Hows and Whys: Guidelines for the Chinese Ph.D.

Ph.D. students in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature must adhere to (1) the University of Washington's Graduate School regulations, (2) the Department of Asian Languages and Literature policies and procedures, and (3) all program specific regulations.

The information below is meant only as a reference. Final authority in all cases remains with the official regulations.

General Aims

The goal of graduate study is to train students to make original contributions to scholarship in their field. Therefore, the graduate student needs to build a solid awareness of the publications in the field of specialization, the major questions that are being (and could be) researched, as well as the methodology for answering such questions. In addition, the student should have a solid grasp of the broader academic context in which the field of specialization is situated (i.e. "the big picture").

How to Proceed

The following explains the rationale behind each of the general requirements for Ph.D. students in the department, and outlines the procedure students should follow to satisfy them. It also contains, in bold, the specific rules of the Chinese language and literature program over and above those of the department. Finally, notes in boxes are explanations, examples, and additional commentary.

1. Meeting with the Advisor

Each new student is assigned an interim advisor, that is, a graduate faculty member with whom the student can discuss the course of his/her study in the initial stages. Upon arrival, the student should meet as soon as possible with the interim advisor to chart a plan of course work; subsequently the student should meet quarterly with the advisor to keep him/her apprised of his/her progress. It is the student's responsibility to initiate these meetings, and the advisor's responsibility to file a formal progress report once a year. Once the student has determined, in consultation with the interim advisor, his/her area of specialization and the faculty member with whom he/she would like to work, the student should approach that faculty member. If the faculty member agrees to advise the student, he/she will file a form appointing that professor as his/her faculty advisor. Students are required to appoint a faculty advisor by the end of their second quarter of graduate study.

2. Filing a Program of Study

The student should carefully plan a program of study that will contribute to achieving the skills mentioned above, including a detailed timetable, keeping in mind that many courses are not offered every year and that some courses will not be offered when faculty are on leave. Ideally, students should take at least one course with every faculty member in their program in order to familiarize themselves with the full range of scholarship and expertise available to them.

By the third quarter of graduate study, the student should submit a feasible proposal of study to the advisor, which, after approval,
will be filed by the department secretary. The plan of study should be viewed as a guideline rather than a straitjacket; specifics of the plan are likely to change as the student proceeds, but the general course of study should be clear.

There is a minimum course requirement of 90 credits (45 of which must be taken before pre-candidacy), and the student must take classes and examinations relating to both the linguistic and literary aspects of the language of specialization. Classes in other disciplines (e.g., religion or anthropology) might also be recommended depending on the student’s chosen field of specialization.

The student’s file contains a checklist of the required courses in his/her program and the student is responsible for checking off each requirement as it is completed. When all courses are taken, the student should present the completed list to the Program Coordinator and ask him/her (or his/her designated representative) to sign off the box “course work completed” on the checklist. If there are any irregularities (such as course substitutions), an explanation will be placed in the file along with the signature.

Please note that each graduate student is required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA.

No student enters the department in the Ph.D. program. Please note that fulfillment of the credit requirements does not automatically ensure admission to the Ph.D. program. All students must be formally admitted to pre-candidacy by the faculty in their program.

3.a. Students with an M.A. from this Department

Students with an M.A. from this Department cannot automatically assume successful admission into the Ph.D. program. A student who would like to enter the Ph.D. program must file a “Petition to Proceed.” (See item 4, below.)

3.b. Students with an M.A. from another University or in another area

Students with an M.A. from another University or in another area than the one to be pursued will first need to fulfill the following requirements before petitioning to proceed.

1. The student must complete at least 45 relevant graduate credits at the UW.

2. The student must prepare for and pass the additional language requirement. In consultation with the advisor, the student selects a language relevant to his/her program of study and files a plan for achieving the necessary level of competence in this language. In the language plan, the student should outline the reasons for choosing this second language and a time schedule detailing how the student intends to prepare to fulfill this requirement. The requirement may be satisfied by taking a reading exam in the Department or by taking classes up to a certain level of proficiency. The language plan must be approved by the advisor and added to the student’s file no later than the third quarter of graduate study. Coursework cannot be substituted for a reading examination in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs in Chinese.

3. Except when the student has undergone a comparable M.A. examination in a comparable program, the student also needs to pass the departmental M.A. General Examination. This is a written test, consisting of two two-hour exams to be taken in the same week. The purpose of the general exam is to establish the student’s general competence in the field. The advisor will suggest which steps should be taken by the student to prepare for the exam. In some cases, a student may be advised to take the Department’s general examination even when he/she has passed a comparable exam elsewhere, in order to strengthen the student’s petition to proceed.

Ideally, the prospective candidate will have completed an M.A. degree in the field of Chinese language and literature prior to entering the Ph.D. program. If the student has an M.A. in another pertinent field, e.g., in Linguistics, Comparative Literature, Philosophy, History, or Asian regional studies, it will not be necessary to take an additional M.A. in Chinese language and
The student will however be required to satisfy all course and examination requirements for the M.A. program in this department. Equivalent courses from other programs may be substituted with the written approval of the regular instructor of the course in question. In addition, whichever quarters of the sequence Chin 461, 462, and 463 were not taken for the M.A. must be taken for the Ph.D.

The student's post-M.A. course work should be designed, in consultation with his or her advisor, to fill in gaps or strengthen weaknesses in the student's background, and to establish and develop four fields of special study that he or she will pursue in some depth in preparation for the general examination. Upon admission to the program, the student should be prepared to enter courses in modern Chinese at the 500 level, and should have at least two years of Classical Chinese.

