PHIL5130/7130: Topics in Chinese Philosophy: *Qianfulun* 潛夫論
Term 1, 2026-27

Course Outline

Time: Thurs 3:30pm-18:15pm Location: Room 401, Wu Ho Man Yuen Bldg (Yasumoto Int. Academic Park)

Course overview

Wang Fu's 王符 (83-170 CE) "Essays of a Recluse" (*Qianfulun* 潛夫論) is a work of philosophy and politics. Written during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), it is a critical reflection on the social values of the time. The text argues the gentleman should seek a life of simplicity, the ruler should respect the common people and control undisciplined officials, and the emperor should choose worthy advisors and eliminate the power of the old noble houses. Most of this can be done by cultivating and utilizing the primary breath (*yuanqi* 元氣) of the universe. Through a close reading of the text, we will not only learn about the most important issues for Wang Fu, but the close integration of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist ideas that came to characterize Han thought.

Learning outcomes

1. Understand the key concepts and philosophical issues raised by Wang Fu.
2. Read and interpret the text.
3. Reflect on the modern relevance of Wang Fu's thought.
4. Be able to engage in critical discussion, and put forward and defend your own ideas.

Topics

See the lecture schedule below.

Learning Activities

1. Read and give thought to the assigned readings.
2. Develop the skills mentioned above in the Learning Outcomes.
3. Improve your research skills through various writing assignments.
4. Attend lectures and engage others in discussion on the material presented.

Assessment Scheme

Task	***Description***	***Weight***
Research Paper Proposal	2 pages	10%
Research Paper Draft	7-9 pages	20%
Research Paper Draft Presentation	15 minutes	15%
Research Paper	15-20 pages	55%

Remarks on Assessment Scheme

Research Paper Proposal

The proposal should be structured as follows: one paragraph describing what your paper is generally about, followed by one paragraph discussing each of the major arguments will use to support your thesis. You should also include a bibliography of texts relevant to your topic and include a short statement (1 or 2 sentences) on why you chose them. It is due in class on Sept. 24 and should be single spaced and use 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Late submissions may be penalized.

Research Paper Draft & Presentation

This is an opportunity for you to show me your work and receive written feedback on it. As a working draft, you are expected to submit a properly formatted paper (including citations but no bibliography). The draft should represent approximately one-half of your final paper and it should be clear from reading it how your argument will develop over the pages yet to be written. You will also give a 15-minute presentation summarizing the work you have done so far and what remains to be done. Presentations will be on Nov. 5.

Final Research Paper

You will be assessed according to the clarity of your writing, your ability to integrate the arguments of scholars into your discussion, and your level of philosophical thinking. You must provide citations for all quoted or summarized material. The length of your paper is to be 15-20 pages, not including the bibliography, and is due in class on Dec. 3. The paper should be double spaced and use 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Late submissions may be penalized.

***Note:** You are not allowed to use any AI tools in the preparation and writing of your weekly reflection papers, the research paper outline, or the actual research paper.

Grade Descriptor

See: http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf

Required Reading

Kinney, Anne B. and John S. Major, trans. *Essays of a Recluse: A Complete Translation of the Qianfulun*. Columbia University Press, 2025.

***Note:** A research bibliography will be posted on Blackboard to help you locate secondary sources for your research paper.

Lecture Schedule

Week	***Reading***	***Remarks***
Sept 10	Trans. Introduction Ch.1: In Praise of Study	
Sept 17	Ch.2: Concentrating on the Root Ch.32: Teachings on the Root	
Sept 24	Ch.5: Difficulties of the Worthy Ch.8: Thinking about the Worthy	Research paper outline due
Oct 8	Ch.6: Enlightened and Unenlightened Ch.31: Enlightened and Loyalty	
Oct 15	Ch.9: Fundamentals of Government Ch.10: Sighs of a Recluse	
Oct 22	Ch.7: Evaluating Merit Ch.11: Loyalty and Nobility	
Oct 29	Ch.13: Taking Care over Minutiae Ch.14: Substance and Recommendation	
Nov 5	Research paper draft presentations / Research paper draft due	
Nov 12	Ch.18: Using People's Time Sparingly Ch.20: Governing in an Age of Decline	
Nov 19	Ch.25: Divination Set Forth Ch.26: Spirit Mediums Set Forth	
Nov 26	Ch.27: Physiognomy Set Forth	

	Ch.28: Dreams Set Forth	
Dec 3	Ch.22: Transformation through Virtue Ch.34: Treatise on the Five Powers	Research paper due

Contact details

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Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.