

# Universality, Modernity, and Cultural Borrowing among Vietnamese Intellectuals, 1877–1919

Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, Western Connecticut State University

The policy questions at the palace examination held at Huế in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently asked examinees to demonstrate not only their knowledge of the ancient classics or of major neo-Confucian texts, but also their comprehension of European civilization, technology, and modern ideas transmitted in literary Sinitic. The need for Nguyễn dynasty scholar-officials to understand their world in new terms became even more urgent after French forces and Spanish forces attacked Đà Nẵng in 1858. In the context of negotiating the 1862 Treaty of Saigon, which ceded three southern provinces to the French, the Nguyễn administration asked candidates at the palace examination how to use the ideas of “attack, defense, or negotiation” most effectively against their French adversaries. The Nguyễn dynasty’s Tự Đức Emperor 嗣德 (r. 1848–1883), would ask similar questions again in 1868 and 1877. After the completion of French efforts to establish a protectorate over Annam and Tonkin in 1885, the palace examinations turned increasingly to establishing how, or whether, the Nguyễn dynasty could or should harness their knowledge and expertise in the classics to comprehend electricity, trains, steamships, and other such contemporary technology.<sup>1</sup> Arguments about the applicability of neo-Confucian ideology to comprehending technology remained a theme of the palace examinations until Nguyễn control over the education system came to an end in 1919, fourteen years after the system of civil service examinations had been abandoned in China.

In addition to being forced to adapt to the military presence of France, these examinations also occurred within a shifting East Asian intellectual context. In China, the destruction wrought by the Second Opium War spurred a series of reforms. Starting in the 1860s, a Chinese effort at self-strengthening was led by the intellectuals and statesmen Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) and Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872) and focused on establishing the Zongli Yamen, or Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Maritime

---

1 See Đặng Văn Thùý’s response to the 1904 policy question in *Xuân Kinh Diên Thi Văn Tuyển* [Selected works from the Spring Palace Examinations], Manuscript A. 208, Sino-Nom Institute, Hanoi, Vietnam, 8–13. See also Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, “French Imperialism and the Vietnamese Civil Service Examinations, 1862–1919,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 21 (2014): 381–387.

Customs Office. They also worked to improve the Qing armed forces in terms of firearms technology, shipbuilding, and the education of military and diplomatic officers. Japan embarked on a more thorough and much more effective program of reforms following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This involved not only a far more successful military reform than China's, but also a wholesale borrowing of Western techniques in industrialization and the establishment of an advanced technological infrastructure. Much more than in the Chinese case, Japanese administrators under the Meiji Emperor also embraced cultural elements of Westernization far more quickly than their counterparts in China. The precedents provided by Japan and China gave Nguyễn intellectuals a number of options to choose from in dealing with the threat from France.

This article investigates how Vietnamese ideas about Europe, and about technology associated with European powers, were filtered through Chinese sources. Even through the 1910s and 1920s, decades into the era of French imperialism in Indochina, Vietnamese intellectuals still looked to their Chinese (and sometimes Indian) counterparts not only for strategies for coping with the presence of Europeans but also for their understanding of the history of Western culture and technology. This article will consider several specific examples. First, it will examine the way in which the 1877 policy question and the model answer that accompanied it borrowed its ideas about the origins and development of Western civilization and technology from Xu Jiyu's 徐繼畲 (1795–1873) 1849 text *Yinghuan Zhilue* 瀛環志略 (Short account of the maritime circuit).<sup>2</sup> It will then consider echoes of the ideas of Chinese reformist intellectuals, such as Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), especially on the 1904 examination and on the later writing of its top graduate Dang Van Thuy 鄧文瑞 (1858–1936). It will also examine the implicit emphasis on Gandhian thought in the 1919 examination. In the course of these examples, I am interested in looking at the way in which these examinations evidence a shift away from confidence in the ability of candidates to answer questions by making reference to canonical texts in classical Chinese. This lack of faith in canonical texts caused candidates to increasingly view “Western civilization” as a unique and separate phenomenon (that is to say, in particularistic terms). This development, which mirrors intellectual changes amongst Chinese reformers, is deeply ironic, since it was largely through reading the work of Chinese thinkers that Vietnamese intellectuals became convinced that they

---

2 Xu Jiyu, *Yinghuan Zhilue* 瀛環志略 [Short account of the maritime circuit] (Shanghai: Shao ye shan fang, 1898), accessed August 21, 2017, <http://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&res=2293>. In the case of all terms and names requiring descriptions in multiple languages, I have given the terms in English, followed by characters, pinyin, and, where appropriate, quốc ngữ (modern Vietnamese). All translations are the author's unless otherwise stated.

could not rely on ideas from China to explain their world. Thus, even as these scholars continued to defend the premises of a classical East Asian education, they came to defend it as something particular rather than something universal.

Because of this, the relationship between Vietnamese intellectuals and their canonical texts changed. Rather than regarding the classics, very broadly defined in the Vietnamese case, as a source for the universal values of a civilized society, they increasingly defended them (or, at times, rejected them) as aspects of a particular, historical, Asian tradition of Confucianism.<sup>3</sup> The final example I consider in this article—the intellectual Tran Trong

