



**Yan Shaoxiang. *Xila yu luoma: guoqu yu xianzai* 希腊与罗马: 过去与现在 (*Greece and Rome: Past and Present*). Commercial Press, 2019.**

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Yan Shaoxiang is one of most prominent scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity in China today. Since 2007 he has been based in the Department of History at Capital Normal University and has published numerous monographs and articles on diverse aspects of Greco-Roman history. He has also translated into Chinese numerous works of Western scholarship on classical antiquity and its reception, including Jenkyns' *The Legacy of Rome*, Finley's *Politics in the Ancient World*, and Lintott's *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*. In recognition of his contribution to Chinese scholarship, in 2016 Yan was bestowed the Changjiang Scholar award, which is one of the most prestigious honours in Chinese academia.

Published by the Commercial Press in 2019, *Xila yu luoma: guoqu yu xianzai* 希腊与罗马: 过去与现在 (*Greece and Rome: Past and Present*) is an anthology of nineteen articles concerning Greco-Roman political philosophy, its reception in Western intellectual history, and modern scholarship on Greco-Roman antiquity. Covering articles dated from 2003 to 2019, it is a testament to Yan's prolific engagement with Western scholarship. Its premise is that Greco-Roman antiquity remains a powerful influence in Western thinking, serving as a mirror for contemporary problems and debates. Yan is well aware of the limitations of history as a guide. He goes beyond the Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini to argue that even if similar conditions are met, history will not repeat itself because of free will. Yet classical concepts such as the "Thucydides' trap" continue to inform decision-making. Although most of the articles were written well before the current diplomatic tensions between China and the United States, Yan's rigorous analysis of classical, medieval, Renaissance and modern debates on the relative merits and pitfalls of democracy and oligarchy, symbolised by Athens and Sparta respectively, foreshadows some of the current polemics between the two superpowers. Yan's book helps the reader understand that many of the icons of the Western intellectual tradition, such as Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle, were suspicious of democracy and that the representative democracy prevailing in the West today is far removed from its Athenian prototype. How democracy was appraised in different time periods changed according to historical contingencies.

The first section of this book consists of seven chapters revisiting ancient and modern debates on the Spartan, Athenian and Roman political systems. The two opening chapters, "Between the ideal and despotism: the problem of Athenian democracy in ancient thought" (理想与暴政之间: 古典思想中的雅典民主问题) and "The Spartan Illusion in Antiquity and Today" (斯巴达的幻想: 古代与现代), constitute the bulk of this section, and are also by far the lengthiest articles in the entire book. The other five chapters in this section touch upon a rich

array of topics, such as Thucydides' critical appraisal of Athenian democracy, Greek attempts to check the scourge of bribery, the early modern reception of Greco-Roman democracy, and Montesquieu's views on ancient republicanism. In these chapters, Yan seeks to demonstrate how both ancient and modern interpretation of Greco-Roman political philosophy was not conducted in a vacuum, but was intricately tied to the context in which scholars and historians worked.

In the second section of this book, Yan turns his attention to a survey of 19th and 20th century scholars working on Greco-Roman antiquity and assesses their contribution to our knowledge and their limitations in light of more recent research. This section reveals the breadth of Yan's reading, covering scholars such as Moses Finley, J.B. Bury, Arnaldo Momigliano, N. G. L. Hammond and Jean-Pierre Vernant. As many of the works discussed in this section are not available in Chinese translation, this section would be of particular interest to Chinese scholars who do not have the linguistic facility to access the original sources or are in need of a contextual overview of the history of modern Western scholarship on the classics.

The third and final section of the book would interest readers outside China because they contain Yan's reflections on the significance of translation for understanding the classical world both in Western and, above all, Chinese scholarship. Here Yan surveys the development of scholarly translation in West from Renaissance times and provides interesting insights into the development of attempts to convey Greco-Roman classical traditions to Chinese audiences. Yan discusses how in the beginning Chinese translations focused on the major Western works of ancient history and then in the 1950s and 60s more of the original Greco-Roman source texts were translated, including the writings of Thucydides, Herodotus, Aristotle, Xenophon and Tacitus. Yan is highly conscious of the limitations of these Chinese translations: they are almost always translated from modern Western languages (especially English). Translation activity basically ceased during the Cultural Revolution, but since the Opening Up in the 1980s, it has been conducted much more systematically, thanks in part to the efforts of the Commercial Press.

