
Foreword

The papers collected in this volume were presented at the conference “Rethinking Enlightenment in Global and Historical Contexts,” which was held at Peking University, Beijing, between August 25–27, 2010. Co-organized by Takahiro Nakajima and Xudong Zhang, the conference was one of a series of inaugural events designed to launch a transnational, multi-lingual consortium of research and graduate training in the humanities, particularly in the area of literary and philosophical inquiries, that bears the name of ICCT (International Center for Critical Theory). The network of ICCT involves four centers as it is currently envisioned: New York, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Beijing, each with its own pace of development and semi-autonomy in academic programming, but together forming an assemblage of strengths and specialties that extend the tasks and ambitions of ICCT above and beyond its physical locales.

We chose the location in Beijing at the end of Summer 2010 because ICCT-PKU was, as it happened, the first center within the network that was already formally established, thanks to institutional as well as financial support from Peking University, and from New York University as an equal partner in this joint-venture. However, the intellectual agenda of the conference evolved from a longer history of exchange and cooperation between NYU and East China University (ECNU), in the form of numerous Summer Research Institutes since Summer 2005; and between NYU

and Univ. of Tokyo, in the form of faculty and student exchange and bilateral conferences and symposia since Winter 2006. In Summer 2008, NYU and PKU organized joint summer research programs on modern Chinese literature and culture, only to be followed by NYU-Univ. of Tokyo's faculty symposium on humanistic research in the age of globalization. The increased interactions and heightened activities have thus given substance to the idea of ICCT, with the PKU center as its first concrete institutional fruition.

Academic activities and intellectual dialogues within this network have always been diverse in topic and interest, involving scholars and students working across humanities disciplines, who are rooted in different academic backgrounds and versed in several languages. Yet it is not impossible to identify a central theme or a cluster of coherent themes that run through all the events: A sustained rethinking of modernity in global and particularly East Asian context; a critical engagement with intellectual and literary lineages and genealogies but with contemporary sensibilities and theoretical sophistication; and an auto-reflexive critique of dominant positions and ideologies in today's world. The format of discussions has been informal, the content of debates serious and dense. Participants in these activities have been drawn from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds, and spanning over the entire spectrum of academic career development, from beginning graduate students to esteemed senior faculty.

From such a starting point, it's easy to arrive at the question of rethinking Enlightenment, a question that lies at the crux of critical pluralistic inquiries into some of the central, deep-seated questions that still defines our time. We include the original preambles of the conference below to provide a sense of context for reading the papers that follow. These questions, not always answered or answerable, nonetheless served as a point of reference that contributed to the coherence of the conference and hence that of this volume:

1. Enlightenment, like Revolution, generates reactions and counter-movements against it, often in the form of appealing to pre-Enlightenment traditions, cultures, and social- and value-systems which are said to be more in tune with "humanity" or "natural right." Are these concepts of pre-Enlightenment modernist visions themselves, or they pertain to his-

torical, cultural, and political substance qualitatively different from what the modern rational Self takes for granted? What kind of interpretative strategies, methods, and cultural politics are necessary in order to keep the debate between the ancient and the modern, in our own context, productive and meaningful, without falling into the trap of nostalgia for a more authoritative, hierarchical order or a flattened, undifferentiated and unmediated “democracy” which quickly becomes a euphemism of unthinking?

2. Is a positive concept of Enlightenment still possible, that is, defensible and desirable? Taking the cue from Horkheimer-Adorno’s dialectic between mythology and enlightenment, is a more authentic enlightenment, one which combines critique and self-critique, theory and practice, politics and aesthetics, the only plausible way to overcome enlightenment by holding on to a notion of negativity, and by turning on itself as necessary ideology and mythology? What are the implications of this assumption on our relationship to knowledge, to critical, theoretical thinking?

3. After Frankfurt School and Foucault, it is commonly accepted that Enlightenment always and necessarily comes hand in hand with power and domination, which are understood either through the Marxian notion of division of labor or through a more ontological-existential notion of the political; or through a more Freudian conception of civilization and its repression. To what extent this analysis of structures of power/repression still constitutes our basic frame of inquiry? To what extent, one may add, a “cultural” or “moral” or even “religious” analysis practiced by Hegel and Nietzsche, offer a new perspective by refocusing on the issue of Man—the inevitable albeit painful growth of his productivity and freedom; his agnostic renewal through creative destruction and the establishment of a higher morality, etc.?

4. What can we ask in the name of Enlightenment from East Asia Today? If Enlightenment is a historical construction in Europe to make people have historical consciousness of their living moment i.e. “modernity,” we can point out that there was a twisted structure of Enlightenment in 19th and 20th Century East Asia between the universality and locality.

However, what could be Enlightenment in this post-modern age of globalization? We have to inquire once again the universality of human beings through East Asia with criticizing the notion of the Enlightenment.

Hui Jiang participated in the conference as a commentator, and stayed on after the conference to prepare the papers for publication. We would like to thank the Chinese Department of Peking University and colleagues at ICCT-PKU, above all Prof. Jiang Langlang, Executive Vice Director of ICCT-PKU, for their support and help, which was crucial for the success of the conference. We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to Univ. of Tokyo Center of Philosophy's (UTCP) support and inclusion of these papers in the UTCP Booklet series. We hope this new step in ICCT-UTCP cooperation will soon lead to the formal launching of ICCT-UT as a new entity within the network that will anchor the Center's activities in Tokyo involving more and more Japanese scholars, students, and intellectuals.

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