

Xúnzǐ

荀子

c. 312–c. 230 BCE—Confucian philosopher

Alternate names: Xún Kuàng 荀况, Master Xun



Summary

Xunzi was a Warring States thinker recognized as one of the three great classical Confucian philosophers. He is known for his doctrine of self-cultivation, which stresses the role of education and ritual participation in the creation of an ethical nature, as well as for his epistemological and linguistic theories. In the twenty-first century Xunzi's influence has not waned; he is considered one of the most popular and influential philosophers in East Asia and is the subject of more English-language book-length studies since the 1990s than any other Chinese thinker.

The Confucian philosopher Xunzi, also known as Master Xun or Xún Kuàng 荀况, is often considered to be one of the most influential thinkers of the Warring States 战国 period (475–221 BCE). Born in

the northern state of Zhào 赵, Xunzi was sent to the neighboring state of Qí 齐 (in present-day Shandong Province) at a young age to attend the famous Jìxià Academy 稷下学宫, at that time a flourishing hub of intellectual activity. After finishing his studies, in addition to teaching at the academy, Xunzi held several official posts in the Qi court. It was during his tenure in Qi that Xunzi had the opportunity to travel to the royal court of Qín 秦, and to his native state of Zhao, where he engaged in a well-documented debate over military affairs with Prince Línwǔ 临武君. In this debate, recorded in the “Debating Military Affairs” 议兵 chapter of his book, Xunzi stresses the role of efficient governance in the creation of a strong and unified army and the maintenance of law and order in the state (Watson 2003, 59–82). Later, persecuted and slandered by political rivals, Xunzi was forced to relocate to the southern state of Chǔ 楚, where

he was appointed as the magistrate of Lanling prefecture by the prime minister, Prince Chūnshēn 春申君. After Prince Chunshen's assassination in 238 BCE, Xunzi was dismissed from his post but remained in Lanling until his death.

According to Xunzi's biography in *Sīmǎ Qiān's 司马迁 (c. 145–86 BCE) *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shǐjì* 史记), the work known as the *Xunzi* took form during his final years in Lanling. While it is certainly possible that the book bearing his name might not be entirely Xunzi's own work, it still contains an overall consistent philosophical vision that seems to be the product of a single writer. The received version we have access to in the twenty-first century, which comprises thirty-two chapters, was originally collated from earlier sources by the Hàn 汉 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) bibliographer *Liú Xiàng 刘向 (79–8 BCE) and later finalized by the Táng 唐 dynasty (618–907 CE) scholar Yáng Liàng 杨倞 (fl. ninth century CE), whose edited version resulted in its contemporary standard arrangement. The *Xunzi* covers a wide range of discourses, including essays on topics that have traditionally concerned Western philosophers, such as ethics, epistemology and theories of perception,

ontological skepticism and relativism, theories of government, and philosophy of language.

Warring States Philosophy

The Warring States period is traditionally known as the age of the “Hundred Schools of Thought” 诸子百家, an era in which new ideas about the self and its relationships with social and political institutions found articulation in a growing corpus of philosophical literature. With the gradual decline of the Western Zhōu 周 (1045–771 BCE) royal court, political control was divided among multiple independent states governed by powerful local rulers. By the end of the Spring and Autumn 春秋 period (770–476 BCE), it became obvious that the old institutional arrangements and social norms of the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BCE) could no longer guarantee the stability of the multistate system. A constant state of warfare, however, did bring about economic, technological, and social developments, such as the introduction of private land ownership, the invention of infantry armies, and the enhancement of social mobility. The latter is best exemplified by the rise of a new and influential social group known as *shì* 士, often translated as scholar-officials or officer-aspirants (Sato 2003, 95). Driven by a common goal—the reestablishment of a world order—this new group viewed civil

*People marked with an asterisk have entries in this dictionary.



service as their route to power and influence; and, in most cases, they served as advisors and even high-level functionaries in the governments of the feuding states.

