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Roundtable Discussion on the Remaking of Connectedness

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Roundtable Discussion on the Remaking of Connectedness

As is mentioned in the Introduction, this is an edited chapter based on the roundtable discussions during the workshop. The discussions suggested how factors such as the time of migration, generational differences, education, gender balance, collaboration, language, religion, and contextualization work in the remaking of connectedness. In describing ongoing discussions, this chapter aims to show how we come to share additional key points to understand the remaking of ethnic/micro-regional connectedness.

1. Time of Migration and Difference in the Survival Strategy

Takako Yamada

I want to ask [Suchart Setthamaline], you once said that in the northern side and cities there is quite a difference, that there is a big difference between those who live in the mountain and those who live in Chiang Mai city. Does this mean that those who live in the mountain are newcomers? I think that in Chiang Mai, there seems to be a history of resentment. I mean, they have a very deep history. But compared with those who live in the city, those who live in the mountain may not have the same history. I'm wondering whether the situation, the differences in the situation, come from the depth of the history.

Suchart Setthamaline

I think, actually, that they are not newcomers. When the Yunnanese came to Myanmar, and there are many Chinese Muslim communities in Myanmar also. The border to Myanmar would be the Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai in the mountain area, and then they moved to the city later. Yes, they moved to the city later, but it's a quite old community and mostly they practice agriculture. They have plantations, such as lychee plantations.

Takako Yamada

Then, what is the difference between those who could succeed in migrating to the city and those who could not just stay in the mountains? That comes from either personal talent or some other factors?

Liulan Wang-Kanda

My idea is that, in these places along the borders, namely Yunnanese Muslim villages, some people, Yunnanese Muslims, they have a special role because they used to be ex-soldiers of Kuomintang, the Nationalist Army. They partly engage in the religious activities.

On the other hand, they also have a very important role to be a mediator between Taiwanese and Yunnanese communities. Their fathers, some of their fathers, used to be soldiers and the Taiwanese government still supports these Kuomintang soldiers. Some of the Muslims were soldiers in the past, so the second-generation also still keep these relationships. They have this very important role. They cannot move from refugee villages along the borders. Some people move to the cities such as Chiang Mai, but they have their own house in the border areas as well, so they have two houses sometimes, and go back and forth and back and forth and...

Takako Yamada

That's just one thing. In your book [to Liulan Wang-Kanda] it is also mentioned that there are those who belong to Kuomintang and those who came as traders. Those who came as traders seem to be able to easily move to the south.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

Because, for example, one community was built at the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century. Traders have a longer history than the Kuomintang Army. In the city areas, for instance, in Chiang Mai and in Chiang Rai, there are very old Yunnanese Muslim communities. Those who became refugees after 1949 also have the connection and married these descendants. They have another network. They have optional networks that are different from Kumintang soldiers.

Takako Yamada

I mean that those whom you mentioned and those he [Suchart Setthamalinee] speaks about seem to have different origins.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

I think the origin is same, but they have many choices to make when they migrate.

Takako Yamada

I mean the origin is not only Yunnan, not in that sense. Their background...

Liulan Wang-Kanda

The background is, traders, some of them are civilian traders, some of them are porters of the Kuomintang Army. So they are also different. The network is also different.

Takako Yamada

But to form a middle-class, it is necessary that they have especially strong motivation and their own motivation.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

For example, those ex-soldiers whose father was a famous Kuomintang Army member, a Yunnanese Muslim, they have social capital from that, because he's the leader of the

Kuomintang, so he is very famous among the Muslim communities.

Suchart Setthamalinee

You know, the owner of the tourist company, he also came from the mountain area. We cannot say it is mutually exclusive between the two because they move forth and back, they have relatives and things like that.

Takako Yamada

Very flexible and very adaptive. I see.

2. Generational Differences in the Remaking of Connectedness

Setsuko Sonoda

I was pretty interested in the generational differences inside of the Chinese Muslim community in Chiang Mai. What you [Suchart Setthamalinee] presented about is somehow so unique about Chinese Muslims, but it's because of some differences among generations, namely the generations inside the communities. If you know anything about the difference between the first generation and the second generation, and if you know anything about the third generation, if there is some sort of cultural change or class change or social change with each generation, I'd like to know about this.