---

3 This line of reasoning is borrowed from Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch'i Chao and the Mind of Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), and Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate. Volume 1: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), and also his less well-known but very important *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Stage and the Chinese Stages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Over the course of the last three decades, historians have viewed Levenson's contribution through the lens of Paul Cohen's influential interpretation of it in his *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 57–96. This interpretation, which accurately frames Levenson's argument as being about the intellectual transformation from tradition to modernity, suggests that by understanding modernity as being derived from Western countries, Levenson denies agency to Chinese actors in their own history, since “the picture of the Chinese revolution that emerged from this perspective was one that was shaped, from beginning to end, by problems posed for China by the modern west” (78–79). Instead, Cohen proposes a “China-centered” view of Chinese historiography, which purportedly gives agency back to Chinese actors in their own history, in part by pushing the question of modernity back further into history rather than giving the impetus for that modernity to the British cannons of the Opium War or to the translation of Mill or Rousseau. I have critically appraised Cohen's notion of “China-centered” history as well as the tacit application of “China-centered” or “autonomous” historiography to Vietnam, in Wynn Wilcox, ed., *Vietnam and the West: New Approaches* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2010), 7–12. Two brief points can be made about this here. The first is that Cohen's view of Levenson's remarks assumed that what was important to Chinese thinkers was that modern ideas were coming from Western sources, or that modernity was somehow to Levenson inherently Westernized, whereas in fact what mattered was not whether modernity was Western but that Chinese intellectuals perceived it to be so. Levenson's critique focuses not on Western texts or Western ideas at all, but on how modernist epistemologies caused Chinese thinkers to think through elements of Chinese tradition particularistically, as a defined tradition of a national state among particular national states needed to be made equivalent with other European nations. See Levenson, *Liang Ch'i Chao*, 4–5, and Levenson, *Confucian China*, xxvii–xxx. Second, and more importantly, Cohen's “China-centered” view is ironically an example of the modernistic “search for equivalency” that Levenson provides. For the desire to “discover” in China a China-centered past is undoubtedly a desire to find in China a particularistic past that is equivalent to the purportedly particularistic past of the West. It is in other words evidence that, at least in the case of Chinese historiography in North America as it has evolved since the 1980s, the impetus for understanding the past still involves finding something in the Chinese past that will be its own equivalent to Western modernity. When viewed in this light, Cohen's arguments about China-centered history mirror Liang Qichao's arguments for finding antecedents for modern thought in the Chinese past in an almost uncanny way, and in this way ironically affirm Levenson's original analysis, since it is impossible to think historiographically about autonomous histories (especially along national lines) without tacitly accepting the conceits of modernist historiographical thought.

Kim's (1883–1953) interpretation of Confucianism as related to Henri-Louis Bergson's (1859–1941) conception of intuition, which was directly borrowed from the Chinese reformer Liang Shuming—represents the culmination of this transformation. In that case, a version of the Confucian orthodoxy is given legitimacy because of its resonances with the universalistic rationality of post-enlightenment French thought, but ironically, the insights about that universal rationality still emerge from the Chinese intellectual milieu.

### **Xu Jiyu's influence on the 1877 palace examination**

On the 1877 palace examination, the Tự Đức Emperor of Vietnam sought to understand the origins and development of European nations in the context of negotiations with the French. He asked:

How, when, and where did all the countries [and peoples] of the far West begin? They have existed for a long time already, but they only began to arrive here and be discussed during the Ming dynasty. How did we not hear of them earlier and investigate their scope and extent? How are they able to succeed and expand so rapidly? Compared with past examples, is it true or not that they are very sophisticated?<sup>4</sup>

This question contrasted with similar policy questions in 1862 and 1868 that asked candidates to comment on what would be for them the best military strategy to deal with the Western barbarians, and to choose a different one if traditional means of using attack, defense, or negotiation proved insufficient.<sup>5</sup> In those previous examples, both the questions and the answers presumed that the appropriate way of devising a military strategy was to compare the Westerners with other tribal peoples mentioned in the histories. Thus, both the emperor in the question and the candidates in the answers made analogies to previous “non-civilized” peoples who had “invaded” China, such as Xiongnu and the Kitan, and based on their examples, devised strategies such as marriage alliances or payments to make the Westerners go away.

The 1877 question was something different. It assumed from the start that the Westerners possessed a unique history that required particular

4 “何始何在徵何極泰西諸國立國。日人從人生以來已固有之無至明論始見其諸前代豈萎無聞。究其規模。何以駸又日盛較諸往事果否擅。” *Đình Thi Văn Tập* (hereafter *DTVT*), appendix of Phạm Thị Kim, “Những vấn đề chống ngoại xâm qua văn thi hội thi đình của một số nhà khoa bảng thời Tự Đức,” [Issues of foreign invasion in the Palace Examinations of a number of candidates of the Tu Duc Era] (PhD diss., Viện Hán-Nôm, 1986), 71.

5 *Quốc Triều Đình Đối Sách Văn*. Archival Manuscript V.Hv. 318/2. Viện Hán Nôm, Hanoi, Vietnam, 29 and 93.

investigation. To understand this required more than drawing analogies to the classics, since peoples from the far West were largely absent from such sources. Instead, the examination suggested a focus on European history as particular and unique. Doing so, however, would undermine one of the central conceits of the structure of the policy question, and of the examination system itself: that by studying a series of (broadly conceived) canonical texts, and by using them as precedent for understanding the world, one could develop a universally applicable way of comprehending human knowledge.

Ironically, however, the officials administering the 1877 examination expected candidates to affirm the particularity of European history by borrowing directly from Chinese sources. This can be seen in the “model answer” composed to provide a key for graders to evaluate the policy question. Based on previous precedent, the chief reader, Nguyễn Văn Tường (1824–1886), and the two readers, Nguyễn Hữu Độ (1813–1888) and Nguyễn Thuật (1842–1911), most likely wrote this model answer.<sup>6</sup> In substance, the model answer derived portions of its responses to the emperor’s question from a single Chinese source: Xu Jiyu’s 1849 *Yinghuan Zhilue*.<sup>7</sup>

Key sections of the model answer are either paraphrased or borrowed entirely from this text. For example, the description of how gunpowder technology reached the Western countries is lifted verbatim from the Chinese text. The passage below is identical in both Xu Jiyu’s geography and the model answer for the 1877 examination. It describes how the *History of the Ming (Mingshi)* notes that Western mercenaries found employment in the armies of Timur, the founder of the Timurid Empire in Central Asia in the fourteenth century. These mercenaries manned Timur’s cannons, and it was speculated that they brought cannon technology back to the West via their experiences in Timur’s armies:

