some of these ideas seriously.

STOP TRYING TO FIND YOURSELF

When we ask ourselves how we can lead a fulfilled life, or when we give advice to others about the same, many of us will fall back on a seemingly straightforward recommendation: look within and find yourself. Find your true self. And, once you find yourself, devote yourself always to being sincere and authentic to who you truly are. Such an assumption has clearly liberatory possibilities. But what if it is also dangerously limiting? The goal of this talk will be to discuss these potential dangers and explore other possible approaches through an engagement with ideas that arose in classical China.

RITUAL AND HUMAN FLOURISHING: THEORIES FROM CLASSICAL CHINA

Theories of ritual and human flourishing that developed in classical China are among the most complex in world philosophy. This paper will explore these theories in relationship to those that have developed in recent Western thought. I will argue that the theories from classical China have much to offer contemporary discussions.

MICHAEL PUETT

HOW TO READ A TEXT, HOW TO READ THE WORLD: THEORIES FROM CLASSICAL CHINA

Over the course of the classical Chinese tradition, a complex set of understandings developed around ways to read and interpret both texts and the world around us. We will explore these approaches and discuss their larger implications.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

CLASSICAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

1. To explore some of the nuances of classical Chinese philosophy, we will read portions of the *Laozi* and explore the counter-intuitive implications of its philosophy.

CLASSICAL CHINESE POLITICAL THEORY

2. To explore aspects of classical Chinese political theory that may challenge some of our assumptions, we will read portions of the *Xunzi* and *Han Feizi* and discuss the implications of their arguments.

HOW TO READ A POEM - IN CLASSICAL CHINA, FOR EXAMPLE

3. To help us understand some of the complex approaches to reading texts in classical China, we will explore the surprising and counter-intuitive ways that poems were interpreted.