Modernity's Classics

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Transcultural Research – Heidelberg Studies
on Asia and Europe in a Global Context

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Contributors

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Michael Fotiadis has taught at several universities in the U.S.A. and now teaches in the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Ioannina, Greece. A prehistorian by training, with research in Stone Age sites in northern Greece, he also has a sustained interest in, as well as publications on, theoretical questions arising from the practice of archaeology in the nation state (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and in the contemporary globalized world.

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Setrag Manoukian (Ph.D. in anthropology and history, University of Michigan) is Associate professor at the Institute of Islamic Studies and the Department of Anthropology at McGill University. He is the author of *City of Knowledge: History, Poetry and Subject Formation in Iran* (Routledge 2012).

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Tao Wang was born in Kunming, China in 1962. He studied Chinese language and literature in the Yunnan Normal University (Kunming), then art theory at the graduate school of the Chinese Academy of Arts (Beijing) before coming to London in 1986. In 1993, he obtained a Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London with a dissertation on *Colour Symbolism in Late Shang China*, and in the same year was appointed as lecturer and later senior lecturer in Chinese archaeology at the department of art and archaeology of SOAS. He now holds the position of reader in Chinese archaeology and heritage at University College London. He has published more than fifty academic papers and several monographs, including *Ancient Chinese Bronzes in the Meiyintang Collections (2009), Unpublished Chinese Wooden Slips in the British Library* (2007, ed. with Frances Wood and Hu Pingsheng), *A Selection of*

Inscribed Early Chinese Bronzes from Sotheby's and Christie's (2007, with Liu Yu), *A Complete Collection of Chinese Wooden and Bamboo Documents,* vol. 20 (2005, ed. with Hu Pingsheng), *Exploring China's Past: New Discoveries and Studies in Chinese Art and Archaeology* (1999, trans. and ed. with Roderick Whitfield), *Origins of the Wuxing Theory and Modes of Thought in Early China* (1998, ed. with Sarah Allan, and Fan Yuzhou), *Exploration into China (1995),* and *Dunhuang Manuscripts in British Collections (Non-Buddhist Scriptures)* (1990–1997, ed. with others). He has organized a number of conferences and workshops and is academic adviser and contributor to four television documentaries on Chinese history and archaeology.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Sarah C. Humphreys and Rudolf G. Wagner

The Theme

Modernity's Classics deals with tensions in modern thought between travelling into the future and keeping the best from the past; with the frictions between political-social realities and the sociocultural imaginaire; with the global circulation of ambitious dreams and the local realities of practice. Opening up an international debate about the role of 'classics' and 'cultural heritage' in modern constructions of knowledge and of education, this volume has grown out of an extended conversation among scholars from many different fields over 3 years and three conferences. Their varied national and disciplinary backgrounds have shaped their questions and concerns. The reconfiguration of 'classics' in the modern period was a global phenomenon, with the restructuring of disciplines in modern educational systems exerting a major influence. However, there has as yet been no sustained effort to study this interlinked process across the whole range of civilizations and disciplines. A single volume could not possibly provide a comprehensive analysis; what we aim to do, instead, is to present a collection of provocative case-studies that raises new questions and suggests directions for further research.

The term used for a 'classic' in imperial China, for example, was "jing." Translated by Europeans as 'classics' or 'canon', the word is a live metaphor taken from silk weaving,[1] which commentators explain as being the woof of the cloth on which the warp forms the specific pattern. The "jing" is thus the eternal all-pervasive element shot through with all the specificities of place and time—most importantly for the Chinese imperial context, all meaningful thought on state,

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[1] Cf. Ganeri 2011, 108–110 on commentary as re-weaving in India (and, of course, "text" itself).

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governance, and public order. The metaphor is appropriate for this collection, where we are dealing with the survival and reconfigurations of the 'classical'.

'Classics', as the term is used here, refers to texts, historical periods, artworks, etc.[2] of the remote past to which normative authority was attributed in premodern times (it thus also covers texts more commonly termed 'scriptures' or 'sacred books').

Every civilization with ancient texts, monuments, or artefacts had given some of them a privileged status in an 'imaginaire' of a widely shared set of assumptions about how things should be. These assumptions formed at a very early stage of a culture and, in various guises, survived even abrupt and radical historical changes.

The key element that made the 'classics' into an important and highly legitimate resource for both critical and supportive reflections on the actual condition of state, society, and man was their location in this imaginary realm of an idealized time before time—whether seen as the timelessness of God, the time of prophets and sages, or the time of a glorious past civilization swept away by historical change. While various players in historical time tried to harness "the classics" for their purposes—and would always present their current recommendations as being in accordance with the "classics"—even the most rigid system of discursive control and imposed orthodoxy never managed fully to silence the specific voices of these "classics." They retained their potential as a challenge to any given present and could recurrently be drawn upon to articulate such a challenge in terms of the need to 'return' to the hallowed ideals of the imaginaire through a thorough cleansing of the 'classical' texts of the interpretive debris that had accumulated through social practice in historical time—if these foundational texts had not been forgotten altogether.