Suchart Setthamalinee

I think that's a very interesting issue and maybe I'll have to conduct new research. I think that's a big issue, about the class change, but as I show you, maybe for the first and second generation, I have seen the difference. Because for the first generation, they are less educated and they are just like traders, small traders, things like that. But, for my generation, the second generation, we're more highly educated—big company, big business, things like that come out. I call that becoming middle class.

But for the third generation, I think we need to explore more about that because I feel that many of them wouldn't speak Yunnanese. But, even though they don't speak Yunnanese, I feel that they are trying to learn more in Chinese, in Mandarin Chinese, and try to connect to relatives in the mainland.

Setsuko Sonoda

This is something really interesting. How do we have to think about immigrant-oriented society? Initially the second generation creates something based on what the first generation went through. Yet, in my case study of the Chinese in Vancouver, usually the second generation and first generation are both quite active to do and produce something. In your case, it's really interesting to know about the old Chinese way to chant the Quran and to display the signs on the mosques' gates.

3. Importance of Education in Host Society

Elena Glavatskaya

[To Suchart Setthamalinee] I would like to ask you two questions. One is rather simple. Is it correct to say that every Muslim Chinese living in Thailand can speak three languages, Arabic, Chinese and Thai?

The other question is more complicated. It seems that you have developed a unique system of Muslim education and through these educational institutions you establish inner connectedness. Your Muslims are not dependent on Saudi Arabian educational institutions. There is no need. They are connected through the inner educational network, which includes several levels of education: primary, secondary, and, what is very important, religious education. You do not need foreign teachers and you do not need to send your students abroad to get religious education. That is how you transfer and reproduce your system of values, avoiding uncontrolled import of foreign values from somewhere else. Can you please give us more details about your educational system?

Suchart Setthamalinee

Yes. To answer the question about the languages, it's actually now Arabic, Chinese, Thai, and also English, four languages. For the second question, your observation is very interesting. You know, as I said, I think during the past decades, they were confronted with the Islamic version of Wahhabi. They are trying to construct a solid boundary inside the Muslim communities. Even though the religious teachers, they are not Chinese Muslims, but you know, for the contract with the committee of the mosque, they will put the requirement that if you come to this community, you have to practice the Islamic—you have to follow the Islamic tradition as our communities have followed them for a long time, they just put as requirements.

Because you know, for the Wahhabi people, when they have the death ceremony, the Wahhabi didn't practice reading of the Quran for the dead for 3 days or 7 days. But for the Chinese traditional practice, they read the Quran for 3 days or 7 days to pray for the dead. But according to the Wahhabi teaching, they said, this is *Ḥarām*. This is forbidden. It's not good to do things like that. But the community is still very strong. They are very strong and, they still deserve to follow every tradition. Even though I do know, too.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

[To Suchart Setthamalinee] I have one question about the accomplishment of higher education among the Chinese Muslims. You mentioned that there are some higher class people who got a Ph.D. or became a doctor, reached some high position. But I found many people in the border, mountainous areas and they are also Muslims, with poor conditions, poor educational conditions.

I think now among the people who live in the center of the Yunnanese Muslims in

Chiang Mai and those people who live in the mountain areas, class is something stratified. Although, people who live on the mountain area, they have no chance to access the very famous [school], only the Thai people, who are rich and have a good family background, can enter the private primary school, which is very famous in Chiang Mai. I want to know about the current situation for people in the mountain areas.

Suchart Setthamalinee

I think it's true. I think now the lower class is very small in the Chinese Muslim communities. You have to keep in mind that many of them in the border area, they send their students to Taiwan, to work in Taiwan. They own big plots of land for a plantation, even though maybe they don't have higher education, but they do business and they send their children to work in Taiwan. Yeah, they own a large amount of land, and I think that also, we have to keep this in mind.

In the border area, the community is very small, it is not a big community in the border area. Actually, I am now also doing a research project in the border area about the peace-building in the ethno-religious pluralistic societies. I'm doing research in those communities to see how the Chinese Muslims peacefully coexist with the Chinese non-Muslims, with the Christians, with the Buddhists. Things like that, how they can peacefully coexist, trying to bring up this kind of lesson.

4. Keeping and Transfer of Cultural/Ethnic Identity

Elena Glavatskaya

[To Tsering Choedon] It is especially valuable that you are presenting the inside view, so we can get a deeper understanding of the situation.

