

NGO “Along the Silk Roads” — Center for
Chinese Culture

Moon Pavilion · 月阁

Cultural Programme Portfolio

2026–2027

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The portfolio brings together three principal programme formats developed by “Along the Silk Roads” — Center for Chinese Culture. Moon Pavilion · 月阁 is their principal home venue, while selected programmes can also be adapted for cooperation with partner institutions and other venues.

I Cultural Activities

Accessible cultural programmes combining a focused introduction with an activity, object, puzzle or other form of participation.

Who Lives on the Moon?

Mid-Autumn Legends and the Moon Palace
A Mid-Autumn Puzzle at Moon Pavilion · 月阁

Beyond Red: Chinese Colours

Edition I — What Colour Is Moon White?
Edition II — How Do You Name a Colour?
Edition III — Can a Poem Have a Colour?

Reading the Dragon and Fenghuang

A Forest at Night

How Did Plants Become Models of Character?

II Moon Pavilion Reading Club

A reading programme organised in thematic cycles. Each session stands alone and requires no prior knowledge.

First Cycle — Reading the Strange

Early Encounters with the Strange

Strange Tales of the Tang

Foxes, Ghosts and People in Liaozhai
The Qing Still Has More Strangeness

A Story Travels

The Strange Is Still Here: Contemporary Chinese Horror

Between the Strange and Poetry

Second Cycle — Poetry

III Thematic Encounters

Guided cultural evenings centred on Chinese history, literature, mythology and cultural traditions, with selected comparative encounters.

Her Story Encounters

What Happened to Her Name?

Who Wrote the Rules?

What Shape Does Fear Take?

Chinese Cultural History and Mythology

Can You Sue a God?

The Chinese Netherworld

The Mythology Beneath the Mythology

Comparative Encounters

What's a Mountain Worth? — Mount Tai and Lovćen

The Three Teachings

Confucianism

Daoism

Buddhism

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I Cultural Activities

The following programme concepts have been developed by “Along the Silk Roads” — Center for Chinese Culture as accessible introductions to particular aspects of Chinese culture. No previous knowledge of China or the Chinese language is required. Each activity begins with a clear question that a general audience can enter easily, while the cultural material behind it remains specific and well grounded.

Who Lives on the Moon?

Mid-Autumn Legends and the Moon Palace

This programme introduces the Mid-Autumn Festival through the stories connected with the Moon Palace. It begins with 八月十五, the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, and then follows several figures that became associated with the moon in Chinese tradition.

Chang’e, the Jade Rabbit and Wu Gang form the main narrative line. Their stories also offer a way to look at how familiar Mid-Autumn traditions developed over time. The Jade Rabbit, for example, appears in earlier traditions connected with the Queen Mother of the West before becoming part of the lunar world associated with Chang’e. Wu Gang brings the osmanthus tree into the story, while other lunar figures can be introduced more briefly where they help complete the picture.

A short quiz would allow participants to work with the stories during the gathering instead of receiving all the material through an introduction.

The practical part is the preparation of a sachet 香囊. Participants first encounter the ingredients through their scent and learn why certain plants have been selected for the activity, with particular attention to the Jade Rabbit grinding herbs and the osmanthus associated with the Moon Palace. They then choose the ingredients for their own pouch.

The event would be accompanied by *Echoes of Moonlight II: Who Lives on the Moon?*, a short bilingual companion booklet containing the stories and cultural material introduced during the programme. Participants could take the booklet home together with their 香囊 and return to the stories in their own time.

A Mid-Autumn Puzzle at Moon Pavilion · 月阁

八月十五 · *Unlock the Night of Reunion*

This programme approaches Mid-Autumn through a guided cultural puzzle game for a small group. Participants move through three connected stations and gradually discover the numbers 8–1–5. At the end, the three digits become 八月十五, the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month.

The first station begins with early forms of Chinese characters and the modern character 明. A hidden clue leads participants to Li Bai's 《静夜思》 in a real book from the Moon Pavilion library. The second station draws on the story of Houyi and the ten suns and introduces the Ten Heavenly Stems through the structure of the puzzle. The final station uses mirror-reversed Chinese characters on model mooncakes together with the phases of the growing moon.

Each station provides the information needed to solve it, so previous knowledge of Chinese is not required. The cultural explanations remain short while the group is working and can be developed further once the puzzle has been completed.

