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Comparisons of Greece and China

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Abstract and Keywords

Comparative study of Greece and China dates back to the mutual awareness of their classical traditions that began with the Jesuit missions to China in the late sixteenth century. The full potential of such work was delayed in part by the slow and inconsistent progress of translation of classical texts. Further complications arose from the processes of industrialization and colonialization in the nineteenth century, which contributed to notions of the cultural superiority of the West, hindering the study of both traditions on equal terms. Much earlier work focused on the “lack” of certain key elements of ancient Greek culture in early China, an approach that has reinforced narratives of cultural superiority. Changing intellectual trends and shifts in global economic and political power have contributed to a reassessment and to approaches that account for similarities and differences without assuming that the Greek tradition is superior or paradigmatic.

Keywords: Greece, China, comparative literature, comparative philosophy, history of science, reception history

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If, as Haun Saussy (2006, 12) has claimed, comparative literature as a discipline is defined by the search for its object of study, then the comparative study of ancient Greek and Chinese cultures has the opposite problem: a relatively well-defined object of study, but a search for methods, models, and justifications. The bodies of texts in question have invited juxtaposition and comparison since mutual awareness of their existence began as a result of work by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries, though frequently on both sides from an initial position that presumed the superiority of one tradition over the other and thus hindered more rigorous comparison. Interest has continued in spite of these obstacles, in part due to the vast influence of each early tradition over large sections of the world for many millennia, Greece and China being in this sense especially salient and distinctive manifestations of Karl Jaspers's so-called Axial Age, the era from the eighth through the third centuries BC (depending on the always-controversial dating of key figures of each tradition), in which significant intellectual and spiritual revolutions seem to have taken place across the major regions of Eurasia. Through the late twentieth century, comparative Greece-China work tended to focus on questions of what one scholar in the field, Wiebke Denecke (2013, 13), has called "ellipsis": that is, working out why one of the two cultures (almost always China) lacked cultural features found in the other—epic, scientific metaphysical philosophy. Such comparative work, whether wittingly or no, and whether produced in China or in the West, continued to conform to the European narrative of the "Great Divergence," whereby inherent advantages in European (and often specifically ancient Greek) culture were held to be responsible for Europe's rapid economic and military progress past China and other great Asian empires in the early modern and modern eras. Some more recent scholarship, particularly in China, seeks to invert this narrative, by insisting on the inherent advantages of traditional Chinese culture over Western culture. In other words, while the topic of Greek-Chinese comparative literary and cultural studies has long attracted considerable interest, ideological factors have often intervened to hinder analysis on the basis of the systematic comparison of actually existing similarities and differences, as opposed to essentialist arguments built out of national or cultural pride. Such work, which Denecke (2013) labels "catachresis," has been much rarer historically, but is becoming more common as the field expands in the early twenty-first century.

Periods and Texts

Both Greek and Chinese were used as literary languages for several millennia, and their literary use reflected changes in everyday spoken language only gradually and partially until the twentieth century. Both have been used as the languages of great empires and have been appropriated for use by non-native speakers across significant world regions. Both have also struggled with the transition into modern national vernaculars. There are therefore many moments in the long history of these linguistic traditions that would be ripe for comparison. Nonetheless, the major, indeed virtually the only, emphasis in comparative study has been on work from the earliest stages of each culture: the

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foundational literary, philosophical, and historical texts mostly dating from before the death of Alexander in 323 BC on the Greek side, and (with an exception for the great historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 [d. 86 BC]) from before the establishment of the Han dynasty in 206 BC. Since both literary traditions seek their origins in relation to key foundational events of the late second millennium BC—the Trojan War for the Greeks, traditionally dated to around 1200 BC; the conquest of the Shang by the Zhou traditionally dated around 1046 BC for China—we are left with approximately a millennium's worth of highly canonical texts, foundational to European and to East Asian cultures respectively, to compare.

On the Greek side of the comparison (and leaving aside for the moment the question of the comparative history of science, touched on only briefly in this article), the focus on points of imagined ellipsis in China has been on a handful of key texts: Homeric epic, Plato's dialogues, Herodotus and Thucydides. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, Greek lyric has more rarely been compared with Chinese equivalents; the fact that there are such equivalents, of course, minimizes the salience of the comparison if the goal is to understand gaps in the Chinese tradition. Drama, another gap in the early Chinese tradition (though it became important in the Yuan dynasty, 1271–1368), has also less frequently been studied from a comparative perspective. The emphasis, in other words, is not merely on canonical texts, but on the subset of those texts that might be considered “foundational”: those that establish the standard for what will constitute poetry, philosophy, and history throughout the European tradition.

On the Chinese side of the comparison, similar tactics motivate the selection of texts. Answering to the role of Homeric epic, the Chinese imaginative literature most frequently compared with Greek texts is the *Shi Jing* 詩經, whose title is translated into English as *Book of Songs* or *Canon of Songs*. This collection of just over three hundred short poems claims to represent periods from the foundation of the Zhou dynasty to around 600 BC, although recent scholarship has offered linguistic grounds for thinking that the earliest poems may date to around 800 BC instead (Behr 2015). The collection is in four sections: the *Airs of the States*, short songs that may have popular origins or inspirations; the *Lesser Court Songs*, poems likely performed at convivial occasions at court; the *Greater Court Songs*, many of which narrate the history of the Zhou; and the *Temple Hymns*, which are supposed to have been performed at ancestral sacrifices.

In Chinese philosophy, Greek-Chinese comparative studies has tended to privilege the Confucian *Analects* over other intellectual traditions, just as on the Greek side more attention has been paid to Plato than to other perspectives. Like Platonic dialogue, the *Analects* seems to represent an oral teaching tradition rather than a manuscript tradition, including hundreds of short anecdotes featuring Confucius (traditional dates 551–479 BC). While the *Analects* was traditionally supposed to have been compiled in the generation or so immediately after the death of Confucius, recent scholarship again suggests a much later date for the compilation of our collection out of a much larger universe of such anecdotes, perhaps around 150 BC (Hunter 2012). Other philosophic texts have received less comparative attention, though they are certainly deserving of

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more: Mencius (following in the Confucian tradition); the Daoist texts the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*; Mozi, the advocate for the value of impartial, universal love; and Xunzi, who argued that human nature was essentially bad, and his follower Han Feizi, the Legalist. As this brief and simplistic survey suggests, a comparative analysis of Greek and Chinese philosophy will look significantly different depending on whether one takes as the point of comparison two exemplary if unusual figures (Confucius and Plato), some other small-scale comparison between two individuals, or indeed the full range of debate found in each tradition.

Chinese historiography can be said to begin with the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a particularly terse text listing major domestic and diplomatic events between 722 and 481 BC, from the perspective of the small regional state of Lu (located in modern Shandong province, and the home of Confucius). Traditionally said to have been compiled by Confucius himself, the wording of the *Annals* was subjected to the most intensive scrutiny, in which high praise and deep blame were read into small differences in word order. More exciting from a comparative perspective has been the *Zuo zhuan* (a historical narrative, perhaps compiled in the fourth century BC, covering roughly the same years as the *Annals*, and at some point rearranged to look like a commentary on that text). While the *Zuo zhuan* is attributed to an otherwise unknown Mr. Zuo, the first historical text composed by a named individual about whose methods and assumptions we can know something is *Records of the Grand Historian*, by Sima Qian. He wrote when the Han dynasty was at its height, and he himself was caught up in the vicissitudes of court life; defending the wrong general after a military defeat and sentenced to death, Sima chose castration rather than death so that he could complete his history. The *Records* offers a comprehensive narrative history of China up to the author's own time, along with a small collection of short treatises on thematic issues (from astrology to rivers and waterways), histories of the various regional houses important in earlier periods, and biographical accounts of at least 130 specific individuals.