For Yan, translation is a double-edged sword. Chinese scholars need translation to access Greco-Roman texts and stay abreast of Western scholarship. In the past, Chinese scholars referred to Soviet primers on Greco-Roman antiquity, which kept Chinese scholarship in a state of stagnation. For this reason, a lot of ignorance about classical antiquity remains in China: there is little reference to classical antiquity in Chinese high school and university textbooks, and little understanding of its complex reception in the West. Translation plays a pivotal role in removing these barriers. However, translation cannot replace the rigorous study of classical and modern Western languages. It is difficult for the Chinese language to convey the nuances of the Homeric hexameter, and reliance on translated scholarship ensures that Chinese scholarship will always be behind the times: in the time it takes to publish a translation, the central thesis of a book might already be outdated.

Yan's anthology is primarily aimed at a Chinese readership and hence there is little attempt to make it accessible to Western audiences by providing Western-language transliterations of the historical figures, authors or scholars discussed. Of course, for some famous figures such as Cicero (西塞罗) or Homer (荷马), a Western-language equivalent is plainly not necessary; however, for minor figures, where there is no standard transliteration, the lack of the Western-language equivalent can make it difficult to work out who Yan is talking about. Sometimes, Yan's transliterations even deviate from the standard. For instance, Yan transliterates Menelaus as 麦涅拉俄斯, but the standard transliteration is 墨涅拉俄斯; Tyrtæus is transliterated as 提尔泰 whereas the online encyclopedias use 提尔泰奥斯. While the author is free to use his

own transliterations, having the Greek original or the English name side by side would have improved clarity and comprehension.

Another annoying feature of the book is that Yan seldom follows conventional citation methods for classical works. As a courtesy to the Chinese reader, Yan cites Chinese-language editions where available, but he includes only the page number. The lack of references to book, chapter and line numbers makes it very difficult for readers to cross-reference to other translations or indeed the original text.

From the opening of the anthology, Yan makes clear that one of his goals is to present Western-scholarship to Chinese audiences. While this goal is laudable, in some chapters greater attempt could have been made to present Western scholarship more synthetically. For instance, chapter one follows very closely Jennifer Roberts' *Athens on Trial* whereas chapter two is essentially a summary of Elizabeth Rawson's *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*. Rawson's work is cited on most pages, and in sequential order as well. In fact, most of the sources that Yan discusses can be found in Rawson's book. Even the occasional subtitle seems to have been lifted: "Laconism Exported" in Rawson's original becomes "斯巴达传统的出口" (p. 87).

At times, Yan seems to misrepresent the sources he is paraphrasing. Under the title "Laconism Exported", for instance, Rawson writes "It's is time to look beyond the confines of the Greek world." Rawson is simply inviting the reader to consider parallels that were drawn by Greeks such as Herodotus between Spartan governance and Egypt. However, Yan places under his heading "斯巴达传统的出口" the rather remarkable claim, "希腊文化开始与东方文化融合, 希腊人也开始认识到, 他们传统的疆域之外, 还存在许多非希腊的民族和文化, 眼界大为开阔" (p. 88). Of course, the age of Hellenism expanded the Greeks' worldview, but it simply does not stand to reason that only after the Macedonian invasion did the Greeks start to notice non-Greeks.

Similar problems reveal themselves in other sections. For instance, when dealing with the reception of Sparta in the medieval period, Yan follows Rawson in having a brief discussion of Thomas Aquinas. Rawson's text shows that while Aquinas objected to the dual kingship of Sparta, he was broadly in favour of the ideals of the mixed constitution as exemplified by the Spartan constitution. However, Yan states "不过阿奎纳对这种混合政体好像没有多少好感", and cites a passage (difficult to identify because Yan does not provide the customary section numbers of Aquinas' works) indicating Aquinas' support for monarchy. The author seems to have confused Aquinas' support for monarchy as a critique of mixed constitution, not recognising the fact that monarchy can be part of a mixed constitution.

Overall, *Xila yu luoma* provides valuable insights into the development of Classical Studies in China. It is most unfortunate that this work, like much other Chinese-language scholarship, is inaccessible to the vast majority of Western scholars working on Greco-Roman antiquity. Scholarly engagement between China and the West should be bidirectional. As it is unrealistic to expect Western classicists to learn Chinese, translation will continue to play a pivotal role in facilitating this exchange.



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