The final code opens a locked box containing mooncakes and osmanthus tea. The reveal connects 8–1–5 with the date of the festival and with 团圆, the idea of reunion that lies at the centre of Mid-Autumn.

The programme gives participants a way to encounter Chinese writing and festival traditions through active problem-solving, while the tea and mooncakes afterwards provide time to return to the stories and references that appeared during the game.

Beyond Red: Chinese Colours

A three-edition series concluding with a 漂漆扇 floating-colour fan activity

The series looks beyond familiar explanations of Chinese colour based mainly on symbolism. Each edition approaches colour through a different question, while the recurring fan activity gives participants a way to work with the colours discussed during the programme.

Edition I — What Colour Is Moon White?

The first edition begins with a simple surprise: 月白, literally “moon white”, may appear as a pale blue. From there, the programme introduces 青 qīng and several colour names in which it appears, including 粉青, 梅子青 and 翠青. 青 does not correspond neatly to either blue or green, and its appearance changes according to the word in which it is used.

Museum objects and material examples would help participants compare the colour as it appears on silk or beneath a porcelain glaze. The purpose is to show how direct translation can give only part of the information contained in a Chinese colour name, while the object itself provides another part.

For the 漂漆扇 activity, participants would work from a limited range of colours prepared around the examples introduced during the event. Their fan therefore develops from one of the colour names they have just encountered.

Edition II — How Do You Name a Colour?

The second edition turns to the names themselves and the images behind them. 海天霞, “Sea-Sky Rosy Cloud”, was a Ming court colour described as almost white with a slight red tint. Its name gives the colour an image that a simple label such as “pale pink” would lose. The way it was worn also matters: sources describe the effect of a pale 海天霞 inner garment seen through light blue or green gauze.

Other examples could include 天水碧, connected with Southern Tang court tradition, and 鸦青, whose name evokes the dark surface of crow feathers. 纁 offers an older colour term from a different context. These examples allow the discussion to move between the names people gave colours and the materials on which those colours appeared.

The main question is therefore how a colour came to be called something as distinctive as “Sea-Sky Rosy Cloud” or “Crow Qing”, and what that name tells us about the way the colour was seen.

During the practical activity, participants would choose from a limited set based on the colours discussed and combine two of them on a 漂漆扇. They may then give their new combination a contemporary name of their own.

Edition III — Can a Poem Have a Colour?

The final edition brings colour into Chinese poetry and literary writing. A small selection could range from early texts such as the Book of Odes and Chu Ci to Tang and Song works, with each passage introduced briefly enough for participants to understand its setting and imagery.

Some of the examples already considered include 东方既白 from Su Shi, where the eastern sky has begun to grow light, and 暮山紫 from Wang Bo, where evening mountains appear purple through gathering mist. 秋水共长天一色, also from Wang Bo, raises a particularly interesting visual question: what colour could belong at once to autumn water and the distant sky?

The literary discussion comes first. Participants consider the scene and the language before deciding which colours they imagine. They are not shown a fixed modern swatch as the answer.

For this edition, the available range of colours can be broader. Each participant chooses a passage, creates a 漂漆扇 based on their own reading of it, and gives the resulting palette a name. Different interpretations of the same line can then be compared.

Across the series, the participant's role gradually changes. The first edition asks them to work from an existing Chinese colour name. The second allows them to combine colours introduced during the programme. The third gives much more room for personal interpretation because the starting point is a literary image rather than a prescribed shade.

Reading the Dragon and Fenghuang

Classical Descriptions and Visual Form

Dragons and fenghuang are immediately recognisable symbols of Chinese culture, yet the way traditional texts describe their bodies is much less familiar.

The programme would begin with selected written descriptions and ask participants to look again at creatures they may think they already know. A traditional description of the dragon, for example, compares different parts of its body with those of real animals: the head with a camel, the horns with a deer and the eyes with a rabbit, alongside several other comparisons. A

selected description of the fenghuang would be approached in the same way.

The activity would use complete, visually coherent images of the dragon and fenghuang. Participants identify the animal resemblances and place explanatory cards around the image. Historical representations can then be compared with the written descriptions to see how artists transformed these comparisons into creatures that still appear unified rather than assembled from separate animals.