This article aims to sketch the broad history of the comparison of Greece and China, with a primary focus on materials in European languages, but with some attention also to the comparison as seen from the Chinese side. I begin with a section on the conditions of possibility for the practice of Sino-Greek comparison: the gradual translation and reception of key texts from each tradition in the other culture, a process that began with the Jesuits in the late sixteenth century and continues to this day. From there, I examine briefly the fields of history of science and comparative philosophy, both of which have been particularly fertile ground for comparative work, before moving to comparative literature toward the end of this article. This movement is largely, though not entirely, chronological, and tracks the gradual broadening of the range of comparative interests in the realm of Sino-Greek studies.

Reception History

The conditions of possibility for Greek-Chinese comparative study began to open in the seventeenth century, with Jesuit missionaries as the medium. Missionary efforts worked in both directions, simultaneously educating Chinese audiences about certain aspects of the Western tradition and providing the first translations into European languages (initially Latin, and sometimes later French) of major classical Chinese works. (For a fuller account of these early translations of the Confucian classics into Latin, see Meynard 2015).

The very earliest attempts at translating Confucian texts into Latin had unfortunate fates. The very first such effort was probably that of the missionary Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), who had begun to study the so-called *Four Books* of Confucian thought while a missionary in Guangdong Province in the 1580s and completed a translation of these books while in Rome between 1590 and 1592, seeking support for the establishment of another mission to China; he was stymied by the death in rapid succession of four popes during those years. A portion of his translation of the preface to the *Great Learning* (*Da Xue*) was published in 1593, but allegations, probably false and perhaps politically motivated, that his Chinese language skills were inadequate halted his work in the field, and his translations remained in manuscript form.¹ Still more unfortunate was the fate of the translation of the *Four Books* by the more famous Matteo Ricci, begun in China during the very years in which Ruggieri was working in Rome. These translations were circulated in manuscript form for many years, as an aid to language learning for missionaries en route to China, but were never published and are now lost.

The earliest known published translation into a European language of a major work of Chinese literature is the *Sapientia Sinica*, a translation of the first half of the *Analects*, along with the *Great Learning* (*Da Xue*), by the Jesuit Ignatius de Costa, in 1662. The translation was published, significantly, not in Europe (nor even in Goa, the center of Portuguese India, and the station from which Christian missionaries were deployed to China, where many later translations were published), but in China itself, in the town of Jianchang (modern Fuzhou City, Jiangxi province). De Costa's partial translation, achieved with the support of a number of recently arrived missionaries (Prospero Intorcetta, Christian Herdtrich, François de Rougemont, and Philippe Couplet), was published in a bilingual edition, with facing-page text in Chinese (printed for the first time in horizontal, left-to-right European fashion) and Latin, and included a four-page biography of Confucius. Clearly intended as a further aid to language learning for missionaries, this text was followed by another similar volume, the *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis*, edited by Intorcetta, and containing a translation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (the *Zhongyong*), half published in Guangzhou in 1667, with the remainder produced in Goa in 1669.

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Neither the *Sapientia Sinica* nor the *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis* was intended for general consumption, having been produced with parallel Chinese texts and with the clear intention of assisting in language instruction. Still, the latter text ended up in the hands of the French polymath Melchisédech Thévenot (1620–1692), also known for inventing the bubble level and for authoring a treatise on swimming, and was published by him, apparently without Intorcetta’s knowledge. This publication of the Latin translation of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, in 1672, thus represents the first significant exposure that mainstream European intellectuals had to Chinese philosophy.

Thévenot’s bootleg publication of Intorcetta’s translation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* was joined a few years later by the more orthodox publication of the Jesuit translations of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Analects*, under the title *Confucius Sinarum philosophus, sive Scientia sinensis latine exposita*, in Paris in 1687, under the names of Intorcetta and Couplet. Couplet had been sent back to Europe with (among other goals) the intention of publishing this translation. The decision to do so in Paris rather than through the Vatican was not an accident: fresh from his revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Louis XIV was presenting himself as the defender of Catholicism and was consequently eager to be seen as the patron of this translation enterprise. The book consequently opens with a letter to the Sun King, fulsomely praising him for his support of the project. It is this publication by Couplet, rather than the earlier, more tentative efforts, that led to the considerable influence Confucian thought was to have in late seventeenth-century Europe, notably with Leibniz. A few years later, in 1711, another Jesuit missionary, François Noël, furthered the translation project by publishing his versions of the three works already translated, plus the *Lesser Learning*, the *Classic of Filial Piety*, and the *Mencius*, in Prague, where he had ended up after the newly assertive Qing court had begun to make life difficult for the missionaries. Unlike the Couplet translation, which was very much a work of Jesuit public relations as much as of scholarship, Noël’s was published independently of major church or state patronage and is rather less focused than Couplet’s translation on illustrating the usefulness of Confucian thought for missionary purposes.

This had been of course the major goal behind the study of the Confucian classics since at least Matteo Ricci: to develop an understanding of the Chinese tradition adequate to deploy that tradition in pursuit of the conversion of Chinese souls. The comparative study of Chinese and European cultures, in other words, was instrumentalized from the start, which is not to deny that that instrumentalization was frequently balanced by a sustained and genuine intellectual curiosity and a desire to learn more about Chinese culture. Early Jesuits in China, such as Ricci, had advocated a policy of “accommodation”—for example, the use of Chinese rather than Latin in the Mass, the acceptance of many traditional Confucian rites of mourning as not in their essence anti-Christian, and other similar concessions to Chinese traditions.

These early translation efforts took place during very specific moments in the intellectual histories of both Europe and China, and local intellectual and political conditions on both ends had a great deal to do with how Chinese philosophy was first received in Europe.

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The 1660s were an era of ongoing instability in China: the Ming dynasty had been overthrown in Beijing by the Manchu Qing dynasty in 1644, but the last renegade Ming prince on the Chinese mainland did not surrender until 1662, while Zheng Chenggong (better known in the west as Koxinga) maintained a Ming loyalist kingdom in exile on Taiwan until 1683. Jesuit missionaries remained in contact with the holdout Ming rulers in the south and were slow at first to regain support in the capital from the new Qing regime. Their understanding of key Confucian texts in this era therefore betrays the influence of Ming-loyalist intellectuals of the style of Gu Yuanwu (1613–1682), in its adherence to an originalist interpretation of the text, and a rejection of the neo-Confucian philosophies of the Song and later, which had become orthodox in the meantime. Ming loyalists sought to situate the dynasty's collapse in terms of its departure from authentic Confucian virtues, and these prejudices show themselves, for example, in the 110-page introduction to Couplet's translation, wherein neo-Confucian philosophers such as Zhu Xi (1130–1200), highly orthodox at the time, are represented as little better than the Buddhists and Daoists, whose beliefs were, of course, abhorrent to the Jesuit missionaries. This rejection of neo-Confucian philosophy in the introduction sits oddly with the translation's heavy reliance on the commentaries of both Zhu Xi and the more contemporary neo-Confucian Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582), tutor to the Wanli emperor of the Ming dynasty. In the Europe of Louis XIV and of Leibniz, questions of the role of the monarch in a benevolent absolutism, of the powers and limits of rationalism, and of the value of ancient tradition in a changing world made the sudden appearance of Confucian thought in Europe a major intellectual event. After all, 1687 is also the year of Charles Perrault's *Le siècle de Louis le Grand*, one of the major works of the Modern party in the "Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns." Ancient Chinese wisdom thus arrived in Europe just as the continent was beginning, for reasons of state as much as for other reasons, to debate the enduring role of the Western classics.

