Self-realization through Confucian Learning: 
Xunzi’s Ethics for the Modern World

Dr. Siufu TANG (HKU)

Date and Time: **February 4, 2015** (Wednesday); 4:00-6:00 pm
Venue: Room 730, Run Run Shaw Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU
Commentator: Professor Roger T. Ames (University of Hawai’i)
Moderator: Professor Shu-mei Shih (HKU)

**Abstract:** The manuscript is concerned with a reconstruction of Xunzi’s moral philosophy in a response to the modern belief of self-concern and self-realization. Such a modern belief is used as a perspective as well as the background for an understanding of Xunzi’s (荀子, born around 310 BCE) moral philosophy in the modern world. I suggest that we should take seriously Xunzi’s claim that “people’s xing (性) is bad.” By such a claim Xunzi highlights that our xing is originally without an ethical framework and that our xing has a natural tendency to dominate us, leading us to make bad judgments and consequently behave badly. Thus it is necessary that our xing be transformed by Confucian learning, the center of which is ritual propriety (li 礼). Ritual propriety represents the Confucian understanding of human goodness, the components of which are the best nourishment of desires and a harmonious communal life. Ritual propriety does not amount to external constraints on our xing. Rather, ritual propriety is derived from our self-interpretation of our xing and refers to norms that allow us to realize ourselves fully.

Siufu TANG is assistant professor in the School of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong. His research interest mainly focuses on the moral and political philosophy of Confucianism, in particular that of Xunzi, and their modern relevance. He has published papers on Xunzi in journals such as *Frontiers of Philosophy in China, NTU Philosophical Review, Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*. Besides the current manuscript, he is also the author of an upcoming Chinese monograph: *Learning for One’s Own Self in the Xunzi* (Peking U, 2015).

All are welcome