

Michael Nylan, Berkeley Book Chats, February 6, 2019

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Michael Nylan of the History Department discussing her book *The Chinese Pleasure Book*.

He is joined by Hans Sluga of the Department of Philosophy.

Hans Sluga: Thank you everybody for being here today. I thought the best way to introduce this would be not for me to begin with asking some questions or making some comment, but to invite Michael to read to us two pages: the first page and the last page of her introduction. I think they will serve very well to set a stage for our conversation. Please. Page 17.

Michael Nylan: Thank you.

Hans Sluga: If you have forgotten.

Michael Nylan: I have forgotten. I haven't actually opened the book since the copies came. That's because the first book I ever wrote, I opened the book and I found a typo on the first page I looked at.

Michael Nylan: "This book traces the evolution of pleasure theories in early China, over the course of a millennium and a half, from the fourth century BCE to the eleventh century CE. To signify acts of pleasure-seeking, pleasure-taking, and imparting pleasure, a wide range of thinkers during that time deployed a single graph, freely borrowing from one another, sometimes to differing ends, but often with the same goal of arriving at the most versatile model of the human condition.

Michael Nylan: Undergirding their rhetoric was always the dual presumption that pleasure matters a great deal to most people and how people seek, take and give pleasure is the truest test of their character. Why take pleasure as my chosen subject? At first, it was simply because sinologists for so long sidestepped the topic. More recently, because serious consideration of pleasure in academia has reentered the realm of ethical and aesthetic theory. Also, the histories of early modern Europe.

Michael Nylan: Chiefly, however, it's because the steady contemplation of pleasure, not short term delight or kindred concepts, invites attention to distinctive aspects of Chinese culture as well as to notions common to Chinese and non-Chinese traditions. Consider the cultural relativity of our division and conceptualization of what we deem the inner states. In German, for example, there are many words approaching pleasure: die Freude, die Lust, die Vergnügung. I'm going to screw that up. Die Vergnügen, das behagen, and so on. Yet, none capture the valances of the Chinese term *lè* (樂).

Michael Nylan: Equally curious and no less significant is the Chinese opposition of pleasure to insecurity rather than to pain, its classic antonym within mainstream western

traditions. The verbal use of *lè*, to take or derive pleasure in, in the classical literature in Chinese takes but a very few objects, almost always those that promise deeper satisfactions and return for steady long-term commitments.”

Hans Sluga:

Jump to the last page. 31.

Michael Nylan:

Hans has kindly begged me to turn to what I call the larger implications. You can tell we're friends.

Michael Nylan:

“A tired series of dichotomies has occupied far too much of the sinological community's attention including inner versus outer, subjective versus objective, pragmatic versus ethical, truth versus rhetoric, nature versus culture, emotion versus reason and mind versus body. What blessedly seems to have run its course among astute readers is the simplistic impact response model or a variation thereon, the sender medium percept receiver model. Unfortunately, orientalist and self-orientalist still cling to the gratifying notion of the western impact on a passive receptive China. One instance of Jack Goody's *Theft of History*.

Michael Nylan:

If this book, big if, breaks new ground, it charts unfamiliar terrain via more nuanced translations of both familiar and seldom read texts that imply the deep inner penetration, effect and value, objectivity and affect. The wisdom of consulting the ancients should be evident in our more distracted contemporary age of anxiety. But I do not wish to contend for relevance. As a historian, I aspire mainly to acquire fuller evidence in the firm belief that the historian's task is to reveal the unpredictable contours of this polygon that we call human experience and restore to it the original silhouettes of events and ideas that have been concealed under borrowed garments.

Michael Nylan:

If some portion of the litany celebrating categorical alterity and the clash of civilizations is jettisoned in the process, so much the better. That said, the payoffs from attending to the early Chinese sources seemed huge. For example, the stipulation of the precise circumstances for pleasure-giving and pleasure-taking neatly obviates the naughty Anglo-American philosophical problem of how to get from is to ought. The sources are at once highly contextualize and praxis-guiding, commonsensical in the sense of design to mirror the world that is and regulative of human practice.