All of these factors influenced the reception of the Chinese classics in the West, especially within the church itself. Whereas the Jesuits from an early stage had advocated "accommodation" of Chinese traditions in their proselytizing activities, others, notably the Dominicans, objected, in the long-running "Rites Controversy" concerning the appropriateness of mourning rituals. The papacy ruled in favor of the Dominicans in 1645, ruled of the Jesuits in 1656, and was back on the Dominican side in 1704 and 1742, only to return to a position resembling that of the Jesuits as late as 1939. (The shifting Vatican position on this question could serve, we shall see, as something of an index for the broader shifts in the reception of traditional Chinese culture in the West.) Space does not permit the fuller discussion of these questions here; for an engaging discussion, see Spence (1984).

China Receives the Western Classics, Slowly

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Meanwhile, the Chinese reception of the European classics proceeded more slowly, and on a path that remains to this day somewhat obscure, as there was relatively little interest among leading Chinese intellectuals in European ideas before the mid-nineteenth century. The case of Homer will serve as a point of reference for the larger reception history. Sher-shiueh Li has traced that reception history, showing that Jesuit missionaries, in their Chinese-language writings on Western culture, deliberately suppressed mention of Homeric epic, whose pagan content they thought inappropriate for their converts, even as they translated moral and philosophical texts and precepts (Li 2014). For example, Matteo Ricci authored a short text in Chinese in 1599, while resident in Nanjing. Titled *Ershiwu Yan* (二十五言), or *Twenty-Five Passages*. This work was a series of extracts from the *Encheiridion of Epictetus*, a second-century AD manual of Stoic aphorisms. One of these extracts contained a critique of Homer by Chysippus; in his translation, Ricci replaces the name of Homer with the phrase 優伶 *youling*, or “actor,” and refers to the Homeric epics as *yuefu* 樂府, the term for a type of popular ballad supposedly collected by ancient bureaucrats and much imitated by later literati poets. This is more than a simple act of cultural translation on the part of Ricci, merely pouring Greek wine into Chinese bottles, as it were. The connection Ricci establishes between *yuefu* and epic is a clever one—poetry with a patina of folk origin, with a serious politico-ethical content—but by suppressing the name of Homer and referring to him as an actor (a profession scarcely more prestigious in late Ming China than in early modern Italy), Ricci also successfully suppresses possible interest in Homer on the part of his Chinese audience. Similarly, a few decades later Alfonso Vagnone (1566–1640) compiled a collection of anecdotes relating to Greco-Roman political and ethical philosophy, organized around the cardinal relationships of Confucian thought: ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, older brother-younger brother, friend-friend. This text, the *Dadao Jiyan* 達道紀言 (1636), includes the famous story that Alexander slept with his copy of Homer beneath his head, but Vagnone, like Ricci, omits the names of Homer and of his poems, referring instead to “the poem of a renowned scholar” (名士之詩). Again, the translation simultaneously assimilates Homer to categories familiar to Chinese readers of the period and also forestalls potential interest in Homer by stripping him of any particularity. (Vagnone may, however, be the first person to refer to Homer by name in a Chinese text, in an anecdote in the *Dadao Jiyan* about Xenophanes’s mockery of the poet, though what appears to be a transcription error confuses the issue; see Li 2014, 86–88).

Joseph de Prémare (1666–1736) played an important role on both sides of the reception history of Sino-Greek comparative studies. As the author of one of the first grammars of classical Chinese in a European language, the *Notitiae Linguae Sinicae* (1724), Prémare offered the first translations of the *Canon of Songs* into French, or any European language, though he offers translations of only eight of the odes. Prémare also wrote in Chinese, and in one of his Chinese texts (the *Tianxue Zonglun* 天學綜論), he dismisses Homer, explaining that philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates had condemned Homer for instituting the worship of false idols (Li 2014, 89).

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The combination of Jesuit reluctance to include polytheistic texts among the European culture they disseminated in China, together with perhaps a general lack of Chinese interest in learning about ancient European cultures during an era of Chinese economic and political ascendancy, left the question of Chinese knowledge of Homer in much the same state until the eve of the Opium Wars. The Protestant missionary Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) appears to be the author of an 1837 Chinese-language essay in a Chinese missionary magazine, taking the Chinese to task for not having learned about, let alone read, Homer (a somewhat unreasonable complaint, given the history above). In another essay in the same magazine the following year, under the title “A Brief Sketch of Chinese History,” Gützlaff offers a plot summary of the *Iliad*, in which he describes Helen’s beauty in language borrowed from the conventions of classical Chinese poetry, referring to her thus: “Her beauty would shame the flowers; her brow was as a mountain in spring.” (嬌如羞花, 眉如春山). These lines echo not only generic Chinese descriptions of beauty (women’s brows are like mountains, because both are like the antennae of moths: arched with a delicate line), but, in the reference to “shaming flowers,” point specifically to Yang Guifei (719–756), the consort of the Xuanzong emperor of the Tang dynasty (r. 712–756). When the general An Lushan rebelled in 755, and the emperor was forced to flee the capital, the soldiers escorting the emperor forced him to execute Yang Guifei, his beloved consort, believing her uncle to be responsible for the rebellion. The story of Yang Guifei would be told and retold in countless forms and remains to this day one of the most beautiful and poignant love stories in the Chinese tradition.

This moment of plot summary, in other words, is, perhaps in spite of itself, one of the first explicit moments of comparative Greek-Chinese literary study, comparing and contrasting the great beauties of the two traditions and the tragic consequences that love for them had for the kings who wed them. Gützlaff’s plot summary of the *Iliad*, in fact, borrows in several ways from the story of Yang Guifei, assimilating archaic Greek epic to a romantic and sentimentally tragic style familiar to a Chinese audience.

From this point onward, knowledge of the plots of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* began to seep into China, with the history of the Trojan War becoming a feature of histories of Greece. Further plot summaries of the epics are found in the Chinese writings of, for example, the British missionary Joseph Edkins (1823–1905), who further discussed such questions as the metrical form of Greek epic, the biographical issues known as the “Homeric Question,” and even analogies between the Greek gods and the Indian gods known to the Chinese through Buddhism (so Zeus is like Brahmā, and Hermes like the Devas) (Li 2014, 95). The closest we come to a Chinese translation of Homeric epic in the late imperial era is a translation of the story of “Circe’s Palace” from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Tanglewood Tales*, published in 1910, on the eve of the collapse of the empire. This rule-proving exception emphatically underscores the extremely limited ways in which classical Western texts were known in China before 1911. Things would change substantially after that date.

Nineteenth-Century European Reception of the Chinese Classics

In Europe the nineteenth century had seen rapid strides in the understanding and translation of key Chinese texts. As late as 1800, virtually the only classical Chinese literary texts available in European languages were the basic Confucian classics whose translation is discussed above. The only other texts to have been translated prior to 1800 were *The Art of War*, attributed to Sunzi (translated into French by the missionary Jean Amiot in 1772); an anonymous late-seventeenth-century novel of the *caizi jiaren* (“talented scholar and beautiful woman”) variety, called *The Fortunate Union* (*Haoqiu zhuan*), partially translated into English by a merchant, John Wilkinson, and later published in a completed translation by Thomas Percy in 1761; and *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhaoshi gu'er*), a Yuan dynasty play translated into French (without the songs, which form a crucial element of the drama) by Prémare in 1731. (For details on these and other early translations from Chinese, see the still-useful Wylie 1902).

