

## ***Is there a happy degrowth in historical studies? The Jinan mall, Chinese globality and Italian historiography***

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It comes naturally to historians to put into perspective the scientific conferences they have attended only many years later, after time has made it easier to distinguish between what turns out to be merely contingent and what fits a pattern of development clearly visible with the benefit of hindsight. However, there are good reasons for taking stock of the 2015 Jinan conference before first impressions have completely faded. As on many previous occasions, the Italian Committee has made the decision to publicly review the conference and the role of the Italian participants. In doing so it has followed a well-established tradition that has a lot to commend it. First of all, it provides an opportunity to gather information on what occurred at the conference for the benefit of those who funded the attendance of many of the speakers, at least partially (essentially the tax-payers of this or a later generation). Secondly, from a specifically scientific point of view, it allows those in charge to improve the quality and representativeness of the Italian delegation at the next congress, in Poznan in 2020. Thirdly, it allows a critical assessment of the international trends most visible in Jinan.

The history of the many conferences organized by CISH (also called ICHS in English) has been recounted by the German historian Karl Erdmann in his *Die Oekumene der Historiker*, translated into English by Wolfgang Mommsen and published for an international audience in 2005 under the title *Towards a community of historians*.

Reading Erdmann's volume is necessary to grasp the crucial features and specificities of the Jinan congress as the latest in a long series. To cut a long story short it may be useful to recall that China's candidacy was controversial. The Chinese application was turned down in Sydney in 2005, when Amsterdam carried the day. Five years later the Chinese submitted a further and this time successful application. Considering the background of previous congresses, which had been an arena for open discussions and free exchanges of ideas, the decision to choose Jinan raised concerns: was the human rights situation in China compatible with the tradition of

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CISH congresses? These concerns were allayed by the serious efforts made by the Chinese organization to live up to the expectations of the international audience arriving in Jinan. Patriotic pride also played a role. The Jinan congress was described in the press as ‘the Olympic Games of historians’, being held in Asia for the first time: at first sight a bizarre nationalist boast (with an eye on Japan), on closer inspection a Freudian slip revealing Chinese determination to compete with the best historians in making sense of the past and its outcome in the present.

But irrespective of what ‘the Olympic Games of historians’ was intended to mean, the Chinese commitment was extraordinary: the staff of students, hostesses, and stewards was impressive, numerous, helpful, and faultless, and a far cry from the understaffed organization in Amsterdam in 2010, when the budget was evidently very, very tight.

Public relations were deftly managed by scores of journalists and film-makers, with the support of university students. The footage posted on Youtube reflected the official attitude to the ‘Olympic Games of historians’ accurately. Each frame would deserve remarks and comments:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmt1q6NBNOQ>.

Party big-shots attended the opening ceremony on Sunday. Prominent among them was the vice-premier of the State council, Liu Yandong, whose presence was evidence that the Central government in Beijing is mindful of history.

We should all be reminded that Liu Yandong is the only woman sitting on the Politburo since 2007. She is a prominent personality in the crowded Chinese political landscape, a protégé of Hu Jintao. Liu Yandong is credited for being fairly liberally oriented, but was born into a family that has been part of the inner life of the Communist Party for 4 generations, since 1920.<sup>2</sup>

The official photo of the audience, taken at the opening ceremony on Sunday and published in the China Daily, vividly expresses how Chinese the whole event was supposed to be, as if no foreigners were attending it. Similarities with party events were unmistakable.

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<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/china/top-future-leaders/liu\\_yandong](http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/china/top-future-leaders/liu_yandong).



Thousands of historians from 90 countries and regions attend the 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences in Jinan, Shandong, on Sunday. Ju Chuanjiang / China Daily

There is at least one more point that is worthy of attention. Each element of the congress logo has a political meaning. In the official footage it captures attention to a perhaps surprising degree.



There is a reason. The congress logo consists of a cloud, which symbolizes good luck, and a chariot and horses of the Han dynasty that symbolize the turning

wheel of history. The color of the logo is also very revealing: it is cinnabar red, the traditional, immemorial color of Chinese civilization. Cinnabar red is the color of the walls of the Imperial palace and of the University of Shandong, whose capital is Jinan. Cinnabar red stands for hospitality. According to some sources, in Confucian traditional medicine, for instance, we all have a 'cinnabar field' (dantian) under our navel, which is the locus of meditation.

This logo is possibly opaque to European eyes but conveys symbols and a visual vocabulary fitting with the Chinese tradition.