The idea of the 'classical' was not new in the modern period, and neither were the routines of bringing the message of the classics to bear on the present. Each civilization had its own category of specialists with their own strategies for negotiating the balance between contemporary relevance and timeless authority. These strategies consolidated into shared practices of 'scholarship', mastery of which conferred status on men of letters. In this common pattern, however, there was considerable variation in such matters as the relationship of scholars to political authorities, procedures for certifying their expertise, the linguistic, school or denominational homogeneity or heterogeneity of textual authority, the genres and institutional contexts in which rereadings were formulated, the relations between oral performance and writing, the ways in which scholars constructed and signalled autonomy of judgment, and the degree to which scholarly discourse became esoteric, whether as a strategy for escaping political censure or because approval from peers became an end in itself.

Modernity constructed itself as a trajectory into the future that necessitated a rupture with key aspects of the past: as progress in scientific knowledge, and

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[2] There is interesting recent work on the reconfiguration of 'classical,' music in India: Bakhle 2005, Weidmann 2006.

evolution towards rational, secular government and society. The necessity of such a rupture was most radically proclaimed with regard to the recent past but this modern dispensation also followed the routine of earlier reform efforts by anchoring itself in a social imaginaire located in the deep past, yet surviving in a selection of texts, objects, institutions, values, and practices deemed 'classical'. Even where this 'classical' was seen as encrusted with much later accretions, once its 'original' purity had been rediscovered and reconstituted through scholarly efforts, and once it had been disseminated through the educational system, it could not only function as object of contemplation, as food for the spirit, as national or universal heritage, or as an anchor of identity and stability, but could also lend authority and dignity to radical innovations and controversial calls for reform.

Modernity came with a huge destabilization of the superstructure. This was a traumatic as well as exhilarating experience already in Europe, and it was still more disruptive in Asia. There, it was perceived as involving not only a reconfiguration of the local environment, but also a reconfiguration of the role other nations and their systems of governance and education played in the local scene. There were many forms of dealing and coping with this tumultuous change and the visible asymmetries in cultural exchanges and power relations this involved. They ranged from the Taiping, Sepoy, or Mahdi upheavals to cutting telegraph lines; from utopian dreams to dreams about returning to the times when people still kept to their station in life; and from a total rejection of local traditions to the claim that the values and institutions of the present Western canonical dispensation had their ultimate origins in the Eastern golden age of antiquity. Such lines of reasoning offered a way to find common ground while accepting the inevitability of radical change.

As modernity, from the late eighteenth century, became a global issue, so did its relationship to the 'classical'. This new relationship differed from earlier rereadings because it was forming in a world that was becoming closely and consciously connected in information, trade, economic cycles, projections of power, and fashions—but also in utopian dreams of a 'civilized' and modern world. The reconfiguration of the classics as a resource supporting 'modernity' thus became inserted into an increasingly connected process that was also perceived as such by all participants involved. This globalized perception in turn introduced a new factor into the process: the awareness that the classical heritage was a crucial resource that had been used by more successful players in their modernization drive. The modern recasting of the classics by the different players in Europe and Asia is therefore no innocent set of parallel developments, but is linked together in a single process with a complex dynamics of the interaction of the different players.

This recasting of the classics as props of modernity is not a homogeneous process but one with its own tensions and dynamics. Modernity was not generated by the classicists out of the classics. Modernity occurred in a process that happened elsewhere and was little understood, much less planned. But it was disruptive and required great effort in adjustment and institutional change, down to details of government-mandated changes in shaved chins and school curricula. The non-

simultaneity of political and economic developments in Europe, with England and France surging ahead and the German states lagging behind, had already fostered a sort of asymmetrical warfare in which Prussia, especially, tried to overcome its disadvantages by investing in two areas where it felt it had the means to score: education–including scholarship and science - and the military. Many of the key figures in the recasting of the European 'classical' heritage came from this backwater and their massive contributions were one way of handling this asymmetry with the neighbours. German thinkers also promulgated the claim that each cultural unit had its own specific characteristics, and that the 'national' spirit had developed organically through a slow process of accumulation of tradition and experience and extended beyond the boundaries of the many German states. It could not be heedlessly swept aside by radical schemes for rational reorganization as carried out next door.[3]

Information about the 'modernization package' was initially carried by middlemen such as colonists, traders, and businessmen, Western missionaries in Asia, and Asian students in the West (and eventually Japan). In East Asia, initially, local elites saw military technology as its core ingredient and only gradually turned their attention to the argument that scientific knowledge and political structures might be the key. Only then did they ask how such deep structural changes could be made without uprooting society altogether. The task of grounding modernity in Asian classics—or defending these classics against such an abuse—presupposed men of letters with strong exposure to the new trends of the world. In the process their roles as political activists and scholars gradually, never fully, separated, with a professionalized classical scholarship assigned its own responsibilities in the modernization process.

Modernity, as well as prompting thinkers, educators, poets, and artists around the world to 'reread' their classics, came with new models of reading. Western philology was presented as 'science' and thus gave new authority to critical judgments on dating and attribution, distinctions between genuine works and forgeries, technical treatment of manuscripts (both conservation and emendation), and the transfer of approaches from one genre or culture to another. The value of existing scholarly practices was reassessed in the light of this new dispensation.