By 1900 the situation had changed completely, and most of the major pre-Qin Chinese texts had been translated into at least one European language (in a sign of the times, now almost always English or French); indeed, some pre-Qin works, notably the ritual texts, have not been retranslated since. The *Canon of Songs* (and indeed almost all later Chinese poetry) was all but unavailable to Europeans in 1800, with only the eight poems translated by Prémare in his grammar available to be read, and those only by an audience that went looking for them there. In 1830 Father Alexandre de Lacharme’s (1695–1767) Latin translations of the *Songs*, mediated through their Manchu translation, were finally published, a century after they had been written, although their pedantic style (described by one later missionary as “la plus indigeste et la plus ennuyeuse que la sinologie ait à rougir” [“the most tedious and indigestible thing Sinology has to blush about”]) did little to excite readers’ interest.

More significantly, two missionaries, the Scotsman James Legge (1815–1897) and the Frenchman Séraphin Couvreur (1835–1919), published translations of the *Canon of Songs* in their native languages in 1871 and 1896, respectively. Over the following decades, each would translate most of the other Confucian classics, as well as other major early works, doing much to bring this period to life for European audiences. Both were operating very much within a framework of proselytizing: Legge’s preface casts doubt on the aesthetic merits of the *Songs*, but suggests that their existence demonstrates the conditions of possibility for a Christian hymnal in Chinese, while Couvreur argues that the *Songs* are most useful as a means of learning about the ancient customs of China and are as such indispensable to the missionary. Their work is thus in a sense comparative, existing to illustrate key differences between Chinese and European cultures in order to aid the latter in transforming the former. Both draw heavily on the neo-Confucian commentaries also used by the earlier Jesuits in their translation efforts, though Legge in particular also makes use of considerable recent scholarship, as well as of the assistance

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of Wang Tao (1828–1897). Himself a figure of note—the founder of the first Chinese daily newspaper, author of the first Chinese-language travel diary about Europe, and the first Chinese scholar to give a lecture at Oxford—Wang, as much as Legge, made Chinese culture available to the West, and Western culture available in China. While the period was one of European imperialism, Chinese political turmoil, and the rapid demoralization of the Qing regime, it was also the first era in which cross-cultural knowledge had reached the minimum threshold necessary for real comparative work to begin.

The Twentieth Century

Conditions that make scholarship possible do not, of course, generate that scholarship all on their own, and in fact the earlier twentieth century saw relatively little work that might be called Greek-Chinese comparative studies. There are a number of reasons why this was so. In China itself, detailed knowledge of the Western classics was disseminated gradually beginning in the Republican era (1911–1949), though the extreme instability of China from the 1920s through 1949, combined with the continual political upheavals of the Mao era, made this a very slow process. The first complete translation of the *Odyssey* into Chinese (albeit from an English translation) was completed by Fu Donghua and published in Changsha in 1929. The first (prose) translation of the *Odyssey* based on the Greek original was completed only in 1961, by the Oxford-trained Yang Xianyi, who with his wife was also responsible for many translations of major Chinese works into English, notably the first versions of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Secret History of the Scholars*, two of the great novels of the eighteenth century. But Yang's work on translating Homer was interrupted, first by his *Dream of the Red Chamber* translation and then by the Cultural Revolution. Another Chinese scholar with training in the Western classics, Luo Niansheng, published the major works of Greek drama gradually over a period from the 1930s through the 1960s; his prose translation of the *Iliad* was completed after his death in 1990 by Wilson Wong and published only in 1994. Platonic dialogues began to be translated on a consistent scale in the 1930s, and new translations continue today, in the context of (and outside of) the Straussian translation project of Liu Xiaofeng and others (see below).

Of course it is not necessary for translations to exist for comparative scholarship to function, so long as scholars themselves have access to the primary texts, through their knowledge of their language, or, if necessary, through the medium of a third language such as English. And in the Republican era, the Chinese certainly thought and wrote extensively about the Western classics, even as those texts were only slowly emerging in Chinese translation. Reformers, such as Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967), sought to find explanations for the decline in China's prestige relative to the West in a failure of traditional Chinese values and explored the Greco-Roman tradition as the source of the (presumably more effective) values of the West. Zhou, the younger brother of the famous

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modern Chinese writer Lu Xun, initially learned Greek in order to gain access to the New Testament, but his broad interests in the Greco-Roman tradition can be seen through his translations of authors as varied as Sappho and Lucian.

Such reformist efforts met considerable political challenges later; Zhou, who became chancellor of Peking University in 1939, was persecuted by the Nationalists for alleged collaboration with the Japanese invaders in 1945. Released by Mao in 1949, he spend his later years in relative obscurity, dying in the midst of the Cultural Revolution. This particular instrumentalization of the Greco-Chinese comparison, as a heuristic for what ailed (or was perceived as ailing) early twentieth-century China, is of course also of limited value within the realm of comparative studies, especially as changing circumstances have made such cultural navel-gazing seem old-fashioned. More conservative Chinese scholars of the period had different interests in the Western classics. Exemplary of this camp would be Wu Mi (1894–1978), who studied comparative literature under Irving Babbitt at Harvard as World War I was ending, and on his return to China cofounded the important journal *Critical Review* (*Xueheng*). The journal as a whole was known for its critical attitude toward the linguistic and cultural reforms then sweeping China, specifically toward the efforts of the “Doubting Antiquity Movement” of Hu Shih, Gu Jiegang, Liang Qichao, Feng Youlan, Guo Moruo, Kang Youwei, and others, which sought to challenge the hegemony of the orthodox Confucian version of ancient Chinese history and culture through more rigorous scholarly methods. *Critical Review* defended the traditional ethical values of Confucianism as a legitimate basis for a modern nation and society. For intellectuals such as Wu, the Western classics were valuable less as a series of clues to why the West had won the race to modernity, and more as a way of understanding the complexity of the West and its own conflicts between tradition and modernity. Such views were largely silenced on the mainland after 1949 and remained dormant for a long time, though as we shall see, they have considerable traction today in a new guise.

In the West Sinology was gradually emerging as a legitimate academic discipline, no longer merely an auxiliary science to missionary work. There had been lectures in Sinology at the Collège de France as early as 1814, but the formal institutional establishment of the discipline happened only gradually: James Legge (see above) had occupied the first chair in Chinese at Oxford in 1876, within a year or so of the first chairs being established also at Leiden and at Yale. Germany saw its first chair in Sinology only in 1909. The years between the world wars were thus an era in which the field began to grow significantly from these small beginnings and began to develop the trappings of specialization, which discouraged comparative work. After 1949 and the Communist rise to power, interest grew in the study of contemporary China from a social science as well as a humanistic perspective, especially in the United States, with the emergence of area studies in the 1960s. In the context of the Cultural Revolution, in which many in China were actively engaged in erasing the traces of the ancient past, the study of that past began to seem an antiquarian interest, one not connected to urgent

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contemporary realities. Trends in the larger academy, toward postcolonial thought and subaltern studies, for example, likewise marginalized scholarship on early China.

Comparative work between China and the West was, if anything, more marginalized than that, left without an obvious ideological space to occupy. Progressively minded scholars were hard at work on unthinking a century and a half of racist and ethnocentric thought, which had assumed the inferiority of non-Western cultures, and had little interest in comparative work, which for them would have been tarred with the ethnocentric brush. Increasingly specialized and disciplinary in its approach, and under pressure from all directions, classical Sinology had little interest in performing comparative work, even though many Western specialists in early China continued to be people who had studied Greek and Latin at an earlier stage in their intellectual lives, and for whom the comparison must always have been imminent. Much work in the field of Early China studies thus has the Greco-Roman world as a referent (usually implicitly), but the work that raises that comparison to the level of organizing principle has been quite rare until very recently.