Before the congress started some uneasiness was perceived among many participants. A human rights activist (who had had his visa application denied in the past) asked to attend, but this request was rejected by the organizing committee. The use of gmail, skype, search engines and the like was also extremely difficult. In my hotel, for an all-Chinese clientele and not recommended by the organizing committee, most Italian newspapers were not accessible. I learned that no websites were barred in the hotels for the congress participants. The congress was a bubble of unrestrained academic dialogue in an environment run by a different set of rules that do not match with those of liberal democracies.

At the congress, open and frank discussions were the order of the day. Quite a few Chinese historians who had left the People's Republic for the USA right after the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, and who had become American citizens, came back unhampered to attend the conference – in many cases not for the first time.

The Italian delegation was, as usual, quite substantial. Since the origin of CISH the Italian participation has been very visible. In 1903, before the formal establishment of CISH in 1923, the second international congress, the forerunner of CISH congresses, was held in Rome. The Italian capital was to have been the venue for the 1943 congress, canceled for obvious reasons. It was in Rome, however, that in 1955 one of the most remarkable CISH congresses took place. More than 1600 participants from 34 countries (and, for the first time, from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc) came to Rome for the 10<sup>th</sup> congress. Italians may have a cosmopolitan vein shared by historians, artists and tradesmen since Marco Polo. In addition, and more mundanely the University Ministry partially funds the travel and accommodation expenses of the speakers and organizers of panels and roundtables. Internationalization is encouraged, and CISH congresses have been regarded as a suitable opportunity for historians to venture beyond Italian borders and mix with the rest of the world.

Each CISH congress aims to fulfill a variety of functions at the same time. It has always been a meeting point, a reunion tailored for the members of an expanding family who rarely have the opportunity to come together, sit down and have a face-to-face chat about their favorite topics. Every five years a chance is offered, and it is a welcome one. Congresses review the most engaging and thought-provoking

approaches and issues that are attracting historians' attention worldwide, in particular, those focused on by national historical cultures, organizations and institutes. Last but not least, CISH congresses come to be remembered because a specific topic or theory takes center stage, not necessarily as a result of the organizer's intentions. In 2010 in Amsterdam, the overarching theme was the question of human rights.

Human rights have attracted historians' attention since the end of WWII, from a variety of diverging perspectives, as Samuel Moyn has stressed.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, international politics spurred an interest in human rights that was reflected in a remarkable abundance of sessions and round-tables focusing on the defense of human rights, constructed as historical objects: the rights of the living and the dead in different historical cultures, the rights of past generations to be acknowledged and respected, the rights of future generations to spend their lives in a decent environment. The focus on human rights was related and – I would imagine – backed by a number of Dutch public institutions that very generously sponsored the participation of young non-European scholars. Besides bringing a welcome variety of approaches, they had an obvious interest in bringing to the fore the subject of human rights. In Amsterdam millennials from sub-Saharan Africa and South America were present to an extent that was not matched in Jinan.

However, despite the lack of young scholars from non-European countries, the Jinan congress was a great meeting place with excellent opportunities. There was an unusual number of participants, 2700 in total, 2000 of them Chinese. The venue itself was ideal: large enough to provide space for speakers, discussants, and audience, and distant enough from the city center to encourage participants to spend the whole day attending sessions. The organizers went to great lengths to arrange book presentations, lectures, and evening events that would entertain participants and keep them busy. High points were the opening ceremony, the lavish official banquet offered by the Chinese historical association, and the closing ceremony, during which the French historian Serge Gruzinski was presented with the Jaeger-Lecoulre prize and participants were entertained with an impressive show on Confucius, who was born in the Jinan region. These are impressive achievements indeed, and cannot be denied by anybody. Nonetheless, my impression was that the true objective of the Jinan congress did not materialize. Conversation between the 700 non-Chinese participants and the 2000 Chinese historians from the huge network of universities and academies of the People's Republic of China was very difficult. There may have been various reasons for this: different cultural codes and academic backgrounds, diverging perspectives on the past, different methodological assumptions. Even language might have been a hurdle: international English works perfectly as a link language provided that a minimum of implicit presuppositions are

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<sup>3</sup> SAMUEL MOYN, "The First Historian of Human Rights", *American Historical Review* 116, 1 (2011): 58-79.

shared.