---

6 French officials deported Nguyễn Văn Tường to Tahiti for his role in instigating the Aid-the-King movement in 1885. His influence was evident prior to the 1880s. Tường was originally from Quảng Trị Province, and ascended in rank fairly quickly, despite not having passed the palace examination, due to his own force of personality and talent at negotiation. In 1853, he was appointed the *tri huyện* (prefect) of the newly established district of Thành Hóa in Quảng Trị. Nguyễn Hữu Độ, who was from Thanh Hóa Province, received the degree of *cử nhân* (“elevated person,” a graduate of the metropolitan-level examination) in 1837, and received a *phó bảng* (subordinate list) distinction on the palace examination only one year later, in 1838. He then began a long and distinguished career as an official, chiefly in the *Cơ Mật Viện* (Privy Council) and the Ministry of Finance. Nguyễn Thuật also had a distinguished career as a Nguyễn official. Originally from Quảng Nam Province, he received the *cử nhân* title in 1867 and was on the *phó bảng* list in the 1868 examinations. His long official career included many years as the chief reader of imperial examinations, along with serving on the *Nội Các* (cabinet), as an ambassador to China, as Minister of Defense, and as the *tổng đốc* of Thanh Hóa province.

7 Xu Jiyu, *Yinghuan Zhilue*.

In the final years of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), a German who had worked for the Mongols began to copy [cannons], but [Westerners] still did not know how to put them to use. During the reign of the Hongwu Emperor (1386–1398) of the Ming (1368–1644), the Imperial Son-in-Law Timur (Tamerlane, 1336–1405), King of Samarkand, was joined by a military unit of people from the European part of the western region and [they] then took gunpowder back to all the countries [of Europe] and then [they] were able to learn how to use [cannons].

Even those parts of the 1877 model answer that are not directly lifted from the *Yinghuan Zhilue* paraphrase its discussion of the growth of Western civilization. Both include quasi-biblical accounts of Babylon, a description of the rise of Ancient Greece, and an account of the development of cannon and firearm technology. They both share generalizations about Westerners, such as their agricultural base, and their more recent emphasis and dependence on foreign trade for their economies, which in both texts provides the explanation for their encroachment into Asian lands.<sup>8</sup>

There are several aspects of their reliance on this Chinese text that seem at least initially surprising. Insofar as the emperor's question mostly concerned French encroachment, it is notable that the readers, and possibly even those taking the exams, would likely have had some access to literary Sinitic accounts of French people and culture written by Vietnamese authors, such as Nguyễn Khắc Đản's account of his experiences and observations in Paris and elsewhere, written down during his participation in Phan Thanh Giản's 1863 mission to renegotiate the Nguyễn dynasty's concessions to the French. His *Như Tây Ký* 如西記 (Exemplary record from the west) for example, gave extensive descriptions of the history of France, including biographical information on such figures as Charlemagne, Napoleon, and Joan of Arc. It also extensively describes the French education system, its pre-1871 Second Empire constitutional monarchy, its military organization, its economy, and its administrative divisions.<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, this text would have been much more useful in answering this question than the more general introduction to Western history and culture offered by Xu Jiyu. Even if students or the readers could not find a copy of this text, the extant copies of which are handwritten, many other

8 *DTVT*, 93–97; see also *Yinghuan Zhilue*, books 4 and 6 and the account of these chapters in Fred W. Drake, *China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yü and His Geography of 1848* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Research Center, 1975), 112–149.

9 Nguyễn Khắc Đản, *Như Tây Ký*, ms. A. 764, Library of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris, esp. 108–111; Nguyễn Kim Oanh, "Giới thiệu tác phẩm Như Tây Ký của Nguyễn Khắc Đản," *Thông Báo Hán Nôm* 53 (2002).

texts originating from the 1863 embassy, some of which were printed, would also have been available. These include the more general account in *Tây phù nhật ký* 西浮日記 (Diary of floating to the west), which was also partly written by Nguyễn Khắc Dân, as well as the accounts of the official Phạm Phú Thứ such as *Tây Phù Thi Thảo Phụ Chư Gia Thi Lục* 西浮詩草附諸家詩錄 (Record of poems and correspondence on floating to the west).<sup>10</sup>

The reliance on Xu Jiyu is also surprising, given that the readers would have had the opportunity to acquire direct knowledge of the history and culture of France. Chief Reader Nguyễn Văn Tường, who would later serve briefly as regent after the death of the Tự Đức Emperor in 1883, had first-hand experience with the French as the chief negotiator for the Nguyễn of the 1874 treaty that ceded back to the dynasty the territory taken for France by the rogue naval officer Francis Garnier the previous year.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Nguyễn Hữu Độ came to be known for his close relationships to certain French officials, though it is possible that he did not yet have those contacts by 1877.<sup>12</sup>

What this does indicate is that Chinese books were still viewed as valuable repositories of knowledge in 1877; Chinese books and knowledge were circulated extensively in Vietnam until the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> The irony of this reliance on a Chinese text to understand France and Europeans in general is that the results were the same as they would have been if they had depended upon more direct sources. Perhaps this was because Xu Jiyu derived much of his information from discussions with Westerners, and in particular from his long conversations about history and geography with a missionary from New Jersey, David Abeel, in the mid-1840s.<sup>14</sup> It was from Abeel that Xu Jiyu got his biblical interpretation of civilization's ancient past, and probably also his Enlightenment view of the role of Greek and Roman civilization in establishing modern Europe, as well as his notion of the uniqueness of Western civilization and of the character of particular nation-states. Thus, the authors of the 1877 examination policy ironically

10 Moreover, although Xu Jiyu's book was printed in Japan, there is no particular evidence that it was widely available in Nguyễn Vietnam. The Sino-Nom Institute's only copy of the book is an untitled twentieth-century copy; no copies appear to exist in the National Library of Vietnam.

