



China-Update Classics 2021¹

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Classical Studies in China and the whole world have been heavily affected by the pandemic.² Of course, students and scholars of universities, and hence in Classics, are extremely privileged in their status and continuing possibilities to read, teach, study, and research when considering how societies as a whole were, and are, hit by Covid-19. Yet, the once seemingly endless growing internationalization, exchange, and cooperation across continents came to a sudden halt in its “normal” form in the first quarter of 2020, but - *ex pessimo bonum* - built new paths and normalities since then, mostly digital ones though.

2019 where the last update stopped had ended very promising for Classics in China: Several colleagues were present with their panels and papers at the 15th Congress of the Fédération Internationale des Associations d'Études Classiques (FIEC), which was held together with the Classical Association (CA) annual conference from 5 to 8 July 2019 in London. For instance, one sessions dealt with “Ovid in China” and assembled experts from the ongoing Ovid-translation project as well as related colleagues to exchange their thoughts on the reception of Ovid in China and through a Chinese lens (organizer: Tom Sienkewicz, Monmouth College, Illinois, USA; chair: Jinyu Liu, De Pauw University, USA and Shanghai Normal University, China). Within the session “Global Classics”, organized by Joe Farrell (University of Pennsylvania, USA), Jinyu Liu also gave a paper on “Graeco-Roman Classics in China: Historical, Institutional, and Academic Contexts”. A comparative approach was taken in the two sessions “Metatextuality in Greece and China: A Comparative Approach”, organized by Gastón J. Basile (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina / Humboldt University, Germany / Warburg Institute, UK) and chaired by Glenn Most (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Italy) and Michael Puett (Harvard University, USA), respectively. Legal-historical perspectives were in the focus of the session “Frames of Legal Language, Concepts and Cultures in the Late Roman Republic”, organized by the present author. And Chun Liu (Peking University) was participant in the roundtable-discussion “Teaching the Undergraduates of 2019: A Global Perspective”.

¹ For the last update, see S. Günther 2019; cf. Gheerbrant and Zeng Yi 2018; Yang Huang 2019 and Mutschler 2019. See also the blog-entry by Coleman 2016; cf. James 2021. Across the ancient (Western) studies disciplines it is interesting to note such emergence of surveys on the history of the respective field, in China and globally, often under the header of “Global Studies”, which would be worthwhile to analyze from a historical perspective of narrative-building. An uncompleted list of Classics-related institutions and staff in China can be found here: https://www.academia.edu/62600470/List_of_Classics_Institutions_and_Persons_in_China (28.11.2021).

² Conferences and research exactly on this topic have, naturally, been emerging. For a short Chinese paper on epidemic language in Latin historians, see Günther 2021.

Among the several conferences in 2019 and beginning of 2020, just before the pandemic, I would like to mention three noteworthy events. At the end of June 2019, several scholars met for the workshop “Ancient History from the View of World History” at Fudan University, Shanghai, organized by Wang Zhongxiao and Donni Wang to discuss the chances and challenges of the world history framework – including comparative, entangled, and transnational approaches – for ancient (Western) studies.³ Traditionally, the “Historical Studies on Women and Gender”-conference, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, chief-organized by Yi Zhaoyin has several panels on Classics’ topics, and fortunately it could be held in presence in 2019, and as hybrid events in 2020 and 2021, to promote this important topic. In mid-January 2020, IHAC celebrated its 35th anniversary of foundation together with the 60th birthday of its current director, Professor Zhang Qiang with the international conference “*Ad Fontes Ipsos Properandum! Law, Economy, and Society in Ancient Sources*”, selected papers of which are now published in the *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* (JAC 36/2 [2021]).

JAC has continued to be the “Chinese” voice to the international world of ancient (Western) studies (Classics, but also Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Egyptology, and Byzantine Studies). Chief-directed by the present author the introduction of the double-blind peer-reviewed system has improved the international standing, and has resulted in further admission to two renowned international citation databases, Scopus and ERIH PLUS in 2019 and 2021, respectively. Additionally, the supplementary series has been revived in the meanwhile, with three volumes having appeared in 2019 and 2021: *Byzantium in China. Studies in Honour of Professor Xu Jialing on the Occasion of her Seventieth Birthday*, edited by Sven Günther, Li Qiang, Claudia Sode, Stafan Wahlgren, and Zhang Qiang (2019; field: Byzantine Studies; JAC-Supplements; 6); *Of Rabid Dogs, Hunchbacked Oxen, and Infertile Goats in Ancient Babylonia: Studies Presented to Wu Yuhong on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, edited by Sven Günther, Wayne Horowitz, and Magnus Widell (2021; field: Ancient Near Eastern Studies and related fields; JAC-Supplements; 7);⁴ *From Constantinople to Chang’an. Byzantine Gold Coins in the World of Late Antiquity. Papers Read at the International Conference in Changchun, China, 23–26 June 2017*, edited by Sven Günther, Li Qiang, Lin Ying, and Claudia Sode (2021; field: Byzantine Studies and Numismatics; JAC-Supplements; 8).

Another important publication comes from the aforementioned Ovid-project: selected papers of the 2017-conference “Globalizing Ovid: An International Conference in Commemoration of the Bimillennium of Ovid’s Death” have now appeared under the direction of Liu Jinyu in Chinese. The international proceedings are going to be published at Brill in 2022.