Recasting the classics involved new practices of studying, archiving, and administering the past. In East Asian societies the insertion of such scholarly efforts into the agenda of national modernization was a conscious choice for most scholars, but it was also increasingly guided by reformist state authorities who claimed the high ground in setting a master narrative valid for the given moment that claimed the allegiance of the men of letters and left little subjective and objective space for the internal dynamics of scholarly research. Thus, study of the development of classical scholarship and its public role in East Asia requires a much stronger attention to institutional interactions with the state than is warranted for the most

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[3] Specifically, in opposition to the adoption of the Napoleonic code, Savigny; more generally, Herder.

fruitful periods of humanities scholarship in Europe and the United States. The situation in colonial India (and North Africa), in the Ottoman Empire and in diaspora Jewish communities was similar in the basic constraints of institutional guidance and subjective allegiance, but different with regard to the nature of the institutions and the motives for allegiance.

Modernity was tied to historicism with its claim that the knowledge of the 'ancients' had a time line and no longer provided eternally valid and comprehensively useful grounding. With revolutionary upheavals threatening to uproot societies altogether, the German anxieties found wider credence. The classical had to be recast so as to become an integral and stabilizing part of the 'modernization package', and there was agreement, at least for the Asian continent and the Islamic world, that only the recast local classics had the potential effectively to play the crucial role of grounding modernity.

The disjunction in time in the modernization process in Europe (including Russia) was easier to overcome because the elites in the German states and in Russia read and spoke French and increasingly also English. With new developments in scholarship, science, and education in German, German also became a widely shared scholarly language. Thus the absorption of information could proceed quickly and on a broad basis. This was already much more difficult in the Ottoman Empire, and more so in Asian states further east. The most successful process—in Japan—was due to an extraordinary effort by the Meiji government to send large numbers of students to Europe for training and invite foreign scholars to teach in Japan, and thus to gain the wherewithal to engage in the huge translation and appropriation projects of the 1870s through 1920s. One integral part of this Japanese modernization drive was the reaffirmation of the continuing validity of basic "Confucian" values in the hugely influential Imperial Rescript on Education of 1893. This was a direct response to the perceived contribution of Christianity and classical values in the West to social stability in these times of transition. In China, the Raj, and the Islamic world similar efforts were made by people of many ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds with a strong exposure to this global trend. Drawing on the resources of Asian traditions to deal with the modernization challenge and to legitimize the strategies followed or proposed gave these strategies the soothing authenticity of not being foreign-imposed, and even the option to claim parallel simultaneous developments (as in the postmodern concept of 'multiple modernities'). The scholars doing this work were neither bookworms aloof from the great social, cultural, and political issues of the day, nor simply scholarly hacks providing the footnotes for the master narrative of the day as determined by state, religious, business, or party authorities of their home country. They are part of a wider discussion that involves the classics as well as social, cultural, and institutional change.

The interaction of these efforts at recasting the classical tradition with the modern Western dispensations also meant that Western routines associated with this process were to a degree appropriated by local scholars, and that foreign amateurs of Asian cultures became active participants in this globalizing process both locally and through translations into Western languages (the *Sacred Books of*

the East, the *Chinese Classics,* etc.). These efforts developed on the basis of an increasingly accepted understanding that peoples of the Asian continent (including Europe) basically shared a set of values, ideas, and ideals that could provide the basis for the utopia of a 'civilized' world. Their 'classics', whatever the source of their insights, pointed to timeless truths that combined universal validity with expression of the essence of national identity. Once cleared of historical debris, the sagely dispensations of different cultures could thus be put side-by-side to explain and supplement each other. The results of the successful retooling of the classical heritage as props of modernity in the West might then reasonably be interpreted as a stimulus for the rereading of the local classics, and the prevalence of certain desired social values in Asian societies could in turn enrich the common platform for 'civilization' down to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To address such a global process with its many historical predecessors and roots is a challenge to the delineations marking the existing academic disciplines worldwide. Defined as they are in the nation-state framework of their birth in the nineteenth century and delineating their sources by physical properties (text, image, building, excavation, sound) rather than subject matter, they are ill equipped for this analysis. 'Globalization', 'interdisciplinarity', and the 'postmodern' are increasingly prevalent catchwords, but what does it mean to look at 'modernity' in historical perspective, and to write the 'global' history of recasting the classics in close communication across disciplinary boundaries? We do not claim to have the answers, but we can make some suggestions.

'Global' history has little to offer as a new form of Hegelian narrative with 'civilizations' as the agents. At the same time the overwhelming evidence of globalization in our everyday lives has led to a rereading of the past and the discovery that transcultural interaction has been a key constituent in the process of culture since time immemorial. Constructive historiographic reactions to globalization, therefore, focus on processes of reciprocal interaction and flows of ideas, 'entangled histories' in which colonial institutions change those of metropoleis, China and India contribute to the reconfiguration of Western 'classics' and 'literature', new models of public space are elaborated in Africa, India, or Australia, and the category 'religion' takes on new contours as practices, beliefs, and communities are redefined in new patterns of interaction.

