

**Liu, Dong and Xiangdong Xu (eds), *Yisaiya Bolin yu dangdai zhongguo: ziyou yu duoyuan zhijian* [Isaiah Berlin and Contemporary China: Between Liberalism and Pluralism] (Nanjing, 2014: Yilin Press); proceedings of a conference, 'Isaiah Berlin and Contemporary China', held on 10 March 2011 at Tsinghua University**

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## **Translation of Postscript**

This volume is the proceedings of the 'Isaiah Berlin and Contemporary China' conference held in Beijing from 10 to 12 March 2011. Professor Xu and I were the initiators of this conference, held under the auspices of the Academy of Chinese Learning, Tsinghua University, and co-sponsored by Yilin Press.

The conference participants included scholars working on Isaiah Berlin from all over the world – from Tsinghua University, Peking University, Zhejiang University, Sun Yat-Sen University, Shandong University, the Chinese University of Hongkong, Academia Sinica, Flinders University, McGill University, the University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, New York University, Brown University, the University of Vermont, Tulane University and the University

of Notre Dame. Moreover, scholars from Yale University who were not able to be present also submitted papers.

The conference garnered many favourable comments from the participants. 'For me, at least,' writes a scholar in his email to other participants, 'it will set the gold standard for academic conferences from now on.' Such high opinions obviously reflect the impeccable organisation and full schedule of the conference, and the well-known hospitality of the Chinese hosts. Apart from these factors, however, what impressed the participants most, I believe, was the scholars' careful preparation and arresting arguments, and their robust discussions in the conference. After a whole year of collation, translation and editing, it is finally time to publish its proceedings. Readers will find all my words to be true.

The title of this volume has two implications. First, because they value Isaiah Berlin – an intellectual originally belonging to the Anglophone world – so highly, contemporary Chinese scholars not only read his writings meticulously and enthusiastically, but also invited Berlinian scholars from the West to come and discuss Berlin's life and thought in this 'foreign' land. This event accordingly occupies a special place in Berlin studies, and in the story of his reception. For the same reason, the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust paid special attention to this conference. Secondly, although Berlin enjoys a great posthumous reputation in the West, these well-established Berlinian scholars discovered, perhaps to their surprise, that Berlin's thought is much more intellectually vital and stimulating in China than in the West. They were intrigued and impressed to discover that Chinese scholars had, with an enormous investment of energy, translated most of Berlin's writings into Chinese. For this reason I believe that, after this conference, they will be enormously inspired by this creative cross-national study, which will lead them to reconsider the significance of Berlin's writings.

The subtitle too has two meanings. On the one hand, the relationship between liberalism and pluralism is mentioned in almost all the papers presented to this conference, and this reflects the fact that any serious reader of Berlin is bound to address this issue, and to worry about the challenge presented by the conflict between the two principles: the relationship referred to in the subtitle is a knotty problem in the interpretation of Berlin's thought. On the other hand, contemporary Chinese scholars too are involved in the liberalism/pluralism dilemma, and strive to work out a possible solution. Moreover, they wish, by communicating with their international colleagues, to secure an endorsement of the answers they have attempted to provide. The publication of this volume serves to promote and deepen the continuing discussion by enlarging its focus beyond the conference to the general reading public.

Professor Ying of Zhejiang University expresses similar opinions in his presentation to the conference, in which he shows us how, as a contemporary Chinese student of politics, he formed his intellectual outlook, and how he came to reflect on the political rules followed in China, and in the world as a whole, on the basis of certain fundamental, essential political ideas, as a result of reading Berlin's most outstanding essays. As readers will discover, although he has arrestingly suggested that we have reached 'post-Berlinism', he gives many reasons to support his argument that Berlin, who has been regarded as outdated, is still a classic thinker, as well as a starting point for Chinese intellectuals to acquire a better understanding of theories offered by competing camps in contemporary Western political philosophy. I should like to add that even those readers who might not agree with this conclusion can at least empathise with Professor Ying's distinctive personal story of reading Berlin. It is in this sense that we can understand why he quotes the famous line, 'Holding a walking stick while listening to the flowing river' (Yi zhang ting jiangsheng), written by Su Shi, a Chinese poet of the Song Dynasty, to demonstrate the

significance of Berlin as an intellectual walking stick for those who listen to the tide of Western political philosophy.

Finally, and with the utmost sincerity, I express my gratitude to my colleagues at Yilin Press for supporting this conference, and moreover for their enthusiasm in publishing not only Berlin's work but also all the other intellectually original works on their list. In the long run, their persistence in cultural construction will make ineffaceable and irreplaceable contributions to the future of Chinese civilisation as a whole.