

MASTER'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	Taming Human Nature: A Comparative Study of the Political Philosophies of Xunzi and Thomas Hobbes
Student's name:	Fengdeng Gu
Referee's name:	Janusz Salamon

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	47	
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	14	
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	14	
Total		75	
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	8	
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	4	
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	4	
Total		16	
TOTAL		91	

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:

Gu Fengdeng selected for his Master's thesis a fascinating and important topic in comparative political philosophy justifying convincingly its relevance in the current context of the competition between China and the West on the global stage. By identifying and exploring both striking similarities and significant difference in political theories and policy recommendations found in the work of the two classical thinkers of the East Asian and Western political traditions, Fengdeng promotes and defends an attitude of mutual respect and impartial critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of all political ideas to be found in diverse cultures of the world. Moreover, by applying carefully and extensively textual/comparative analysis and historical/contextual analysis to Xunzi's and Hobbes' work, he shows how cross-cultural similarities and differences may be explained in rationalistic, historicist and naturalistic manner, without recourse to cultural essentialism that would suggest an unbridgeable gulf between cultures and a static view of cultural and political traditions. These philosophical ideas about the cross-cultural comparative political philosophy seem to me the most original contribution of Fengdeng's thesis and the intellectual rigour in which these ideas are backed by insights emerging from the comparative analysis of the political thought of Xunzi and Hobbes seem to me the most original and most valuable aspect of the thesis, and they are good enough for a Master's

thesis to justify my suggested grade A. Two considerations weakened somewhat my assessment of Fengdeng's thesis (both when it comes to the Major Criteria and Minor Criteria listed in the above assessment table). Firstly, it might have been advisable to attend to a greater degree to potential methodological challenges of comparing TEXTS that come from two distant epochs and from two very different cultures. Not that his analysis is undone by not taking to a sufficient degree such challenges of comparative cross-cultural philosophy into account, but the methodology of the thesis might be further enhanced. Moreover, the question of the relevance of the political philosophy of Xunzi in the contemporary political context of China might have been addressed with greater clarity, although one may appreciate the objective difficulty of being straightforward on this particular point. (The need of asking the question about the contemporary relevance of Hobbes in the West is not as acute, given that the dominant political framework of the Western-style liberal democracy is the Hobbesian social contract.) Secondly, the presentation, and indeed the comparison of the political philosophy of Xunzi and Hobbes owes a lot to the work of other authors and while Fengdeng is careful to acknowledge at the end of almost every paragraph the debt he owes to other authors who studied Xunzi and Hobbes before him, he almost never refers to particular pages in their work seems suboptimal, since it makes it more difficult to identify the degree of indebtedness the authors on whose works one relies upon so heavily.

Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F): A

Suggested questions for the defence are:

- (1) Is Xunzi's political thought considered to be relevant in any way in contemporary China?
- (2) Negative view of the human nature is a minority position in the Chinese philosophical anthropology (Mengzi's optimism about human nature being more prominent). How do Xunzi's political prescriptions differ from those that are based on a more positive view of human nature? Is there some analogy here with the relation of Locke to Hobbes in the West?

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for