

## Late Winter Humanities Sojourn to Porto, Portugal and Paris, France

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In early March I went to Porto, Portugal to attend the international conference of ECHIC (European Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Centers) in the ancient, cultural city of Porto, Portugal. Afterwards, I went to Paris, France to visit some research centers and institutes. The ECHIC conference was generously hosted by Circulo Universitario de Porto on March 3-5, 2014. Interestingly, IHS of NTU is a founding member of ECHIC. Our IHS is the sole non-EU member in good standing of ECHIC, and IHS is held in special regard by the other ECHIC members because we provide a clear window between Europe and East Asia.

Fundamentally, the aim of this conference was to explore the state of the humanities globally in terms of both 1) vitality of research and 2) level of institutional support. In the EU, the humanities and social science leaders often have to go to

Brussels and elsewhere to present arguments to EU officials for increasing if not just maintaining their level of institutional support. Related to this, the question of developing "impact humanities," that is, having the goal of researching, reporting, and presenting humanities knowledge and education in ways that have a real impact on the thought and action of students and the public, social and political leaders as well as scientists, technologists, doctors, and even managers and administrators. This effort and goal involve focusing and presenting humanities research that is enlightening in regard to environmental protection, conservation, sustainability, on the one hand, and social diversity, fairness, tolerance, compassion, even creativity on the other—to mention just a few of the areas of concern. All of the humanities disciplines—such as literature, language, history, library science, anthropology, linguistics, etc., can

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play key roles in these efforts. Philosophy, for example, has been especially vital in sharpening our ethical thought and sense of responsibility in these areas as well as rousing our ethical volition to stand up and express our views and take appropriate actions.

Under the enlightened and capable leadership of Poul Holm (Long Room Table, Trinity College, Dublin) and Rosi Braidotti (University of Utrecht and Center for the Humanities), the ECHIC conference explored these critical areas and issues. For example, in her keynote address, Rosi Braidotti explored "The Academic and the Civic: Susan Manning's Vision of the Socially Responsible University." She gave a fascinating overview of the dialectical discussions between Susan, with her traditional, knowledge-based perspective, and Rosi, with her more dynamic and diverse, trend-oriented perspective. Next, Poul Holm summarized the key findings of his Humanities World Report in which he and his project team observed, measured, and reported on the state of humanities research and education around the world. (IHS of NTU was the first institute that Poul Holm's research team visited in doing the field observations for their report). And then, Rafael Alvira of the University of Navarra in Spain keyed on "The Articulation between the Humanities and the Business World: an interdisciplinary approach," that is, on the idea of vitalizing the humanities by bringing them into connection with activities in the business and social worlds, which in turn can open the largesse of foundation accounts to sponsor humanities research, conferences, and related activities.

Poul Holm hosted a fundamental afternoon session on "The Future of Environmental Humanities: new models of integrated research for an emerging field" in which Prof Steven Hartman gave a stirring presentation on his Nordic based institute, and its bringing together of interested humanities and humanities-related scholars on a

global scale. In a morning session on "European Humanities in a Globalizing World," I presented an overview of European humanities research and education at the major universities in Taiwan. The ECHIC members were deeply interested and impressed by this account of developments on the Taiwan research and educational scene.

The conference concluded by exploring "strategies that work" in order to alert humanities scholars to the crisis in the humanities, and then move them to reorient their research and teaching with an eye to making positive impacts regarding society and the environment. Admittedly, since the universities require the professors and scholars to focus on the writing of short journal articles, these targeted professors and scholars need to be pulled out of their comfort zone of writing simple articles to open their eyes wider and consider ways to make meaningful impacts on people's lives and the environment.

The conference participants from all across Europe were a wonderful group of scholars, open-minded and idealistic, keen on making their work meaningful, about making a difference.

