

CCC 9.1 Editorials

2012 AD, a Dragon Year!

As this issue went to press, a new year had begun: the production staff and the editorial team of 《神州交流—Chinese Cross Currents》 are now happy to present to their readers their warmest wishes for the months to come. The number 2012 in the Common (and Christian) Era [commonly abbreviated as CE in academic parlance] does not by itself carry any special meaning. But in the Christian world it refers to a “new year of grace” after Christ [AD, *Anno Domini*: “in this year of the Lord”, in the former academic parlance]. Our wishes are certainly that the months to come may carry for every one fresh opportunities to be seized in order to advance in personal realisation and happiness as much as the events of the global situation could permit.

One cannot deny on the other hand that each new year attracts popular attention on the Chinese calendar and its complex computing traditions. Beginning this January 23, a new lunar year begins in the Chinese world under the birth emblem [生肖 *shengxiao*] of the Dragon. Many Chinese couples would therefore hope to give birth to a son in such a auspicious time: the Dragon in fact is not, as in the Christian world, the symbolic image of any devilish power but, on the contrary, the symbolic emblem of heavenly blessings, by which the Emperor should be empowered, unless he loses the Mandate to govern, etc.

These considerations are just meant to be an introduction to this new issue. In this “year of grace” when a fifth of humankind expects much under the emblematic Dragon of its lore, what could be done on so many important matters that wait to be addressed in the world? A great part of the following pages just mentions a few.

Most of our readers have probably already forgotten the “2012” American disaster movie released in Fall 2009, right in the middle of the banking crisis. Based on some obscure Maya calendar, it narrated a complex plot on the end of the world foreseen in 2012, etc. Was such a release intentionally directed, but in vain, at distracting public attention from the lurking crisis to come? First financial, the crisis became economical, then social and recently for certain countries, political. From the time of the subprimes it progressively revealed in the “sovereign debts” of many states (including the most powerful one) a real “crisis of trust” caused by abuses of credit facilities conceived worldwide by the banking industry. It is not the end of the world, but of “a” world not equipped to address its nemesis: rebuilding “trust” in the heart of citizens. Charities in the world are institutions called upon to help rebuilding what natural disasters have destroyed. Even in China they develop but under the control of the state. What then could they do when the state itself, as in the first economy of the world, is at stake?

These global worries should not distract our attention from other debates. Among them is, in China as elsewhere, about the condition of university education, already discussed in this quarterly. In Europe it is a lingering problem centred on the standardisation of the whole scheme. In China voices dare speak out some criticism prompted by their anxiety at seeing universities run not by academics as educators but by functionaries as administrators who tend to look at universities as enterprises run for profits.

This should not be considered a trend for new times: the new China is already one hundred years old! Since its violent birth commemorated last year, and through the sufferings endured by many, it grew up to become the second economy of the world. Much water has flowed under its important many bridges, always renewed yet always the same. This could be some paradigmatic metaphor to examine, as two contributions in the Arts and Letters section do, how Chinese literary tradition remains present like deep hidden currents without which the new developments, particularly in their contents, of modern Chinese literature would not be Chinese any more in present times.

These traditional tenets will survive the effects of globalisation that had already begun at the regional level as a recent study on Asia demonstrates through a detailed history crossing over borders. At that time, some Muslim Chinese scholars had no blinders and dared presenting their faith in Confucianist terminology: let us hope that 2012 similarly opens new avenues for intercultural better understanding!

1. World

The present and lingering financial crisis has already generated, as specialist had foreseen, its economic negative effects in not a few countries, in the East and the West alike: no doubt it is a new dimension of globalization to be studied by future economists and historians. Public opinion and social movements in some of these countries have not been late to manifest, more or less peacefully, a common distrust based on some hidden distress: the “Indignants”, young and not so young, have dared camp for days in front of financial centres as a sign of protest and hope for change of political leadership. Joblessness is on the rise: not a good sign for the next generation to come! In this context, new reflection on “globalization” and “glocalisation” would be welcome: after all, there are differences between countries most affected by a crisis that seems to have several heads, like the Hydra of Lerna, the mythological monster from Greece! In a time of crisis, comparison will not solve any problem, yet could stimulate creativity. China, ranked now as the second economy of the world, is still known as a country that for generations has struggled against poverty and crisis: this section is fortunate to host a contribution on the growth of charity organisations in the country. Zhu Jiangang, from the School of Sociology and Anthropology, Sun Yat-sen University, situates the progresses, difficulties and challenges charity organisations and government are facing when addressing unforeseen crisis.