Using this opportunity, I would like to ask you a question that is unusual for an academic conference. Most of today's presentations were about the communities of people who decided to move to a new place and went to live there for good, having no intention to return.

In the case of the Tibetans who immigrated to Canada, what is their dream? Do they feel like they are in Canada temporarily and that they will return eventually to Tibet? Or are they creating their own cultural landscape in Canada, feeling that, well, life is like that, we are Buddhist, we are Tibetans, but we are Canadians as well? Let us imagine the impossible. China suddenly decides to give independence to Tibet and promises to never, ever touch or disturb the Tibetan people. So, what happens next? Will the Tibetans return to Tibet? Do they live with such a dream?

Tsering Choedon

Thank you for this interesting question. When I answer it is not based on any study, but it's my own experience within the Tibetan community. During my parents' time, they

were eager to go back to Tibet and, unfortunately, they died in exile. Even though time has changed, the Tibetan people still want to go back to Tibet, yes, of course, but then this was not happening.

Now, Canada is a country where they respect multiculturalism, so my daughters' generation, they think that they are Canadian Tibetans. That is by their choice. But they are Tibetans, too. Even though their Tibetan-speaking is not like mine, their Tibetan writing is not like mine, but, they said, they are in a more dynamic situation, being in Canadian society, being a Canadian and being Tibetan in a different way, not like you, mama. They definitely, my son and my daughter, they definitely would like to have a connection, perhaps maybe go back to Tibet and come back to Canada, not like my parents thought of. This is my situation, my experience with my children, and with my father. Did I answer your question?

Elena Glavatskaya

Yes, thank you very much. In a way, it is similar to the situation with the Chinese who immigrated to Canada. They created new connection to the new land and it has become equally valuable to them, perhaps even more important than their parents' connections to their past and culture. That is why they do not want to learn Chinese. I'm just thinking that it is very likely that the same will happen with the next generation of Tibetan immigrants to Canada. They will stop being interested in studying Tibetan language and practices.

Tsering Choedon

Because of multiculturalism in Canada, in the Toronto—it may be the same with other provinces, too—in the Toronto District School Board system, they encourage multicultural imparting of the languages, so they also run international language classes. In a year, they get 2.5 hours across 30 days, which means every week, one 2.5-hour period is allotted to study to your own ethnic language. Chinese, Bengali, Tibetan, or whatever. Tibetan children are participating there, but once in a week. If they don't speak Tibetan in their home, it is very difficult to be a Tibetan like how we were raised in India within the Tibetan community. This is the third or fourth generation. As for the first generation, the excitement is they're being a proud Tibetan and keeping all your things. But the next generation, they'll definitely be Tibetan. Right now, they are proud to be Tibetan but the dynamic will be shifting, that is for sure. Then, change is law of nature and we should accept.

5. Gender Balance and Inter-marriage

Elena Glavatskaya

[To Liulan Wang-Kanda] Thank you very much for bringing the demographic issues to our discussion. It seems that severe gender disproportion is usual among first-generation immigrants. And in such situation male immigrants have great difficulty in finding

spouses and creating a family unless they decide to marry a local person.

However, for the second generation it is a bit easier. Then, it is a question of their own choice whether to pick a spouse from the very same ethno-religious community or to marry an outsider. Then there is another issue—the community’s reaction to such decision.

It seems to me that it is very important to trace these mixed marriages and attitudes to such mixed marriages. Several years ago we made a similar attempt in Russia. There was a nationwide survey in the form of an extensive questionnaire. Among many other questions there was “What is your attitude towards ethnically mixed marriages?” An interesting thing was that people generally did not express negative attitudes toward mixed marriages. They answered, “I don’t mind,” “That’s okay,” “That is a good thing.” However, when the question is posed slightly differently, as “Would you mind if your son or daughter marries someone from another ethnic or religious group?” Then, they usually answered that they would not approve of such a marriage, or “it depends, which religion, which ethnicity.”