The first and most influential scholar-official was Kǒngzǐ 孔子, known in the West by his Latinized name, *Confucius (551–479 BCE). An educator and a ritual master, Confucius saw his ultimate goal as restoring the old sociopolitical Zhou-era framework. In order to accomplish this, he developed a philosophical system that emphasized the role of moral self-cultivation as a prerequisite for civil service. A harmonious society, argued Confucius, is a hierarchically structured system in which each person fulfills their own role for the benefit of all. Confucius's moral paragon, the "gentleman" (*jūnzǐ* 君子), is well-versed in the classics, great works of literature that were beginning to take shape during the Western Zhou period, but is also a skilled moral agent who has the ability to manifest virtue in everyday life and inspire others to behave the same way. The organizational principle in this system is *lǐ* 礼, ritual propriety or etiquette, a set of ethical and sociopolitical guidelines that functioned as the means of perpetuating internal social cohesiveness. Much like the familial unit, society is not a combination of equals but a grouping of disparate units governed by hierarchical power relations.

Confucius's proposed solution to the sociopolitical problems of his time did not go unchallenged. The philosopher *Mòzǐ 墨子 (c. 470–c. 391 BCE), for instance, criticized Confucius's conviction that the familial unit was the foundation for moral education and was skeptical of the utility of traditional ritual practices. Mozi proposed a profit-oriented ethical philosophy that was based on the idea that every moral action can be quantitatively evaluated by its potential contribution to the material welfare of the community and the state. Others, such as the statesman and political philosopher *Shāng Yāng 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE) and the Legalist philosopher and Han chancellor Shēn Bùhài 申不害 (died c. 337 BCE), opted to institute a bureaucracy based on a rational system of reward and punishment and a transparent and fixed set of laws and standards. Finally, nonconformist philosophers such as *Zhuāngzǐ 庄子 (c. 369–c. 268 BCE) rejected the entire legitimacy of morality, government, and other cultural institutions and instead promoted a philosophy focused on the cultivation of private life. Alarmed by these attacks on the Confucian way, Xunzi sought to reformulate the ideas of his master in order to adapt them to this new reality. The results of this effort, recorded in the *Xunzi*, had an immense influence on the history of Confucian thought in particular and Chinese philosophy in general.

Self-Cultivation and the Reshaping of Human Nature

Xunzi's theory of human nature is probably the most well-known and well-studied facet of his thought. Chapter twenty-three, titled "Human Nature is Bad" 性恶, contains Xunzi's response to a claim made by his predecessor *Mencius 孟子 (c. 372–c. 289 BCE) regarding the inherent goodness of inborn nature (*xìng* 性). Throughout the history of Confucian thought, scholars have often portrayed Mencius and Xunzi as philosophical opponents: the former as an optimist who believes in the human potential for moral excellence, and the latter as an authoritarian proponent of law and order. Human beings, according to Mencius, are born with an innate propensity for goodness, bequeathed as part of their cognitive makeup by Heaven. In order to fulfill this potential, the Confucian gentleman must nourish his innate nature through an organic process of self-cultivation and allow his moral tendencies to come to fruition. Mencius's assertion regarding the innate goodness of human nature gave some of his more cynical philosophical rivals an opportunity to attack the validity of the Confucian educational project. Xunzi's essay was written in an attempt to defend the teachings of his philosophical predecessor, Confucius, against such criticism by offering an alternative view of self-cultivation.

Xunzi's theory of human nature has often been discussed in the context of Saint Augustine's (354–430 CE) theory of original sin or Thomas Hobbes's (1588–1679) theory that humans are self-interested by nature and require rules, regulations, and a healthy fear of punishment to become members of a civil society (Stalnaker 2006; Kim 2011). A closer reading of the "Human Nature is Bad" chapter, however, reveals that this assertion should not be taken as a claim about the incorrigible and inherent evil of human beings. Unlike Saint Augustine and Hobbes, who do not believe that humans can change their original nature, Xunzi clearly accepts the wretchedness of the original human condition, but, more importantly, he also believes in our potential for improvement. Humans, argues Xunzi, are born as egocentric beings filled with desires. Their need to satisfy these desires leads them to behave in an antisocial manner, disregarding others' needs in their quest to satisfy their own cravings. This natural state of affairs, however, is not immutable. Along with their inborn nature, humans are also born with an ability to think reasonably and devise tools that can help them escape this unfortunate situation—one that can only lead to chaos and strife (Watson 2003, 161–162).

