

Institute for Chinese Studies OCAPA Lecture

The Pleasure Potential and its Political Dimensions

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EAST ASIAN
STUDIES
CENTER

Friday, Feb. 7, 4-5:30 pm
Mendenhall Lab 115



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“Pleasure,” wrote Oscar Wilde, the nineteenth-century English aesthete, “is the only thing worth having a theory about.” More recently, Andre Malraux’s *The Temptation of the West* poses the question, “Of all his ideas, is there any one more revealing of a man’s sensibilities than his concept of pleasure?” Either formulation could be plausibly ascribed to the most important classical masters in the region we now call China, since they deemed pleasure one of the most effective rhetorical tools to motivate right action, as each defined it, as well as to discern a person’s character.

My talk will discuss the ways in which pleasure theories in early China differed substantially from those developed in early Greece; also the vocabulary distinctions in classical Chinese that reflected the latest scientific concepts of the time. Finally, I will situate the discourse pleasure in relation both to the more negative emotions (anger, fear, and distrust among them), and the role of the emotions in the court debates on statecraft.



Free and open to the public
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