

Intellectual History in a Global Age:

International Conference, Herzog August Bibliothek

Wolfenbüttel, Germany, 14-17 October 2004

This conference, organized by Ulrich Johannes Schneider, of the Herzog August Bibliothek, and the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, brought together scholars in the field of intellectual history to discuss the problems involved in the extension of a historically eurocentric discipline to a wider world that is itself becoming more and more globally conscious. Papers were of three kinds: three presented forthcoming or proposed publications of reference books that seek to globalize the discipline; seven discussed general aspects of the identity and practice of intellectual history; and four examined specific cases. There were respondents to most papers.

The three reference books each seek to be global from differing perspectives. **Maryanne Cline Horowitz** (Los Angeles) presented *The New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, which is substantially completed and will be published in December 2004. There will be 707 entries on such specific ideas as “diaspora,” “theology” and “orality.” Contributors are drawn from a much wider geographical area than was the case in the previous dictionary, and many entries have multiple contributions from different contributors of different origins and specializations. It will be extensively illustrated, including some “visual essays.” A Reader’s Guide will allow multiple forms of access to the articles. **Ulrich Johannes Schneider** (Wolfenbüttel) presented the project of an *International Dictionary of Intellectual Historians*, focussing on the need to develop a globalized perspective on what constitutes an intellectual historian. He stressed three points: (1) the necessity for intellectual historians to create their own object of study; (2) the interdisciplinary nature of the field; and (3) the stress of intellectual history on the practical aspects of intellectual endeavour. The proposed work will take 1900 and 1970 as parameters, and Schneider pointed out that the process of globalization was well underway early in this period. **Matthias Middell** (Leipzig) presented a multivolume German project on global historiography 1850–2000. The contributors will all be German or Swiss, but the volumes will deal with the entire world, divided by region, two in each of the five volumes, such that Western Europe will have ten per cent “and not, as it is the rule, in existing volumes, more than 80 percent.” He stressed the developing importance of memory in current thought on historiography and the relation between institutions and the writing of history.

Three of the more general papers stressed the distinction between “internal” and “external” aspects of history, citing R. G. Collingwood and Arthur Lovejoy.

Donald R. Kelley (New Brunswick) stressed the transition in intellectual history from Lovejoy’s rather Platonist presentation of unchanging ideas to recent views of ideas as

changing radically with change of context. He also pointed out that Lovejoy failed to relate the hierarchical notion of history to hierarchy in society. He discussed the difficulties of bringing the project of intellectual history to a wider world. **Chen Xin** (Shanghai) pitted Collingwood against Lovejoy, then went on to relate both to the development of social history. Referring to recent studies in South Chinese social history, he argued that intellectual history offers a possibility of mediating between increasing globalization and a desire to preserve the specificity of local cultures.

Joseph Levine (New York) attacked the problem of the external and the internal from the perspective of a working historian. He took two events in 1605, the Gunpowder Plot, and the publication of Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*, seeking to show that the same techniques of historical investigation can be used for both. In this way, it can be shown that the investigation of events is not so widely separated from the history of texts and of thought as is often supposed.

Allan Megill (Charlottesville) discussed the nature of globalization, asserting that the first definition of globalization comes from Marx and Engels, who supposed that the globalization of economic production would result in a more uniform world of ideas. He argued that recent events have shown that this is false, that despite technological and economic similarities between places, cultural differences are more than superficial. He argued that Marxian determinism is of more than historical interest, since, in an attenuated form, it still tends to underlie social history.

Jerome B. Schneewind (Baltimore) reviewed recent publications on the philosophy of the non-Western world, referring particularly to Africa. He noted that all such publications on Africa begin with an argument that African philosophy exists, and he went on to quote Kwame Anthony Appiah, who wondered whether all elements of European thought must necessarily be replicated in Africa, any more than Africans should have invented the harpsichord. He noted the importance of the prestige of philosophy and the increasing demand among students for non-Western philosophy. He suggested that philosophy professors will soon need to teach global, and not just European, philosophy, and a historical approach would be the best way to do this.

Bonnie Smith (New Brunswick) portrayed globalization in terms of the impact of non-Western ideas on the Western world, citing such social constructions as coffee-houses, or such concepts as Enlightenment. She argued that the non-Western origins of ideas common in the Western world have been effaced, creating an illusion of the West as far more autonomous than it really is.

Edoardo Tortarolo (Torino) posed a series of questions on the nature of world history. He recalled efforts to build world histories based exclusively on the West, and later to build a social history on common economic foundations. He remarked that the project of creating world history has become much more complicated due to the loss of

common foundations. He referred repeatedly to Arnaldo Momigliano's title "World History from a Piedmontese Perspective," meaning that world history must be built from a confessedly limited perspective in today's world.

The papers concerned with specific problems in intellectual history all referred in some way to the reception and appropriation of West European or American ideas in other parts of the world. **Lorina P. Repina** (Moscow) discussed the distinction in Russian institutions and consequently thought between Russian and universal history. She referred to the influence of West Europeans in the development of a Russian conception of universal history. **Tomiko Yoda** (Durham) discussed the characterization of Japanese literature in a classical period as feminine, and the use of a disembodied femininity by Japanese male literary historians in the twentieth century to characterize what Japaneseness is. She discussed the influence of Western ideas in the definition of national identity. **Takeshi Komagome** (Kyoto) took the example of a Taiwanese intellectual, Lim Bo-seng, in the time of Japanese domination of Taiwan. Lim had done a doctorate in the United States, and returned to Taiwan with American ideas on nationhood. He pitted the "idealized modernity" of the Western nation-states against Japanese domination. Finally, **Axel Schneider** (Leiden) examined the view of Chinese nation in the "Chinese Enlightenment" of the 1920s, showing that there was a view of Chineseness as unchanging and yet dynamic and able to adapt, with much influence on this thought from Western sources. He then turned to the revival of these ideas in the 1990s, discussing their function in the troubled relationship between historians and the Communist Party.

The conference provided an overall view of intellectual history today, both in theory and in practice. The specific papers showed a strong focus on East Asia. The large number of major projects for reference books seems to stem from a feeling that we are in a new, uncentred global world that must be mapped.

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