
Irving Babbitt's Influence in China: Four Perspectives

Since the 1920s Irving Babbitt has been a continuing influence in the moral and cultural life of China, his thought having been, in effect, “naturalized.” The following four articles describe and elucidate the nature and extent of his impact.

The authors approach the subject from different perspectives and with different emphases; for example, two of the authors present contrasting views of the prominent literary figure Liang Shiqiu, who had been Babbitt’s student at Harvard. But all agree that Babbitt’s influence has been substantial and salutary, and that there is a major resurgence of interest in Babbitt that may prove significant for the future of China and thus the world.

The editing of a collection of articles like this one must confront the problem of transliteration of Chinese characters into the English alphabet. Several methods of transliteration are widely used, the most prominent being Pinyin—which recently has gained ascendancy because of its formal adoption by the People’s Republic of China—and Wade-Giles, which previously had been predominant. The editors have not sought to impose uniformity in this regard, which would be inappropriate for several reasons, but have let the authors use their own discretion. This means that in these articles one and the same person or institution may be referred to in two or more ways. For example, “Liang Shiqiu” is the same person as “Liang Shih-ch’iu.” Similarly, Xinghua University, long a competitor for academic preeminence with Beijing University (a.k.a. Peking University), is the same as “Tsing Hua University” and “Qinghua University.”

To compound the difficulty, the Chinese custom of putting the family name before what Westerners call the “first name” is often broken when the Chinese writer is addressing Western readers. For example, writing to Babbitt, Wu Mi signs himself “Mi Wu.”

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