Michael Nylan:

And insofar as they did not hazard a host of unprovable assertions about social units or the cosmos. The early advice comes to today's readers without theoretical superfluity and entanglements. As some have argued, Bernard Williams of the Philosophy Department formerly, the ancients were in appreciatively better shape than we moderns if only because they did not cordon off moral from practical considerations when deliberating. So, it seems high time, past time really, to recall the unique potentials invested in the word 'pleasure' itself.”

Hans Sluga:

Thank you. A few years ago, I happened to read a book on doing business in China and it gave lots of practical advice. And in the last chapter, it said but, of course, we also ought to think about the Chinese, these potential customers, and people we are dealing with. And here is what I learned in my travels. In this very interesting chapter, this British or American author then said a number of unusual things and two really struck me.

Hans Sluga:

And the first one was we have to realize that the Chinese like to laugh and that they think we westerners are much too serious. The second was the Chinese are a

romantic people. Now, most of us probably don't think about China and the first thing we would think of is romanticism or pleasure for that. I thought about this. And then I began to think about these wonderful Chinese landscape paintings. A group of people, men, poets, sitting on a mountaintop, drinking wine and watching the moon rise over a waterfall. And I said what could be more romantic than this and what is this romanticism? And the answer is, of course, a great deal of pleasure that is taken in company, drinking and watching this natural scene, and listening to the waterfall.

Hans Sluga: So, pleasure is indeed an important scene in China. But it's not the concept that comes to us when we think about China today in the west, right? And so, I think the important and interesting thing that I found in your book is precisely that it highlights the centrality of this notion in Chinese philosophy, Chinese thinking, and culture.

Hans Sluga: What struck me though is that maybe the reason why both the sinologists and we westerners haven't paid attention to it is that in the way you would lay it out, this concept is always embedded in a whole multiplicity of other concepts. It never stands on its own. Western philosophy also thinks about pleasure, of course. But it's always in this one dimensional and reductive manner. Pleasure is the only good, Jeremy Bentham that said it.

Hans Sluga: Or pleasure is the most sinful thing you can think of and you must avoid it at all costs. Or pleasure and these feelings have no relevance at all. The only thing that matters is universal rationality. So, it's always an either/or. Either pleasure matters or it doesn't. Either it matters in a positive way or in a negative way. And here, we find a totally different way of talking and thinking. We have to think about this emotion in connection with this whole rich array of other things. Could you say a little more about this?

Michael Nylan: I'll tell you. The first time that I was going, what's going on in this culture, was reading Mencius. And Mencius says food and sex is what we all desire. And he is saying that's where you begin with morality, is the fact that you have desires. And then, what you do with those desires will determine whether you lead an ethical life or not.

Michael Nylan: Well, I went to convent school. This is not in my background. And even in Quaker school, in high school, not in my background. I was struck by that. And then, what I went to do was to look at one of the authorities on Mencius to see what he has to say about it. And nothing. So then, I go, so there's that one line. I should use a database. I should check how often Mencius actually talks about, I wasn't sure what to call it yet. But these kinds of how we deal with desires and things like this. Well, it's in every single book of the Mencius. Then, I began thinking why is it not there when we think about China? Luckily, I'm a historian, so I could make a tentative hypothesis why it's not there.

Michael Nylan: People in China, since 1840, have been trying to prove that they're more modern and more protestant than thou because modernity hit and modernity meant westernization. And it also meant a lot of things dragged in with that. But a very protestant form of Christianity. I say that because the best schools in China were often from Protestant missionaries, so that was their sense of what modernity was.