From this point, I think it is important to take into consideration the first immigrant generation’s gender disproportion and how eager they are to marry outsiders. Then you can see whether this disconnection is indeed tight and the community wants to keep it ethnically or religiously endogamous, avoiding mixed marriages.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

In Chiang Mai, there are some arranged marriages, It’s sometimes very hard to find a Yunnanese Muslim woman with a Yunnanese Muslim man, so the father arranges the marriage, or she as the daughter, the father, brother, son or relative, they could get together. Especially, it’s very interesting that Panthay, which Suchart [Setthamalinee] mentioned, Panthay Muslim is another small subgroup of the Yunnanese Muslims, who migrated from the end of nineteenth century from Dali and around there. They were settled in Burma. They are called Panthay. These people, they have a strong identity. They want their son or daughter to agree to have an arranged marriage. For example, a male Panthay Chinese Muslim descendant in Chiang Rai met a female Chinese Muslim from the same origin, that is, Panthay in Chiang Mai. They finally got married through arrangement by their relatives and parents. Another example is that my informant told me about one Chinese Muslim male who was in America. His father arranged his marriage when he was in America, doing so with a Yunnanese Muslim woman in Chiang Mai. They hadn’t known each other in the past, but the father just tried to make an arranged marriage. But the male didn’t like her and refused to do so. Arranged marriage by parents, relative to relative is still common among them.

Elena Glavatskaya

Exactly, there could be parents, community, elders, or civil or religious authorities, that is

what I mean. It is the way to keep connectedness.

6. Intercultural Collaboration in Host Society

Setsuko Sonoda

[To Tsering Choedon] I have a question. Do you have Chinese Canadian supporters, especially among the second generation or later generations? Because when I was doing my research, I just feel like the first generation of the Chinese immigrants and also the second and later generations of Chinese Canadians, their political stances are totally different.

For example, the second and later generations, they actually severely criticize the Communist government's way to intervene in the Tibetan issue and also criticize their way of getting into international society. The Tibetan issue is so dear between Tibet and the current Chinese authority, I am pretty sure the first generation is bringing their way of thinking from China directly, so they were exposed to their information from China. But as for the second generation, they are mentally separated from the political influence from mainland China, so they might be different. I was thinking, if you have Chinese Canadian supporters who are interested in the Tibetan issue, how they were involved in your activities?

Tsering Choedon

Yes, you are right. We have Chinese Canadian supporters, too. But when we meet with them in Toronto, there are different Chinese Canadian associations. Some came after the '89 Tiananmen Square [Massacre]. They are vocal and they don't at all trust Chinese authorities.

Then there are another Chinese who want the Chinese to be democratized. There are still other Chinese who have the same interest in a Chinese background, but they are in a more—they don't bother about the politics of it, but they want China to be good. When we work together, there is a big difference in opinion, so normally sometimes when we have issues then we work together. But other times, we would like to be friends with the Chinese. But when the Chinese have two, three different groups, then it is also uneasy for us.

We understand the differences of opinions that each has because they have their own reasons. Sometimes, like with the Confucius Institute, this year [2014] there was an issue with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). TDSB has some alignment with the Confucius Institute, which introduced the teaching of Mandarin along with other aspects of Chinese culture by the Confucius Institute in the TDSB schools. This institute has been criticized for advancing CCP's [the Chinese Communist Party's] political agenda on issues like human rights, Taiwan, etc., and it also undermines academic freedom. It's not that imposed but then if they learn Chinese, so... they have been funded by the

institution.

Then again, we have a common ground. We all work together because the Confucius Institute is a soft power that the Chinese [government] would like to spread into the world; universities [in Canada and US] had bad experiences out of that. Tibetan people were at first not aware, but then there was some process and we were successful [in pushing the TDBS to cancel China's Confucius Institute deal].

But then, we did not come as a group of Tibetan-Chinese, but as concerned parents of children studying in the TDSB schools. Because the Confucius Institute only supports the simplified Chinese, which is not compatible with the Taiwanese Chinese or Hong Kong Chinese. We were successful in convincing TDSB authorities. It was a collective effort, but then effort was shown as a parents' group, even though all the groups were there together.

7. Connection with Homeland

Elena Glavatskaya

[To Setsuko Sonoda] Are there any connections with mainland China? My case study of the Russian Catholics [of Polish origin] shows that there are connections with their historic motherland and its culture. It is very important for them to develop, support, and maintain such connectedness.

Then, you mentioned that this policy of multiculturalism inspired the movement, but as you presented it, two people started collecting items, memories, documents, even before the announcement of this policy. It seems that there was some movement among the intellectual elite even before the Canadians introduced a multiculturalism policy. But maybe you disagree with that.