Much like Mencius, Xunzi believes in the power of self-cultivation in creating a fully developed moral agent. But, while Mencius sees this process as a



matter of nurturing and bringing to fruition a person's inherent propensity for goodness, Xunzi believes the only way of fulfilling our human potential is to transform our nature through the help of external devices. Thus, while Mencius often uses metaphors from the realm of nature, describing the process of self-cultivation in terms of nourishing a seed to help it mature into a fully grown tree, Xunzi resorts to metaphors from the world of craftsmanship. A warped piece of wood, he argues, must be boarded, steamed, and forced into shape before it can become straight; a piece of raw metal must be whetted and treated before it can become sharp (Watson 2003, 15). Similarly, human beings must be educated by teachers and habituated by ritual principles before they can become orderly. Using such external tools and combining them with resoluteness allows us to transform our inborn nature and alter our character, thus creating what we might call a second or artificial nature (*wěi* 伪).

Xunzi's process of self-cultivation involves multiple components. The first is theoretical education. The Confucian gentleman, he argues, must immerse himself in the teachings of the moral exemplars of the past and learn how to express himself in a cultured manner. In fact, one of Xunzi's greatest contributions to the development of the Confucian tradition was that he was the first to allocate a textual canon essential for the educational process,

which contained the following works: the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shījīng* 诗经, also known as the *Book of Odes*); the *Classic of Documents* (*Shūjīng* 书经); the *Classic of Rites* (*Lǐjīng* 礼经); the *Classic of Music* 乐经 (now lost); and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chūnqiū* 春秋). While the final arrangement of the Confucian canon would evolve over time, the five texts selected by Xunzi would continue to constitute its core. Moreover, the notion that moral self-cultivation begins with a theoretical study of the ancient classics remained central to the training of scholar-officials throughout imperial history.

Despite its significant role in the process of self-cultivation, theoretical learning was judged to be only one component of the educational process—one that should be accompanied by a commitment to a strict behavioral regime. Furthermore, because by nature humans are prone to selfish and lustful behavior, they require a great deal of external motivation to urge them in the right direction. Xunzi was the first to fully articulate the vital role of the teacher as a source of moral influence and the importance of model emulation in shaping one's "second nature." Education, argues Xunzi, has a crucial corporal component as it involves the internalization of external sources via the medium of the body. By sticking to a strict program of ritually prescribed behavior, the body of the gentleman undergoes a process of "ritualization" that

results in a complete bodily transformation, reshaping his sensory perception and the cognitive mechanisms that control it. The “cultured gentleman” is thus eventually able to perceive, understand, and enjoy the world in way that is qualitatively different from others (Watson 2003, 20). This process, however, cannot be undertaken alone. Given the selfishness of their inborn nature, human beings are unable to see the long-term benefits of the educational process and therefore need to be encouraged to embark on such a taxing journey. Xunzi argues that the best sources of inspiration are the sages of the ancient past and the best tool for this task is the rituals they created.

The Role of Ritual

Despite the divergence in approaches to the study of the *Xunzi*, most scholars agree that one of the most complex and important topics in this work is the author’s theory of ritual. Ritual occupies a central place in Confucian philosophy. In addition to his roles as an official and an educator, Xunzi, like Confucius and Mencius before him, was a ritual master, and a curator and preserver of the ancient rites of the Zhou dynasty. The collapse of the Zhou’s centralized regime, however, created a gap between the then-actual political, military, and economical hierarchy, and the old ritual-oriented one. This engendered a lively philosophical discourse in which

different philosophical masters suggested ways for reestablishing world order and conducting personal life. While Confucius and his disciples stressed the importance of ritual on the individual as well as at the sociopolitical level, others disputed its efficacy and sought to replace it with new frameworks. Mozi, for example, denounced the inherent wastefulness of large-scale ritual performances and suggested replacing them with a utilitarian system based on quantitatively measured cost-benefit analyses. Shang Yang, on the other hand, opted to replace ritual with a new framework based on the mechanism of law and order. Others, such as Zhuangzi, flatly rejected the value of ritual as a foundation for social order and claimed that ritual and other cultural constructs were the cause of the economical and political strife that plagued the Warring States period.

Faced with a new reality and a growing criticism of ritual, Xunzi’s solution was to reappraise and redefine the ritual system through a distillation of certain aspects of the normative system from its old religious ceremonial framework. According to his new theory, ritual is an external tool, developed by exemplary figures from the ancient past, which can help maintain sociopolitical order through its transformative effects on the individual. While ritual can be used on the personal level as means for moral self-cultivation, transforming the inner, morally blind, and

inborn nature of man, it also functions on a public level as a guiding code of conduct, a mechanism that can help humans overcome their selfishness and ensure harmonious interaction between individuals in society.