The purpose is to introduce Chinese mythological creatures through the relationship between text and image, while also giving participants a more precise understanding of the fenghuang beyond the usual translation as a “Chinese phoenix”.

A Forest at Night

Dreams in Chinese Tradition

The event begins with the Chinese character for “dream” and follows its development through different stages of writing. Early oracle-bone forms contain imagery associated with a person, a bed and altered vision during sleep. The Shuowen Jiezi provides another stage in the history of the character, followed by the later traditional form and the simplified 梦 used today.

The simplified character 梦 can be visually divided into 林, “forest”, and 夕, “evening” or “night”. This gives the title *A Forest at Night*, while the programme makes clear that this is a memorable visual reading of the later form rather than the original explanation of the character.

From writing, the event moves to the six kinds of dreams recorded in the Zhouli. Participants encounter an early system in which dreams could arise from different conditions, including waking thought or fear. Later examples introduce dream interpretation and several ways people responded to dreams that felt significant or troubling.

The practical element would be a specially designed illustrated postcard. Participants may record an image or fragment from a dream and decide how they would classify or respond to it. The card is placed inside an envelope and remains private unless the participant chooses to share it.

The event would also be accompanied by *Echoes of Moonlight III — A Forest at Night: A Short Companion to Dreams in Chinese Tradition*, a short bilingual booklet containing the material introduced during the programme. It would include the development of the character 梦, the six kinds of dreams and selected examples connected with dream interpretation and responses to troubling dreams. Participants could take the booklet home and return to the material in their own time.

The purpose is to introduce dreams as a subject with its own history in Chinese thought and everyday practice, while leaving modern psychological interpretation outside the scope of the event.

How Did Plants Become Models of Character?

Chinese flower and plant symbolism

Chinese flower and plant symbolism is often introduced through fixed equations: one plant stands for one virtue. This programme begins earlier in the process by asking what writers and artists first noticed in the plants themselves.

The event focuses first on the orchid and bamboo before turning to plum blossom. The orchid offers the image of fragrance that remains even when nobody is present to appreciate it. Bamboo raises the question of whether flexibility can coexist with uprightness. Plum blossom opens while winter has not yet fully passed. These physical qualities help explain why the plants later became associated with particular ideas of character.

The Four Gentlemen and the Three Friends of Winter are introduced afterwards. This makes it possible to ask why bamboo and plum belong to both groupings and to show that a plant does not carry one fixed meaning in every context.

The peony then brings a different setting into the discussion, associated with public admiration and the enthusiasm surrounding its flowering in Tang cities. This prevents the programme from reducing Chinese flower culture to moral symbolism alone.

The final section introduces selected principles associated with *Song-style flower arrangement*. Participants work with the existing direction of a branch and consider the role of empty space before making a small arrangement based on a relationship such as upright and bending or visible and hidden.

The purpose is to show how observation of the natural world became part of a cultural language of character, and how the same attention to the individual plant can continue into the arrangement itself.

II Moon Pavilion Reading Club

Reading the Strange — First Cycle

The first Reading Club cycle will explore Chinese writing about the strange across different periods. Selected stories will bring participants into worlds where the ordinary can open unexpectedly onto transformation, unusual beings, other realms, religious ideas and local beliefs. The texts also preserve traces of everyday life and cultural imagination that are often encountered most vividly through narrative itself.

The amount of reading for each meeting will remain manageable. Some gatherings will use several very short pieces, while others will concentrate on a smaller number of developed stories. Conversation will be informal, with an optional activity where it fits naturally with the texts.

Each session stands alone, so participants may attend one meeting, several, or the full cycle. No prior knowledge is required. Reading materials will be shared in advance.

Reading the Strange I — Early Encounters with the Strange

The first meeting will begin with early zhiguai 志怪, centred on selections from Gan Bao's 《搜神记》 Soushen Ji.

Several short accounts will introduce participants to different kinds of unusual occurrence: encounters between the living and supernatural beings, transformations, anomalies and events whose explanation belongs to a world in which the visible and unseen remain closely connected.

Their short form makes them particularly suitable for opening the Reading Club. Participants can read several pieces without a heavy preparation requirement and then discuss which stories stayed with them, what they

found unsettling or amusing, and what kind of world the accounts seem to assume.