11 Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên* [First collection of the veritable record of the Great South], vol VII (Hanoi: Giáo Dục, 2007), 1433.

12 Nguyễn Q. Thắng, *Từ điển nhân vật lịch sử*, 512.

13 On questions of literary transmission and distribution across East Asia, see Kathlene Baldanza, "Publishing, Book Culture, and Reading Practices in Vietnam: The View from Thăng Nghiêm and Phố Nhân Temples," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 9–28; and "Books without Borders: Phạm Thân Duật (1825–1885) and the Culture of Knowledge in Mid-Nineteenth Century Vietnam," *Journal of Asian Studies* 77, no. 3 (2018): 713–740.

14 Drake, *China Charts the World*, 35–37.

reached their model answer to the question about the perceived uniqueness of the West through a Chinese text.

### **The 1904 examination: Đặng Văn Thụy, Tan Sitong, Kang Youwei, and Liang Qichao**

In the 1904 palace examination's policy questions, candidates were asked to consider whether theories of the natural order of the universe (*đạo*) from the earliest times were still relevant in the current situation. The policy question asked candidates to consider the role of *đạo* in popular cosmology, yin–yang theory, Five Phases theory (五行, *Wu Xing*), and in neo-Confucian (道學, *daoxue/đạo học*) ideology. The policy question suggested that these varied conceptions of *đạo* would provide an alternative means of comprehending modern technology. It asked whether *đạo* could be used to assist in governing under the present conditions where “European countries” had drawn near. Could the language of the yin–yang duality and the five elemental phases (wood, metal, earth, fire, and water), which had long been used to explain everything from medicine to astrology to physics, also be used to provide a theoretical framework for modern technology? The question pointed out that, while Western technology produced machines capable of “piercing through wood” and “setting men ablaze,” these technologies were fundamentally based on an understanding of the element of fire. Similarly, many of the mining technologies employed in France and England involved an understanding of the properties of water. The question inquired as to why the existing knowledge of the five phases could not be used as a means to derive this same technology. On that basis, could not the Confucian classics be used to comprehend such things as electricity and therefore be of use in constructing trains and steamships?<sup>15</sup>

The gist of this question sought to use the classic texts to understand the development of modern technology and engineering. As the question later specifies, “the classic texts” were broadly understood as not only encompassing the Five Classics (the authoritative books adopted during the Han dynasty as forming the basis for Confucian thinking) and the Four Books (a smaller collection popularized by the neo-Confucian thinker Zhu Xi), but also histories, military strategy texts, other *daoxue* texts written by key reformers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE, and works in the Daoist and Buddhist traditions.

The 1904 policy question, and the one written response to it that has survived, did not include the direct borrowing from a Chinese text seen in the 1877 model answer. Yet the ideas associated with the Chinese Hundred

---

15 *Xuân Kinh Diên Thi Văn Tuyển* (hereafter *XKĐTVT*) 春京會試文選 [Selected works from the Spring Palace examinations], Manuscript A. 208, Sino-Nom Institute, Hanoi, Vietnam, fo. 7–8.

Days Reforms of 1898 (a failed attempt to achieve political reforms to limit the Qing Monarchy) are behind almost everything in the text. For example, the question's language is strongly reminiscent of Zhang Zhidong's 張之洞 (1837–1909) 1898 notion of “Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application.”<sup>16</sup> The question seems to imply that a theory for modern engineering and technology could be found in the purportedly all-encompassing knowledge of the Four Books, Five Classics, major histories, and other canonical East Asian texts, and the technology itself could be imported without disturbing a universalistic theory of civilization. This is precisely the line of reasoning Zhang Zhidong pursued.<sup>17</sup>

Though Zhang Zhidong and Tan Sitong were making arguments about technology for drastically different political purposes, Vietnamese examiners and examinees were willing to borrow from their ideas without regard to their particular political affiliation. The 1904 question's application of yin–yang and Five Phases theory to electricity and metallurgy also strongly suggests the influence of Tan Sitong's writing. He argued that modern chemistry and physics support a unified view of the existence of all things. He associated this view with the Confucian notions of *ren* [humaneness] and *dao* [in the Confucian context, the path toward human truth], and with a number of Mahayana Buddhist texts. Tan Sitong wrote: “How can we destroy one element and separately create another one? In mineralogy, metal cannot be extracted from nonmetallic ores [...] water, for example, gradually dries up when heated; it is not destroyed but has merely been decomposed into hydrogen and oxygen.”<sup>18</sup>

Later, in a discussion of arable land and overpopulation, he argued that ideas derived from Five Phases theory could be used to support inquiry into a number of different forms of modern technology. For example, in the field of electricity, an understanding of heat might help elucidate how power might be transferred without wires; an understanding of earth and topography could help understand geography; an understanding of water could help combat drought and flood, and so on.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the topics and vocabulary of Tan Sitong's passages being similar to the policy question of 1904, the rhetoric strongly suggests the kind of empiricism linked to the texts written

16 See Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, vol. 1, 60. The original can be found in Zhang Zhidong, 張之洞, *Quan xue pian* 勸學篇 [Exhortation to study], Chinese Text Project, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=771533>.

17 Zhitian Luo, *Inheritance within Rupture: Culture and Scholarship in Early Twentieth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 140–142. It makes sense that Zhang Zhidong's more conservative reformist views would appeal to the Nguyễn bureaucracy responsible for framing the question, as opposed to explicit references to the ideas of Kang Youwei or Liang Qichao.

18 Tan Sitong, *An Exposition of Benevolence: the Jen-hsüeh of T'an Ssu-t'ung*, trans. Chan Sin-Wai (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1984), 90.