Science

Where the Sino-Hellenic comparative project proper began at all was in the fields of the history of science and of comparative philosophy, for each of which China's status as a great Other to the West, long outside the sphere of direct intellectual contact, made it a relatively natural object of study. The monumental *Science and Civilisation in China*, begun by Joseph Needham in 1963 and still being published today, is of course a kind of comparative project in its own right, having its origins in Needham's question:

Why did modern science, the mathematization of hypotheses about Nature, with all its implications for advanced technology, take its meteoric rise only in the West at the time of Galileo [but] had not developed in Chinese civilisation (or Indian or Islamic)?

(Needham 1969)

This question, of course, takes the form identified earlier as "elliptical," being in fact virtually the *locus classicus* of such comparisons of China with the West, and has accordingly come under heavy criticism for decades. But it does mark a significant rise in interest in explicit comparisons between China and the West, taken on the basis that the two are great civilizations with long and rich intellectual histories, both inherently interesting to study. (Indeed, other readers of Needham sometimes come away with the impression that he has overemphasized the contributions China made to human civilization and to technical advancement.) More recent work on the early history of Chinese science, notably that of G. E. R. Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, has been much more explicitly comparative in its approach. Lloyd's and Sivin's work has problematized

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Needham's question, suggesting that it may not represent a fruitful line for further inquiry, and has stressed the need for a more complex history, taking into account broader patterns of cultural exchange, and seeking small-bore, localized explanations for technological innovations in the West, rather than differences in civilizational *mentalité*. Their *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (Lloyd and Sivin 2002) seeks to redress previous civilizational histories of China, which often sought the root causes for China's nineteenth-century technological failings deep in the history of Confucian thought. They argue instead that, at around 200 AD, Greece and China had equal potential for developing toward what would become science, with each culture possessing some, but not all, of the characteristics that would eventually be needed. While the focus is still on an inherently "elliptical" question (Why didn't China develop science first?), scholars like Sivin and Lloyd have moved the debate forward in substantial ways, emphasizing the contingent, rather than essentialist, nature of any future answer.

Philosophy

Before beginning a discussion of the body of work in comparative philosophy, mention must be made of the sizeable debate in the field about whether there is such an object as "Chinese philosophy," and, even assuming it can be found, whether it is possible to compare that object with "Western" or "Greek" philosophy—or whether that latter strain of philosophy is in fact the only species in its genus. The claim is that the notion of "philosophy" is so deeply bound up in Greek habits of thought (and European habits gradually learned from the Greeks) that the term is more misleading than helpful in the analysis of the intellectual traditions of other parts of the world. There is famously no single indigenous Chinese term equivalent to "philosophy." The term used today is *zhexue* 哲學, a gloss for the European term "philosophy," adopted in Japan in the late nineteenth century and then imported to China. Emerging as it did during an era of self-criticism, the "elliptical" question "Does China have philosophy?" necessarily took on the air of a value judgment, and as we shall see, early histories of Chinese philosophy have as an explicit goal of asserting the value of traditional Chinese thought vis-à-vis Western philosophy. When the question of whether traditional China had philosophy or not is raised today, the terms of discussion tend to be more nuanced and complex. As Carine Defoort (2001) has argued, both Chinese and Western intellectuals have a wide range of motives for answering yes or no, from a Western xenophobic desire to assert the supremacy of the Greek tradition to a Chinese insistence on the exceptionalism of their culture, to debates about whether the term "philosophy" should have a stable referent at all, or whether in fact the value of the comparison might be to problematize philosophy in its European birthplace. In her monograph on the early figures of "Chinese philosophy," Wiebke Denecke (2010) historicizes the emergence of that category in the context of both the emergence of philosophy as a European academic discipline in the late nineteenth century and the newly nationalist Chinese intellectual world of the Republican era. She observes that the adscription of figures such as Confucius to the category of "philosophy"

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had been unproblematic in the West prior to that period, since the West's own definition of philosophy remained flexible and capacious, and argues that the historical context in which "Chinese philosophy" was constructed as such in the early twentieth century distorts the content and value of the texts in question (2010, 1–32). In this view she concurs, for example, with Ge Zhaoguang (2014), who in his magisterial *Intellectual History of China* prefers the concepts "history of thought" and intellectual history, which he sees as richer and more inclusive and as not imposing external categories on indigenous texts they do not suit. Such an approach does risk a kind of "inverse ellipsis," a valorizing of the plenitude of Chinese thought precisely in terms of those dimensions in which Western philosophy might be said to be lacking—and thus risks continuing to read Chinese texts in terms of (this time, their surpassing of) Western concepts. Still, we must be careful not to evaluate premodern Chinese texts on the basis of whether or not they fulfill certain modern Western expectations about what philosophy is. If I continue to use the terms "philosophy" and "Chinese philosophy" below, they should be taken as placeholders for some broader meta-concept, capable of encompassing both Greek philosophy and Chinese "Masters' Texts" within its grasp.

Rooted itself in a kind of meta-ellipsis, comparative philosophy frequently emphasizes several other leading "elliptical" questions in Greek-Chinese studies, notably the question of "Why doesn't China have metaphysics?" Such a question, of course, presumes that metaphysics is both something that it is desirable to have and, more important, something that can exist outside of the very specific Greek cultural context that gave it birth. To the extent that philosophy and its branches are defined in terms that take the European case as normative, the histories of other philosophies will always look as though they are lacking (and the more so if we restrict our understanding of "Chinese philosophy" to texts produced prior to the Han dynasty, and thus prior to the arrival of Buddhism, with its own version of Sanskrit metaphysics in tow).

Comparative Greek-Chinese philosophy can be said to have begun with Xie Wuliang's 中國哲學史 *Zhongguo zhexue shi* (*A History of Chinese Philosophy*), published in 1915. This work, little read today, strikingly emphasizes the foreignness of the concept of *zhexue*. Although Xie was writing a history of Chinese philosophy, not an explicitly comparative work, this emphasis on the foreign nature of the concept of philosophy renders the project inherently comparative (Denecke 2010, 15). More widely read was Hu Shih's 中國哲學史大綱 *Zhongguo zhexueshi dagang* (*An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*) of 1919. Hu was a student of John Dewey's and a leading reformer of Chinese language and culture in the early twentieth century. As an avowed nationalist, his goal in writing his *Outline* was explicitly to establish the legitimacy of the Chinese philosophical tradition as worthy of comparison with Western philosophy.

Also significant in this regard is the work of Feng Yu-lan (1895–1990). Another student of John Dewey, Feng is best known for his two-volume *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1934), still one of the most complete and accessible works on its topic, as well as being the first systematically composed on Western principles. Feng is animated throughout by a concern that Chinese philosophy lacked a rigorous metaphysical tradition, something he

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attempted to address as well in his own philosophical writings. Feng aimed to bring “Chinese philosophy” into the purview of Western intellectuals, by writing a history of philosophy on Western lines and using the Western philosophical tradition as the paradigm for understanding the Chinese tradition. Such a comparative model necessarily produces the lack it seeks in its object.

Further work in comparative philosophy has frequently continued to operate within this paradigm, while challenging various aspects of it. The slender but influential *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, by Herbert Fingarette (1972), broke new ground in insisting on the value of Confucian ideas for the here and now of the book’s audience, without assimilating the *Analects* to the conceptual world of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. The scholarly duo of David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, known for a number of books, including *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), emphasized the nontranscendent, nonmetaphysical nature of Chinese philosophy consistently in their work, although generally in the form of celebrating that philosophy’s emphasis on the “here and now,” on the practical, ethical questions of everyday life. The elliptical “lack” in Chinese philosophy, in other words, is reimagined in terms of a plenitude of something else—a something else, it turns out, that the West might benefit from learning more about. Their Confucius is a radically immanent one, and their convictions are on the side of inherent differences between cultures, worldviews that are deeply rooted in the minds of a nation, rather than historically contingent and shifting differences and debates.

