

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 Political Philosophies of Xunzi and Thomas Hobbes
Student's name:	Fengdeng Gu
Referee's name:	Jakub Franěk

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	50	45
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	15	13
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	15	13
Total		80	71
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	10
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	3
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	4
Total		20	17
TOTAL		100	88

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria (min. 1800 characters including spaces when recommending a passing grade, min. 2500 characters including spaces when recommending a failing grade):

The reviewed Master's Thesis consists of a comparative analysis of the political ideas of Xunzi and Thomas Hobbes, i.e. of two canonical authors belonging respectively to the Eastern and to the Western intellectual traditions. Generally speaking, the present thesis is very well conceived and clearly argued. Nevertheless, it could still be improved in a number of ways. Since this is an "opponent's review", the following lines will focus on the apparent shortcomings of the reviewed thesis.

Perhaps most importantly, the author could have done a better job explaining the choice of the topic of his thesis. Indeed, he suggests two principal justifications for conducting a comparative study of the thoughts of authors separated by more than thousand years and belonging to two entirely different cultural traditions: (a) both Xunzi and Hobbes share a similarly pessimistic account of human nature and (b) both of them are crucial political thinkers in their respective cultural traditions. Nonetheless, both of these points could have been better developed: Ad (a): While the author repeatedly emphasises the alleged "naturalism" or materialism of both Xunzi and Hobbes, it remains unclear to what extent their understanding (or use) of the very concept of "nature" is comparable. Ad (b): The

importance of Xunzi's and Hobbes' ideas for contemporary Chinese and Western politics should have been likewise better explained.

Especially in the concluding sections, the author emphasises Hobbes' methodological individualism, putting it into contrast with the collectivistic (or, perhaps, communitarian) ethos of Xunzi's political thought. This is quite understandable. Nonetheless, the author's description of Hobbes' social contractalism as a "bottom-up" approach to the justification of the sovereign state is not fully convincing. After all, Hobbes recognises that historically speaking most existing states have been created by conquest. Perhaps even more importantly he insists that even contracts that have been undertaken under duress are binding.

The author's command of written English appears to be very good, in spite of occasional mistakes in grammar or syntax. On the other hand, the present reviewer finds rather frustrating his approach to citations. (The author repeatedly forgets to include page numbers – even when referencing direct citations.)

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

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	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 defence.