The global historian also has to deal with time in a new way, to account for the time- and information-lags in these processes of interaction. Modern ideas and institutions travelled at varying speeds and by varying routes, while continuing to produce change at the points of origin; what was presented and perceived as modern in India in 1800 did not have the same salient features as the modernity seen by the Chinese a century later.[4] Prussians, 'backward' in comparison with England or France, saw modernization largely through their experience of Napoleon in terms of military threat, rationalization of administration and education, and radical

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[4] Gershenkron's model of the "historic advantages of backwardness" (1962) is relevant here.

recodification of law; while accepting the need to modernize in warfare, education, and bureaucracy, they resisted the Napoleonic code as incompatible with the organic development and spirit of German institutions,[5] placed the emphasis in classical education on Greece rather than Rome, and developed a Romantic, aestheticizing conception of the role of philosophy in education that diverged from the French Enlightenment model, which was more specifically anticlerical. Chinese men of letters, in a state that already had a bureaucracy staffed by them, and had a huge rural peasant population hardly touched by modernization (at a time when traditional German peasants almost seemed to be a dying breed: see Algazi below), supported their conviction that the 'stupid people' at large were incapable of collective rationality and needed strong guidance with references to their recast classics as well as most recent Western doctrines of the state (Bluntschli) and the 'masses' (Le Bon), while simultaneously asserting with other references that the legitimacy of a government hinged on acceptance by this very people, and by inserting the new notion that only a literate population unified by a national consensus that was bolstered by unimpeded flow of communication between high and low would be able to overcome the manifest asymmetries in power with the West.

Modern conceptions of time contained costly contradictions. The model of all human societies moving at varying speeds along the same track from primitive origins towards a unified modern future became dominant as part of the asymmetrical spread of the narrative of modernity. In turn, this prompted the rearticulation of the many intellectual, social, cultural, military, etc. histories—each with their own, usually border-crossing connections—into a 'national' history characterized by a 'culture' and moving through 'stages' each defined by its particular Zeitgeist. The energy wasted on explaining away the myriad anomalies and non-sequiturs of this story must be reckoned among the transaction costs of modernity. The push for a unified approach and even 'axial' timeline to the hugely varied body of materials dubbed 'classical' in the new global conceptual lingo is part of this global homogenization.

We consider it essential to look at the modern reconfigurations of classics from the point of view of several disciplines, as well as culture areas, for a number of reasons. First, because the tendency to reify 'cultures' is one of the legacies of modernity that now seems increasingly problematic both politically (as in Huntington 1996) and because it has encouraged disciplinary narrowness, for which the growth of 'comparative literature' and 'comparative religion' only marginally compensates. With regard to written 'classics' in Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and other Indian languages, and Chinese it is important to emphasize that they are not confined to 'religion' and 'literature' but include works on mathematics, medicine, philosophy, law, and statecraft, which have

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[5] The code remained in force in southwestern Germany, however, until it was eventually replaced by a new German civil code in 1900.

been marginalized until very recently in modern university disciplines. As much as 'classical' works in architecture, painting, sculpture, or music, they are all part of processes of transcultural interaction.[6] Historicist models of 'stages' of historical development were framed as universally applicable, and this ambition may well have encouraged the transfer to Asia of the earlier European narrative in which "classical" achievements had been followed by "medieval" decline (and then "Renaissance"). This model did not impede the growth of research on medieval history in modern Europe, especially where the national culture was traced to medieval roots (see Algazi, below), but elsewhere[7] medieval decline was used to explain lack of progress and weaknesses attributed to modern populations.

Historicism did lead to an interest in the pre-classical, the 'origins' of classical civilizations, which favoured archaeological research, interest in Chinese oracle bones, 'archaic' art, 'presocratic' philosophy, etc.;[8] but there was no comparable move towards studying the post-classical genres and styles of rewriting that extended, reframed, or transformed the 'classics' in the interim period between ages designated 'classical' and modern times.

One of the main obstacles here was the modern idea that scholars should concentrate on 'original' texts and that 'mere commentary' was a secondary, derivative, 'unoriginal' genre (except insofar as it was directed towards improving 'original' texts by removing 'corruptions'). It is now increasingly recognized that commentary in the premodern period was in many traditions a favoured genre for the expression of new ideas and recommendations for change.[9]

The asymmetry between the Western narrative marked by milestones along the road to progress and modernity and the other story leading through decline to decadence (or eventually to a belated modernity produced by Western influence) was duplicated at disciplinary level. Western philosophy, science, and historiography had progressed, while elsewhere early innovation (attributed where possible to Western influence) had been followed by stagnation. The Islamic world had 'translated' and 'preserved' Greek texts that would otherwise have been lost, but there was (again, until recently) no Western interest in the development of Islamic philosophy and science—still less in interactions between the Islamic world and India.[10] The post-classical texts of non-Western civilizations were seen only as 'sacred texts' or as 'literature'. Research on the education and scholarly activities of 'classically' trained premodern elites has thus been—with the partial exception of China—selective and biased. Some historical background is therefore needed here, both on common features and on significant variations.