2. Society

The importance of information technologies needs not be underlined: their social impact is well known, not first of all in politics, as certain media would observe, but it reaches also the fields of education and academic research. It has deeply influenced all levels of societal life around the world as much as the invention of various scripts in the early ages of mankind or of the printing techniques at the beginning of modern time, for the advancement of culture, learning and education of the people. This new step forward towards accumulated information is not deprived from the old challenges of what it is to acquire real knowledge. All the more so that these new technologies, by their own global development, affect similarly any society around the world. Focusing on the role universities should play in this process, this section offers two different yet interrelated contributions. In the first, meaningfully entitled “Knowledge is not Shovel”, Professor Gesine Schwan, from the Viadrina European University in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder, Germany, discusses the present global trend in the evaluation of universities. The quality of „professional training“ they deliver is scrutinized, deprived from any reference to the quality of the „cultural formation“ they should transmit. But without the ability for „reflective knowledge“, the fruit of such formation, what kind of education is really given to the next generation of leaders? This over emphasis on the „contribution to the economic development of a country“, made by universities around the world, carries with itself a real pitfall as shown in the second contribution by Professor Zhang Ming, from the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, Beijing. Evaluated as any other enterprise by “productivity” results, universities tend more and more to be run by functionaries and not by their “academe”. Hence his complain: “Can China’s universities be saved?”

3. Arts & Letters

The arts in general, but more explicitly literature and poetry, are no doubt of a mysterious nature: without narrating history, they are grown out of its societal traditions which nourish them. Directly or indirectly they allude to the living experience of their human community, yet they need figures, symbols or allegories to signify what the fecund interaction of language, forms, colours, volumes or sounds cannot express. Due to their uninterrupted history so varied in twists and turns and integrated influences, arts in the Chinese world, literature and poetry in particular, carry some continuously renewed traditions which might temporarily lay hidden as some fertile sediments buried under the powerful currents of history. Such is the case for modern Chinese literature the transformation of which is examined by both contributions of this section. In the first, Zhao Huan, from Changyi Zhengzhou University, presents her analysis of the factors behind that transformation in relation with the continued influence of tradition. Wang Yuntao, from the Zhengzhou Radio and Television University in the second, without denying the influence of tradition, focuses more on the characteristic modernity of its content rather than the extent of Western influence on the forms of literary works in the twentieth century.

4. History and Culture

The contributions of this “History and Culture” section would easily appear to a superficial reader largely disconnected. We start with a review-essay by Paul B. Spooner, from the University of Macau, on renowned world historian Geoffrey Gunn’s latest work on Asia, *History without Borders: the Making of an Asian World Region, 1000-1800*. Dr. Spooner, in his laudatory appreciation of this master piece of regional world history, opens the mind to accept historically grounded but geographically new regional categories, long before the establishment of contemporary geopolitically and economically motivated international organisations like the ASEAN (Association of the South-East Asian Nations). Spanning seven centuries, the detailed story of “the Making of an Asian World Region” by Geoffrey Gunn certainly deserves the title given to the essay “History without Blinders” : a de-centralised history! Readers of the second contribution by Sachiko Murata, from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, **would do well to note that her study (of more than twenty years!) on Liu Zhi (1660-1730), an early Qing time Muslim Confucian scholar, was attracted, as she writes at the start of her contribution, by the fact that some Chinese literati had understood that “Islam could not survive among Chinese-speakers unless Muslim scholars could express themselves in the sophisticated language of Neo-Confucian learning” : a de-centralised cultural encounter!** So, in other words, this section is focused on some “without blinders approaches” of the Other. Sound lessons for our time...

5. Thought and Humanism

It is not customary for this section to address contrasted topics: after all, such a situation is just part of common human experience. It is nevertheless unfortunate that more often than not media reports in daily news cases of unspeakable brutality and cruelty perpetrated not only among individuals against the human dignity of others but also by human persons against animals. In a recent publication, Professor Xu Ben, from Saint Mary’s College of California, rightly meditates on what such violent behaviours against innocent animals reveal: the hidden threat that such bestiality constitutes against human life in society. No wonder “harmony” is so difficult to achieve! Fortunately, in this social context, artists, poets, composers, playwrights, painters are like the ancient “seers” of biblical times. In a second contribution, Mary Simon Corbett, Anglican Benedictine Sister in England, relates her own experience as painter and how her art comes from within: by such a vision from inside, artists call every one to some inner and higher level of human life.

6. Debates and Features

In the same period of time, debates are often so many that a choice has to be made in order to renew the attention that they deserve beyond the fact that they are lingering without generating any appropriate solution. One of them is the widely spread problem of migration in various regions of the world, but particularly in Asia, as Gemma Tulud Cruz, from the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, explains in her contribution entitled: “Migration in the Asian Region: Retrospect and Prospects”. The analysis does not lack of wide outreach in history, and not only recent history, nor in space, as migrations are also part of the globalised world setting of our time. But by focusing on Asia, the author is able to better fine tune her observations on what she calls the emergence of a “migration industry” and its side effects (marginalisation of the migrant workers, men and women); she also presents suggestions related to “the most serious challenges in humanizing contemporary Asian migration: the re-nationalization of politics in the midst of the trans-nationalization of the economy.” Another debate that has meanwhile taken the limelight in the recent months and continues to occupy centre stage remains the interpretation of the so-called “Arab Spring”. Without perspective on the long run, opinions may vary widely, and diplomatic stands of some countries have changed with time. Marwan Muasher, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, explains that Arab realities escape not a few myths, but the question remains: what fruits can be expected after so turbulent a Spring?