

History as a Bridge to a New Vision of International Society

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MY BRIEF PRESENTATION will focus on the phenomenon of international exchange. But first let me preface this by saying that I do share Ann Florini's sense of the historical importance of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). I too have been struck by the tremendous growth of NGOs during the cold war. It may very well be that a historian writing in the twenty-first century about twentieth-century history might give equal weight to the cold war and to the phenomenal rise of NGOs. However, it is not just the cold war that has characterized international affairs since 1945 through the 1980s. Even more important, I would suggest, is the tremendous growth of NGOs both domestically and internationally. Today, probably there are some twenty to thirty thousand of these organizations, a figure that boggles the mind. How can we understand this growth? Other phenomena, such as the cold war or an international monetary crisis, are much easier to comprehend, as we have methods to analyze them. On the other hand, understanding the growth of NGOs will require a tremendous effort, although such understanding is likely to be gained in the future because NGO growth is an outstanding feature of the history of the twentieth century, if not the entire history of the world.

Now I would like to talk a bit about one aspect of international civil society, or international NGO activities, that comes under the framework of intellectual exchange. In many ways, intellectual exchange or intellectual cooperation, as it used to be called in the 1920s and 1930s, has a

rather long history. Intellectual associations or organizations of scientists, doctors, artists, journalists, and even historians—these are the precursors of what would eventually develop into a far greater number of NGOs.

Now what have such organizations accomplished? Have they contributed anything to international governance? As the answer is really quite mixed, I think we have to be rather modest: for example, the campaign against land mines, which exemplified the tremendous mobilizing energy of NGOs to get something done, is exceptional. Although Ann Florini's presentation was impressively persuasive in pointing out what can be done, unfortunately these small gatherings of scholars and artists and so forth have not produced substantial concrete results. But what they have done in the intellectual realm is to conceive of international civil society as an intellectual proposition. According to them, there has to be a collective mind to comprehend international civil society. People have to think creatively about new developments, how to organize the world, and so forth in terms other than sovereign states, state authorities possessing armaments, or even economic forces. The fact that intellectuals participating in a tradition of intellectual exchange dating from the late nineteenth century have been grappling with this issue provides one source of encouragement. More specifically, it seems that what these intellectual exchange programs have been working toward can be characterized as providing some sense of an integrated world community; that is, to the extent that nations split up the world, intellectual exchange tries to unite the world, or create a sense of world unity. This is a major agenda, indeed, a key force underpinning the gatherings and associations of intellectuals as they engage in exchange.

The idea of world unity has long existed, although it has not always been realized. Florini is right in saying that much of this thought originated in the West. But I am also struck by the fact that after World War I, intellectual endeavors of this kind came to involve more and more non-Westerners. Upon examining the League of Nations' organization called the Intellectual Cooperations Organization, I was struck by the fact that it was intellectuals from Haiti, Hungary, India, Mexico, and other smaller countries, many of them outside of North America and Europe, that became active in trying to present an alternative to a geopolitically defined world order. Some wanted to reconceptualize the international world order on bases other than those of alliances, geopolitics, armed forces, and trade and investment. There clearly is something existing in the realm of the mind, so to speak, that ought to guide the organization of international

life. And I think the realization of this collective mind is what intellectuals have aimed, and are still aiming, for. They are not always successful, but at least the momentum is there.

Yesterday, Gebhard Schweigler and others mentioned the theme of confidence-building. Specifically, before we have a more integrated world order, international community, international civil society, and international governance, we have to build mutual confidence. This again is something that intellectual exchange has been trying to promote. Again, this is not always successful, but in today's world it is more imperative than ever before. Before we get anywhere, we have to build confidence among nations, and intellectual exchange can be a means to that end. Almost by definition, intellectuals, artists, and writers would seem to be engaged in this important activity, although some are not, which is too bad. Some intellectuals appear to not believe in confidence-building, or believe only in presenting their own parochial values and agendas. However, the majority involved in intellectual endeavors are aiming to build confidence, which should be encouraged among such influential persons.

Allow me to say a bit about the situation in Japan. In confidence-building or in developing a sense of shared interests in an integrated, united world or interdependent world order, Japan can claim its share of participation in intellectual exchange programs—rather meagerly before World War I and then with strong enthusiasm in the 1920s, then after petering out in the 1930s it came back again with tremendous force after 1945. But more needs to be done, I believe, not because I am a historian but because it is an important issue. Intellectual engagement with historians interested in other countries in a cooperative endeavor to try to better understand the past seems to merit closer attention, which is lacking noticeably at this point. Particularly valuable would be some kind of intellectual engagement on the part of Asian scholars, for example, Japanese scholars coming together with those from China, the Philippines, and the Koreas to reexamine historical records and objectively study the past, especially the 1930s and the 1940s. With a sense of open inquiry and willingness to be accountable for what the Japanese nation did to other Asian countries during these two decades, including aggression and atrocities, Japanese scholars could use a historical reexamination as a way to build confidence.

Yamamoto Tadashi requested that we address specific issues. It seems, again, that one important specific project that should be undertaken is a joint study—a cooperative antinationalistic, nonparochial examination of the past. If some NGOs in Japan and other countries could get together

to reexamine the past, that would be quite positive. This morning, some participants talked about negative NGOs. Not all NGOs are positively forward-looking in the sense of working toward international community. Rather, some NGOs, other organizations, and writers in Japan don't believe in this kind of engagement but only believe in glorifying the national past, developing a very parochial image of the past, or justifying the past. The existence of such organizations and individuals is problematic, and it is difficult to know what to do about them. One way to combat their negative influence is to establish more internationally oriented NGOs involving historians and other scholars, as well as journalists, students, etc., who can communicate openly with each other to build a sense of a shared past. In the United States, there is an organization called the National Council on History Education, which has branches in many states. After attending some of their meetings, I learned that in the United States there is an eagerness to be engaged. This engagement is not nationalistic, nor does it simply focus on U.S. history, but rather it looks at world history. Trying to understand the past, especially world history, requires genuine collaborative efforts among scholars from all nations in order to develop a sense of the history of humanity, not just of this country or that country. Such kinds of intellectual exercises and endeavors demonstrate potential strengths of international civil society that we have been discussing.

Although many other opportunities exist to strengthen international civil society, it seems that there has to be some sort of intellectual engagement and, therefore, further encouragement in all countries of intellectual communication and cooperation. For this very reason, I am grateful for this conference, which is an excellent example of this kind of intellectual engagement. And we need more of such engagement to ensure that we are revolutionizing our view of the world. We are accustomed to viewing the international governmental structure in terms of national states and armed forces. While this structure is not going to disappear, to the extent that we move toward an alternative definition of international society we are making major progress. We appear to be at a very important turning point and thus may be playing out our roles in a dramatic historical setting today.