

Reception of China in Europe

Dr Thomas Jansen

HPAH7011 Theory and Methodology in the
Study of the Ancient World

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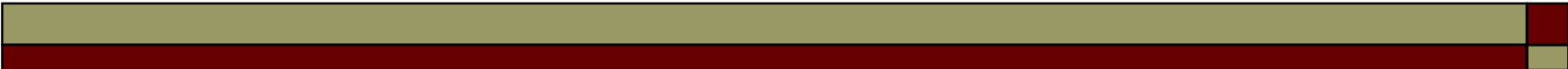


Chinese House (Chinesisches Haus) in Sanssouci Park in Potsdam, Germany



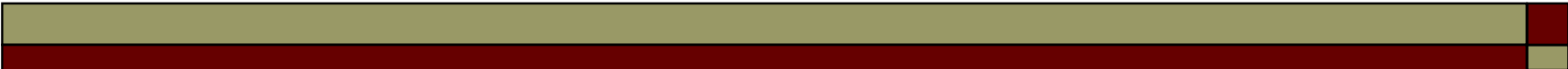
Historic house in Charleston, South Carolina





Recurrent themes

- ❑ The enlightened China
- ❑ The stagnant China
- ❑ China has no transcendent religion and hence no subjectivity
- ❑ Chinese Script
- ❑ Chinoiserie: a decorative style in Western art, furniture, and architecture, especially in the 18th century, characterized by the use of Chinese motifs and techniques



History of the Manners and Spirit of Nations (1756) by Voltaire

“It is surprising that this people, so happy at invention, have never penetrated beyond the elements of geometry; that in music they are even ignorant of semitones; and that their astronomy, with all their other sciences, should be at once so ancient and imperfect. Nature seems to have bestowed on this species of men, so different from the Europeans, organs sufficient to discover all at once, what was necessary to their happiness, but incapable to proceed further: we, on the other hand, were tardy in our discoveries; but then we have speedily brought everything to perfection.”

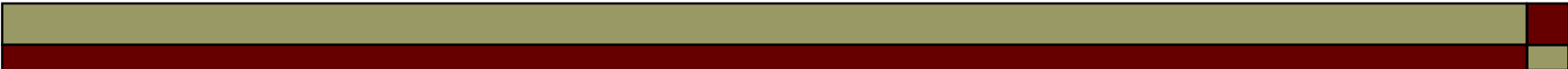
Herder, *Outline of a Philosophy of the History of Man*

Voltaire's assessment is echoed by the German polymath and historian Johann Gottfried Herder roughly thirty years later in his book *The Outline of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784).

Herder described the Chinese empire as “an embalmed mummy, wrapped in silk, and painted with hieroglyphics” and governed by “unalterably childish institutions”. They [the Chinese, TJ] were “planted on this spot of the Globe” and even if they wished, they “could never become Greeks or Romans. Chinese they were and will remain: a people endowed by nature with small eyes, a short nose, a flat forehead, little beard, large ears and protuberant belly.” (Spence, *The Great Khan's Continent*, pp. 97-99)

Frédéric-Melchior Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* (Literary Newsletter)

“What seems to me to be clearly demonstrated regarding the Chinese is that they are one of the oldest peoples of the world, but that they are still at the first stages of the arts and sciences, because they live under the yoke of the most terrible form of despotism, that which governs the customs, manners, and beliefs of private citizens as well as the public administration. It seems to me also demonstrated that the isolation of this people from its neighbors has preserved its industriousness and its ignorance, its laws and its chains. This people, it seems to me, has all the characteristics of the great number of old men: cold and hard prudence, weakness, mistrust, and stubbornness.” (*Correspondance littéraire*, September 1773, 233)

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- ❑ Voltaire and Herder saw “culture” as something given by nature
 - ❑ Culture is defined by unalterable human traits
 - ❑ Chinese culture is quintessentially stagnant, fundamentally different from Western culture
 - ❑ Both Voltaire and Herder were very much concerned to define the essence of Chinese culture.