While Xunzi's theory of self-cultivation can be regarded as a response to Legalist criticisms of Mencian naïveté and Mohist (the followers of Mozi) attacks on the wastefulness of ritual performances, his emphasis on the corporal aspects of moral education can also be seen as a reaction to the growing popularity of bio-spiritual practices among the Warring States elite. Recent archaeological excavations have revealed that in addition to the flourishing of philosophical literature, the third century BCE also witnessed the emergence of a parallel literary tradition comprised of technical manuals that offer us a glimpse into the realm of "natural experts," namely religious adepts, astrologers, physicians, and diviners who, just like the philosophical masters, were vital participants in the Warring States intellectual and spiritual discourse. The growing popularity of bio-spiritual practices, such as meditation, sexual cultivation, and calisthenics regimens among the Warring States elite posed a threat to Xunzi's Confucian project, and thus he took it upon himself to repackage moral self-cultivation as an "alternative" technology of the body that is superior to those advocated by his rivals (Tavor 2013).

Ritual, argues Xunzi, provides a way to gratify the senses in a controlled setting and with a clear agenda in mind. In the "Discourse on Ritual" 礼论 chapter, he provides a clear description of the effects of participating in a ritual experience:

When one listens to the singing of the odes and hymns, his mind and will are broadened; when he takes up the shield and battle-ax and learns the postures of the war dance, his bearing acquires vigor and majesty. When he learns to observe the proper positions and boundaries of the dance stage and to match his movements with the accompaniment, he can move correctly in rank and his advancing and retiring achieve order. (Watson 2003, 116)

Ritualistic performances are thus an aesthetic training ground, a unique mode of practice different from everyday activity. Inside ritual time and space, routine gestures and movement take on a special meaning exactly because they are performed outside of a regular context. Far from being a mere frivolous satisfaction of desire, ritual provides meaningful experience that induces a bodily transformation and is accompanied by a sense of pleasure that is much greater than simple carnal joy. By promising the reader the same rewards that other self-cultivation regimens offer,

such as improved health and acute sense perception, Xunzi is providing a new motivation for upholding the ritual prescriptions of the past. As opposed to other bodily practices that only operate on the minds and bodies of individuals, the public and shared nature of ritualistic musical performances enables such experiences to produce corporal transformations on a much broader scale.

As is evident in Xunzi's description of the village wine ceremony, the intricate and highly choreographed nature of ritual performances involves a large number of participants and a great deal of coordination, but since everyone knows their place and each movement is thoroughly rehearsed, the final outcome is smooth and concordant, as if the entire community constituted one organic body (Watson 2003, 118–120). By adopting this strategy, Xunzi is able to accomplish two concurrent goals: deflecting the attacks of the natural experts while still positing ritual as a legitimate cure for the sociopolitical ailments of his time.

Heaven

Despite Xunzi's belief in the transformative power of ritual participation, he is also widely known as a staunch critic of some of the contemporary religious practices he witnessed. One of the best examples for this attitude is found in the "Discourse on Heaven" 天论 chapter, which is often described as the

fullest systematic version of the philosophical skepticism and critical attitude toward the popular belief in ghosts and spirits and the belief in a sentient and compassionate Heaven that is actively engaged in human affairs. One of Xunzi's main goals in this chapter is to clearly distinguish between the natural and the human worlds. Each realm, he claims, has its own rules and mechanisms: Heaven's Way (*tiāndào* 天道) and the Human Way (*réndào* 人道) are thus discrete realms, and there is no way to communicate between the two spheres—let alone manipulate this communication to our advantage. According to this worldview, calamities do not arise due to malicious extra-human powers or a disgruntled Heaven; therefore, neither can they be averted through sacrifice and ritual activity or by submitting to the moral directives of Heaven. The only resort we have in avoiding them is first to understand the pattern and movement of Heaven and to subsequently use this acquired knowledge to our advantage. This sort of knowledge is gained by observing the course of Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons empirically, recording its configuration, sequence, and movements.