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[6] See Sen 2005, Chap. 8, on intellectual relations between China and India in the first millennium C.E.

[7] Also in Greece, where nationhood was linked to the classical past: Herzfeld 1962, Kitromilides 2010.

[8] Cf. Fotiadis, Thouard and Wang, and Laks, below.

[9] See, e.g. Netz 2004; Ganeri 2011; Wagner, below.

[10] See n. 6 above, and the account of David Pingree's work in Calder and Heilen 2007.

Premodern Classical Traditions: Common Features

Premodern conceptions of the 'classic' had been anchored both in cosmology and in the education of literate elites. Order in the cosmos corresponded to order in the state, to the order portrayed in classical texts, and to order in the physical world. 'Classics' were models of proper behaviour, literary style, valid reasoning, and the relations between sovereigns and subjects. Because the classics were located in the past, disorder in the present state of affairs could be attributed to failure to follow the prescriptions of the classics or to misinterpretation and/or corruption of their texts.

A cosmology is a conception of the interrelations between the divine/supernatural, the universe, human life and society, and the physical world.[11] The modern cosmology was unusual in its emphasis on human understanding and manipulation of 'nature' and in its reconfiguration of the divine (God as divine watchmaker at the beginning of creation, religion as guidance for individual ethical behaviour). The degree to which cosmologies were institutionalized and systematized was very variable,[12] and cosmology did not determine responses to modernity—but it might well determine the way in which the asymmetries between the modern West and other societies were problematized.

The papers in our first section are all in a sense 'cosmological'. Modern public spaces make statements about sovereignty, community, and their anchorage in classical or national pasts; Islamic political theory grapples with the relation between divine and human sovereignty; the Renaissance garden was a cosmological statement (a 'paradise') linking classical culture and power in this world to scripture and divine supremacy; the Chinese classics portrayed an ideal state located in the past, and prescribed proper relations between rulers, officials, and subjects.

Members of premodern literate elites thus thought in categories linked to the cosmologies of classic texts; they also wrote and thought in their words. The languages of the classics were deeply internalized; classic texts had been memorized, quotations and allusions formed a shared network of references. Like any language, that of the classics could be used to express critical opinions and new ideas; classical texts could be read in new ways and did not form a seamless unity. But to eliminate the classics from the cultural *imaginaire* or marginalize them into irrelevance would require new conceptions of literacy and new educational practices.

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[11] Conceptions of time (calendars, astronomy) and space (where was the centre of the world? Sen 2005, 171) were important.

[12] Western observers have been prone to oversystematize non-Western cultures, e.g. Granet 1934 on China, Dumont 1966 on India.

Multiple Traditions

A systematic study on a global scale of the 'classics' of the world's literate civilizations and of the positions of the specialists who studied and interpreted them cannot be attempted here.

It would have to take into account variations in the control exercised over classical canons. These were defined by the state in China,[13] in 363 C.E. by Church Council in Christianity, in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. in the case of the hadīth and the Qur'ān; India had an internally controlled Brahman tradition of oral transmission of the Vedas, whereas there was more recomposition in other performance texts (Mahābhārata, Ramayana, Puranas) and genres of learned writing (treatises and commentaries). In the practices by which canons were maintained or modified, Indian and Muslim teachers, like those of Renaissance and early modern Europe, made their own choice of texts to teach at the more advanced levels; Muslim students were licenced by their teachers to teach texts that they had satisfactorily studied, while European universities (functioning rather like guilds) had collective procedures of assessment through agonistic debate; competitive debate and performance at courts served to establish the reputations of Indian scholars and gain them the resources needed to fund students.

It would also be of interest to know more about the degree and types of specialization in different branches of knowledge and forms of literary production. It was probably in most cases the ambition of the exceptional scholar to master all branches of learning (although studying philosophy and Kabbalah were disapproved of by some Jewish communities); equally, however, there were distinctions everywhere between studying medical texts and exercising practical skills, between poetry full of classical allusions and popular song, between mathematical theory and keeping business accounts, between advanced theological speculation and using sermons to control the behaviour of congregations. The less learned or even illiterate end of the scale was especially common in rural areas, and this is also where we find women (singers, midwives, root-gatherers). But careers might also lead from notarial activity into higher branches of law, or from successful practice to treatise-writing and teaching. It is also useful to consider the careers of the less successful students, who would end up in lower-rank positions or in marginal rural areas, or find alternative careers as singer/poets[14] or perhaps—as in the case of Luo Zhengyu (Thouard and Wang, below)—in some obscure branch of antiquarian research. Practice was also linked to scholarship and teaching in Islamic and Christian areas by the charitable foundation of hospitals with professorships attached.

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[13] The state also tried to exercise control over textual traditions outside the examination system, e.g. the Buddhist and Taoist canons.

[14] China, which had the most rigorously controlled system of classical education, also had a strong tradition of refusenik and dropout literati.

Specialization was also promoted by the reputation of some cities—not necessarily politically significant—as centres of learning, to which students would be attracted. In Europe these centres promoted themselves as 'universities' covering all branches of knowledge, but also developed a division into 'faculties' in which students tended to specialize. In India a city might become famous for a particular school of learning and teaching (e.g. Vārānasī/Benares: Ganeri 2011).