19 Tan Sitong, *An Exposition of Benevolence*, 213.

by key neo-Confucian thinkers. In fact, one of the key intellectual exercises required of candidates in the 1904 policy question was to link questions of modern technology with the conception of *dao* embraced by Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073 CE), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085 CE), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107 CE), Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1192 CE), and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529 CE).<sup>20</sup> This resonates with Tan Sitong’s tendency to see electricity as a manifestation of *qi* and therefore indistinguishable from the self, albeit without the same Buddhist overtones:

Those who are willing to learn must realize that electricity is the brain; that there is no place without electricity just as there is no place without the self; if we wrongly think that there is a difference between others and the self; we will be unbenevolent. Nevertheless, electricity and the human brain are nothing more than manifestations of ether.<sup>21</sup>

Đặng Văn Thụy (1858–1936), the highest placed candidate in the 1904 examination, wrote an answer that clearly exhibits the influences of the key Chinese intellectual moment of the Hundred Days Reforms of 1898. In the introductory passages of his answer, in an argument reminiscent of Tan Sitong, he argues that the universe is governed by a single *đạo* from which modern science could not be exempted:

It takes only one person to create factions and parties. Everything is all alike, and all culture follows the same path. Things at rest and things moving are all within the great *đạo*. All-under-heaven is equitable and its principles can be implemented in the future as they are today!<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Đặng Văn Thụy argued that intellectuals should use yin–yang and Five Phases theory “as a key tool” in understanding engineering and technology so that a unified theory of the world, based on the eight trigrams of the *Classic of Changes* 易經 (*Yijing/Kinh Dịch*) and encompassing ethics, cosmology, and modern science, could prevent the balkanization of different types of knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Đặng Văn Thụy then proceeded to argue that description of the physical world found in the classics actually predicted those articulated by the

---

20 *XKĐTVT*, 6–7.

21 Tan Sitong, *An Exposition of Benevolence*, 72.

22 *XKĐTVT*, 10.

23 *XKĐTVT*, 13.

modernist view of scientific processes. This argument is along lines that are reminiscent of Liang Qichao's and Hu Shi's efforts to see the advancements of modern civilization as inherent in classical East Asian civilization. He quoted the *Rites of Elder Dai*, an expanded version of the *Liji* or *Classic of Ritual*, in which Zengzi (505–435 BCE), one of the “Four Sages” of Confucianism and one of Confucius's main disciples, doubted that the earth could be square by noting that “if the heavens were round and the earth square, then the laws of the four corners could not apply to each of them.”<sup>24</sup> Instead, Zengzi explained that the ancients thought the heavens were round and the earth square only in metaphorical terms, to emphasize that the heavens were *yang* and the earth *yin*.<sup>25</sup> Next, he turned to the *Classic of Changes*, a divination text reflecting on the symbolic significance of a series of broken and unbroken lines in hexagrams and one of the Five Classics. Đặng Văn Thụy explained that the second hexagram, earth 坤 (*kun/khôn*), was represented as having rotated on an axis, though that does appear to be a novel or even implausible reading of this hexagram.<sup>26</sup>

It is easy to miss the almost imperceptible shift in perspective in these answers from the pre-1877 era. The key is that this 1904 examination essay accepted the universality of modern science, and then tried to anchor science in the classics. In this way, the classics had already become the particular, and Western science the universal. In earlier examinations, Europeans were the particular, and they needed to be fitted into the universal canon. Here, the universal truth was that the earth was round and revolved around the sun, and what was necessary was to find such truths embedded in the classical texts. The classics had already become derivative and secondary.

To forestall this demotion of the classic texts, Đặng Văn Thụy insisted that the classics imbue learned people with an ethic that reminds them that the purpose of technological and scientific advancement is to pursue a humane and harmonious society. Though “European countries” are “making progress toward civilization,” and some have come “peacefully with goods to trade,” this did not mean that they possessed the knowledge of classical Chinese civilization. In fact, technological advancements do not have self-evident social purposes. Westerners “present trifling forms of knowledge as if they represent some major achievement,” in the process “undermining our writings on yin–yang and the five phases” to construct “a system

24 Zengzi 曾子, *Da dai li ji* 大戴禮記 [The rites of elder Dai], The Chinese Text Project, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://ctext.org/da-dai-li-ji/ceng-zi-tian-yuan>, § 1. See also Robin Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 48–49.

25 Qiong Zhang, *Making the New World Their Own: Chinese Encounters with Jesuit Science in the Age of Discovery* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 60.

26 *XKDTVT*, 22.

essentially based on profit.” The reason for Western technology was to enrich Westerners. The *đạo* must be “revived,” rather than destroyed; insights about technology should be integrated within a system of proper reason (*lý*).<sup>27</sup>

In his post-1904 writings, Đặng Văn Thụy’s debt to the Hundred Days Reforms becomes even more obvious. He developed a very close bond with the two other top graduates of the 1904 examination, the nationalists Trần Quý Cáp (1870–1908) and Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876–1947). The bond between these three figures persisted even though Đặng Văn Thụy had chosen a traditional official career while the other two had rejected official service because of the dynasty’s subservience to the French. On the occasion of the death of Trần Quý Cáp in 1908, Đặng Văn Thụy composed the following poem:

In the beginning, you had success in small matters  
 But just like Kang [Youwei] and Liang [Qichao], your fate was poverty.  
 In the press, your many words startled those who listened  
 In these difficult times, your four pearls showed your remarkable ability.  
 Jia Yi’s [200–169 BCE] talents were admired in the past,  
 Marx was nothing without Engels.  
 In the New Year, we come together from distant places,  
 The desires of Italy’s three heroes were not the same.<sup>28</sup>  
 (Đặng Văn Thụy “On Hearing the News of My Friend and Classmate’s  
 Death” [1908])

This poem shows the direct link between the thinking of the Hundred Days Reform and the access of Vietnamese intellectuals to revolutionary European ideologies. Đặng Văn Thụy literally compares Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Moreover, the poem contains an explicit reference to Liang Qichao’s writings. The poem refers to “Italy’s three heroes,” which is a reference to Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882), the general of Italian unification; Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), the Italian journalist and politician who popularized the cause of Italian unification; and Camillo Benso, the Count of Cavour (1810–1861), a statesman and diplomat who supported the cause of Italian unification from behind the scenes.