Objects of study matter here, to the extent that Sino-Hellenic comparative philosophy becomes a comparison between Platonic dialogues and the Confucian *Analects*, which will greatly reinforce the conviction that Greek or “Western” thought is about transcendence, and Chinese, “Asian,” or “Western” thought is about immanence. A comparison of, say, Sextus Empiricus and the *Zhuangzi* would yield rather different results, and it should be remembered that both Socrates and Confucius were rejected in their own times, the former executed, the later dying hungry and unemployed. If these two highly unusual, cantankerous, and not entirely consistent men can be used as metonyms of their cultures of origin, they can only do so with due attention to the lengthy and contingent historical processes by which their views came to be, if not hegemonic, at least representative. A salutary effort to compare Greek and Chinese philosophy in a more nuanced way is found in the work of Jean-Paul Reding. His *Les fondements philosophiques de la rhétorique chez les sophistes grecs et chez les sophistes chinois* (1985) poses the question “Are there Chinese sophists?” rather than the elliptical question of lack, and uses that question as a means of exploring our understanding of the figures who might be called sophists in both Greece and China. Lu Xing’s *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric* (1998) likewise offers a comparison of the roles played by rhetoric in the two cultures, one that establishes similarities as well as differences and seeks to use the comparison as mutually illuminating, rather than as illustrative of a lack in Chinese thought or practice. Reding’s later *Comparative Essays in Early Greek and Chinese Rational Thinking* (Ashgate, 2004) likewise compares the early

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Greek and Chinese philosophical traditions in several areas, from logic to atomism to ontology, finding that a careful reading of texts and a nuanced understanding of linguistic issues uncover similarities otherwise hidden. His approach is thus similar to that which has prevailed in comparative Greek-Chinese literary studies proper in the past decade.

Mention should be made here as well of a very different eruption of Greco-Chinese comparison into philosophical discourse, namely the role played by Chinese writing in the work of Jacques Derrida, specifically his *De la grammatologie (On Grammatology)* ([1967] 1978). As part of his larger project of problematizing the Western privileging of the immediacy of speech over the mediation of writing, Derrida explores the Enlightenment tendency (best exemplified by Leibniz) to celebrate Chinese writing as nonphonetic, as the closest actually existing equivalent to the kind of purely abstract language of ideas toward which some Enlightenment thinkers were yearning. This reading of course downplays the undeniable, if complex, phonetic dimension of Chinese writing (for a good discussion see Bachner 2014), and it is not altogether clear whether Derrida is aware of this failing in Enlightenment thinking, and if so where he situates himself in relationship to it. Still, Derrida's *De la grammatologie* marks something of a turning point in the conditions of possibility for Sino-Greek comparisons, raising almost for the first time the awareness that China, or at least constructions of it, play a foundational role in the West's construction of itself in the Enlightenment, a role we pointed to in the earlier discussion of the reception of Chinese texts in the Europe of that era. However inadvertently, Derrida's work opens the door through which it would be possible to claim that the Greek-Chinese comparison was not merely possible, but actually essential to the West's own self-understanding.

Greek-Chinese Comparative Literature

After several centuries of the gradual accumulation of cross-cultural knowledge and several decades of scholarship in comparative philosophy and history of science had paved the way, comparative Greece-China work with a linguistic or literary bent began to accumulate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, thanks to a handful of scholars such as Earl Miner, Wang Ching-hsien, Victor Mair, François Jullien, Haun Saussy, Zhang Longxi, and Lisa Raphals. They could not have been a more disparate group in terms of training, methodology, or thematic interests, but among them they began to establish a body of scholarship that could be described as a subfield, or at least the beginnings of one. Given the limited number of individuals involved and the divergent nature of their approaches, it is more useful to review their work individually, rather than arbitrarily grouping them into “schools.”

Although Earl Miner (1927–2004) was primarily a scholar of Japanese literature, he is responsible for one of the earliest books explicitly in the realm of East-West comparative literature. His *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (1990) attempts to found a comparative discussion on European and East Asian poetics (with reference to other contexts, notably Arabic, as well). Miner argues that, where Aristotle’s *Poetics* (and Plato before him) emphasized a poetics based on mimesis, the commentarial tradition on the *Canon of Songs*, particularly the orthodox Mao preface to the *Canon*, offers instead an “affective-expressive” poetics; that is, one in which poetry is the external expression of internal sentiment. Miner identifies elements of such an affective-expressive poetics in later aspects of the Western tradition, notably in Horace and Wordsworth, but suggests that the early absence of mimetic poetics from East Asia and of affective-expressive poetics from Greece has important implications for the development and privileging of genres, among other issues.

Earlier, in his *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*, Stephen Owen (1985) had argued for a similar contrast between the transcendence of Western poetry, in which truth is revealed through metaphor, and what he identifies as an immanent expression of the poet’s truth through his own lived experience, especially in the occasional poetry that is so central to the Chinese poetic tradition. In a less explicitly comparative vein, Owen’s *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (1992), develops similar arguments in much more detail with respect to the Chinese literary-critical tradition. While their conclusions can certainly be challenged, and their emphasis on certain forms of literary texts rather than others may have an impact on their findings, these books remain compelling in their insights into the texts they discuss and are extremely important in laying the groundwork for any further cross-cultural study.

Wang Ching-hsien, born in Taiwan in 1940, is an accomplished poet as well as a scholar of comparative literature. His scholarly works on classical Chinese literature, *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (1974) and *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays in Early Chinese Poetry* (1988), explore the applicability of oral-

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formulaic poetics in the Parry-Lord vein to early Chinese poetry, particularly the *Canon of Songs*, and consider the great elliptical question of Greek-Chinese literary studies: “Why doesn’t China have epic?” (One of the answers, incidentally, is that the later Chinese storytelling tradition certainly does include long narrative poems, but these were seen as a popular form, not valorized within the tradition. It’s not that China doesn’t have epic, but that the epic it has doesn’t play the cultural role it occupies in Europe. See Idema (2010). Wang argues, among other things, that certain of the poems in the *Canon of Songs* could be construed as a sort of “Weniad,” a mini-epic of short poems dedicated to the life of King Wen, one of the founding rulers of the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BC). While Wang’s work was not always well received within early China circles (in part, it must be said, because some in those circles attributed to Parry-Lord poetics more rigid rules about formulaic percentages than Parry or Lord would themselves have countenanced), and while it does emphasize elliptical issues of lack, his work was nonetheless important in establishing that the conceptual tools used to think about archaic and classical Greek literature could be used to study early China as well.

Victor Mair, born in 1943, is a professor of Chinese at the University of Pennsylvania, specializing in early Chinese vernacular literature. He is the founding editor of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, a journal that has published much innovative work, including Mair’s. Since the 1980s a major focus of Mair’s work has been aspects of contact between China and the West in early times, from linguistic borrowings to the transfer of material culture through the region known as Chinese Turkestan, along early versions of the Silk Road. This work, culminating in the edited collection *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World* (2006), has not been without controversy, and on the whole Sino-Greek literary comparison has followed paths that do not emphasize points of contact. The work of Mair and others of this ilk offers, however, an important challenge to the presumption of transcendent differences between China and the West.

