

Beijing Forum 2019 Civilizational Communication from the Perspective of Global History (III)

On the morning of November 3rd., 2019, the panel session “Civilizational Communication from the Perspective of Global History” was inaugurated in Meeting Room No. 1, Yingjie Exchange Center. Five speakers gave speeches during the meeting. Professor Allen Hemmat, from the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University; and Professor Dennis M. Kratz, from the University of Texas at Dallas, hosted the session.

Professor Dennis M. Kratz was the first scholar to present his paper, titled “Achilles, Jesus, Confucius: Integrating Incompatible Values within and across Civilizations”. Professor Kratz’s lecture focused on two attempts to integrate the values of Christianity and the heroic ethos—the transformation of heroic narrative during Carolingian Dynasty that ruled Western Europe during the seventh and eighth centuries CE, and an alliance of Homeric and Christian values in twenty-first century America. Professor Kratz explained “heroism”, one of the core concepts of the speech. “Heroism” is a cultural construct that varies over time from culture to culture and within the same culture. Finally, Professor Kratz concluded that cross-civilizational communication, competition and collaboration all involve the interpretation of ideas through the filter of one Social Imaginary, which originated in minds that view the world through a radically different filter. American culture in particular tends to interpret the world to some degree through the filter of a Heroic Imaginary. It is essential for those engaging with America to recognize the evolving nature and influence of this “heroic strain” in shaping America’s Social Imaginary and its participation in global society. For America, the question is, what form of Heroism will inform its future.

Professor Gong Yushu, from the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, was the second scholar to present his paper, titled “The Earliest School Regulations”. Professor Gong first showed a Sumerian composition from ca. 2000 BCE during the Third Dynasty of Ur, which was called “School Days”. Gong briefly introduced the main contents of this clay tablet document. The document vividly describes the experience of an ancient boy in western Asia when he was in school. He was subjected to corporal punishment by different teaching staff nine times in a row. According to Gong, corporal punishment was carried out according to the school rules, and each instance of

corporal punishment corresponds to a specific regulation. According to these specific punishments, ten school rules could be constructed. At the end of his speech, Professor Gong pointed out that corporal punishment was not the only way of education for ancient Sumerians. When talking about the education methods of ancient Mesopotamia, Falk, a German Assyriologist, summed up the Sumerian education methods into seven categories: praise, setting an example, argument, luring with social status and wealth, advice and warning, beating and imprisonment. These ways of education include encouragement, guidance and punishment. In current school rules, there are only punishment measures, but not encouragement and guidance. This shows that Sumerian school rules had specific provisions to define and punish students' unacceptable behaviors.

Assistant professor Chen Fei, from the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, was the third scholar to present his paper, titled “The Babylonian Policy of Aššurbanipal King of Assyria”. At first, Professor Chen introduced the background from Tiglath-pileser III to Esarhaddon (729–669 BCE). In the reign of Šamaš-šum-ukin, before the Civil War (669–652 BCE), it seemed that Aššurbanipal and Šamaš-šum-ukin maintained a friendly and peaceful relationship during this period. Actually, Aššurbanipal dominated Babylonian affairs, impaired the authority of Šamaš-šum-ukin, and turned him into a puppet. After putting down the revolt of Šamaš-šum-ukin, Aššurbanipal did not ascend the Babylonian throne, but installed Kandalanu as the new Babylonian king, who was completely a puppet. Chen Fei expressed his belief that Aššurbanipal played a “double game” to uphold the official authority of the Babylonian king in public, but actually placed Babylonian affairs under his own control. There were four causes: (1) the “separation” policy of Esarhaddon; (2) the expanding of the Assyrian hegemony; (3) the reinforcement of the Assyrian kingship; and (4) the tradition of ruling Babylonia directly of the Assyrian court.

Professor Angus Bowie, from the Queen's College, University of Oxford, was the fourth scholar to present his paper, titled “Of Horse-taming Trojans and Bronze-cloaked Achaeans’: The Trojan War and Greek Identity”. At the beginning of his presentation, Professor Bowie discussed whether the war between Troy and Greece really happened, and combined with archaeological materials, ancient texts and other multiple evidence, discussed the relationship between the Trojans and the Greeks. Professor Bowie argued that there was nothing to prove conclusively whether a Greek invasion, an invasion by others or simply civil strife was the cause. What makes it most unlikely that a Greek invasion caused this destruction is the state of the world at this time:

everywhere, from Italy to northern India, was in the process of what is now known as the ‘Great Collapse’, a period with troubling parallels with our own. Professor Bowie expressed his belief that the Iliad thus provides a good illustration of the operation of our theme ‘Language, Culture and Identity in Inter-Civilization Interaction’. It is often referred to as a ‘pan-Hellenic’ epic, but we should be careful what we mean by that. We should rather think of the Iliad as an attempt to speak of the Greeks as being united in their Trojan exploits, but also to acknowledge that some Greeks had an affinity with the Trojans, who were both their opponents in the poem and their predecessors in reality.

Zeng Qingying, a researcher from the Institute for Ancient Civilizations, Peking University, was the fifth scholar to present his paper, titled “Agents of Dialogue: Legacies of the China Committee and the Sino-Swedish Scientific Expedition to Northwest China”. At the beginning of his presentation, Dr. Zeng introduced his major research project as being a "study and sorting out of Chinese frontier academic materials kept in Sweden", and the work of project staff. It included in-depth investigation of museums and archives around the world, such as the Swedish Museum of Ethnology, the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, the Feng Pingshan Library of the University of Hong Kong, and the National Archives of Sweden. Dr. Zeng then reviewed the history of the Chinese Commission and the Northwest China Swedish scientific research mission. For decades, since late nineteenth century until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, Swedish scientists, including archaeologists, zoologists, geologists, botanists, geographers, and meteorologists, came to China and worked together with Chinese colleagues to establish a collaborative partnership that was to be one of a kind in the unprecedented level of scientific significance and set a protocol for international academic cooperation between the two countries. Zeng said he viewed the the expedition itself as an agent of cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary dialogue between Chinese and European counterparts that assumed a fundamental role in Chinese archaeological advancements in the early 20th century. The success of this academic collaboration was founded upon a modernized organizational institute that that had yet to appear in any of the cross-cultural dialogues in pre-modernity. As agents of dialogue, the China Committee and the Sino-Swedish Scientific Expedition to Northwest China deserve our utmost attention in the present-day.