Teaching classical texts, commenting on them, and putting forward new views in treatises were closely connected activities, and famous scholars did not necessarily confine themselves to one branch of learning. There was however a general distinction between those classic texts that students learned by heart in the early stages of their education and more specialized works that would be studied later through reading.

Reconfigurations

Westerners who brought modern ideas to Asia both undermined and reinforced the authority of Asian classics. On the one hand they stressed the value of Western science, technology, and institutions, and the imperative need to modernize. On the other hand, they went to local literati for instruction in language, law, and religion; they admitted that at least the Chinese had once outstripped the West in 'scientific' discoveries; the European historical schema recognized 'classical' progress and excellence even if followed by 'medieval' darkness and stagnation; they were interested in Asian 'classics' as evidence of the pre-medieval development of human ideas, of 'mythical thought', of the 'primitive' poetry admired by the Romantics, and of early history. Their attitudes to 'other religions' were also contradictory; missionaries in China were inclined to stress similarities between Christianity and Confucianism, following an older deist model in which Confucius (with Plato, Moses, and Mohammed) was seen as one of the sages who had preserved through secret teaching a true religious revelation corrupted in the course of history by priests. In India the British colonial officials (coming from a stratum to which lower-class evangelism seemed vulgarly 'enthusiastic' and even dangerously revolutionary) were opposed to attempts at conversion; this led to a policy of respect for 'religious law' in areas where it did not conflict with colonial policies or British sensibilities ('family law' was 'religious' but could not include property relations or *sati*), and it also encouraged a reification of 'religion' as Hindu, Muslim, or 'tribal'. Missionaries in India followed the deist model in its hostility to priests and ritual, and promoted a model of Christianity as monotheist and emotional which appealed to Indian sects and encouraged the development from the European side of theosophy, and from the Indian side of the Brahmo Samaj and Ramakrishna movements.

Westerners also increasingly brought a model of knowledge and texts as divided into disciplinary compartments: theology, philosophy, history, archaeology, geography and geology, mathematics, the 'natural sciences', literature. Asian

'classic' texts were valued as 'literature' or as sources of information on religious law and sensibilities, or on local history.[15] Asian philosophy was often reduced to ethical teaching or subsumed under 'religion' (whereas ancient Greek thought about the divine was reclassified as 'philosophy').[16] Interconnections between philosophical writings in Sanskrit and in Persian were ignored.[17]

The major factor of disruption of premodern education systems in the modern period was Western insistence that only Western knowledge was modern, other forms of knowledge being classified as 'religious', as only of historical interest, or—more recently—as exotic 'alternatives'. Jews and Muslims—whose classics were indeed 'scriptures'—developed parallel systems of education in which the Bible and Talmud, Qur'ān and hadīth, were studied in schools of traditional form while the same students might also attend schools and universities with 'modern' curricula (in which Jewish Studies or Islamic Studies might feature as an option). In China—where the thorough state control of education perhaps encouraged extreme defence or rejection of classical schooling—the examination system was abolished in 1905 and replaced by schools and universities modelled mainly on those of Meiji Japan. The British in India debated whether Indians should be educated by study of 'their own' Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic classics, or by learning Greek and Latin, but decided instead to make English the language of government (replacing Persian) and to follow the pleas of Bengali intellectuals by teaching the 'classics' of English literature in the schools (Viswanathan 1989). The teaching and study of 'classics' in the West was also disrupted, on the one side by claims that it should be replaced by 'modern' scientific knowledge, and on the other side by the preference for early texts and the imposition of modern disciplinary definitions; so Herodotus and Thucydides were considered superior to Livy or Plutarch, Plato's *Timaeus* instead of being considered the supreme statement of his thought became an embarrassment, and 'Hippocrates' seemed more interesting than Galen.

In the process of modernization 'classically' trained elites and the 'classics' in the manner in which they interpreted them were marginalized at varying speeds and in different ways. European Jews were offered more opportunities for assimilation (and experienced more pressure to convert to Christianity), which raised new choices between strict orthodoxy and reform; Indian pandits and mullahs, though consulted by colonial officials in the early stages of British rule, were progressively sidelined even as experts in Sanskrit or Arabic—though a new specialization in deciphering inscriptions developed (Guha-Thakurta 2004). Classical education continued for longer in China but was interrupted by sudden reforms: abolition of

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[15] Cf. Thouard and Wang, below, on the use made of Chinese local chronicles by Chavannes and Segalen.

[16] Philosophy also became a substitute for religion, in different ways, in the curricula of the modern French Lycée and German Gymnasium.

[17] Recently both Tavakoli-Targhi 2001 and Ganeri 2011 have called attention to the translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts into Persian, but they do not ask whether there were also translations of Persian works into Indian languages, or what the translators had been reading as they learned Persian. (The question is raised by Raychaudhuri 1999, 100).

the examination system in 1905 and a savage attack on the lingering impact of 'old' ideas among the educated elite in the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Whereas Jewish communities and Islamic states, as we have seen, tended to develop parallel educational systems, one traditional/religious and the other modern, in the West the competition for time between arts/humanities and science/'modern studies' took place within schools and universities (with more pressure on boys to modernize).