After the discussion, the Strange Tale Wheel can be introduced for the first time. Its rotating circles produce elements of a possible strange story — a person, setting, moment and unusual event. Anyone who wishes can improvise a short tale aloud or write something down.

Reading the Strange II — Strange Tales of the Tang

The second meeting will move into the Tang dynasty and deliberately bring together different forms of strange narrative.

Selections from Duan Chengshi's Nuogao ji will be read alongside Tang chuanqi 传奇, with the Lu Xun Tang Song Chuanqi Ji anthology providing another rich source for the evening.

This gives participants the chance to encounter brief strange notices beside stories that develop characters and situations over a much larger narrative space. The meeting can therefore show the variety that already existed within Tang writing about the unusual without forcing it into a simple literary progression.

The Strange Tale Wheel can return once more, with a few elements adapted to the Tang material encountered during the evening.

Reading the Strange III — Foxes, Ghosts and Humans in Liaozhai

The third meeting will be devoted to Pu Songling's 《聊斋志异》 Liaozhai Zhiyi.

A small selection of stories with different moods will introduce the remarkable range of Pu Songling's strange world. Foxes, ghosts and other supernatural figures enter relationships shaped by very human concerns, while the boundary between ordinary society and the strange remains remarkably permeable.

After the discussion, participants may respond visually to one of the stories. Using watercolour, ink or pencil, they can work from an image, colour or atmosphere that remained with them after reading. The response can be abstract or figurative and remains entirely their own.

Reading the Strange IV – The Qing Still Has More Strangeness

The fourth meeting will continue in the Qing dynasty through selections from Yuan Mei's 《子不语》 Zibuyu and Ji Yun's 《阅微草堂笔记》 Yuewei Caotang Bijī.

Placed beside one another, the two collections offer another experience of the Qing strange world and allow participants to discover voices very different from Pu Songling's.

The stories can open naturally into questions of morality, religious belief, unusual phenomena and the porous relationship between everyday experience and unseen forces. A short visual response can again follow the conversation, based on whichever story or impression the participant wishes to carry further.

Reading the Strange V – A Story Travels

This meeting will follow one story, motif or kind of supernatural encounter through different periods.

The texts will be chosen around a genuine connection between versions, allowing participants to watch what happens when a story passes into another literary context. Details may disappear, new characters may appear, and the meaning or atmosphere of the same basic encounter may change considerably.

This meeting can draw from the collections already encountered during the first four gatherings and introduce one or two additional sources where useful.

Reading the Strange VI – The Strange Is Still Here

Contemporary Chinese Horror

The final meeting of the first cycle will bring the strange into contemporary writing through selected stories from Sinophagia: A Celebration of Chinese Horror, edited and translated by Xueting Christine Ni.

Several contrasting stories will be chosen so that participants encounter different contemporary sources of unease and strangeness.

Coming after the classical and Qing meetings, this gathering gives the group an opportunity to recognise echoes where they genuinely find them and to

notice how completely different modern fears can also be. Between the Strange and Poetry

Reading the Strange VII – Between the Strange and Poetry

A transitional Reading Club meeting draws on selected poems from the Quan Tang Shi 《全唐诗》 attributed to ghosts, immortals and other unusual voices.

This meeting would extend the exploration of the strange into poetry and introduce poetry as the next major direction of the Reading Club. It could also open a broader conversation about voice and authorship in the vast body of Tang poetry.

Second Reading Club Cycle – Poetry

The second cycle is planned around Chinese poetry.

Possible meetings include selections from the Book of Odes 《诗经》 and Chu Ci 《楚辞》, followed by Tang poetry and Song poetry. Each gathering would concentrate on a carefully chosen group of works around a theme, voice or particular way of seeing the world.

The aim is to let participants spend time with the poems themselves while also discovering the cultural world carried within them.

Later Reading Club Directions

The Reading Club can continue to move between periods and literary forms, with each cycle developing its own subject and rhythm.

III Thematic Encounters

Thematic Encounters are guided cultural evenings centred on a particular subject from Chinese history, literature, mythology or cultural tradition. Some focus entirely on China, while others place Chinese and Montenegrin traditions in dialogue when the comparison forms part of the concept itself.

The encounters are developed for a general audience and each can be attended independently. Some also belong to a continuing miniseries, allowing a subject to be explored over several meetings.