Michael Nylan: So, I had, as a working hypothesis ... Well, we got a Protestant version of early China. Each to his own, but I thought wait. Well, how pervasive is this in other books? Is Mencius because, Mencius is talking to the ruler, Is he simply using

this as a way, in a sense, to seduce the ruler? You can have your pleasure and eat it too. Or is this really pervasive? So, I went to the person usually thought of as the direct opposite of Mencius. A guy named Xunzi, who is often called the Aristotle of China because he's so systematic in his thought and covers so many different topics. The analogy is not in expert.

Michael Nylan: I thought what does Xunzi have to say about it? Well, I think there's something like 33 chapters in the Xunzi and then 27 or 28 of them, they're extremely long passages that discuss pleasure. So, I thought what's going on? Then I looked at who was working on Xunzi. I began to think we have a deformation of the way we talk about things. If all of the, what we would call, classical masters... and of course, I very painfully went through all the classical masters, there are a lot of them... to see who's talking about what. And this word keeps coming up, *lè*, *lè*, *lè*—mostly in verbal uses, to take pleasure, to derive pleasure, to give pleasure. There's no difference in Chinese. You would still just use the verb *lè*.

Michael Nylan: I began to think this is very interesting. I was, right then, asked to contribute to the Festschrift of my Cambridge tutor. And I thought what is better? I took so much pleasure in his classes and we've edited books together and we take a lot of pleasure in that, so I thought I'm going to talk about this. I began, in that essay, to unpack what's different about short-term delight, which is perfectly fine. I'm into short-term delight as well. But short-term delight doesn't build. If it becomes a substitute for something that can build like friendship or music appreciation or love of reading or many, many things that can build... I shouldn't say many. Seven things can build. They would be the usual suspects if you think about what do people talk about as enduring pleasures. Pleasures that can get better as you invest time and energy in them. Then you would come up with most of the objects on the list.

Michael Nylan: What do you do after a bad faculty meeting? I come home and lie on the floor and listen to music or I'll email a friend, something like that, so I think we could come up with these objects. I thought that's a one-off. I just write this nice piece, I think, in honor of my professor and he liked it a lot, though he's not very interested in words like *lè*, having been brought up as a stiff, upper lip Brit who takes a cold shower every morning. I think he thought, Well, Michael, it's nice you said all these things but what are you talking about. But anyway.

Michael Nylan: What I then did, I was asked by a couple of people in the field, what am I working on? And I said, "Well, I just finished working on something on pleasure." And they said, "Oh, no. You're not talking about pleasure. You're talking about happiness or joy." And actually, I'd spent quite a long time thinking now. And I said, "No, I'm not." Happiness originally means favored by fortune. What these guys are saying is that you can be unfavored by fortune and live a rich and fulfilling life. They are holding out something that is much more difficult to achieve. Happiness is something like short-term delight.

Michael Nylan: I had a student who made me a wonderful Chinese New Year's card. That's really wonderful. It maybe is a signal that we'll have a different relation overtime, a deeper relation. But anyway, what was interesting to me was how many people told me what I was working on and that I wasn't. So then, I began looking. You may or may not know it, on Berkeley campus, we have a Happiness Project. It brings in millions and millions and millions of dollars to the campus.

Michael Nylan: The premise of the project is that all people at all times have had exactly the same emotions as American's today. And I don't have any with the Happiness Project. But I found myself mentally writing against the Happiness Project because if all people have exactly the same insights as we have today, then we really should

quit reading. We read to find things that we haven't thought or experienced before. I'm a reader and I love reading and I wasn't going to give up that easily on the notion that we should read.

Hans Sluga: One of the differences that you say in the conception of pleasure between east China and west is that in China, the opposite, the antonym to pleasure is insecurity. Pleasure being presumably a form of security then, right?

Michael Nylan: Yes. And the text makes that hop very quickly.

Hans Sluga: My question to you is aren't there pleasures of insecurity? The roller coaster pleasure? Of course, you might say they are only temporary delights. But you could also live a risky life and take pleasure in that. So, it doesn't only have to be temporary in passing. With that, how would think about that kind of pleasure?