Furthermore, the still increasing number of publications of Chinese scholars, both internationally and in Chinese (ancient) history journals, edited volumes, and, of course, monographies, testifies of the great momentum of ancient Western studies, and Classics in particular in Chinese academia. Hence, it is more than welcome that recently the *Année Philologique* has announced to start registering Chinese articles and journals related to ancient (Western) studies in their famous bibliographical database.⁵ In this way, also the present East

³ On this topic, cf. the “Forum Comparative Studies – Chances and Challenges” with opinions by Mutschler and Scheidel, and S. Günther 2017; and the bibliographical survey “Global History” with contributions by Schulz and Walter and Shi Xueliang, both 2018.

⁴ Therein, one finds a short summary on ANE- and Egyptology-studies in China: Piccin, Wang Guangsheng and Günther 2021, cf. their bibliography for further surveys in the fields.

⁵ This was officially announced and presented at the workshop “L’*Année Philologique* and the New Correspondence for China” on 12 November 2021, organized by Xavier Gheerbrant and Zeng Yi, Sichuan University.

Asian Journal of Classical Studies will certainly contribute substantially to the further development of Classics and Ancient History in China, East Asia, and the reputation and impact of Asian scholars in the world.

Important for stimulating this momentum is the annual meeting of scholars and students, always organized at a different university across China. While the annual meeting of Ancient History researchers in China could still be held in presence in 2019 in Harbin, the meeting in 2020 was organized as a hybrid event at Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, Guangxi Autonomous Region, and the 2021-conference had to be postponed but was eventually held at Mongolia University for Nationalities, Tong Liao, Inner Mongolia, in the middle of November. Equally important is the institutionalized exchange within the region, yet the 12th Japan-Korea-China Symposium on Ancient European History – China taking part therein since 2007 – could unfortunately not be held in 2021.⁶ Anyway, Chinese researchers and students have found their ways of communicating and discussing their research results with their peers.

In this respect, online-events have become a frequent medium of exchange, both in teaching and scholarship. Regarding teaching, the advantages and disadvantages of online courses are obvious. To name but a few: Recorded lectures can be prepared and heard at times convenient for instructors and students who both can work remotely; virtual classrooms are a convenient medium to exchange, to share (digital) content, and use the whole toolset of digital methods; on the other hand, communication via email, chats, social media, and digital rooms where one often cannot see or get a direct feedback is open for misunderstandings and ambiguities; and most importantly, the momentum of different personae being together in one classroom and being creative in full interaction based on the presence of their *physeis* and *psychoe* is impossible to resemble in the digital world.

One further potential lies in bringing the world to a digital classroom with few means. Speaking for IHAC but also – as I know – for many Chinese universities, the possibilities to invite and organize online courses, lectures, and workshops provided by scholars from all over the world has enriched the teaching, as well as the access to scholarly discussion, in times when travelling is more difficult. Besides, at IHAC we conducted two courses where we brought students from our institute and German universities in exchange, working on digital exhibitions: one was on mapping Pliny the Elder's perspective on ancient Rome in the middle of the first century AD, together with students from the Institute for Digital Humanities at the University of Göttingen in WS 2020/21; the other on “Parthia as Core and Link of the Ancient Silk Road”, together with students from Ancient History departments at University of Kassel and Trier in SS 2021. All advantages and disadvantages for teaching and cooperation mentioned above appeared, naturally, in these courses; yet, the intercultural contact between students from different countries who would normally not have the chance to meet in person (except for the few lucky ones receiving travel scholarships via the Chinese Scholarship Council or Erasmus +) and the necessary (ex-)change of perspectives was the core element, and stimulated students' minds.⁷ Consequently, the that becoming aware of different perspectives is an important part of our research, into ancient sources and into modern historians' and our viewpoints, has been

⁶ On the research and reception of Western antiquity in this region, see the contributions in Renger and Xin Fan 2019.

⁷ See E. Günther and S. Günther 2022. The digital exhibition “Parthia as Core” is going to be published in 2022.

intensively discussed in two online-conferences on “Frames and Framing in Antiquity”, held from 16-18 October 2020 and 15-17 October 2021.⁸

Yet, “online” has gained momentum in another aspect since the beginning of the pandemic. Individual help and support via Wechat etc. in times when access to libraries and personal meetings were limited, discussions about Classics’ topics in dedicated Wechat groups, and online teaching as well as knowledge-sharing platforms such as Bilibili have become seemingly more important. What is more, Wechat and other social media platforms are not only suitable for such aspects of the Classics community but can be researched as fora of very dynamic reception of Classics-topics, for instance, by putting face-masks over the face of ancient statues or commenting on current events with quotes from classical authors. In this way, the “next foreigner”, as Uvo Hölscher has called (Western) antiquity, serves as a mirror of ongoing discourses linked to texts, artifacts, and iconographies (not only) from Greek and Roman times – a topic that certainly deserves further attention.

A last and good development in the real world: The standardized Greek and Latin test organized by Hendrikus van Wijlick from the Centre for Classical and Medieval Studies at Peking University, offered since 2017, could be conducted after a gap year in 2020 at the end of May 2021, the first time not only with students writing the tests on elementary and intermediate level in Greek and Latin at Peking University but also at IHAC. This more flexible scheme has attracted a great number of students to write the respective test in order to know their current level of Greek and Latin. It is hoped to be held at further university locations in China in the future to promote the knowledge and professional teaching of these two ancient languages that open the world to classical antiquity, and beyond.

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⁸ Conference report on Frames and Framing I by S. Günther and E. Günther 2021; Frames and Framing II: E. Günther and S. Günther 2021. Selected papers of the first conference will be published in 2022 in *JAC-Supplements*.

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