Marginalization generated new ways of dealing with 'classical' pasts, which were increasingly removed from contexts of everyday use to be repositioned as texts of high stature in 'dead' languages in need of translation and comment, or as ruins, 'art' (to be kept in museums) or archaeological sites and artefacts to be explored, excavated, catalogued, preserved, labelled, and (again) museumized (Shaw 2003; Guha-Thakurta 2004).

This process of museumization involved contradictory notions of time: museumized 'classics' were now timeless not so much because they were seen as belonging to a Paradisal, eternally relevant past, but because they were detached from all contemporary reuse. On the other hand they had to have a date: museums were organized by chronology and 'cultures'.[18] Dating raised questions of precedence; had China enjoyed democratic government already under the Duke of Zhou? Could Aristotle have learned logic from Alexander's reports of Indian philosophy?[19] The nation-state and the idea of national culture favoured a search for 'origins' in the deep past; classical ages could be used to rebalance the asymmetries of the modern present by highlighting past achievements, to explain these asymmetries as due to 'medieval' periods of corruption and decline, and to offer models of a new national character for the future—or at least models of the persistence of national 'spirit' in contexts dominated by modern Western materialism (Raychaudhuri 1999).

The reconfiguration of 'classics' in the modern period is only one aspect of these contradictory movements. It is significant, however, for several reasons. First, 'classical' education had been a major force in creating unified elite cultures in literate societies; this predisposed these elites both to defend their culture and their privileged positions as interpreters, and to think of wider national models of education in terms of cultural unification, even though this might involve a shift to vernacular 'national classics' or—in colonial India—to English literature (Viswanathan 1989). Secondly, the selection and construction of periods and aspects of 'national' pasts that would be presented as significant was influenced (even where the past selected was 'medieval') by the model of an ideal, timeless age (heritage) of origin remote from modernity (cf. Algazi below). Thirdly, the question of the authority of texts was closely linked to 'religion' (particularly in the nineteenth century, there was a tendency to scripturalize 'secular' classical texts while simultaneously undermining the authority of scriptures through historicization). The question whether, or how far, prescriptions in religious texts can be adapted to modern conditions through rereading is still highly controversial (cf. Pasha, below).

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[18] For Japan see Tanaka 1994.

[19] This was suggested by Görres in the early nineteenth century.

Modernizing Iranians who promote the study of Achaemenid Persia, non-orthodox Jewish historians interested in Hellenistic Judaism, and left-wing historians of India concentrating on the once neglected Mughal 'middle ages', are still manoeuvring within frameworks set in the modern period.[20]

Frameworks and categories—including disciplinary categories—are not immutable, but are anchored to institutions and change only slowly. There are time-lags here too. Historians and philosophers of science have discarded many modern assumptions about the irrelevance of the humanities, while governments still cling to them. Universities claim to promote interdisciplinarity but still direct funding to discipline-based departments. Global, post-modern histories can make readers more aware of the specificity and peculiarities of modern categories.

Taking some distance from modernity and its cultural frameworks might also lead to reflection on distance itself and its place in the poetics of knowledge. Distance both enhanced the authority of classic texts and left a space in which critical reading could modify them in relation to changing circumstances. While critical reading often declines into irrelevant pedantry (or eccentricities such as Bentley's attempt to rewrite Milton), it is not an element in education that can be discarded as elitist. The continuing value of 'classics' should be that there is no single prescribed way of reading them, yet not every reading is possible; there is space for argument. The tacit and stubborn insistence of 'classical' works on their own meaning and their refusal to bend to randomly imposed interpretations forces the scholar and the student into a willingness to both recognize and bridge this distance. The environment of the 'classical' works in the distance of time as a foreign country, just as a different tradition works in the distance of space. The challenge of the transcultural interaction of the present with the past and of one cultural environment with another is the same in both fields, as is the methodology required to deal with this challenge.

The Case Studies

Our case studies cluster around three connected themes: the re-rooting of modernity in classical pasts and cosmologies through new experiences of space and new interpretations of texts; the rearrangement and rereading of classical texts to fit new conceptions of disciplinary knowledge, national culture, and linear history; and the impact of modern ideas on the eye, as viewers learn to see ruins, feel the presence of the past, criticize historicist conceptions of proof through images, see objects as 'information', or see their contemporaries as living relics.

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[20] Far too often, non-Western rejections of Western views and positive assertions of 'otherness' have operated within and with constant reference to Western categories, asserting that ancient China already had the institutions characteristic of modernity (Wagner, below), or that India had its own 'science' (Prakash 1999), had transmitted the zero and calculus to Europe (Raju 2007, with no discussion of Islamic connections), and had its own tradition of 'philosophy' defined by reference to western standards (Raghuramaraju 2006, criticizing this obsession with Western philosophy; Ganeri 2011).