The Jinan congress was an interesting stage for new research areas and succeeded in being representative of original trends worldwide. The effort of the organizing committee deserves to be acknowledged. In 2005 one of the doyens of Italian historical studies, Paolo Prodi, commented on the Sydney congress and compared it to the 1955 Rome congress, the structure of which was extremely straightforward: only reports (rapports, in the then-usual French denomination) on recent historical writing and short papers (communications) that were printed in 7 volumes and distributed to the participants prior to the congress itself. More recent congresses have become mammoth-like: major themes, specialized themes, round tables, poster sessions, affiliated international commissions, internal commissions, workshops. Looking back on the last 50 years Prodi could not hide his bewilderment: ‘we are dealing now with a sort of historical mall, where it is impossible, for everybody, to follow the proceedings that overlap in a number of parallel sessions’.<sup>4</sup> Jinan was an even more colorful mall than Sydney 2005 or Amsterdam 2010. We are all aware that malls display a wide but not endless variety of commodities. In Rome, 60 years ago, the chief organizer Federico Chabod pulled the strings of the Congress like a kind of skillful and enlightened monarch who consulted his peers but in the end called the shots according to his own strategy. Negotiations and pluralization have replaced benevolent monarchy. At the historical mall in Jinan some commodities were more visibly positioned to be grabbed by the hungry consumer of historical products. Human rights were prominently on offer, and globality was in great supply too. What globality? Globality, no matter how useful a socio-political category it might be, runs the risk of being tautological, and requires specification and qualification in order to be useful in historical studies. In Jinan a four-fold globality was discussed.

1. Chinese historiography as a global historiography.
2. Global history as a dimension of historical research to acknowledge and emphasize China’s role.
3. Global history as an interpretive methodology.
4. Global history as an approach to European history and American history, ‘deprovincializing’ them (Dipesh Chakrabarti, 2000).

The most challenging among these four views concerns ‘Chinese globality’.

The Jinan congress suggests a close link between the impressive financial and

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<sup>4</sup> PAOLO PRODI, “Il X Congresso internazionale di scienze storiche, Roma 1955. Cinquant’anni di distanza”, in *La storiografia tra passato e futuro. Il X Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche (Roma 1955) cinquant’anni dopo. Atti del convegno internazionale Roma, 21-24 settembre 2005*, ed. by MANUEL ESPADAS BURGOS et al. (Roma: Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell’Arte, 2008), 19.

organizational investment made to turn the congress into a success and the notion that Chinese historical culture is a self-supporting collective effort committed to its own agenda. During the congress the official history of Chinese historiography in the last 30 years was presented.<sup>5</sup> Appropriately entitled *Thirty Years of Chinese History Studies*, this volume focuses explicitly on the principles of historical practice, as it has been carried out since 1978, and its very high ambitions. Reading this collection of essays helped me to figure out some baffling situations occasioned by some of the papers by Chinese historians. To be sure, historical studies feature a pervasive political meaning imbedded in both analysis and narrative. The chronological order of historiography itself derives from the vicissitude of the Communist Party. The reform started in 1978. The demise of the ‘gang of Four’, after it had placed suffocating ‘spiritual chains’ on Marxism and on Mao’s thought, was a turning point in historiography: ever since, historical studies have evolved and become more empirical while recognizing the importance of a distinctive Chinese identity. One passage in particular is worth noting as it blends description and prescription.

*‘Chinese historians in this new historical period need to draw extensively on the theory of traditional Chinese historiography and historical theories from the West, under the guidance of the basic theory of Marxism, and strive for innovations, in the new historical context, and for China style historical theory, concepts and systems’.*<sup>6</sup>

What this really means is made clear in the pages that follow. It means, for instance, that China takes its place in a vision of universal history stressing the origins of humankind. Monogenetic theory, with its accompanying assumption that the human race originated in Africa, is incompatible with Chinese archeological remains. Humans have lived in China for over 2 million years, as attested by the Peking Man, the Yuan Mou Man, and the Fanchang Man, and ‘humans have multiple sources rather than a single one’.<sup>7</sup> Bioarcheology backs this view. There is a Chinese civilization that is the outcome of a variety of life forms eventually coming together and integrating into an individual unit.<sup>8</sup> The study of Chinese civilization, moreover, belongs to the 10th five-year program led by the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences. The authors of *Thirty Years* present similar and equally strong views on modern world history. Eurocentrism is rejected, quite understandably. The authors also suggest that universal history shows that structures of political and economic power have developed and interacted on a global scale and that Europe, since it was the origin of capitalism and colonialism, has played a crucial role. Chinese historiography should definitely stress that China too, before and after the decline between 1840 and 1949, has been an important player in a pluricentric world. In the

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<sup>5</sup> *Thirty Years of Chinese History Studies*, ed. by ZHANG HAIPENG, trans. by LI WENZHONG and WU JINSHAN (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2015. Chinese edition: 2008).

