

## Globalizing Classics: Ovid through the Looking Glass

Interest in Classical Studies and Ancient History is growing rapidly in China. In mid-spring of 2017, about four dozen speakers gathered for three days in Shanghai (China) for “Globalizing Ovid: An International Conference in Commemoration of the Bimillennium of Ovid’s Death.” The current paper reflects on that conference before asking what it means to “globalize” a western classical poet and what are our collective aims, objectives, goals, and the potential rewards for doing so?

I address five points regarding the future of western classics in light of globalization.

**International Collaboration:** In April of 2012, Harvard Sinologist Puett challenged a roomful of Greek and Roman historians to imagine how the history of Greek democracy or Roman imperialism will be taught and written when the world’s premier professors and their students are located in China. Since then, many American universities have launched “China Initiatives”, exchange programs between institutions. Classicists must be active participants in this dialogue and also recruit and support Chinese-national students. Our research and classrooms have much to gain from collaboration and diversified perspectives.

**Comparative Studies:** Comparative Studies of Chinese and Greco-Roman Antiquity is a nascent field, but a growing one. Recent work has focused primarily on comparative history, such as Scheidel’s *Rome and China* (2009). As Chinese scholars strengthen and renew philological and literary studies of Western Classical texts (to be discussed in the following paper by Liu), we should begin to see more comparative literary studies like Handler-Spitz’s *Symptoms of an Unruly Age: Li Zhi and Cultures of Early Modernity* (2017), which uncovers horizontal commonalities and recognizes China and Europe as co-participants in the making of modernity. Can this comparative literary approach be extended back to Classical Antiquity, East and West? Ovid may have claimed that Tomis was at the edge of civilization, but work such as Chin’s current study of Silk Road narratives continues to correct perceptions of “antiquity [be it Greco-Roman or Chinese] as a sort of linguistic and racialized past,” and demonstrate the high degree of interconnectivity, including literary cross-fertilization.

Post-Classical Texts: I position within the current trend to study post-antique Latin (see, for example, the *ITatti* series and Laird's work on Latin literature of colonial Spanish America) the relatively unknown C16 texts of Jesuits such as Giovanni Pietro Maffei. Travel texts, especially texts that consider the periphery and furthest shores, remain a hot topic among Western Classicists. The scholarly moment is ripe for the consideration what Western Classical texts informed Maffei's construction of the Far East, and, furthermore, how that construction both defined a western intellectual and cultural vision of China and continued to precondition China's reception long after the sixteenth century.

Who Owns Classics?: In the aftermath of the Opium Wars, Chinese study of Greco-Roman Classics aimed to understand Western supremacy and recognized Greece as both the cradle of Western civilization and the source of Western supremacy. This notion intersects current claims by Greece's Neo-Nazi movement the Golden Dawn, which locates in its readings of ancient Greek texts justification for their nationalism, racism, and misogyny. Here lies the struggle to determine who possesses (Western) Classics, who gets to define it, and how it can even be weaponized. This is the opposite of "globalizing Classics", and Ovid himself proves to be an ancient author very susceptible to this question of ownership, use, and abuse. In response to student protest, the *Metamorphoses* was eradicated from university canons after trigger warnings proved insufficient. At the same time, Zuckerberg's *Not All Dead White Men* (under contract with Harvard UP) examines, *inter alia*, how a growing community of men's rights activists and self-fashioned "Pickup Artists" have adopted *and adapted* Ovid as their spiritual ancestor. Several have published their own self-help manuals teaching the art of seducing, and if not successful, of assaulting and raping women. They identify their manuals as didactic heirs of *Ars Amatoria*. The best *remedia* for these assertively violent readings of Ovid's *Ars* is to globalize his text: to increase textual access and ownership and to diversify interpretations.

Access: There is no modern Chinese-Latin dictionary. Scholars of Western Classics in China do not have the luxury of attending regular national and regional societal meetings of professional classical organizations in the US and Europe, and likewise lack the facility of building up international networks of colleagues. The age of the World Wide Web allows us to produce truly global scholarship: to disseminate

knowledge wherever there is internet access. Posting work on open-access sites is an act of collegiality benefiting not only our Chinese colleagues, whose institutions are only beginning to build their western Classical libraries, but also countless colleagues with limited access to library collections.