Chronology of Chinese History

- ❑ Remote Antiquity (*yuangu* 远古): before writing
- ❑ Ancient History (*gudai shi* 古代史): -1840
- ❑ Early Modern History (*jindai shi* 近代史): 1840-1919 (1911)
- ❑ Modern History (*xiandai shi* 现代史): 1919-49 (1912-49)
- ❑ Contemporary History (*dangdai shi* 当代史): post-49



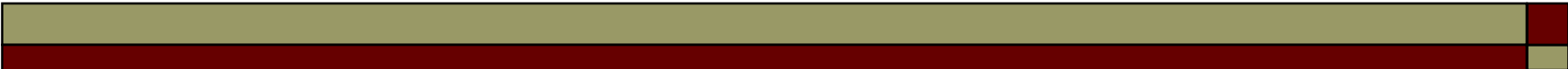


THE QUESTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

Subjectivity in Chinese Culture

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) maintains that morality depends on “subjective freedom” rather than from past models
- subjectivity was something fundamentally absent from Chinese culture
- Instead, China is in the grip of “substance”, the unquestioned authority of tradition
- Absence of inwardness of conscience and morality
- Consequence: China cannot become “modern” unless it imports the principle of free subjectivity





Hegel on Subjectivity in Chinese Culture

“Together with more free reflection, the ethical separates from the legal. Then the constitution rests on the legal which brings forth laws while the ethical is left to the **individual**. [...] Nothing should appear in the laws what is free inside and has its being in the subject. In our modern consciousness we have the idea that the **inner life of the human being** should be respected. This demand expresses itself in the form of honor. It refers to the unimpeachable realm of **what I am for myself**. [...] It is a never-ending injury for me if someone touches this sphere in a hostile manner. This honor presupposes the sanctity of **my being for myself**. However, if someone rules over me morally, then my being for myself is not respected, and there is no room for honor here, and likewise not for the productions which come from my inwardness. That this is the case in China remains to be concretely shown.” (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* [Leipzig: Meiner, 1920], p. 300; translation by Heiner Roetz (2020), p. 5)

Immanence vs Transcendence

- Hegel posits religious source for lack of subjectivity → a world-immanent form of religious with transcendence; an “absolute secularization of the religious principle” (F.W.J Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie*) → religious aura of worldly institutions, esp. the imperial institution → “where everything is holy, there is no leeway for subjectivity to develop” (Roetz [2020], p. 6), as everything is too dense, too compact
- Modern intellectual Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波 traced back his generation’s “submissiveness, parochialism and denial of independent thought” to a “form of thought” characterized by “lack of transcendence”: **“My tragedy is that I do not have transcendent values, it is the tragedy not to have a god.”** (Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波, *Zhongguo dangdai zhengzhi yu Zhongguo zhishifenzi* 中國當代政治與中國知識分子 (Taipei: Tangshan, 1990), 156)

The Hegel–Weber Paradigm

'Immanent' Religion (IR)

Typical case: Confucianism

This-worldliness = adaptation to the world

'Transcendent' Religion (TR)

Typical case: Puritanism

Other-worldliness = tension to the world

Consequences for the actor-world relations through absence (IR) or presence (TR) of 'leverage'

Subject – Object (natural world)

Unbroken unity with nature

Disenchantment and subjugation of nature

Subject – Co-subjects (social world)

Reification of the given order

Questioning of the given order

Subject – Subject (inner world of the self)