Her Story Encounters

The Her Story encounters continue Moon Pavilion's exploration of women in Chinese history and literature. Historical records, literary traditions and individual texts provide different ways of looking at how women were remembered, represented and expected to live.

Two of the encounters also bring Chinese material into dialogue with Montenegrin or South Slavic traditions.

What Happened to Her Name?

This encounter looks at what happens to women's names in historical and literary memory.

Chinese examples are placed beside Montenegrin and South Slavic ones, beginning with women whose personal names disappeared behind family relationships or social position. The Widow Qing of Ba 巴寡妇清 is remembered through her status as a widow. Hasanaginica survives through the name of her husband, while Batrićeva sestra enters Gorski Vijenac through her brother.

The evening also considers women whose names survived for a very different reason. Zheng Xiu 郑袖, Mo Xi 妹喜, Da Ji 妲己 and Bao Si 褒姒 entered later narratives in ways that connected their names with political failure or dynastic collapse.

The encounter therefore looks at several forms of historical memory: a name may disappear, survive only through someone else, or remain because later generations made it carry a particular judgement.

The final discussion turns towards the participants themselves and asks whether they can think of a woman in their own family whose personal name has been lost, or who is remembered mainly through her relationship to someone else.

Who Wrote the Rules?

This encounter centres on Ban Zhao 班昭 and her 《女诫》 Nüjie (Lessons for Women).

Ban Zhao completed important parts of the 《汉书》 Book of Han after the death of her brother Ban Gu 班固 and later became a respected teacher at the imperial court. She was also the author of a short text written for her daughters that became one of the most influential works on women's conduct in Chinese history.

Selected passages from the Nüjie allow participants to encounter the text itself. Particular attention is given to Ban Zhao's argument for women's education and to the sections concerning behaviour within marriage and the household. The Four Virtues introduced during the Spring Light Yaji return here in their original textual context.

The evening also considers the circumstances in which Ban Zhao wrote the work: a mother preparing her daughters for marriage and for life in another household. The later history of the Nüjie raises a further question about what can happen when advice written for a particular moment becomes a model applied over many centuries.

The encounter ends by asking what changes when the person writing rules that may limit women is herself an exceptionally educated woman who understood those limitations from within.

What Shape Does Fear Take?

This comparative encounter places the Chinese fox spirit 狐狸精 beside the South Slavic vila.

The Chinese side follows the fox through different periods of literature and tradition. Early sources present foxes as strange and powerful beings, while later stories increasingly bring them into human relationships. In Ming and Qing literature, the fox may appear as a threatening presence, a deceptive woman or a sympathetic lover.

The vila belongs to a different cultural setting. Her power is associated strongly with her own space, particularly mountains, springs and places marked by the vilino kolo. Stories about the vila often turn on what happens when a human being crosses a boundary that belongs to her.

The comparison gradually reveals a difference between the two figures. The fox can enter the human household and conceal what she is. The vila remains sovereign within a world of her own and becomes dangerous when someone else enters it.

The final discussion asks which fear feels more familiar: the fear that something inhuman has already crossed into the human world, or the fear of a powerful being who has no need to enter it.

Chinese Cultural History and Mythology

Can You Sue a God?

This encounter explores ideas of divine accountability through the Chinese City God 城隍 Chenghuang.

The City God occupied a defined place within local administration of the divine world and could be imagined through concepts familiar from human government, including office and jurisdiction.

A seventeenth-century case from Nanjing introduces a man who brought a formal complaint against a local deity. The evening also draws on Pu Songling's 蒲松龄 《聊斋志异》 Liaozhai Zhiyi, particularly the story 《吴令》, in which a magistrate disciplines a City God for allowing costly ceremonies to burden the local population.

A further example comes from the Sichuan opera piece 《打城隍》 Beating the City God, where the same cultural logic becomes the basis of comedy.

Together, these cases provide a way of looking at how administrative ideas could extend into relations between human beings and divine authority.

The Chinese Netherworld

Courts, Judges and the River of Forgetfulness

This encounter explores the Chinese netherworld as a cultural system that developed over centuries.