Setsuko Sonoda

Yes, connectedness with China, especially the mainland. Recently, creating memories of family history is extended to their ancestors' life in mainland China, so some Chinese Canadians have started to pay visits to their ancestral places, especially in Guangdong province. They've tried to excavate deeper into their identity by looking at mainland ties, but this kind of movement is occurring among Chinese descendants who came from Guangdong province, and this has not occurred among Chinese people from Shanghai or Beijing, who nearly all came here as newly rich people, or among people from Hong Kong.

We have to look at what kind of Chinese group in Vancouver is actually positively doing this sort of activity. For example, some Chinese groups from Hong Kong are not quite active in the history preserving movement, but they are more active in welfare activities among Chinese elders. The history of Chinese in Canada is always related to Guangdong

province. This kind of fact has brought some conditions to Chinese descendants whose ancestors came from Guangdong.

Another one is about multicultural policy. I think probably I have to put too much emphasis on the policy side, but this is because I am from Kobe, which is pretty famous among the Chinese community there, and also I am deeply involved in the activity of Chinese in Kobe, who are doing an oral history project and also excavation of their own history.

But if we compare Chinese in Kobe with Chinese in Vancouver, the history-preserving movement is really different. Usually, as for Chinese in Kobe, a very, very limited number of Chinese were active in the history-preserving movement in Kobe. Those limited populations are quite confident that they are Chinese. But there is another group or there is another generation who is not really vocal about their identity as Chinese. Maybe I can say it depends on the social situation, which, how can I say... gives a space, gives priority, and/or gives confidence to speak about their identity as mainly Japanese, or mainland Chinese, and non-Canadian. Somehow I feel like social status, mental factors, and micro factors are so important to think about for this kind of history-preserving movement.

8. Importance of Language in Religious Services

Toko Fujimoto

[To Elena Glavatskaya] This summer I met with Catholic sisters in Kazakhstan. One of the two sisters is from Slovakia and the other is from the Czech Republic. You said that when Catholicism was revitalized in Ekaterinburg, they were supported by the organizations or persons from abroad. I would like to ask you if they are mainly Poles. The support came from only Poland or from the other countries also?

Elena Glavatskaya

Thank you, the support came from different Catholic countries. The local Catholics collected some money, they also received finances from Poland and other countries, but it was still necessary to arrange the construction and to work hard. The volunteers came from different countries: Italy, Slovakia, Poland, even one Brazilian. It was an international community and wide international support.

Before the revolution, Russia had its own schools to educate Catholic priests in St. Petersburg. Nowadays, Russia does not have such educational institutions. Most contemporary priests came from Poland. All the Ekaterinburg Church priests came from Poland, however in the Ural northern cities there are priests from the Italian Order of Lazarists.

Toko Fujimoto

In which language do they talk about Catholicism?

Elena Glavatskaya

Well, that is an interesting issue, and of course language agenda is very important for the connectedness. The Poles hoped that the service will be in Polish and it will help them to maintain language and ethnic identity. However the Pope decided that services should be understandable for everyone regardless ethnicity. The Poles who devoted themselves to construct the church hoping that their children would be practicing Polish were disappointed. So as a compromise, the Ekaterinburg priests conduct most of the services in Russian, however, one service is in Polish.

In the northern parishes of the district, Italian priests conduct services in Latin, as it used to be before the Second Vatican Council.

In many former territories of the Soviet Union, where there were no connections with Vatican during the whole twentieth century and little was known about the Second Vatican Council decision about vernacular languages, Catholics still use Latin. The parishioners are usually elderly people who prefer to stick to their habits. For some, that is more important to hear the language of the service that they are used to hearing than to understand what it is all about.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

[To Elena Glavatskaya] I have two questions. Russian language and Polish language are still used during the service?

Elena Glavatskaya

Yes, that is correct.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

But I want to know, Bible is written in which language and to sing hymn, which language is used—they're printed in which language?

Elena Glavatskaya

They use Bible texts in Russian, all the hymns are translated and sung in Russian.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

Only Russian, no Polish inside?

Elena Glavatskaya

Unfortunately, I have not been to the Polish service. However, it could be that they bring their own texts. All the hymn books I saw in the church were in Russian. The texts themselves are rather traditional and so is the music. There is organ music, but the text is

Russian.