A student who wishes to go directly from the B.A. to the Ph.D. program must present an unusually strong background preparation in the disciplines of literary study or linguistics. He or she will be expected in the course of his or her work to satisfy all curriculum requirements for the M.A., and must petition the Department for special permission to by-pass the M.A.

4. Petitioning to Proceed

Graduate students wishing to enter the Ph.D. program must file a “Petition to Proceed.” The petition should demonstrate to the program faculty the student’s ability to pursue the Ph.D., i.e. to make a meaningful contribution of original research to the field. This document should highlight the student’s accomplishments (M.A. thesis or papers, exam papers, transcript of graduate courses, other preparation for research, honors) as well as indicate future direction (study and language plan, proposed four fields and dissertation topic and scope). It should also include a time schedule. If the petition is successful, the student becomes a Pre-candidate.

Students admitted to the Ph.D. program may, at the discretion of their advisor, be required to add to their basic program any course(s) considered necessary to remedy a deficiency in their background.

5. From Pre-candidate to Candidate: Four Fields and the General Exam

The Pre-candidate engages in further course work (minimum 45 credits) as established in the study plan. In addition, he/she works towards fulfilling a second additional language requirement, as established in the language plan. Prior to the General Examination the student must demonstrate a reading knowledge of an additional Asian language and a pertinent European language. The student may apply the foreign language reading examination required for the M.A. to this requirement. Coursework is not allowed to substitute for a reading examination in the graduate program in Chinese.

The student should select his course work such that he/she acquires a solid foundation in the field and builds expertise in an area of specialization, as well as prepares for the field exams. The four fields represent areas of specialization but also span the broader range of the program area. The purpose is to assure that the student develops into a broadly versatile scholar. In order to maintain this broad range, linguistics students should have at least one field in literature, and literature students should have at least one field in language. Each field is supervised by a faculty member; one of the fields can be taken outside the department. Fields must be approved by the faculty advisor.

A “field” as used here is considered to be an area of study within the overall domain of Chinese language and literature limited by genre, discipline, and time period, but not overly specialized or narrow, that the Ph.D. student shall investigate in some depth. The student shall be expected to familiarize himself or herself with both the original texts and the secondary scholarship of the field, and to show some potential for carrying out original research in the area in question. Each student must pursue four such fields of special study and will be examined separately by an appropriate faculty member prior to the general oral examination.
The four fields that a student elects to study must, in the aggregate, reflect both of the primary components of the Department’s graduate level offerings, i.e., language (linguistics and philology) and literature. Students are encouraged in connection with at least one field to incorporate substantially some aspect of Chinese history and culture in addition to literature and linguistics. As stated above, with permission of his or her advisor a student may select one field from outside the Department in such topics as general linguistics, literary criticism, a non-Chinese literature, Chinese philosophy or religion, or a particular period of Chinese history. Such a field must be demonstrably related in a significant way to the student's overall course of study.

Early on, the nature and scope of the field exams should be discussed and arranged with the main advisor and the individual field advisors, who together constitute the student’s supervisory committee. The field examinations must be written. This committee will also oversee the General Examination, which again is intended to demonstrate the student's general knowledge of his/her program area. By the quarter prior to the exam date, the student should meet with the advisor to discuss exam preparation. In preparation for this meeting, the student should compile a list of classes taken and readings completed, so as to give the advisor a good idea of what the student already knows and what needs more work. On the basis of this information, an effective strategy for exam preparation can be devised. Once the student passes the general examination, he/she becomes a Candidate.

The General Examination is usually a two-hour long oral examination, and covers principally, but not exclusively, the four fields that the student has prepared.

6. From Ph.C. to Ph.D.: Writing the Dissertation

Officially, the student begins work on the dissertation only after passing the General Examination. It is advisable, however, to start thinking about a topic of specialization and discussing it with the advisor before this time, and to start working on it as soon as feasible.

The Ph.D. dissertation should make an original contribution to existing research in the student's field and present it in a coherent scholarly form. In this department, demonstrating the ability to work with primary sources in the language of specialization is a requirement of the dissertation.

In practical terms this means that the graduate student will go through a study process to familiarize him- or herself with the publications in the field of specialization, the major questions that are being (and could be) researched, and the methodological approaches to answering such questions. The end product of this process, the dissertation itself, demonstrates the mastery of these materials and approaches. The Ph.D. dissertation differs from the M.A. thesis in that it is broader in scope. It is similar to a book in length and scope, while the M.A. thesis is comparable to a lengthy scholarly article.

Before beginning to write the dissertation, the Candidate should select an informal reading committee and provide the members with a prospectus of the dissertation (topic, state of the field, student's contribution, resources to be used) and a time schedule. The student is to send yearly (or more frequent, if appropriate) progress reports to the members and should meet regularly with the advisor, submitting drafts for comments. It is advisable to consult early on the graduate school guidelines for formatting and to make sure the dissertation complies with these rigid stipulations. Once the dissertation is nearing completion, the committee is formalized (usually the quarter before the final examination). The committee consists of three members, two of whom should be in this department; in addition, the graduate school appoints a GSR, who will oversee the procedure, and needs to be consulted about the scheduling of the examination. Usually this committee is the same as the supervisory committee. The student should give each member an abstract of the dissertation. The complete draft should be given to the committee six (or eight, if the committee members so require) weeks before the final examination. The Final Examination is an oral defense of the dissertation before the committee and the general public. The final version of the dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate School by the last day of the quarter of graduation.