In a well-known essay, Liang Qichao had argued that the efforts of all three were necessary for the success of the Italian national project.<sup>29</sup> The three *tiến sĩ* (“presented scholar” or doctoral-level examination) graduates had

27 *XKĐTVT*, 27.

28 Poem reproduced in Nguyễn Nghĩa Nguyên, *Cụ Hoàng-Nho Lâm*, 136.

29 Liang Qichao, “Yidali Jianguo Sanjie Zhuan,” in *Liang Qichao quanji*, ed. Yang Gang and Wang Xiangyi (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), vol. III, 827–855.

fancied themselves as Vietnamese versions of these three Italian national figures, with Trần Quý Cáp playing the role of Garibaldi, at the forefront of the anticolonial campaign; Huỳnh Thúc Kháng as the Vietnamese Mazzini, inveighing against injustice in the press; and Đặng Văn Thụy as Cavour, working behind the scenes to achieve reform through diplomatic negotiation.<sup>30</sup> In the last line, Đặng Văn Thụy appears to regret not having been on the front lines with Trần Quý Cáp, going “forward together.”

Indeed, one of Đặng Văn Thụy’s last works was a tribute to Kang Youwei on the occasion of his death. The poem illustrates that despite the problems of the modern era, the core problem of politics had not changed:

Before the West arrived, the Chinese unicorn were five hundred strong<sup>31</sup>  
 The path of humaneness was not taken by Qi or Liang.  
 After three thousand years of fairness and logic  
 The last sixteen have been a battlefield  
 Within the walls of Qingdao, an old man  
 A mound of chrysanthemums carries the aroma down to the bones  
 The deep-green mulberries in the end are motionless  
 As the mountains and trees still sing the song of [Confucius] the  
 unadorned King.<sup>32</sup>  
 (Đặng Văn Thụy, “Upon hearing the news of Kang Youwei’s Death”  
 [1927])

The problem of Western encroachment, for Đặng Văn Thụy, was still not fundamentally different from the problems of governance and rule experienced by the Zhou dynasty during the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BCE). It was a question of just rule. French rule in Vietnam should be rejected on the grounds of its despotism, just as the ancient Confucian philosophers Mencius and Xunzi had rejected the way of the five famous despotic monarchs of that era as emblematic of the failure of the “way of the despot” (*Bá Đạo*). Instead, Mencius and Xunzi had encouraged rulers to follow the way of a true king (*Vương Đạo*).<sup>33</sup> The “sixteen years of war” in China between

30 Nguyễn Nghĩa Nguyên, *Cụ Hoàng-Nho Lâm*, 98, 139.

31 Possibly a reference to Kang Youwei’s use of apocryphal texts about Confucius that referenced unicorns. See Anne Cheng, “Nationalism, Citizenship, and the Old Text/New Text Controversy in Late Nineteenth-Century China.” in Joshua A. Fogel and Peter Zarrow, eds., *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890–1920* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997): 70–71.

32 Đặng Văn Thụy, *Khuyến tân học thuyết*, 27–28.

33 On the Mencian distinction between *Vương Đạo* and *Bá Đạo*, see James Legge, ed. and trans., *The Chinese Classics Vol. II: The Works of Mencius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895), 455. Legge translates the terms as “sovereign” and “chief.” For the translation of 王道 as “true king” see Peimin Ni, *Understanding the Analects of Confucius* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017), 317.

the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and Kang Youwei's death in 1927, and the warlords that had emerged from this period, were no different a problem than the despots of the ancient past, as far as he was concerned.

Đặng Văn Thụy drew an absolute continuity between the ancient despots, the modern warlords, and the French “protectors.” All of these rulers would ultimately fail because they did not have the loyalty of the people. In the words of Mencius, “when one by force subdues men, they do not submit to him in heart.”<sup>34</sup> For all of Đặng Văn Thụy's interest in engineering, Cavour, and Marx, this principle remained unchanged.

However, despite this apparent traditionalism, Đặng Văn Thụy still unwittingly demonstrates that in his perception modernist scientific inquiry is a particular and specific thing that requires new procedures not anticipated by the previous structure of examination answers. In Levensonian terms, Đặng Văn Thụy, like Liang Qichao, embraced traditional notions of *đạo* defensively. Even as he defended Confucian ethics as a universal worldview, he implicitly did so by declaring it to be equivalent or even superior to Western culture. Thus, he produces two particularities, which ultimately foreclosed the possibility of seeing the classical canon as anything other than a Chinese Confucian tradition.

### **The 1919 examination: Liang Qichao and Rabindranath Tagore**

In the 1919 palace examination, the last to be held, the Khải Định Emperor asked whether or not classical Asian notions of civilization defended a kind of autocracy. He observed that “many countries around the world talk about civilization” (*văn minh/wenming*), and inquired into what this concept could really mean, given that it was used to denote “everything from human relations to national politics to ways of the time to the customs of the people.” The history of Vietnam and China, he noted, has as much “confusion and disorder” as they did civilization, and openly wondered whether a lesson to be drawn from the Chinese experience is that its style of governance may have actually “retarded the advent of civilization.”<sup>35</sup>

The obvious antecedent for the Emperor's line of thinking in this regard is Liang Qichao, who argued in “On Reforming the People” (1902), that while ancient China had all the requisite ideas to be a “civilized great state,” it lacked the ability to spread its ideas and compete with the rest of the world. Though the idea of *văn minh* (“civilization,” cf. Chinese *wenming* 文明) could be located in ancient China, reform was necessary to make this

34 Mencius, *Gong Sun Chou I*, trans. James Legge. Chinese Text Project, accessed June 29, 2016, <http://ctext.org/mengzi/gong-sun-chou-i?searchu=sovereign&searchmode=showall#result>.