Michael Nylan: I want to backtrack and I want to get to your question. One of the things, when you are reading these masters on pleasure, the supreme pleasure is to discover what you might become. And all of these pleasures are ways to get to that pleasure. Why is that a pleasure? Because then you operate from some relatively secure place. It doesn't mean you never have doubts. It certainly doesn't mean you never experience awkwardness. But you have a sense, this is who I am and this is where I'm coming from when I talk or when I react. And that is a profound sense of security. I'm not there yet by the way.

Michael Nylan: But what they are pointing us to is there are some pleasures that we take the plunge in that help us, as a result, know who we are. If The plunge is disastrous or the plunge is not. But the key thing, the only way that the plunge will mean something is if we commit to the plunge. I think that I was brought up to be extraordinarily hyper careful. I think that by reading the Chinese masters, what you learn is to be a little less careful, you will make mistakes and that will teach you something about the next plunge you take, when and how and why to take it.

Michael Nylan: I don't think it's whether you do plunge and if you're taking on a lover. But even if you're taking on a friend or even if you're taking on a new instrument to play or a new language to learn, you must plunge into it. Otherwise, you don't learn anything.

Michael Nylan: What is different about *lè* is you make this profound commitment to the friendship. Let's say the friendship can go wrong. I made a profound commitment to learn the oboe. I'm a terrible oboe player. But it's given me a much greater insight into people who are good oboe players.

Michael Nylan: When I got to a concert now and I hear certain sounds produced, boy do I know something. So, I think that's the way it is. It's something about not being so careful. But doing things that have a chance to teach you something about who you actually are. And so, I was reading a passage with a student, a visitor here, a pre-doctoral candidate this morning. And it was about plunging in, leaping into the experience. It's a set of four friends, and the four friends look at each other. One of them says, "Who can go in arms with me to learn how to function alone?" I'm doing the translation very badly. It would take me a long time to polish it. It's about locating the people and the experiences that will allow you to live life with some vitality.

Hans Sluga: So when we read the Analects, the most striking feature is certainly this insistence on the need to observe the rites and to look the tradition. And that

seems to give a very different focus from a concern with pleasure, so what's the connection between ritual, tradition, and pleasure?

Michael Nylan: That's a huge question.

Hans Sluga: Yeah. Of course, it is.

Michael Nylan: But I'm a student and I was a friend of Herbert Fingarette. And what Herbert Fingarette told us, and it was a revelation at the time, is that the rites are not about rote, repetitive activity. The rites are about seeing how, in every human interaction, you can somehow get the best out of the human interaction. And that doesn't mean sometimes you don't say "I've had enough, I'm fed up." But Herbert Fingarette talked about the handshake as a ritual. We don't think about it. But try going to a culture, and I have done so, where you put your hand out and no one takes it. You know something didn't happen. Some connection was not made. Some preliminary basis for contact.

Michael Nylan: Anyway, I think we tend to think of the rites and certainly, they can become over-elaborated. I was brought up on the Vogue Etiquette book of 1923. They were over-elaborated, okay? That's not the point. The point is that the rites are a language that you use to communicate. They give you words to say and they give you gestures that, within that culture, will be read as I grant you your dignity, grant me mine. And that's the basis on which we interact.

Michael Nylan: For me, the most moving or one of the most moving, there is a short passage in the Analects about dignity. Confucius sums up the way he advises people to act. And it is to, basically, recognize their humanity. But another really moving passage in the Analects has to do with music and Confucius, like me, was a pretty bad musician. And so, he's going to his music master and he has set him a piece to play and he tries and every time the music master says you didn't get it, you didn't get it, you didn't get it. This is done three times. And the last time, he comes to the music master. He says when I play this music in my mind's eye, I have a vision of someone. It turns out to be King Wen of Zhou who epitomizes all ritual graciousness and humanity, a humane way of dealing with other people. And his music master said finally, you got it. This piece was composed by King Wen of Zhou and you finally understood what the composer wanted you to understand.