<sup>6</sup> ZHANG HAIPENG, ‘A Bird’s-Eye View of Contemporary Chinese Historical Studies’, in *Thirty Years of Chinese History Studies*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

chapter on ‘archeological discoveries’ it is claimed that since the late Paleolithic Age ‘the original Chinese [...] have been living ever since on the historical stage of China’.<sup>9</sup> ‘China’s ancient culture might well be described as being characterized by indigeneity, uniformity and diversity’:<sup>10</sup> it has developed and preserved unique features, because its geographical position favored isolation, so that civilizational unity could grow without influential interaction with the rest of the Euroasian continent.

These and other statements seem to convey a strong prescriptive message that resonated in the official statements made in Jinan by high-ranked historians with pervasive effects. In his inaugural speech on 23 August, the chairman of the Chinese Historical Association, Prof. Zhang Haipeng, who also edited *Thirty Years of Chinese History Studies*, announced that the Jinan congress would be remembered because it ‘will break through Eurocentrism, move toward Asia, and toward the global’.<sup>11</sup> In Zhang Haipeng’s speech a prominent position was given to Hu Shih, a historian relatively unknown in Europe. He was in fact the first Chinese scholar to participate in a CISH congress, in Warsaw in 1938. The reason for mentioning Hu Shih as the starting point for engagement with international historiography in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century might relate to his biography. Hu Shih was one of the founders of the reform movement in politics and cultural affairs known as ‘4<sup>th</sup> May’, and a follower of the reformist pragmatism that John Dewey advocated. He was also the Ambassador to Washington from 1938 to 1942 and, after having moved to Taiwan, the president of the Academia Sinica, from 1957 until his death in 1962.<sup>12</sup> Hu Shih was a historian of Chinese philosophy, looked up to the New Social History, and made an attempt to reform the Chinese language, in order to modernize it while saving its philosophical and literary value from decline against the background of modernity. He pleaded for a renewal of Chinese classical culture and made no concessions to the assimilation of Western civilization in a balancing act. His name was erased from the history of China under Communist rule, while radical neo-Confucians criticized him in Taiwan. In the late 1980s, Hu Shih once again became a presence in public debate, when a different political climate made this possible. In the inaugural ceremony, besides (and in fact in stark opposition to) Zhang’s speech, the Senegalese historian Mamadou Fall delivered a paper addressing a two-fold rejection in historiography: to him neither Eurocentrism nor empires and political expansion should be taken as the moving forces behind the proper understanding of the past. Fall argued that in fact the *terroir*, the combination of the natural environment of a given territory and the cultural tradition proper to it, is the notion

<sup>9</sup> CHEN XINGCAN, “Archeological Discoveries of New China and Their Contribution to the Understanding of the History of China”, in *Thirty Years of Chinese History Studies*, 25-26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

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[http://casseng.cssn.cn/experts/experts\\_1st\\_group\\_cass\\_members/201402/t20140221\\_969596.html](http://casseng.cssn.cn/experts/experts_1st_group_cass_members/201402/t20140221_969596.html)



that most forcefully contradicts Eurocentrism, all forms of imperialism, and Orientalism. Focusing on the *terroir* means acknowledging that all links between the human and the natural should be properly upheld, and that the ecosystem should be respected because it is fragile and constantly endangered.<sup>13</sup> Echoes of post-colonial literature, very much present in Amsterdam in 2010, were conspicuously faint in Jinan.