The critical and skeptical attitude expressed by Xunzi has led Western-educated Chinese scholars such as Féng Yǒulán 冯友兰 (1895–1990) and *Hú Shì 胡适 (1891–1962)—who, at the dawn of the twentieth century, made a self-proclaimed attempt to free Chinese



philosophy from the shackles of its traditional past and rediscover its true origins—to hail Xunzi as the precursor of rationalist thought in China. Marxist-oriented scholarship in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has continued to emphasize Xunzi's purported antireligious and materialistic worldview (Goldin 1999, 109). Others have suggested that Xunzi's objective was to criticize the religious motivation behind the performance of certain religious rituals. This assertion is based on the following often-quoted passage from the "Discourse on Heaven" chapter:

You pray for rain and it rains. Why? For no particular reason, I say. It is just as though you had not prayed for rain and it rained anyway. The sun and moon undergo an eclipse and you try to save them; a drought occurs and you pray for rain; you consult the arts of divination before making a decision on some important matter. But it is not as though you could hope to accomplish anything by such ceremonies. They are done merely for ornament. Hence the gentleman regards them as ornaments, but the common people regard them as supernatural. He who considers them as ornaments is fortunate; he who considers them as supernatural is unfortunate. (Watson 2003, 89–90)

As opposed to the popular "give-and-take" (*do ut des*) mode of religiosity, in which rituals are performed for the sake of the spirits in order to receive their blessings, Xunzi's doctrine targets an elite audience and thus portrays ritual participation as an ornamentation, an external manifestation of the gentleman's cultured nature. Writing for a new elite audience of educated scholar aspirants, Xunzi wishes to establish a new mode of religiosity based on an absolute sense of devotion to the ritual system designed by the sages and the ethicoreligious values it represents. Moreover, in an attempt to supply a justification for the supposed efficacy of this system, Xunzi also seeks to create an indissoluble link between ritual as a system of ethical and sociopolitical guidelines and its divine cosmic origin by asserting that it is based on the patterns of "the Way" (*dào* 道) the ultimate metaphysical principle that lies at the basis of reality. Rituals, he argues, are far from arbitrary. They are markers (*biǎo* 表), left by sages, that function as a prescriptive script, a guiding light for the rest of humanity to follow. Based on the one Way, ritual is thus depicted as the only viable method of putting the Way into practice. Because the Way represents an ideal, the way the universe should be, by piously following its rituals, human beings become active partners in the maintenance of cosmic order (Ivanhoe 1991, 317).

Politics, Language, and Metaphysics

Xunzi's ontology of the Way is also intrinsically linked with his theory of language, known as the "rectification of names" (*zhèngmíng* 正名). This theory has become the focal point of much interest since the end of the twentieth century, especially by scholars of comparative philosophy, who labeled Xunzi a relativist, a conventionalist, a nominalist, a realist, and an absolutist (Hagen 2007). In the context of his overall moral, political, and metaphysical doctrine, however, it is clear that Xunzi's main interest does not lie in investigating the nature of language per se but in determining who should have control over it. The mission of creating order in the linguistic realm, he argues, should not be entrusted in the hands of philosophers, but in the hands of a single authoritarian sage-ruler, who needs to control it in order to ensure the stability of the state (Watson 2003, 140).

The issue of language was one of the most hotly contested topics in Warring States philosophical discourse. The followers of Mozi, for instance, promoted a theory of language that emphasized the arbitrariness of the act of naming. Names, they argued, are arbitrary because there is no intrinsic link between them and the object they signify. But once a certain name is picked as shorthand for a certain object or a class of objects, it replaces it and thus conveys

its meaning. After making the initial association between the two, we must maintain it as a standard, otherwise it is meaningless. Developing this initial interest in the nature of language, some philosophers, most famously Gōngsūn Lóng 公孙龙 (fl. third century BCE) and Huì Shī 惠施 (fl. fourth century BCE), launched their own philosophical investigations, using paradoxes to prove the limitations of logical thinking and the artificiality of human language. The philosophical argumentation of these dialecticians and sophists represented a never-ending source of frustration for Xunzi. In many cases he criticizes the philosophical futility of their linguistic games, which he deems not only as ineffectual but as outright dangerous:

To split words and recklessly make up new names, throwing the names that have already been established into confusion, leading the people into doubt and delusion, and causing men to argue and contend with each other is a terrible evil and should be punished in the same way as one punishes those who tamper with tallies or weights and measures. (Watson 2003, 144)