Michael Nylan: I think also as Americans, we tend to think of ritual as the opposite of enlivening. The point is that you're supposed to bring to every ritual a real sense of seeing the other person. The other person may be dead. So, dead or alive, the way you sacrifice in China is you think of everything about the dead until they are present. And then, they're there. So, it's granting this full humanity to others as a way to get others to grant full humanity to yourself and I think that works pretty well.

Hans Sluga: Okay. Let me ask one more question and then let's open up to the audience. You write about lots of different kinds of pleasures. You talk about friendship, you talk about music and such. But where is the sex in your book?

Michael Nylan: Okay. The reason I didn't talk a lot about sex is because if I were going to talk about sex, I wanted to do it as food and sex. This book took 18 years to write partly because of George W. Bush. I said I can't write about pleasure. I'm in political depression. I finished this book because I'm from Kentucky and I knew Trump would be elected the summer before he was elected. That was just totally clear to me.

Michael Nylan: So, I said if I'm ever going to do this, I might not be alive in eight more years. I better get this done. Anyway, so what was your question?

Hans Sluga: Oh, it was a very minor topic.

Michael Nylan: No, no, no. No, no, no. What was your question?

Hans Sluga: I said where is the sex in your book?

Michael Nylan: Food and sex. Yes.

Hans Sluga: I mean there are other pleasures.

Michael Nylan: Part of the reason this book took a long time was they found a manual in China called "The Classic of Eating" and I wanted to have a chapter on... we have sex manuals from Mawangdui... and I wanted there to be food and sex. I go a lot to China and I'm tied in with the archeological community. And finally, I said look, I'd really actually like to know whether this is ever coming out. It's been reported that it's there and is it ever going to come out.

Michael Nylan: And so, by a very long and circuitous path, it took nearly a year and a half, I found out that to the great chagrin of everyone, this book had been dealt with by the local archeological bureau that didn't have the right things to preserve the text and it was now black sludge. So then I thought I could have sex on its own and I have a pretty sexy picture in here from a Chinese wedding manual where these were made for modest young women to introduce them to the joys of connubial bliss.

Michael Nylan: But I thought, and partly it was pushed back, that sex is not entirely missing but sex is a continuum. So one of the editors at Zone, I had a wonderful editor at Zone. But one of the editors said the only way the book will sell is if you talk a lot about Chinese sex. The sex manual says this is all about a continuum. You don't have good sex unless you have a good relation. And I thought I really can't give this editor what this editor wants. And so, I did briefly say to the editors I don't think I can produce what you want because what you really want is kinky sex in chapter one. Whatever that means anymore. I don't know what that means. But really, that's what he was pushing towards, so that's the reason.

Hans Sluga: Okay. Let's open it up to the audience here. Yes, Daniel, please.

Speaker 1: Okay. Just two comments more than questions. Two puns is that it's precisely the sense of security that enables the risky life. I think that that is the answer to your question which is a focused paraphrase of what you said Michael, but I think maybe putting more of a point on it. And secondly, with respect to the whole question revolving around that, first of all, there are more than two cultures in the world.

Michael Nylan: Even I would admit that.

Speaker 2: The dichotomy between China and the west is so misleading because there's so many and not all cultures, other than China, are protestant.

Michael Nylan: Or Greek.

Speaker 2: Or Greek.

Michael Nylan: Because there's quite a bit about early Greece in there.

Speaker 2: So, just to quote a bit of Talmud, who is rich? One who is satisfied.

Michael Nylan: Exactly.

Speaker 2: That already pulls the sense of pleasure away from accumulation and into a psychic state that we might call security. So, I don't think it's so unique in the sense or unusual to see satisfaction and security as the deepest source of pleasure.

Michael Nylan: Thanks.

Hans Sluga: Yes, please. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Thank you, Professor Nylan. Is this working?

Michael Nylan: It is.

