

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

On the afternoon of 3rd November, the fourth session of the panel “Civilizational Communication from the Perspective of Global History” was held at the First Meeting Room, Yingjie Exchange Center, Peking University. The session was chaired by Angus Bowie from the Queen’s College, University of Oxford.

Allen Hemmat from Peking University delivered a speech titled ‘Towards Cross-cultural Understanding, Hermeneutic Translation of Classics and Cultures-The Case of China’s Inter-civilizational Dialogue.’ Hemmat first explained some concepts concerning Hermeneutic regarding the age of enlightenment and scientific revolution, postmodernism and cultural pluralism. Factors such as economic, cultural renewal, revitalization and preservation of tradition, psychological identity crisis could all serve as motives for interpretation. As for the conceptual foundation of Hermeneutics, originally, its purpose was to understand sacred texts. Yet its contemporary end is about understanding everything (between cultures). Interpretation of Chinese Classics follows the general pattern of development in Western hermeneutics thought, which includes three phases--literal translation, dialogical interpretation and radical localizations. Take *I Ching* for instance. Its first Latin translation in 1730s could be categorized to the first phase while Richard Wilhelm’s translation belongs to the second phase. *I Ching* has influenced the Western society in many ways and scholars and artists such as Leibnitz, Carl Jung and Bob Dylan were all inspired by it. And the Chinese culture represented by *I Ching* has experienced localization in the West, which could be exemplified by the entering of Chinese terms such as *ying-yang* and *feng-shui* into western common vocabulary. Just as there are three phrases in Hermeneutics thought, the cultural exchanges in the era of globalization could also be divided into three levels: adoption, dialogue and appropriation. In the end of the speech, Hemmat cited a sentence from Wang Ning, saying that ‘cultural interpenetration is beyond one’s expectations and resistance’, and agreed with Paul Kurtz that the future culture under globalization would be some kind of ‘shared culture.’

Roya Akhavan from St. Cloud State University delivered a speech titled ‘Understanding the New Historical Dialectic: Effects on Discourse and Action toward Peace’. Akhavan’s speech

was generally based on her book *Peace for our Planet: A New Approach*. Instead of the dominant paradigm of peace as a progressive linear process, she proposed that two separate and parallel processes for peace, the constructive process and the destructive process. While the latter is more visible in daily life experience, Akhavan supposed that reviewing history could make the constructive process visible along with the destructive process. The past two hundred years has witnessed a great number of scientific discoveries and technological innovation as well as constructive trends including the end of cold war, end to colonialization, visible rise in regional collaboration and so on. As for the causes of the constructive process, ethically Akhavan suggested the discovery of new ethical truths such as a new collective conscience, together with which were a series of social innovation including the foundation of the League of Nations, the United Nations and world court. As for why the destructive process seems to be more visible, Akhavan supposed that it may be considered to be the result of the threat posed by the constructive process to the destructive and not the other way around. In the end Akhavan emphasized that China's constructive leadership is crucial for ensuring a better future for humankind.

Yan Haiying from Peking University delivered a speech titled "Art of Memory and Cultural Identity in Eastern Civilizations". Yan first explained the concept of "High culture", which is abstract but embraces many fields such as art and knowledge and is shored against ruins. The "High culture" of Ancient Egypt has the characteristic of the so called "monumentalization" while in Mesopotamia, "High culture" was demonstrated by writing, encyclopedism and lexical lists. In the Greco-Roman period, many temples were established in the south of Egypt, far from the political center. They were different from traditional temples as there were more decorations and reliefs and the latter temples seemed to follow some kind of temple grammar so that the contents of the temple could be codified and abstracted. Compared with earlier periods, more detailed descriptions of religious festivals were found on the temple walls. Yan supposed that temples in the Greco-Roman period had become the medium of cultural memory, serving as a kind of 3D book and important knowledge was record by the temple. Besides, Yan introduced the concept of "text community" as well. While Mesopotamia focused more on books, the "text" of Egyptians included both books and temples. During the Greco-Roman period, Egyptians tried to conserve their culture but at the same time did not want it to be known by foreigners. Thus, they codified their texts, which to some extent contributed to the latter mystification of Ancient Egyptian culture.

Jia Yan from Peking University delivered a speech titled “Opening the Imperial Doors of Assyria”, which focused on three doors from Balawat. Traditionally doors are interpreted pictorially yet Jia, basing her argument on the Critical spatiality theory by Henri Lefebvre by analyzing the space schema of the doors, offered a more spatial and stereoscopic interpretation. The doors from Balawat were all two-leaf doors and the subjects of reliefs on them included battle, hunting, booty/captive, tribute and ceremonial activity. The king was the subject in the stories while the telling of them followed linear arrangement and was symmetrical. Take the door of the Mamu temple for instance. The door opened towards the principal shrine and could thus form a corridor. When it was open, the king in the battle reliefs was demonstrated as driving the enemy outwards. This “god/king inside and visitors outside” design corresponded to the Assyrian idea of “good in and bad out”. Jia supposed that the open-door schema demonstrated Assyrian ideological order of the king as the mediator between god and ordinary people and the world order of the king as center and inside, which could be understood as the cultural production of Assyria as a rising empire.