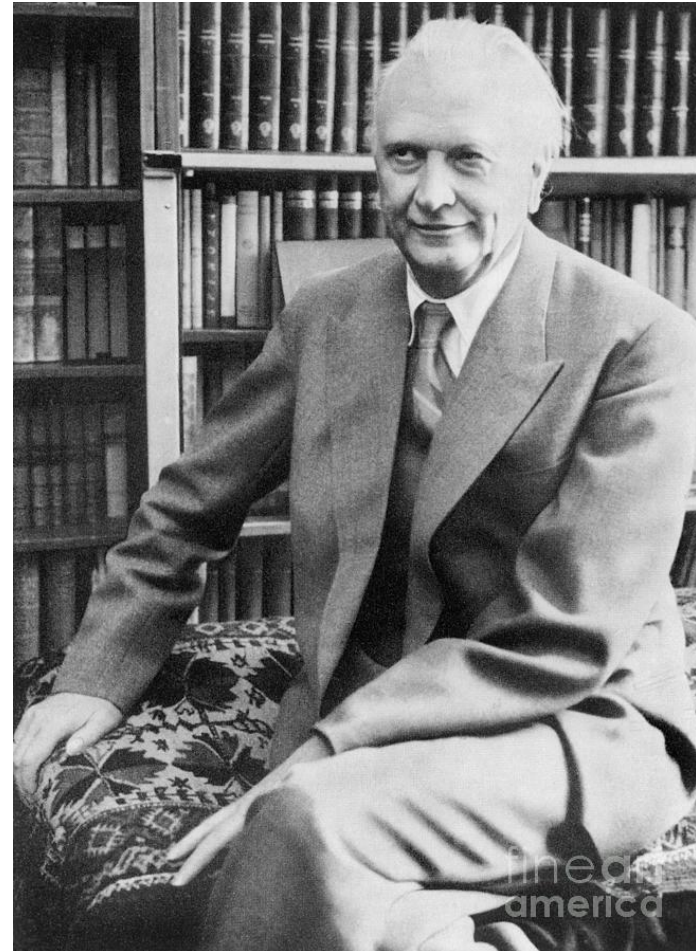
Collective identity

Development of subjectivity

Source: Roetz (2020), p. 8.

Critique of Hegel

- Karl Jaspers (1883–1969)
 - Thesis of the Axial Age, which is characterised by
 1. Breakthrough through the unquestioned presence and closedness of Life; humankind “transcends the world and himself.”
 2. Calling into doubt what Hegel calls “substance”: “Opinions, customs, conditions that had been unconsciously accepted were now scrutinized, questioned, dissolved.”
 3. Development of personhood and self-consciousness – of what Hegel calls “subjectivity.”
 4. Steps towards critical, detached thinking (second order reasoning).
 5. Steps towards the universal by reaching beyond oneself and “recognizing oneself in the other” rather than reifying what is one’s own.
- Chinese culture is one of transcendence (understood as a structural rather than ontological difference)



Roetz, Disenchantment and subjectivity

- ❑ Heiner Roetz, German sinologist, put Jasper's thesis on an empirical footing by studying the relationship between humans and nature in ancient China
- ❑ Roetz argues that from the 9th century BCE, "Heaven" (*tian* 天) the highest deity of the Zhou dynasty, lost its religious aura and "secularized to the notion of dysteleological 'nature'"
- ❑ The human world is no longer under the sway of gods and spirits → this becomes a source for subjectivity to develop
- ❑ This shift in the relationship between Heaven and humans, this disenchantment, signals a breakthrough through "substance" towards personhood and self-consciousness.
- ❑ Roetz agrees with Hegel that a recourse to subjectivity is hardly possible in a compact world where everything is sacred. However, he argues that transcendence is possible even within a world-immanent culture like the Chinese.
Transcendence: "a kind of standing back and looking beyond, a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and new vision of what lies beyond"
(Benjamin Schwartz, "The Age of Transcendence", *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (1975)).



HISTORICAL COMPARISON

“Fabricate an ancient history”

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International

Chinese professor: There were no ancient western civilizations; just modern fakes made to demean China



February 11, 2021 Phillip Charlier 46 Comments China expansionism, made in china, propaganda

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1775. 217/1.

MEMOIRE

DANS LEQUEL ON PROUVE,
QUE LES CHINOIS
SONT UNE COLONIE
EGYPTIENNE;

Lû dans l'Assemblée publique de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, le 14. Novembre 1758. Avec un Précis du Mémoire de M. l'Abbé BARTHELEMY, sur les Lettres Phéniciennes; lû dans l'Assemblée publique de la même Académie le 12. Avril 1758.

Par M. DE GUIGNES, de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, Professeur au Collège Royal de France en Langue Syriacque, Censeur Royal; Interprète du Roi pour les Langues Orientales, & Membre de la Société Royale de Londres.



NOUVELLE ÉDITION.

A PARIS,

Chez DESAINT & SAILLANT, rue
S. Jean de Beauvais, vis-à-vis
le Collège.

M. D C C. L X.

Avec Approbation & Privilège du Roi.