Liulan Wang-Kanda

Yeah, because I know that the Chinese church in Japan, built by Taiwanese, their hymnal is written in Taiwanese, Chinese, English, and Japanese. When they sing, some people who are not able to speak Japanese, they will sing in Chinese while some, who want to sing in English, will sing the same song in English. There are three things at the same time. But as for the Bible, there are two versions of Bibles, those who can read Chinese will select the Bible written in Chinese, but those who cannot read Chinese will select the Bible written in Japanese, so there are several Bible and hymnals.

Elena Glavatskaya

I am sure there are other than Russian-language books in the Church's library. When the church was consecrated in 1886 and the Poles pronounced Credo and sang hymns in Polish, the rest of the visitors who came to celebrate the consecration, many of them Russians, recognized the rhythm and joined the Poles in singing, although in their own language. It was natural to have services in Polish then. Now everyone speaks Russian in Ekaterinburg, but not every Catholic speaks Polish, even those of Polish origin. For such people it would have been a problem to follow service in Polish so that is why they have it separately and can practice Polish. Otherwise, the spoken language is Russian.

9. Scripts and the Way of Recitation of Religious Texts

Takahiro Kojima

[To Suchart Setthamalinee] I was very interested in your presentation, and especially the script written above [see photo 9 in Setthamalinee's paper]. The script is in Arabic, but it is a little formalized into the Chinese style. That is, it is not the same Arabic script used in the Middle East; it is a little different. Why don't you use the style of the Middle East instead of using the Chinese style?

Suchart Setthamalinee

This is quite similar to the Arabic style. But you know, as I will show you, this one is not the Arabic style. It's mixed with the Chinese style. This is Arabic. I think the Arabs, when they came to this mosque, it's very hard to read, even though they are Arabs. But this is an Arabic word, in a Chinese style. Very unique. This is also above 100 years old.

Actually, I can guess this character. I can guess because I'm quite familiar with the Chinese. Also, not just for the writing, but the pronunciation, when they read the Quran. They also read in the Chinese style, not an Arabic style. It's totally different. Luckily I am of the second generation and when I was a child, I studied with the Ustaz [teacher] from China. I got the Chinese style in the Quran, but after that for five years, we got an Islamic teacher from Central Thailand who taught the Arabic style, so I can practice two styles, actually.

Takako Yamada

Actually for me Kojima's presentation is very interesting because the practice—religious practice—of Palaung is deeply related with reciting the text. It seems that reciting is just like imagining the spiritual by hearing the tone or voices. This kind of spiritual feeling can be very related to the tone of recitation, I think. It means that the language of reciting has been more connected to the locality, however, it is highly probable that some consider, if the recitation is performed in the local language, then the practice is more attractive for them. Maybe there might be this kind of shift from Burmese or Shan to the Palaung depending on some sort of language shift. Then, how did they come to decide which language to use? I would like to ask more about this kind of language shift also.

But as you [Takahiro Kojima] explained it, it depends on the political affiliation to decide which language they usually use. If it changes, they also have to change the language. However, even though the official language has been changed, the local language is still kept. Maybe villagers would always like to recite in the local language. It's a key point that they prefer to use it.

Takahiro Kojima

Yes. I think, as I explained in this presentation, the first reason is that they can't understand it. But, as you pointed out, the tone is also important for them. I think they want to listen to the traditional tone, because they find it familiar. Even though some listeners cannot understand it, they are familiar with the tone.

Takako Yamada

Because in Tibetan, I'm not actually referring to the Tibetan's case, but I've worked among the Ladakhi and also Tibetan Buddhists. Even though they don't understand—local Ladakhi don't understand the meaning of the text written in Tibetan—if the monk recite texts with the constant rhythm in this way, all the laypersons feel very satisfied just hearing how the monks recite. The sound of this kind is very important sometimes for laypersons.

10. Translation of Religious Texts, Contextualization, and Sacredness**Elena Glavatskaya**

[To Takahiro Kojima] I was thinking whether we can compare this process or development with something that other religions went through at certain times. Like in Lutheranism or in Western Christianity, in some way to some extent, there was a similar movement to translate text into vernacular languages, so everyone would understand, so maybe that is an attempt to make it personal, so every person can understand.