Speaker 3: Yeah. It's truly a great pleasure to read this book. I think everyone who opens it has a feeling that it's not only the content but also the style and everything is transformative. It is making you feel pleasure.

Michael Nylan: This is a paid political announcer.

Speaker 3: My question is actually related. I'm thinking this kind of experience is not that common, not that unique, so I come to my mind. Many scholars will complain learning erudition is not making them happy. I learn all this stuff. But in the end, I'm so enraged. And then my question is how do you think about the relationship between learning, especially in your case, and erudition and pleasure and why, like Faust, who learns everything but is so distressed?

Michael Nylan: I'm going to be honest. I absolutely adored my mother. I had her to myself because my brother and sister are 20 years older than I am. So, I was a virtual only child. Every weekend, we went to the public library and she got a stack of books. She was an avid reader. And I got my stack of books. Reading, for me, will always be a pleasure. And it doesn't much matter what kind of reading I'm doing because I think I'm a historian because I'm curious how other people have lived their lives. And so my task is to try to imagine what were they thinking when they did that. And then, of course, would I do the same thing.

Michael Nylan: I think, in many ways, I'm a very late bloomer in terms of maturity precisely because I've always had books to retreat to. When things weren't going well with human beings, I've retreated to books. But, I think that I had three or four or five teachers, four at least, five... Jeffrey Lloyd wrote me this morning. He's my late teacher. Not an official teacher. Who so love what they do as an entry into social relations, into thinking about the world at large. Not as a retreat, but as a way of, okay, I have this. I can then take a leap into the boundless. That I think, at least over and over again, I can see that as a mode of conduct.

Michael Nylan: And certainly, Herb Fingarette was there. He was famous not only for doing "Confucius: The Secular As Sacred" but for writing all kinds of books on responsibility and how those relate to rules and rituals and all of these things. I've just had marvelous models in front of me including these four men as teachers who couldn't care less whether I'm a woman or a man.



Hans Sluga: Can we speak of arduous pleasures here? So, climbing a mountain is arduous, but it may be pleasurable.

Michael Nylan: Absolutely.

Hans Sluga: Scholarship can be a form arduous pleasure, right?

Michael Nylan: I think when you find the right word, and I was just writing some essays with graduate students, and when you find the perfect example and when you go "Oh wait, I never knew that before, this is so great," some people, that will be their pleasure. The great thing about this pleasure theory stuff is you don't have to have the same pleasures as somebody else. You don't have to say "I got that, now, I'm going to get this." One or two will stand you in extremely good stead.

Michael Nylan: So for me, one of the things you can have pleasure in is having a sense of integrity. I would like to have that as a pleasure, to be able to look at myself in the mirror. But the ones that really count are reading and classical learning. That's what it meant at the time. And music and friendship. Where the metaphors are all the same about attunement. The sound can't be the same. The persons can't say I demand that you be me. But they are operating in tune.

Michael Nylan: Let me say one thing. One of the cheap pleasures of writing the pleasure book was there's so many words for different kinds of pleasure in Chinese. So thinking, what is the pleasure that they're talking about is a really great pleasure. It's a pleasure of finding the *lè*. But when someone asks me what I'm doing next, my cheap and easy response to a lot of people is we're in the age of Trump. I'm working on the negative emotions. But I decided who wants to work on the negative emotions. Life is short.

Michael Nylan: So, I'm writing with a student, who is a really great student, an essay on daring and not daring because those go both ways. There are things you should not dare to do and there are things you definitely should be daring to do and maybe don't have the guts for. I think this will both have extremely positive meanings attached to it and extremely negative meanings attached to it. I'll be the person who looks at their histories and there will be lots there. And he will be the person who looks more at the more philosophical side. We exchange notes and then we make a *mélange*.

Hans Sluga: So, we are back to the risky pleasures.