- Joseph de Guignes (19 October 1721 – 19 March 1800)
- French orientalist, sinologist and Turkologist
- Admission to the Royal Society of London in 1752
- 1757, appointed to the chair of Syriac at the Collège de France.

- William Warburton (1698—1779), Church of England bishop of Gloucester;
[https://www.google.co.uk/books/editio
n/The_Divine_Legation_of_Moses_Demonstrate/h-
VCAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.co.uk/books/editio/n/The_Divine_Legation_of_Moses_Demonstrate/h-VCAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)
- John Turberville Needham FRS (10 September 1713 – 30 December 1781); English biologist and Roman Catholic priest; in his *De inscriptione qundam Aegyptiaca Taurini inventa et characteribus Aegyptiis olim et Sinis communibus exerta idolo cuidam antiquo in Regia Universitate servato ad utrasque academias Londinensem et Parisiensem ... data epistola* (1761); attempted to interpret the Egyptian inscriptions on a bust, supposedly of Isis, by using Chinese characters.



John Turberville Needham



COLLECTING ANCIENT CHINA

Cyfarthfa Castle Museums and Art Gallery Merthyr Tydfil







Cms

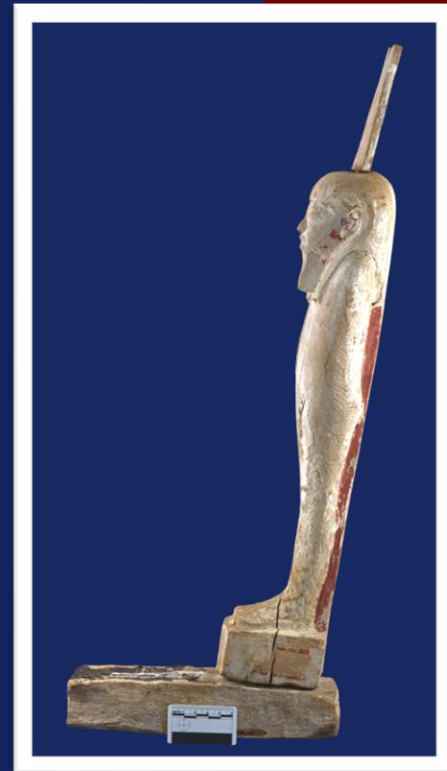


Cms



Cms







Cyfyrrthfa Castle Objects



SOUTHEY COLLECTION.

THE CONTENTS OF THIS CASE WERE COLLECTED BY THE LATE

MAJOR HARRY HARTLEY SOUTHEY,

1/5TH BATT. WELCH REGT

A PORTION OF THE ARTICLES WAS BEQUEATHED BY HIM TO THE CORPORATION.

THE REMAINDER, INCLUDING THE WHOLE OF THE EGYPTIAN OBJECTS,

AND THIS CASE, WERE PRESENTED BY

H. W. SOUTHEY, ESQ., J.P., AND FAMILY.

The Welsh collector

The Memory Studies perception

*Geology.
Palaeolithic & Neolithic.
Cases.
Southey Collection.*



Major Harry Hartley Southey (1871-1917)

- ❑ from a wealthy family who owned the Merthyr Express newspaper
- ❑ military career → travelled widely throughout Mediterranean and the Middle East → Started to collect Roman, Grecian, Egyptian and Asian Objects
- ❑ particularly interested in Egypt, and on a visit in 1901 was able to buy a quantity of Egyptian antiquities which he later added to when stationed in Egypt during 1916 → Cairo: became friendly with a curator of an Egyptian museum who helped him to collect 'spoils from the tombs' → packed objects away safely in wooden crates ready to be shipped back to Wales
- ❑ killed in action during the Battle of Gaza in WW I (1917)
- ❑ Family donated his collection to Cyfarthfa Castle Museum (founded 1911) after his death

Richard Glynn Vivian (1830-1919)



Glynn Vivian Collection of Chinese Porcelain



Fonmon Castle Collection

- Fonmon Castle Collection
- Naval papers of Captain Oliver J. Jones, 1862-1870





5. Reverse of throne cushion, Wolseley Bequest. © The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Used with permission.

军团博物馆的帝国画廊 Empire Gallery - The Black Watch Castle and Museum, Scotland



Thank you for your attention!