

SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP

Topic for discussion:

Organization of an International Conference on East-West Comparative Utopias – prospective panels, important topics to be covered, invited speakers, publication possibilities

Summary of discussion:

Firstly, it was noted that for future research and conferences on comparative utopias, the cultural scope of the study should be widened to include expressions of imaginary societies and projections from a range of cultures such as African, Caribbean, Islamic, Indian, Russian and Indigenous cultures of Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, the Americas etc. The East-West focus of this workshop reflected the particular research interests of the participants, focusing mainly on Japan and China, but Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand are also rich sources of utopian projections to be explored further.

The framing of the research projects and potential conferences was also discussed, questioning whether to maintain the notion of comparative utopias, even though “utopia” is essentially a Western construct, or whether to opt for the less Euro-centric model of intercultural imaginaries of the ideal. Given that the aim is to draw on the expertise of scholars who are currently working in utopian studies, but also to attract scholars in comparative mythology, cultural anthropology, area studies, philosophy, comparative religions, indigenous histories and many other areas, it seems that the double emphasis used to frame this workshop could be useful in future calls for papers, etc.

Propositions for panels or workshops for a future conference were:

Archetypal Utopias: grounded in oral histories, popular folklore, mythologies, religious texts

Utopia and Science Fiction: including futuristic fiction

Definitions of “utopia” or the imaginary of the ideal society – some may be applicable to cross-cultural studies, some particular to certain cultures

Comparative chronologies of the development of the model for the ideal society

Philosophical Utopias

Political Utopias

Social Utopias

Potential Speakers to be invited:

It would be desirable to attract some keynote speakers with specialized cultural knowledge such as Zhang Longxi (Chinese and Comparative Studies), as well as others with wider experience in comparative utopian studies like Krishan Kumar (Comparative Utopian Studies).

Publication possibilities:

Special issues of Journals such as Science Fiction Studies, Utopian Studies.

Topic for discussion:

Research project on Comparative Utopianism – Frame for funding, participants

Summary of discussion:

It is envisaged that participants will undertake to fund their research independently as at this stage, the proposed outcomes and the desire to attract a wide range of participants are incompatible with the small team focus required for an Australia Research Council Discovery Grant, for example.

Topic for discussion:

Publication of an anthology of non-Western utopian-style projections – suggestions for inclusions

Summary of discussion:

Serious interest in compiling a critical anthology of non-Western utopian-style projections. To be discussed further in conjunction with specialists in the relevant cultural representations.

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