

On the Wang Yangming Reading

These readings are fairly dense, and may strike you as a bit repetitious. I believe this is because the debate here is about verbal formulas, how we understand aspects of the human condition. These formula are different in Chinese, but sound much the same in English. If you were reading the Chinese, the various arguments would like quite different, but in English they sound quite similar. One way to approach these readings, I believe, is to pick one claim, and see how you would apply it to a contemporary situation. Note that in Wang's commentary on the Great Learning, the sections labeled "Question" point to specific passages in the Great Learning, and Wang's answers deal with those sentences. One interesting question to ask is why Zhu Xi understood the title to mean "learning for an adult," while Wang Yangming understood it as "learning for the great man." Other themes to look at in the Wang Yangming readings include sincerity, the idea that knowledge and action are the same thing. One might also think about the question of how Wang Yangming challenges orthodoxy.