35 Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Đông Khánh, Khải Định Chính Yếu* (Hereafter *DKKDCY*) (Hanoi: Thời Đại, 2010), 420.

idea dynamic in a modern context.<sup>36</sup> By the time of this examination, however, ideas about Confucianism among Chinese reformers had evolved; even Liang Qichao had abandoned his earlier idea that a reform of Chinese institutions could be based on a recovery of the genuine spirit of an ancient Confucianism that had been obscured by later commentary.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the Vietnamese emperor was at least a decade behind the times, in that he found that “a Confucian pedigree was necessary to make a modern idea respectable.”<sup>38</sup>

The emperor’s question also asked whether Western civilization (as represented by the French) was really any more civilized than Eastern civilization. French policies in Indochina contradicted their claims of civilizational superiority, according to the emperor. For example, “taxes” were onerous “to the point that people both inside and outside of cities have had their property confiscated,” even though they had been identified as being under hardship.<sup>39</sup>

Worse still, the French system of taxation imposed upon the Vietnamese an unfair system of social classes and prevented mutual aid. Painting an idealized picture of the past, the emperor claimed that when a particular person suffered a crop failure or other hardship in the past, their taxes would be paid through mutual-aid arrangements or covered by the village elite. Now, however, the situation was different, because the Vietnamese were being told that modern “civilization” consists of dividing people into three classes, rather than the four traditional classes of scholar, farmer, artisan, and merchant: the “high class” or wealthy, those with fancy villas; the “middle class,” who were “able to provide for themselves”; and the “lower class.” Since all of these classes, under a French idea of civilization, were made up of autonomous individuals, rather than of village units helping each other, this division created a cruel tax burden that the poor would not have been able to pay. In the traditional imperial system, by contrast with the French, the goal was “to collect enough revenue for our purposes without imposing great harm on our people.”<sup>40</sup>

This idealization of the past did not deny that modern technological and cultural change was necessary. “We have entered a civilized era,”

---

36 Alison Adcock Kaufman, “One Nation Among Many: Foreign Models in the Constitutional Thought of Liang Qichao,” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2007), 93–97. The words and phrases used by the emperor are so similar, on occasion, that it leaves little doubt that he was specifically thinking of this text. Kaufman is quoting Zhongguo zhi xinmin [Liang Qichao], “Xinmin shuo” 新民说 [On renewing the people], *Xinmin congbao* 5 (April 1902): 1–11.

37 Levenson, *Liang Ch’i Chao*, 2.

38 Levenson, *Liang Ch’i Chao*, 88.

39 *DKKDCY*, 420–421.

40 *DKKDCY*, 420–421.

the emperor declared, and therefore, “our politics must be renovated and improved.” However, the French did not always give a clear method for that improvement. The emperor complained that, after participating in a devastating war (World War I), the French did not give any clear method for honoring the dead or the heroes of that war, and did not appreciate the Vietnamese contribution to the war effort. The emperor asked, how “do we take care of our people in a civilized way and still make progress?” Given that French civilization was not civilized in practice, adopting Western values would not automatically lead to civilized behavior.

The emperor’s thinking resonated with the neo-traditionalism of the Indian poet and thinker Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and the political and intellectual figure Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948). The emperor’s critique resembled, for example, Tagore’s argument that World War I was based on a violent nationalism that was to be avoided, and that the Indian National Congress erred in basing their ideas “on Western history.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the emperor’s rejection of Western ideas of social class as uncivilized recalls Tagore’s statement:

In the West the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value; but they are bound in iron hoops, labelled and separated off with scientific care and precision. Obviously God made man to be human; but this modern product has such marvellous square-cut finish, savouring of gigantic manufacture, that the Creator will find it difficult to recognize it as a thing of spirit and a creature made in His own divine image.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that the emperor’s thought resonated with that of Tagore and Gandhi was not without precedent in this era. Olga Dror has pointed out the influence of Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* on the early romantic twentieth-century scholar-official Kiều Oánh Mậu (1854–1912).<sup>43</sup> She points to the similarity of the following passage from *Hind Swaraj* to Kiều Oánh Mậu’s ideas, but it is equally indicative of the emperor’s ideas about civilization:

We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same

---

41 Pradip Kumar Datta, *Rabindranath Tagore’s The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* (London: Anthem, 2005), 110–111.

42 Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 16–17.

43 Olga Dror, *Cult, Culture, and Authority: Princess Liễu Hành in Vietnamese History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 148–149.

as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fiber.<sup>44</sup>

Just as Gandhi and Tagore infused their critiques of colonialism and Western modernity with traditionalist elements, so too did the Khải Định Emperor. However, this was not mere conservatism, as evidenced by the fact that Gandhian ideas were not only embraced by traditional scholar officials such as Kiều Oánh Mậu, but also by reformists like the emperor's critic Phan Châu Trinh.<sup>45</sup> Purportedly traditional elements were now being defended as particularly Asian or even particularly Vietnamese, rather than as universal truths, and they were being used as a defense against the onslaught of Western modernity and colonialism, rather than as a simple affirmation of a universally acceptable Confucian philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

### **Postscript: Trần Trọng Kim, Liang Shuming, and the persistence of Chinese Modernism in Vietnam**

Though the system of traditional education in Classical Chinese ended with the examinations in 1919, the transfer of contemporary ideas through the circulation of books in Chinese characters continued. The historian and intellectual Trần Trọng Kim (1883–1953), who was notably the failed prime minister of the Japanese-sponsored Empire of Vietnam in 1945, prior to the August Revolution, wrote what is arguably the most influential Vietnamese book on Confucianism in 1929–1930. One criticism of his interpretation was that it was so eclectic that what was being understood as Confucianism in Vietnam was in fact “Trần Trọng Kim-ism.”<sup>47</sup> He explained that Henri Bergson (1859–1941), a contemporary “philosopher of substantial fame from France,” had argued that “it is only through intuition that we know reality.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, Trần Trọng Kim's version of intuition was a very compressed version of Bergson's ideas. Bergson explained, in introducing the principles of metaphysics, that people could know a thing either by

44 Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 2010), 50.

