

THE HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Course Outline

Part I

Course Title:	The Morality of the Water Margin 水滸傳的道德世界
Course Code:	GEA1008
Department:	IELL
Credit Point:	3
Contact Hours:	39
Pre-requisite(s):	Nil

Part II

1. Synopsis

The Water Margin (水滸傳 Shui Hu Zhuan) is also translated as the Outlaws of the Marsh. It is a martial arts novel which has over 300 years of age. The novel is generally regarded as one of the four greatest novels of ancient China. It describes how the 36 main characters (out of a total of 108 characters) were driven to become bandits because of poor governance and widespread corruption. These bandits were later pardoned by the emperor and turned into generals and warriors; most of them died fighting battles for the imperial court.

Over the years, there were different interpretations of the moral significance of the actions performed by these characters. However, there is a near consensus that they are “heroes and heroines” - despite the fact that these heroes perform wanton killing, over retribution, in addition to (various forms of) cannibalism and an unconcealed desire for personal wealth and material well-being. This will lead us to wonder why these people deserve the moral appraisals as heroes from generations of Chinese intellectuals and readers. What exactly is the concept of hero or haohan (好漢) in the context of traditional Chinese society?

The aims of this course are twofold: First, by analyzing the scenarios of the novel, I will attempt to unravel the layers of cultural and ethical meanings of the behaviour of these outlaws. They include the tendency to involve innocent friends and family in attributing legal or moral responsibility (zhulian 株連), the comparatively low status of husband-and-wife relation in contrast to brotherhood relation, and the importance of maintaining faithfulness to the emperor, etc. From these investigations, students will gain an in-depth understanding of an important aspect of the great work of Chinese literature.

Second, apart from making use of Chinese philosophical thoughts to explain the scenarios, we will make sense of the heroes’ actions from the viewpoint of contemporary virtue ethics. Special attention will be paid to Nietzsche, who, in his classic work *The Genealogy of Morals*, explores the difference between the bourgeois “virtue” of obedience and social cooperation, and the heroic virtue of honesty and the courage to face disorder, complexity and an unpredictable future. In Nietzsche’s work, he also provides an analysis of the meaning of punishment, guilt conscience and violence, which suit the situation of the world depicted in the Water Margin.

2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

CILO₁: Construct a moral understanding of persons which transcends the limits of time, place and culture.

CILO₂: Appraise the contents of the folk morality in traditional Chinese society and analyze their significance in a modern and globalized society.

CILO₃: Sharpen their practical sensitivity in regard to the variation of social, cultural and psychological factors as students make moral and social judgements in everyday life.

CILO₄: Critically read, evaluate and understand a classic Chinese novel.

3. Content, CILOs and Teaching & Learning Activities

Course Content	CILOs	Suggested Teaching & Learning Activities
A. Background (1) What is the Book? What are its histories? Background of the novel of the Water Margin: the author(s), versions, social circumstances, structure of the stories, etc.	CILO _{1,4}	Lecture
B. Morality (2) Can't moral judgements be relativistic? (3) Standpoints of moral assessment: Moral relativism and its problems; a review of the major (universalist) normative theories such as Kantianism and Utilitarianism.	CILO _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures, etc.
C. Heroism and the Meaning of Life (4) Virtue ethics (Confucian tradition and the Greek); the notion of a good life (eudemonia) (5) Nietzsche's moral philosophy: Master and slave morality, the aesthetic ideal of life, etc.	CILO _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, etc.
D. Wu Song and Pun Jingliang (6) The Virtue of Vengeance: Cruelty and Collective Guilt (株連) (7) Wu Song: A Hero? A Monster? The meaning of vengeance, honor and the pursuit of justice (kuaiyi enchou 快意恩仇) in Wu's life	CILO _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, etc.
E. Tricks in War: Qin Ming at Qingzhou Road (8) The Trick that involves the Sacrifices of Innocent Lives (9) Considerations of War Ethics	CILO _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, etc.
F. Lu Zhishen's Lies and Character (10) The Wrongness of Lying: Virtue Ethics and Deontology	CILO _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, etc.

G. Virtues and Resentiment (11) Li Kui's ZhiXing (直性) and Nietzsche's concept of Resentiment	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, etc.
H. The Progressivists' Criticism (12) The (Supposed) Moral Superiority of Modern Morality (13) The Meaning and Idea of Good Art	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, Film, etc.
I. Confucianism (14) The Duty to the Monarch in an Non-Ideal World	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}	Class Discussion, Reflection, Life Journal, Blogs, Lectures and Reading, etc.

4. Assessment

Assessment Tasks	Weighting (%)	CILO
a. Research Blog Students will form groups with 3-4 members and engage in the construction of a research blog over a period of five weeks (week 4 to week 8). They have to select a character from the novel, and collect descriptions, comments, pictures or youtube videos about this character. Each group will furnish the blog with all relevant materials of the character within the stipulated period of time.	20	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}
b. Group Presentation and Acting Each of the groups will use 15 minutes to do an act on the representative story of a character in the Water Margin. Then, they will be given 15 minutes for verbal presentation and 15 minutes for Q&A. Basing on the research materials they have collected on the blog, groups of students are to share with others about this character's life story and explain what moral judgement we can rightfully impose on him or her, or what moral response (e.g. sympathy, praise, blame, etc.) we should have in regard to his/her actions.	30	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}
c. Individual Paper Basing on the materials of their research blog and the points they gather for the presentation, individual students will submit a paper of their own. They have the freedom to choose to write on any character in the novel, but basically they can choose to write on the character that they presented in class and in the blog.	30	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}
d. Participation (i) Online Participation (10%) Students are required to visit the blogs maintained by other groups. Those who leave at least one informative comment (i.e. not to say hello) on the other blogs each week (from week 4 to week 8) will get all the online participation marks. (ii) Class Participation (10%)	20	<i>CILO</i> _{1,2,3,4}

5. Required Text(s)

水滸傳 (一百回, 容與堂本)

6. Recommended Readings

- 1.) MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue* (London : Gerald Duckworth, 1985).
- 2.) Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 3.) Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 4.) Palmer, Frank. *Literature and Moral Understanding* (London: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- 5.) Shi Nai an and Luo Guan Zhong. *Outlaws of the Marsh*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing, Foreign Language Press, 1988).
- 6.) 牟宗三「水滸世界」收於氏著《生命的學問》(台北: 三民書局, 1971), 頁228-235。
- 7.) 金聖嘆評點《第五才子書施耐庵水滸傳》文子生校點(河南: 中州古籍出版社, 1985)。
- 8.) 馬幼垣《水滸論衡》(臺北市: 聯經出版事業公司, 1992)
- 9.) 李真瑜《正說水滸》(北京市: 京華出版社, 2007)。

7. Related Web Resources

Nil

8. Related Journals

Nil

9. Other

Nil