Xunzi believes that language and the distinctions it creates are crucial for personal self-cultivation on one hand, and for creating a well-ordered society on the other. Given his theory of human



nature, Xunzi puts much emphasis on the role of one's external environment in the process of education. If we grow up in disorderly society, he argues, we might never find the right inspiration to act as the trigger for self-cultivation. In order to want to change, man has to live in a society that will allow him to channel his energy in the right direction by means of a solid education. But, education is highly dependent on language. The solution of ethical dilemmas, for

example, depends on clear moral categories. Ritual prescriptions rely on clear and meaningful terminology. A clear and consistent system of language is thus absolutely crucial for the survival of human civilization. Xunzi claims that, while such an ideal system of language existed in the remote past, during the reign of the sage-kings, these times are gone forever. For this reason, Xunzi deems it necessary to produce his theory of language, to be used as a manual for any forthcoming ruler who wishes to restore sociopolitical order.

Xunzi's theory of rectifying the names, far from being a mere speculative philosophical essay regarding the nature of language, is therefore a pragmatic game plan for a campaign of language reform. Moreover, it is also intrinsically entwined with his metaphysical and epistemological theory. According to Xunzi, although we are not moral by nature, Heaven does endow us with one important thing—one's mind and the ability to use it correctly. By using our minds we are able to know the Way and implement it on a practical level.

The act of naming is based on the same principle. It begins with data received from our senses, followed by analytical analysis conducted in the mind (*xīn* 心). In this process, we assess the various similarities and differences we notice and then assign objects with specific names, so they can be mutually understood and employed when the



Hanging scroll from the *Xunzi*, by Deng Shiru (1743–1805). Ink on paper. Palace Museum, Beijing.

occasion demands. Xunzi's emphasis, however, is that this process should only be undertaken by the sage-ruler. In the metaphysical sense, there are no two Ways under Heaven; in the epistemological sense, there is only one mind; and in the sociopolitical sense, there should be only one ruler.

Because language has such a big influence on the way we perceive reality—and think and act—creating order and stability in the linguistic world is seen as the one of the basic steps in achieving the overall goal. But since language is an organic entity, always evolving, a ruler must combine old names and be responsible for creating new ones, always keeping in mind the entire system's inner order and stability. The importance of a rectified linguistic system should thus be measured not only by its appropriateness or correlation to certain realities but also by its inner stability and utility that produce the desired outcome—sociopolitical order.

Xunzi's Legacy

While Xunzi did not live to see the unification of China under the rule of the short-lived Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206 BCE), the role of his philosophical theories in shaping the newly emerging imperial ideology was significant. Two of Xunzi's most famous students, the philosopher *Hán Fēi 韩非 (c. 280–233 BCE) and the Chancellor *Lǐ Sī 李斯 (c. 280–c. 208 BCE),

both staunch anti-Confucianists, were highly instrumental in laying the foundation for the ultimate ascendance of the First Emperor of Qin, *Qín Shǐhuáng 秦始皇 (259–210 BCE). Xunzi's ontological observations and theory of ritual influenced the thought of *Dǒng Zhòngshū 董仲舒 (c. 195–c. 105 BCE) and Jiǎ Yì 贾谊 (201–169 BCE), two of the main architects of Former (Western) Han 前(西)汉 (202 BCE–8 CE) imperial philosophy.

It is conceivable that Xunzi's immense influence on early imperial thought was also the reason for his demise. With the collapse of the Han, Xunzi's place in the history of Chinese thought was largely superseded by his purported archrival—Mencius. During the neo-Confucian renaissance of the Sòng 宋 dynasty (960–1279), while some still praised his philosophy, others, like *Zhū Xī 朱熹 (1130–1200), emphasized the similarities between the *Xunzi* and the works of Shen Buhai and Shang Yang and even partially attributed the rise of the much-maligned Qin dynasty to his ideas (Goldin 2011, 68). From the late nineteenth century onward, however, a renewed interest in the thought of Xunzi started to emerge. Xunzi's well-preserved and intricate essays on issues that have traditionally concerned Western philosophers, such as epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language, have made him a prime focus for comparative studies (Cua 1985; Lee 2005; Hagen 2007). In



the twenty-first century Xunzi's influence has not waned; he is considered to be one of the most popular and influential philosophers in East Asia and is the subject of more English-language book-length studies since the 1990s than any other Chinese thinker (Knoblock 1988–1994; Goldin 1999; Kline and Ivanhoe 2000; Sato 2003).

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