It is plainly impossible to dissect what Prodi has called the historical mall of the CISH congresses. However, some general remarks about visions of Chinese globality, as this was articulated in Jinan, might be in order. Quite a number of papers on international relationships were given by Chinese scholars who are active in the People's Republic of China (not expats for whatever reason, who, in most cases, teach in American universities). These papers dealt with global topics and made connections with the current international debate on world history and global history. One instance of this is provided by major theme #1: China from global perspectives, chaired by Kenneth Pomeranz, among others. The contributions from Chinese scholars did not really have the effect of pushing the discussion in one direction or another, and did not open up new vistas on a challenging area of analysis. It might be interesting to remark that three of the most original and innovative contributions to the general discussion were given by Italian scholars: Guido Abbattista, who dealt with China and Europe in the 'long Enlightenment' as factors in the creation of a 'family of nations'; Valdo Ferretti, who discussed the diplomatic networks at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and Salvatore Ciriaco, who spoke about the silk trade on a global scale. These papers, in a very significant session that marked the scientific start of the congress, belonged to a program highlighting recent research on various aspects of China's inclusion in international exchange networks of commodities, services, and knowledge. The paper given by the Chinese speaker was a very learned piece on funerary cults, that did not really fit with the rest. Another very important major theme, #3 on revolutions in world history, was chaired by Annamaria Rao. The majority of the papers examined the transnational ties between different revolutionary movements. Wang Qisheng devoted his paper on the Chinese revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the singular is remarkable) to an interesting and provocative analysis of the three revolutionary movements in China from the perspective of the development and continuity within Chinese history. As in his book on revolution and counterrevolution from 2010 (in Chinese, reviewed in detail in the scholarly journal *Cross-currents, East Asian History and Culture Review*), Wang Qisheng deconstructed the foundations of the party historiography from a national, strictly Chinese point of view. His paper for the Jinan congress critically reviewed the results of the three revolutions, republican,

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<sup>12</sup> Q. EDWARD WANG, *Inventing China Through History. The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 53-67.

<sup>13</sup> MAMADOU FALL: *Les terroirs de la Sénégambie entre l'épée et le croissant: X<sup>ème</sup>-XX<sup>ème</sup> siècles*, (Dakar: L'Harmattan-Sénégal, 2015).

nationalist, and communist, paying no attention to the links and interactions with similar revolutionary events elsewhere.

An interesting example of the trend towards Chinese globality took place in the roundtable I myself organized on What world for world history? A young scholar from Nanjing Normal University, Chi Xinyan, and her PhD supervisor, Wang Yongxiang, submitted a proposal that was readily accepted. According to the abstract, the focus of their paper was on the position of prehistorical China in global history. Through a historical and semeiotic inquiry of the Pentateuc and of Chinese artifacts their paper argued that the biblical narrative was fallacious and inconclusive when it placed Creation in Mesopotamia. Modern scholars, however, could easily fix the inconsistencies in the Bible, as they did with archeological data, by arguing that Creation and the first forms of human civilization in fact occurred in the Great Chinese Plain. The Garden of Eden was, literally, on the banks of the Yellow River. The biblical description fits with the geography of central China.

This argument, without a hint of irony and completely pre-Voltairian in its trust in the literal meaning of ancient text, made an open debate with the other participants at the round-table, open and interested but resolutely post-Voltairian, rather awkward. Language barriers were no reason why arguments fell on deaf ears on both sides. The point is that the argument put forward by the brilliant young PhD candidate matched the overall claim advanced in *Thirty Years of Chinese Historical Studies* and in the inaugural speech, as it presented an empirical case study proving the centrality of Chinese history in the global context.

The general impression is that a comprehensive rethinking on the global dimension of history is underway and that this process, whose importance can hardly be underestimated, is limited so far to domestic historiography and to the Chinese past. A constructive dialogue with non-Chinese scholars still seems to be missing. The question of the interactions between China and other areas has been treated mostly by scholars who share a background in the American and European academic system. Competition for hegemony in Southeastern Asia between the declining China and the upcoming imperial Japan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is indeed a crucial issue that was addressed in Jinan by Western and Japanese historians.

Global history has been the arena for a variety of approaches and explanatory patterns. The 2000 Chinese historians who registered and were actually present (or at least a substantial portion were), listened but regrettably did not talk a lot.

China, its past and its present, was in the minds of everybody at the congress, but despite the best intentions it was surprisingly difficult to engage with the Chinese as individuals. Because Chinese historians, both young and established scholars, are all redefining what globality is all about and because this redefinition apparently harbors problematic assumptions, it is crucial not to shy away from dialogue and

discussion.

Chinese historians were mostly silent. Italian participants were a marked presence and highly vocal. The program included 57 papers given by scholars from Italy. Thirty sessions had Italian speakers or chairpersons. There were some no-shows (less so however than in the previous CISH congresses), but on the whole the Italian scholars were highly visible. In the historical mall in Jinan Italian commodities abounded and, one might hope, found favor. In particular, in the sessions of the affiliated societies, Italian speakers were very active. This is an important point. Affiliated societies were set up during the 20th century to coordinate specialized fields of research that might especially profit from international collaboration. In these highly specialized and fairly traditional areas Italians are at their best. The commission on the history of representative institutions organized a session with 7 Italian speakers, the commission on the History of French Revolution, the commission on the History and Culture of East Central Europe, the commission on the study of international relations, chaired by Prof. Canavero, each had 4 Italian speakers. The commission for the history of reading, for public history and gender history had one Italian contributor each.