Michael Nylan: We're back to the risky pleasures. I think every time you write a paper, every time you write a poem, you're plunging, aren't you? Every time you have a thought that you've never had before about yourself or any condition of the world, it's a bit of a plunge because it requires that you readjust everything else that you thought you knew. Anyway, I think it is about plunging. It's about being vital till the day you die and that's a tall order. It's about learning how to be vital till the day you die regardless of infirmity, regardless of pain, regardless of this.

Hans Sluga: Yes, please.

Speaker 4: Just a quick question, Michael. I'm struck from my perspective thinking of the Greeks and the current interest in stoicism and so on. I think it's fair to say that in a lot of Greek philosophy, invulnerability is one of the good things that become obsessive vulnerability because you're not vulnerable to the things that people think are so bad, you're not going to as bad. I too share this thought that Hans

brought up of these people that thought that *lè* might be happiness. Well, you've explained why it's not happiness. But it did sound a little bit like a kind of contentment.

Michael Nylan:

It's not.

Speaker 4:

It's not contentment. Okay. So, here's my question then.

Michael Nylan:

That's a great question. And it's not invulnerability because it's more and more open and vulnerable.

Speaker 4:

Right. How does vulnerability relate to the pleasure? Because there's two ways that I can think of. One would be the vulnerability to something, "I'm going to go for this pleasure. It's arduous and so on and it could go wrong," as you said. And then, the vulnerability is a nimbus on the outside of the activity. It's always there.

Michael Nylan:

No. No.

Speaker 4:

But do you actually make that the center?

Michael Nylan:

It's the center of knowing humans are vulnerable. We're vulnerable. We care about what other people think way too much usually. We know we're going to die. We see people we love die. We see people that we would like to have respect for act badly. We see a lot of things, okay?

Michael Nylan:

And so what it is, as I see it and I'm going to get a lot of pushback from people who would prefer another vision, but over and over again, what they're talking about is a kind of receptivity to whatever comes down the pike. And sometimes that receptivity will mean you need to say "I need to figure out how to stop this." If it's giving me pain, it may well be giving others pain. This is not a good situation and I need to work with the other person. One thing that historians believe is we're sedimented human beings. And so you don't say "This person just needs to change." You somehow have to work with the sedimentation that's already there.

Michael Nylan:

That's a very difficult thing to do with because at the moment, you are really annoyed or you're really excited about something. But it doesn't mean not having emotions. In fact, it means being very aware of what those emotions are and then trying to figure out what to do with it. So, one of the big differences and why people always say Chinese philosophy is not philosophy is there are no eternal. The way Chinese grammar is set up in the classical period, it's always situated and always contingent on the situation.

Michael Nylan:

I think, for me, that's a huge insight, that it's enough. One of the few phrases that the Analects of Confucius and the Laozi share is "know what's enough." And so, it's enough to say I'm having this experience. Now, what do I do with it? It's quite enough.

Speaker 4:

Just quickly, how far is consistency a very relevant factor in this. In a way, you talk about knowing one's self and plunging, but that plunging can't be random.

Michael Nylan:

No. And that's why *lè* means long term relational pleasure that you have put a commitment into, whether it works or not. And I could invest a lot of time in a friend and that friend unexpectedly dies, what do I do with that? Well, it's not a waste. So no, the whole point about Chinese ways of thinking is they have a

notion quite different than Numa and they have a quite different notion of how humans are to interact in the world because they're always grabbing things from the world and giving out things from the world.

Michael Nylan: Now, you could try to stop that process. You're not going to be able to according to the Chinese way of thinking. So this continual flux, you are changing. Now, what do you do with this?

Speaker 4: So there's a tentative notion of adaption?

Michael Nylan: Absolutely. Mine was conformity to circumstance.

Hans Sluga: We have unfortunately run out of time here. But I want to thank Michael for a very pleasurable, profitable hour. Thank you.

Michael Nylan: I would like to thank people who took time out from their lunch and also to the Townsend Center for all of this, making it possible. Thank you.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.