The French Sinologist and philosopher François Jullien, born in 1951, holds a chair in Alterity at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris. The title is a fitting one, for Jullien’s work explores Chinese and Western thought from the perspective of differences or gaps between the two, rather than from points of similarity, with the goal of uncovering the “unthoughts” of each tradition. Perhaps the best known of Jullien’s works in this field is *Le Détour et l’Accès: Stratégies du sens en Chine, en Grèce* (1995) translated as *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (2004). Jullien argues here that, while Westerners from the Greeks onward have emphasized direct speech and action, the Chinese have always preferred to speak or act through “detour,” or indirection: through allusion, understatement, or oblique reference. Jullien offers readings of Chinese texts ranging from commentaries on the *Canon of Songs* to Maoist propaganda. While his readings are always penetrating, and his ideas provocative, his work has also been challenged for seeming to reinscribe the kinds of essentialist images of the inscrutable East common to orientalist scholarship of an earlier era, and for treating both East and West as more internally consistent than they actually are.

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Proceeding from a similarly deconstructive position, but with rather different results, is Haun Saussy. Born in 1960, and trained in Comparative Literature at Yale, Saussy's work represents one of the most sophisticated efforts both to think of premodern China in terms of Western literary theory and to think of the role China plays in that theory itself. Both these themes are seen in his influential first book, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (1993). That book is mostly built around a reading and interpretation of the orthodox Mao commentaries on the *Canon of Songs* and around the problem those commentaries might present for a Western scholar of comparative literature bringing to bear upon them the concept of allegory. Through the complex and subtle reading Saussy develops here, and through the problems he identifies in engaging in the comparative project at all, he proceeds to a reading of Hegel's understanding of China as ahistorical in his *Philosophy of World History, Part I*. Ultimately, Hegel's reading of China, and the allegorical reading of the *Canon of Songs*, are seen to be analogues in some sense for one another. Described by one reviewer as "not for the faint of heart," Saussy's book remains important to the field of Greece-China comparison, both for its insistence that the "China" constructed in both the commentaries on the *Canon of Songs* and that constructed by Western observers such as Hegel are ideologically motivated and contingent structures, bearing complex relationships to the China of anyone's lived experience, and for the important role the book played in insisting on the centrality of China to theoretical discussions in comparative literature (even discussions about Hegel, for example, which might not immediately seem to involve China).

One of the most influential voices in the study of China and the West (including Greece) is Zhang Longxi. Born in Chengdu, Sichuan, in 1947, Zhang was among the first cohort of graduate students in English at Peking University after the end of the Cultural Revolution, in 1976. There he met with, and was influenced by, Qian Zhongshu (1910–1998), one of the greatest comparative scholars of his time, before receiving a PhD in comparative literature at Harvard. Zhang's work has long aimed at bridging the gap between China and the West, to reduce the Otherness of each to the other, through a hermeneutic project inspired by Gadamer. In his *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (1992), Zhang explores this territory, through readings of major poets of the Chinese and European traditions and through an exploration of the concepts of Dao (otherwise transcribed as Tao) and of Logos, which Zhang sees as concepts performing similar work in their respective cultures, in spite of their complex ranges of meaning and arguable incommensurability. Zhang's is one of the earliest voices in the field of comparative Greek-Chinese studies to see Otherness as an obstacle to be overcome through interpretation, rather than as the object of study itself. As such, his work is directly and indirectly very influential on more recent work in the field.

Another very distinctive and influential voice is that of Lisa Raphals (1951–), whose work bridges the fields of history of science, philosophy, and comparative literature. Her *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (1992) considers the concept of *mêtis*, or cunning, a concept she derives from Greek sources but identifies as a category of intelligence (contrasted with discursive knowledge) also found in Chinese texts of varying periods. Through a series of readings of Chinese

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philosophical texts and a comparative study of Homeric epic with the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the *Journey to the West*, two great novels of the Ming dynasty, Raphals argues for the value of *métis* as a conceptual framework for thinking about a wide range of Chinese texts. In so doing she makes the case for a kind of comparative work that (again like Zhang Longxi, but unlike many of the others discussed so far) emphasizes points of contiguity or similarity in its act of comparison, rather than dwelling only on the incommensurate (though Raphals's work does insist on the existence of concepts that might not be comparable between Greece and China; see in particular her more recent *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece* (2013)). In the process of privileging similarity over difference, her book also represents a tension between discursive and strategic knowledge within traditional Chinese culture. Where earlier works had seen the interesting debates as lying between two incommensurate cultures, scholars of Zhang's and Raphals's generation began, importantly, to shift the emphasis to debates happening within cultures and to cultures (China as much as Greece) as sites for debate.

These shifts (from incommensurability to comparable similarities; from static to dynamic models of the cultures compared) have importantly defined the further development of Greece-China studies in the American academy, in particular in the past twenty years. An index of these shifts is the volume *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons* (2002), edited by Steven Shankman and Stephen Durrant, and derived from a conference they co-organized at the University of Oregon in the late spring of 1998. The volume contains contributions from Hall, Ames, Saussy, Wang, Raphals, and the editors, as well as from a number of scholars whose published work focuses more heavily on China, but which has a comparative component as well (David Schaberg, Michael Puett, David Keightley, Andrew Plaks, Michael Nylan, Anthony Yu). It offers a wide range of perspectives on how to go about thinking of the comparison between Greece and China, as this list of contributors suggests, and both the conference and the volume itself underscored the arrival of this comparison as, if not a coherent field of study, at least a productive one. Shankman and Durrant (one of several pairings of scholars whose coauthored work has been influential in the field, along with Hall and Ames [1987] and Lloyd and Sivin [2002]) published their own volume, *The Siren and the Sage: Knowledge and Wisdom in Ancient Greece and China* (Cassell, 2000), which explores the relationship between knowledge and wisdom in the two traditions, through comparative sections exploring in turn poetry, history, and philosophy. Shankman's and Durrant's perspective, like that of Raphals or Zhang, emphasizes points of commonality and debates within cultures.

The Greek-Chinese field has continued to grow in the twenty-first century, as new generations of scholars have entered the field. The past few years have seen a number of new works, by Zhou Yiqun, Hyun Jin Kim, Wiebke Denecke, and myself. As a collection of scholars born in the 1970s and afterward, and having come of age in the 2000s (and along with other scholars, such as Tamara Chin, whose work may focus primarily on

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China, but whose training and methods are comparative), these four offer different perspectives on how to do comparative work between Greece and China, but taken together, I believe certain trends can be detected.

Zhou Yiqun's *Festivals, Feasts, and Gender Relations in Ancient China and Greece* (2010) explores the strategies used to negotiate kinship and gender relations in both Greece and China through the contexts of festivals and other convivial occasions. Her book contrasts the agonistic competitiveness the Greeks deployed as they created a public sphere of friendship transcending familial ties with an early Chinese approach in which public events served to negotiate and assert relationships within patrilineal clans. Zhou's book accordingly gives us both a China and a Greece that are somewhat more monolithic and static than those found in some of the other works discussed above, but her focus on a very specific set of issues, along with her careful derivation of her conclusions from close textual analysis, also distinguish her work from some of the more impressionistic versions of cultural essence.

Hyun Jin Kim's *Ethnicity and Foreigners in Ancient Greece and China* (2009) compares the views of the Greeks and the Chinese on the peoples surrounding them, offering first a historical survey of the development of those views, followed by a more detailed analysis of the representations of foreigners in Herodotus and in Sima Qian. Again, a hallmark of Kim's study is an insistence on rooting abstract claims of cultural difference in careful readings of primary texts, rather than treating them as a priori assumptions. Kim's book is also noteworthy for its attention to shifts in the perception of foreigners over time, as well as the differential representation of different kinds of foreigners (e.g., nomads versus sedentary rivals). Again, a careful attention to actually existing complexities on the ground yields fruitful results.