In other categories, like major themes, specialized themes, joint-sessions and round-tables there was on average one Italian speaker. It is fair to say that the Italian historians in Jinan did their homework.

On a more serious note three more remarks are in order. The first concerns the participation of a considerable number of young scholars under the age of 40. It was a wise decision to at least partially fund their flight and accommodation, as they have virtually no chance to get travel grants otherwise. The same decision should be taken for Poznan 2020. The second relates to an issue traditionally affecting the impact of Italian scholars at international conferences. In 1928 at the CISH congress in Oslo the use of German as a lingua franca in discussions on the history of Eastern Europe was a matter of controversy, and outstanding Polish historians made an unsuccessful attempt to veto it as they rejected its status as a hegemonical language.<sup>14</sup>

In 1955 Chabod managed to have Italian as an official language of the congress. Major papers were delivered and published only in Italian: the obvious implication was that everybody could read and understand. Which one of the major (European) languages is used speaks (literally) volumes on the nature of the conversation in progress in an international setting. The Oekumene der Historiker has undergone shifts and transformations and is now called a global community of historians. Italian and German lost the preeminence they enjoyed in the 20th century. French as a language of cosmopolitan intellectuals stood its ground more

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<sup>14</sup> STEFAN GUTH, *Geschichte als Politik. Der deutsch-polnische Historikerdialog im 20. Jahrhundert* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015).

successfully, thanks also to the massive public funds to defend Francophonie in the whole world. Even French, however, seems to be becoming a language for very specialized exchanges. So, there is a logic to the rising hegemony of international English for obvious reasons that it would be foolish to deny. Still, it was a source of bewilderment to witness a session organized by the Commission on the History of French Revolution that featured Pierre Serna, Professor of History of French Revolution at the Sorbonne and hear him talk in English. His English was very clear but lacked – quite understandably – the nuances and allusions that he could convey when using the language of Robespierre and Danton, Michelet and Furet. I do hope all participants would have appreciated him speaking French on the French Revolution. Unlike Pierre Serna, Italians in general have been slow to fully grasp the Americanization of the scholarly world in the last 20 years.

In a brilliant newspaper article the distinguished historian Alberto Melloni, who was in Jinan, reviewed the Italian participation and mentioned that Italian scholars there spoke ‘an excellent Globish and sometimes even a fairly good English’.<sup>15</sup> Interaction was possible: this is good news, as language barriers have long been a hurdle for Italians abroad. The third remark is rather critical. Italians were less active in the cutting-edge, innovative areas of historical research. The history of emotions is a case in point. The second major theme on historicizing emotions included only one Italian participant, now holding a teaching position in Spain, the medievalist Fabrizio Titone. Since the history of emotions is a new area, more attention should be paid to it in Italy too. In Jinan the history of emotions has been pushed by two institutions collaborating on a joint project. The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions<sup>16</sup> and the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, led by Ute Frevert, who has launched research situated at the intersection of history and cognitive sciences, psychology and sociology.<sup>17</sup>

The Australian group of researchers is connected to Italian scholars, and in 2015 the Istituto per la storia moderna e contemporanea in Rome hosted an interesting workshop on emotions in history organized by Giovanni Tarantino and Giuseppe Marcocci.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, German, Dutch, French, British, and North American historians have been more alert to grasp the innovation and were more conspicuous in Jinan with papers integrating narrative, analysis, and multimedia in the dissection of emotions.

From the Italian perspective, Jinan was a positive experience. However, there is

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<sup>15</sup> *Corriere della sera*, 5 September 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (<http://www.historyofemotions.org.au>).

<sup>17</sup> UTE FREVERT, *The Moral Economy of Trust: Modern Trajectories* (Annual Lecture, German Historical Institute 2013), German Historical Institute, London 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Feelings Matter: Exploring the Cultural Dynamics of Emotions in Early Modern Europe* (Rome, 30 March 2015).

no 'happy degrowth' in historical studies. There is a threat looming ahead that Italian historical studies might be pushed to the margins of the global conversation. In Jinan we were able to avoid the unpleasant experience of irrelevance. In 2020 the situation might be different.