Part I: Anchoring Modernity

This part deals with the use of 'classics' in the public sphere. Monica Juneja, *The making of New Delhi*, begins with a classic moment in the discipline of art history and the modern reconfiguration of the Greek and Roman classics: Winckelmann's argument that the greatness of 'classical' Greek art was the product of Athenian democracy. Classical architecture came to be associated especially with public space and with democratic or at least republican government. On the other hand, public space in the modern period was increasingly seen as national, and this prompted alternative suggestions that Gothic architecture was more appropriate for northern Europe; this debate between the rival claims of national and classical styles was transferred to India and China.

Ronald Inden, *Classics in the Garden*, deals with an earlier period but is equally concerned with the reorganization of spatial experience to enhance power and authority, and with the harmonization of alternative systems of reference to the past, in this case 'classical' and scriptural symbolism in the garden of the Villa d'Este.

Rudolf Wagner, *The Classic, the State, and Modernity. The Ritual of Zhou 1860–1950*, shows in a detailed analysis how the *Zhouli*, for China the "classic" text on the organization of the state, was reread in the modern period as prefiguring the modernizing reforms being recommended in China in a distinctly critical perspective on the structure of governance and political communication in late Imperial China.

This might indeed be called the 'classic' strategy of reconfiguration, in which a classic text is adapted to new circumstances—in this case, the impact of Western modernity—by commentary. Scholars who had deeply internalized a model of harmonious correspondence between good governance, human morality, and the society portrayed in classic texts, were impelled by this model, and by the need to deal with the asymmetry between its authority and the claims made for the 'advancement' of Western government and science, into repositioning the *Zhouli*, the 'classic' account of statecraft, as a model for reform. As the Chinese state derived its authority from the "classics" and the viability of the state-imposed educational system with its state-mandated readings of the classics was increasingly questioned, a commentary that was recasting the classics was the preferred genre of political debate.

'Recasting the classics' has also been an essential part of Islamic debates over modernization. Too often, however, these debates are seen only in terms of a choice between modernity and 'fundamentalism'. This simplistic dichotomy is questioned by three of our contributors (Pasha, Pormann, and Manoukian), all showing that it does not fit the way influential but controversial Muslim thinkers have tried to rethink the relations between Islam, knowledge, and modernity. In the first case Sayyid Qutb, studied here by Mustapha Pasha (*Sayyid Qutb's theocentric reconstruction of sovereignty*), formulates a new theory of sovereignty which implies a correspondence between the structure of the Islamic state and the character of the believing citizen (there are interesting parallels with the recommendations of Sun Yirang, analysed here by Wagner).

Part II: Repositioning Texts

While Wagner and Pasha both deal with thinkers whose use of texts is oriented towards reconceptualizing the state and formulating recommendations for reform, our next two papers deal more specifically with recasting the past as a marker of identity down to its becoming the prehistory of the modern nation. Peter Pormann, *Classical Scholarship and Arab Modernity*, shows how Egyptian ideas of 'national history' incorporated the periods of Ptolemaic and Roman rule that had been appropriated by Western classicists as part of a "Western" history, and how modern conceptions of philology as a universally applicable text-processing discipline produced controversial reinterpretations of early Arabic 'classic' poetry and of the Qur'ān.

Judaism has its own division between 'reform' and 'orthodoxy'; it has been influenced not only by the general problem of deciding how far scriptural rules should be taken as valid for all time or can be seen as produced by and for specific historical circumstances (cf. Pormann's paper), but more specifically by the impact of modern philology and historicism on Bible interpretation, and by the influence of modern concepts of the "nation" on Jewish history. Nicholas de Lange's case-study of the reception of the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint or LXX), *The Septuagint as a Jewish classic*, shows how an open attitude to translation as a necessary adaptation of God's word to the understanding of congregations was gradually replaced by an insistence on the preeminence of Hebrew. Interest in the LXX revived in the modern period first among historians interested in the origins of Christianity; Jewish scholars began to take a serious interest only in the late twentieth century, when Jewish culture came to be seen in terms of proto-national or at least ethnic resistances to Hellenistic and then Roman influences and domination.

André Laks, *Phenomenon and reference: revisiting Parmenides, Empedocles, and the problem of rationalization*, deals with disciplinary identity. This essay traces a history of reception which had its tensions already in antiquity, as fourth-century B.C.E. and later scholars faced decisions about the boundaries of 'philosophy' and of its history. These issues were sharpened in the modern period by interest in the "origins of Greek thought," and construction of early Greek thought as the birth of a new form of rationality. Parmenides and Empedocles, already problematic figures in antiquity because of their use of verse and the associations of Parmenides with revelation and Empedocles with magic, attracted more attention from the late nineteenth century onward as figures standing between an imagined 'traditional' Greece and its progress towards full rationality. In turn, 'premodern', 'archaic' Greece could be seen, in a backlash against classicism and rationalism, as a source of 'anthropological' insights into the human condition. Historians irritated by philosophers' reluctance to allow their discipline to be reduced to "history of ideas" may be attracted by this marriage of historicism with modern irrationalism. Laks, however, takes a line much more in tune with the theme of this volume, arguing that Parmenides and Empedocles were not unconsciously recycling earlier