My own *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China* (Beecroft 2010) aims to do the same. The book takes as its premise that a kind of homology exists between archaic and classical Greece on the one hand, and Spring and Autumn/Warring States era China on the other, in that both are regions in which emergent senses of cultural unity were coupled with political fragmentation and almost constant war. Building on this premise, I argue that both cultures use stories of authorship (and the implicit theories of poetics that underwrite those stories) as a means of giving meaning to literary texts as they circulate in wider and wider contexts. Second, I consider a kind of comparative poetics and argue that our understanding of that field is crucially limited if we take, say, Aristotle's *Poetics* and the Mao preface to the *Canon of Songs* as metonyms for their entire traditions. By exploring some of the poetic theory implicit in the authorial anecdotes I discuss, I hope to show that Greece knew aspects of what Earl Miner (1990) would call "affective-expressive poetics," while China knew a form of mimesis, even if both of these alternatives were gradually to be marginalized for historically specific reasons.

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One final recent work deserves mention here, even though it may technically fall outside the scope of this piece: Wiebke Denecke's *Classical World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons* (2013). Denecke (the source for the ellipsis/catachresis distinction I have used throughout) presents a sustained comparison of the reception of Greek literature in the Roman Empire with that of Chinese literature in Japan. Attentive throughout to the historical specificities that make her two cases distinct from one another (like the fact that Japan did not conquer China in premodern times, or that the Japanese wrote in both Chinese and Japanese, while the Romans wrote almost exclusively in Latin, not in Greek, for literary purposes), and frequently juxtaposing unlikely pairs of texts from the two traditions, Denecke draws out some fascinating and important parallels between the two traditions, making a compelling case for further comparative study in this area. The world of Sino-Greek comparison, then, continues to grow as it thrives.

I use this discussion of Denecke's innovative comparison of Greco-Roman and Sino-Japanese literary relations as an opportunity to mention a few other works that compare premodern East Asian cultures to the world of the ancient Mediterranean. These works do not strictly speaking fit under the heading of Greece-China comparisons, but are linked closely enough with that topic to warrant mention here. The Rome-China comparison has generated less literary interest than one might have hoped for, but has generated some discussion in historical contexts. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler's and Achim Mittag's coedited *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared* (2008), for example, based on an earlier conference, explores a variety of themes pertaining to the establishment of the Roman and Han Empires. Likewise, Walter Scheidel's edited *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empire* (2009) and more recent *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (2015) both offer a series of essays on comparative topics pertaining to these two great early empires. Synthetic comparative monographs on Roman and Chinese empire have yet to emerge, though given the rapid evolution of this field, such a development seems likely. Literary and other cultural fields of comparison remain largely unstudied. Likewise, the potential for Greco-Japanese, or Latin-Japanese, literary or cultural comparison remains largely untapped, apart from Denecke's (2013) book, with the exception of Mae Smethurst's *The Artistry of Aeschylus and Zeami: A Comparative Study of Greek Tragedy and Noh* (1989). It is to be hoped that the increasing interest in Sino-Greek comparisons will lead in turn to further study of this broader family of comparisons.

Of course, a significant reason (direct or indirect) for the recent uptick in interest in comparative Greece-China study has been the recent economic rise of China, making the history of Chinese culture (and therefore its comparison with the West) newly urgent. In particular, the contemporary economic might of China seems to have sparked an interest as well among economic historians in reassessing the "Great Divergence," in which China (and South Asia) fell behind the West during the Industrial Revolution (Pomeranz 2001). If China's delayed industrialization was both less dramatically delayed than previously

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imagined and based more on highly contingent factors, as this recent scholarship argues, then it no longer seems necessary to seek cultural or civilizational explanations for that divergence. As a result, earlier assumptions about essential differences between Chinese and Western culture may need urgent attention.

Chinese academia has likewise seen a renewed interest in this comparative project, if for slightly different reasons. As China's economy has continued to grow enormously, some elements within Chinese intellectual circles have been moved to reject the previous consensus, emerging out of the May Fourth linguistic reform movement after World War I, that China's modernity was going to have to come through rejecting key aspects of the nation's traditional culture and embracing corresponding aspects of Western culture. This is an era in which the figure of Confucius has been increasingly, if not unproblematically, seized upon as an emblem of a perduring Chinese identity that transcends, without erasing, Communist ideology. For example, one need look only to the spread of "Confucius Institutes" around the world (hundreds have been established since the foundation of the program in 2004), or to the (admittedly temporary) placement of a statue of Confucius in Tian'anmen Square in early 2011, to see the increasing, while still controversial, role of the Chinese classics in contemporary China. Debates about the roles played by the classics, Confucian and Greco-Roman, have therefore been an important vehicle for debates about tradition and modernity in contemporary China. (For a thorough discussion of this debate, see Weng 2010) One of the leading figures of these discussions, Liu Xiaofeng (1956-), draws heavily on the work of Leo Strauss, and particularly on the notion of esoteric teachings. Liu (2007) argues, that as (in his view at least) Strauss demonstrates the need for a distinction between public versions of philosophy, oriented toward guiding citizens into appropriate ways of life, with a more subtle and complex esoteric version accessible to those who are careful students of philosophy. Liu borrows this notion of esoteric teachings and applies it to the context of the Chinese classics. In particular, he draws on the Gongyang school of interpretation of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (popular also with the early Republican intellectual Kang Youwei) to argue that the esoteric interpretation of the classics is that Confucius himself should be understood as the sage (*sheng*) or "uncrowned king" (*suwang*) obliquely referred to in those texts. Straussian readings of Plato are thus used to generate Straussian readings of Chinese texts, which in turn are seen as offering guidance on how to navigate the complexities of contemporary Chinese political life and to offer a way forward for the Chinese nation.

To some extent, these contemporary debates draw on debates in political theory around the viability of democracy in the Chinese context. The "Political Confucianism," as represented by Jiang Qin (1953-), argues that Chinese culture and society are ill-suited to Western-style liberal democracy, and that the interpretation of Confucian texts can allow for the development of a model of benign autocracy, which (its proponents argue) would be better suited to the Chinese context. This Political Confucianism situates itself in contrast to what is known as "New Confucianism" (whose best-known advocate in the West might be Harvard professor emeritus Tu Weiming, [1940-]), which argues that democracy and Confucianism are in fact compatible, while also arguing that the former has much to learn from the latter about establishing harmonious communities. Political

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Confucianism has played a role (though exactly what role is difficult to say) in debates within the Chinese administration about the relative roles of Marxism and Confucianism as guiding principles for the Communist Party of China in the twenty-first century. The potential stakes of these discussions, in other words, are high.

Not all Chinese Straussians are as enamored of the notion of esoteric teachings as Liu Xiaofeng: Gan Yang, for example, offers a different Straussian take. Other scholars are critical of the Straussian enterprise altogether, and the last five or ten years are remarkable for the broad resurgence in interest in the Western classics in Chinese intellectual circles, indicated by the establishment of a Western classics program at Peking University in 2011, by the strength of the ancient history program at Fudan University in Shanghai, and by the prevalence of conferences on such themes in China today. Many, perhaps most, Chinese intellectuals who are interested in the Western classics are opposed to the Chinese Straussian narrative, and its presence may do as much to spark oppositional readings of the Western classics as to shut them down. The Western classics therefore occupy a position of unexpected significance in contemporary China. As China's economy continues to grow, and as ties between China and Western nations, long hindered by political complications, continue to thrive, Greek-Chinese comparative studies will no doubt continue to flourish on both sides of the Pacific. The challenge will be, as it has always been, to nurture the development of such studies while resisting the always-present urge to instrumentalize those studies as a part of internal debates or international relations.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ Note that Ruggieri's skill with classical Chinese was sufficient for him to compose poems in the language. See Chan (1993).

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