45 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 272.

46 Levenson, *Confucian China*, xxvii.

47 Quoted in Shawn F. McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 77.

48 McHale, *Print and Power*, xxxiii.

“moving round the object” or by entering “into it.”<sup>49</sup> The first case, which he associated with pure empiricism, would only produce relative knowledge. In that case, the observer would be intentionally detached from the object of study, and would therefore be able to observe the object and apprehend its meaning only from that observer’s standpoint. Even after observation of an object—such as after staring at a distant star from many observatories—the scientist was in no better position than a mathematician using calculus. That is to say, we are only creating a greater and greater number of approximations of reality, and since we cannot perform infinitely many observations, what remains after this time-consuming process is a crude representation of the object one is trying to describe.

On the other hand, one who embodies a thing by entering into it would learn about it through experience and perform it through intuition. Bergson gave us the examples of reading the Greek classics or learning to dance. Whereas one might learn Homer by having someone translate a passage, and then explain it, for Bergson, this would be a far cruder method than having someone learn to read Homer in the original. Similarly, a dance teacher might be able to lecture a crowd of potential dancers on the kinesiological and physiological principles behind a certain movement, but their knowledge of it would be far more comprehensive if they learned to embody the movement by dancing themselves. “It follows from this,” Bergson told us, “that an absolute can only be given in an *intuition*, whilst everything else falls within the province of *analysis*. By intuition is meant a kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.”<sup>50</sup>

Trần Trọng Kim explained that we could “look at the studies of Bergson” and “clearly recognize the highest thoughts of Confucianism.”<sup>51</sup> This was because Bergson’s idea of intuition seemed to resonate with canonical Confucian ideas about the natural order of the universe.<sup>52</sup> It was also because intuition associated metaphysical reality with embodied practice, and this view corresponded perfectly to the primacy of ritual in the classical writing of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, as well as the descriptions of ritual in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which is one of the canonical Confucian “Four Books.” Bergson allowed Trần Trọng Kim a way to posit the relevance of Confucianism as a spiritual supplement to Western materialist

---

49 Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T. E. Hulme (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 1–2.

50 Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 6–7.

51 Trần Trọng Kim, *Nho giáo*, xxiii.

52 McHale, *Print and Power*, 82.

philosophy. In Shawn McHale's words, "the use of Bergsonian 'intuition' allowed Trần Trọng Kim to ignore history when he wanted, to assert radical social differences between East and West, but then to build limited bridges between East and West at the level of epistemology."<sup>53</sup> This seemingly bizarre fitting of the square peg of Confucianism into the round hole of twentieth-century intuitionist metaphysics was what leftist intellectuals such as Ngô Tất Tố (1894–1954) were complaining about when they said, as mentioned earlier, that what was being understood as Confucianism in Vietnam was in fact "Trần Trọng Kim-ism."<sup>54</sup>

But what seemed to be a highly original, if suspect, interpretation of Confucianism was in fact not original at all. Trần Trọng Kim borrowed almost the entirety of his mapping of intuitionism onto Confucianism from the Chinese New Culture Movement intellectual Liang Shuming. Like Trần Trọng Kim, Liang had been attracted to arguments that Confucianism could be seen as a form of empiricism. Similarly, Liang had come to believe Bergsonian intuition was the best Western metaphysical analogy to Confucianism, because "like the empiricists, Bergson started from human experience, but unlike them, however, he did not reject metaphysics."<sup>55</sup> It was Liang Shuming that coined the term *zhijue* (Vietnamese *trực giác*) to translate Bergson's idea of intuition, in 1921, in the course of his works comparing Eastern and Western philosophies.<sup>56</sup> Using this, it was originally Liang, not Trần Trọng Kim, who "fashioned his own theory of the Chinese mind and of Confucianism with this and other Bergsonian concepts."<sup>57</sup> By the 1930s, however, this cultural borrowing went largely unnoticed, because younger Vietnamese intellectuals were no longer able to read new ideas in literary Chinese.

Regardless of whether new knowledge about technology or modernity emanated from Chinese texts or French ones, these texts had the same epistemological result. They required proponents of a universalistic classical canon to find that appealing to universal values without reference to the

---

53 McHale, *Print and Power*, 82.

54 Quoted in McHale, *Print and Power*, 77.

55 Thierry Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 82.

56 Liang Shuming abandoned the concept of *zhijue* by 1934 in favor of *lixing* (reason). Yanming An, "Liang Shuming and Henri Bergson on Intuition: Cultural Context and the Evolution of Terms," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 3 (July 1997): 337–340. See also Liang Shuming, *Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 [Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 72–73.

57 Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 96.

content from which those values were derived was a hollow exercise. Moreover, in the course of formulating and responding to these exams, not only the candidates but also the officials responsible for evaluating the examinations, including the emperor himself, slowly realized that European history, culture, and diplomacy were not explained by the canon. Nor could any proper action toward European barbarians be easily derived from that canon. As strained analogies mounted, there was a shift toward viewing Westerners as possessing a particular civilization, one that was outside the norms described as universal in the canon. Once Westernization was seen to be particular, however, the canon could no longer be seen as universal. In this situation, the questions asked shifted. The task of Vietnamese intellectuals was no longer to incorporate Westerners into the existing and purportedly universal canon of philosophical texts and histories. Rather, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Western civilization was viewed particularistically, in contrast and even in binary opposition to Eastern civilization. Once scholars came to believe that there were “Western” and “Eastern” versions of civilized society, the power of the civilizing rhetoric of the classical canon began to wane.