Porto is a fascinating old city. It is the oldest city in Portugal and the country is named after Porto. I enjoyed exploring the ancient city streets and shops there. The most classical bookstore in the world can be found in downtown Portugal. Riding the new MRT from the state-of-the-art Porto Airport, I observed green, hilly farmlands and old brick farm buildings with tiled roofs that reminded me very much of scenes in Taiwan, except that I noticed in Portugal a stronger desire to maintain the beauty of the old buildings and to restrain the design and construction of new buildings to match the elegant old ones-- and blend beautifully into the environment. Porto city, too, is a very green city filled with lovely waterways, ancient streets and buildings, and a charming town center. I felt I had time-traveled to

an earlier era, yet the local people were modern and efficient yet elegant and courteous. I felt relaxed and at ease in the lovely, idyllic environment there: Portugal's economy is not so robust as the East Asian economies, but the beauty of Portugal's environment, the quality of life, and the maturity and elegance of the people are deeply impressive. Asia can learn much about folk culture and human life from this elegant old country. Advocates of globalism should pause in places like this to enjoy the richness and the uniqueness of the local. (For vivid impressions of the Portuguese people and society, see the award-winning films *Lisbon Story*, directed by Wim Wenders, and *Night Train to Lisbon*, starring Jeremy Irons. These films are available on DVD.)

After the ECHIC conference in Porto, I flew to Paris to continue my Humanities Sojourn on March 6. In Paris, I made contact with Stephanie Smadja and Robert Mankin of the Humanities Center of University Paris Diderot to discuss our research programs, academic exchanges, and our respective research programs. They had hosted me to visit their center in the autumn of 2012 and Stephanie plans to visit IHS in early 2015. Robert might represent his Humanities Center at our UBIAS conference at the end of 2014. Stephanie was also very informative regarding both classical French art and culture and the more recent diverse face of French society and culture to be observed in Paris. Robert is an expert on the 18th century enlightenment of Scotland as well as of France, and has cast insight on the connection between the two. I also made contact with Chinese intellectual historian Anne Cheng and cultural anthropologist and geographer Philippe Descola both of the College de France. Philippe is a celebrated national intellectual in France. The entire College de France holds the status of an advanced research and education institution. Anne and Philippe both attended the recent UBIAS meeting hosted by the Peter Wall Institute at the University of Vancouver

in September 2014. Anne mentioned that the College de France was planning to hold a conference to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of French Sinology, and she discussed the formation and development of sinology in France. Philippe discussed the evolving manifold practical uses of mapmaking, focusing on rapid developments in aerial photograph based maps that were used to track trench warfare in Europe during World War I. They also talked about their college's interest in the UBIAS Directors Conference to be held at IHS, NTU at the end of 2014. Besides Anne's East Asian orientation, Philippe is developing an inter-relational approach to model and understand relations among peoples, populations, and cultures, and the impacts of their activities on natural ecologies and the overall natural environment. In developing this approach, he is realizing its intimate connection to much East Asian thought, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and hopes to have more interactions with our and other East Asian institutes for advanced research. At several points, we shared information on Chinese and Japanese philosophy regarding relational understandings of humanity and nature.

About halfway through my visit to Paris, I was pick-pocketed in the streets of Montmartre! This event left me in a blue mood for a few days. A few hours after the event, I calmed down and figured out that two foreign children had followed close behind me in the street, and smoothly lifted my wallet while I was distracted in the middle of a crowd. Feeling depressed, I had to make many calls to cancel and replace my credit cards and to arrange some emergency cash to cover the rest of my trip. I am thankful that my hotel and some friends were sympathetic and helpful to me. Still, this event disturbed me and slowed me down for the final few days. However, I did manage to get myself together eventually, and I had some meaningful activities during the final two days.

On the last day, my flight out was at 7 o'clock a.m., so I had to be at CDG Airport to check in by 5:00 a.m. Then, I had to transfer at Frankfurt Airport en route to Taipei, but the layover was only two hours and everything went smoothly, so I arrived back in Taipei early the next morning to start a new day.

This trip was fruitful for building institutional and research links between IHS and the other centers and institutes around Europe. It was also important for my own intellectual development and research orientation. Throughout my academic career, my goal has been to develop research that not only advanced human knowledge and insight but also offered life wisdom and practical perspectives on making life—human and natural—richer and more fulfilling. This goal gets all the more urgent with age and the passage of time.