Earlier traditions associated the realm beyond ordinary human life with places such as 黄泉 Huangquan and Mount Tai 泰山. With the spread of Buddhism, ideas of karma and rebirth became part of this evolving picture, while later traditions gave the netherworld an increasingly elaborate administrative form.

The Ten Courts form the central framework of the evening. Figures such as King Yanluo 阎罗王 appear alongside the functionaries associated with the passage through the netherworld, including Ox-Head and Horse-Face 牛头马面.

The final part centres on Meng Po 孟婆 and the Naihe Bridge 奈何桥. Before rebirth, the soul drinks the soup of forgetfulness and leaves the memories of the previous life behind.

The encounter therefore brings together ideas of judgement and rebirth with one of the most evocative questions in Chinese afterlife tradition: what remains of a person when memory is gone?

The Mythology Beneath the Mythology

This encounter explores some of the older and less familiar mythic traditions preserved in the 《山海经》 Shanhaijing and related early texts.

Figures including Nüba 女魃, Yinglong 应龙, Gun 鲧, Xingtian 刑天, Jingwei 精卫 and Kuafu 夸父 reveal a mythic world in which great actions often leave consequences behind. Floods remain unfinished, landscapes are altered, and powerful beings may be unable to return to the world they once inhabited.

The encounter also looks at larger mythic ideas surrounding Gonggong 共工, Mount Buzhou 不周山, Kunlun 昆仑 and the relationship between Heaven and Earth.

Particular attention is given to the nature of the surviving sources. Chinese mythology does not always come down to us as one continuous narrative. Different texts may preserve different versions of the same figure or event, sometimes without resolving the contradictions between them.

Qu Yuan's 屈原 《天问》 Tianwen provides an especially important voice within the evening, since the poem itself questions inherited myths and asks why the stories do not always fit neatly together.

Comparative Encounters

What's a Mountain Worth?

Mount Tai and Lovćen

This encounter places Mount Tai 泰山 and Lovćen beside one another and looks at the meanings that societies can attach to a mountain.

Mount Tai introduces the Chinese tradition of the Five Sacred Mountains 五岳 and the special position of the eastern peak. Imperial ceremonies on Mount Tai connected the mountain with the Mandate of Heaven 天命, while inscriptions carved across the mountain turned it into a place where political claims and literary memory accumulated over centuries.

The encounter also draws on Du Fu's 杜甫 poem 《望岳》 and Sima Qian's 司马迁 famous comparison between the weight of Mount Tai and the value of a human life.

Lovćen brings the question into Montenegro through the naming of Crna Gora and through Njegoš's decision to be buried on the mountain. The later history of the chapel and mausoleum, together with Ivan Meštrović's design, shows how strongly the summit became connected with national memory.

Placed beside one another, the two mountains offer different examples of what can happen when landscape becomes a place where a society chooses to express something about itself.

The Three Teachings

Confucianism · Daoism · Buddhism

The Three Teachings programme brings together nine thematic encounters exploring Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.

The three encounters within each sequence are connected, while each also stands on its own. Together they allow ideas introduced in one evening to develop through later texts, debates and historical changes.

Confucianism

Who Gets to Be Called Cultivated?

The first Confucianism encounter explores the ideal of the 君子 junzi and the idea that cultivation is something a person develops through conscious effort.

Selected passages from the 《论语》 Analects introduce the importance of 礼 li and the way behaviour within relationships forms part of the Confucian understanding of a cultivated person. 孝 xiao, usually translated as filial piety, brings the discussion into family life and into the wider question of how personal conduct relates to social order.

The distinction between 君子 junzi and 小人 xiaoren also raises questions about who is recognised as cultivated and how the standards of cultivation themselves are established.

Is Human Nature Good or Evil?

The second encounter centres on the disagreement between Mencius 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子 over human nature.

Mencius presents human beings as possessing the beginnings of moral feeling, illustrated most famously through the story of a child approaching a well. His idea of the Four Sprouts 四端 develops this image further by treating moral cultivation as the nurturing of capacities already present.

Xunzi begins from another position. For him, human tendencies require conscious transformation, and education and ritual therefore have a central role in producing a cultivated person.

The encounter places these two positions beside one another and follows the consequences of their disagreement for education and ideas of social order.

How Do You Run a Country With a Book?

The third Confucianism encounter follows the long transformation of Confucian learning from the teachings associated with Confucius 孔子 into an important part of imperial political and educational life.

The encounter considers the changing position of Confucian thought during the Han dynasty and the role traditionally associated with Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 in its growing connection with imperial government.

From there, the focus turns to the civil service examination system 科举 and the way knowledge of Confucian texts became closely connected with the selection of officials.

The evening considers what happens when ideas originally concerned with personal cultivation become part of institutions that educate, evaluate and select people for public office.

Daoism

What If Doing Nothing Is the Answer?

The first Daoism encounter enters the philosophical worlds associated with Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 庄子.

The 《道德经》 Daodejing introduces the Dao 道 and the idea of 无为 wuwei, while images such as water help explain a way of acting that responds to circumstances instead of constantly imposing force.

The 《庄子》 Zhuangzi approaches similar questions through stories. The useless tree challenges ordinary assumptions about usefulness, while the butterfly dream opens a much larger question about perception and identity.

Together, these texts introduce a Daoist way of thinking about human action and the limits of control.

How Does a Philosophy Become a Religion?

The second encounter follows the historical development of organised Daoist traditions.

The Celestial Masters 天师道 provide one important early example of Daoist community and religious organisation. Later developments include an expanding textual tradition, ritual practice and increasingly complex ideas about cultivation and immortality.

External alchemy 外丹 and internal alchemy 内丹 provide a particularly strong route into the subject. They show different ways in which Daoist traditions approached transformation of the body and the possibility of extending or transcending ordinary human life.

The encounter also considers how Daoist traditions developed alongside Buddhism, with periods of competition and exchange influencing both.

Who Runs Heaven?

The third Daoism encounter explores Chinese traditions of celestial administration.

The Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝 appears within a divine world imagined partly through the language of imperial government. Celestial offices and local deities allow the larger order of Heaven to connect with everyday life.

The Kitchen God 灶君 provides one of the most familiar household examples. According to tradition, he observes the family during the year and reports on the household to Heaven around the New Year period.

The encounter also introduces the literary imagination of 《封神演义》 Fengshen Yanyi and its influential vision of divine investiture.

The result is a very different perspective on Daoism from the philosophical world of Laozi and Zhuangzi with which the sequence began, showing the breadth of traditions that came to exist under the Daoist name.

Buddhism

Who Gets Off the Wheel?

The first Buddhism encounter introduces the cycle of rebirth through the six realms 六道.

The realms include human existence alongside heavenly beings, animals, hungry ghosts and other possible forms of rebirth. Even a fortunate rebirth remains temporary, since every position within samsara is subject to change.

Karma provides the underlying logic of this cycle, while the encounter gradually introduces different Buddhist spiritual figures, including the arhat, the bodhisattva and the Buddha.

The central idea is liberation from the cycle itself: what it means to leave samsara, and why a favourable rebirth is still different from freedom.

Who Stays Behind for You?

The second encounter turns to the bodhisattva ideal and to several figures who became especially important in Chinese Buddhism.

Guanyin 观音, Wenshu 文殊, Puxian 普贤 and Dizang 地藏 introduce different traditions of bodhisattva devotion.

The story of Mulian 目连 and his mother then brings Buddhist ideas into a specifically Chinese family context. Mulian's attempt to rescue his mother from suffering became closely connected with filial piety 孝 and with traditions surrounding the Ghost Festival 中元节.

The encounter therefore explores how the bodhisattva ideal of helping other beings could meet the powerful Chinese emphasis on family obligation.

What Did China Do With All of This?

The final Buddhism encounter looks at the long development of Buddhism within China.

Guanyin 观音 provides one important example. The Indian bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara entered Chinese visual and devotional traditions and gradually acquired forms that became deeply rooted in Chinese religious life.

Amitabha 阿弥陀佛 and Pure Land practice offer another example of the ways Buddhist devotion developed in China, while Maitreya 弥勒 opens a window onto the relationship between Buddhist expectation and Chinese political history.

The Chinese netherworld provides a further case of cultural development, as Buddhist ideas of karma and rebirth interacted with existing Chinese traditions concerning the afterlife and administration.

The encounter closes the Buddhism sequence by looking at cultural transmission as a historical process: ideas travel, enter a new cultural setting and continue to develop within it. The question is not simply what China did with Buddhism, but how Buddhism became part of Chinese culture.