On the other hand to keep the “original language” is also very important, because it often is perceived as a language of God or the language of forefathers, and is sacred as such. When Luther translated the Holy text into German there was a lot of opposition from

both the clerics and the laypeople. They used to hear, they did not understand, but believed that that was sacred. By the way, the Russian Orthodox Church still preserves the old Slavic language. My question is whether there was an opposition to his attempt to translate and to create the new language, scripts and start, actually, the movement?

Takahiro Kojima

Yes, that is a very good point. In my field, there is a similar situation. The young generation wants to change to the Palaung script because they don't understand the old one. But the old generation—they don't want to change. In some villages, they still use an old Shan language. Because according to them, when there is a ceremony, we must recite Shan texts; it is a tradition, which they say they don't want to change. The young generation, however, cannot understand it at all. The old generation can understand the meaning and they are used to the recitation.

Now, the situation is changing. In some villages, there is a conflict between the old style and the new style. My presentation focused on the new style but in fact in some villages the old tradition with the Shan language still continues.

Olle Sundström

Well, actually, just to comment on that, from a Lutheran context among the Sami, the indigenous group of Scandinavia, where they just 10–20 years ago, made new translations of the Bible into the Sami language. Before the bible texts were read in Swedish or Norwegian, the majority languages, in church services.

Now, that they had new translations into Sami, they started using that in the church, something which made some elderly Sami very uncomfortable. Some had never heard the Bible in Sami, so they would actually prefer to hear it first in Swedish or Norwegian, like they were used to, and then to get it translated afterwards; so the minister, when preaching or reciting the Bible should speak in Swedish or Norwegian, then someone should translate into Sami.

Takahiro Kojima

Yes. In the case of Buddhism, they use the Pali language when they pray to the Buddha. This is an Indian language, a very old language. They cannot understand the meaning at all, but when they pray to the Buddha, they must use it even if they don't understand the meaning. But when they listen to the recitation in the Palaung language, which is about the story of the Buddha, they want to understand the meaning. At the same time, they don't want to change the Pali language, because the Pali language is a very sacred language for the Buddhists. So I think there are two aspects. When they pray to the Buddha, they don't care so much about the meaning of the Pali. But if they listen to the stories, they want to understand what they mean.

11. Religion, Nationalism and Connectedness

Ippei Shimamura

[To Elena Glavatskaya] I heard Putin's administration supports Russian Orthodox for consolidating Russian nationalism. How does your government cope with the other religions, including the Catholic religion?

Elena Glavatskaya

You see, when the Soviet Union collapsed, there was the question of finding a national identity for each republic, including the Russian Federation. I mean, if we compare the situation with other republics, they were more united than the Russians in the Russian Federation. The Russians in the Russian Federation never thought of themselves as something solid. Soviet identity was very important, whether we liked it or not.

Well, now it all collapsed, and how to unite? For the Uzbek people, Uzbek language is the basis for unification and Islam; for Ukrainians, Ukrainian language and their version of Christianity; for the Lithuanians, even better, Catholicism and language. For the Russians, such a formula did not work. Everyone in the former Soviet republics could speak Russian. We were not religious due to the [state-mandated] atheism. There was a need of finding the national idea. Unfortunately, the country leaders decided that Russian Orthodoxy could become such a unifying idea. They would not listen to the academics' skepticism.

Then they decided, and is unfortunately in our legislation, that there are 'traditional' religions, such as Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, and Lutheranism. The indigenous religions were not taken into consideration, even if there was a very strong process of revitalization of indigenous traditions and individual rituals because they also had to find their own way and identity.

However, there is a positive development in this sphere, because the country leaders started to speak about Russian's diversity, which makes us rich. Finally, it seems that the voices of academics were heard.

Olle Sundström

Well, it was just a comment on this connectedness agendas and religion. I would say we have discussed religion in several talks here. Religions—often at least, not all religions—have a sort of advantage before many other factors in creating connectedness because many or most religions have, so to speak, universal claims and in that sense they try to be universally applicable in every time, in every cultural setting and so on, to create this sort of connectedness. And then of course it depends on how creative you are to contextualize this in different settings.

Elena Glavatskaya

Well, I agree in a way. For the Catholic community in the Urals, their religion was the basis for the connectedness. For the Khanty and Mansi—Siberian indigenous people—their religious traditions were the crucial issue for unification. However, for the Russians, their religion may not necessarily be the best unifying instrument, especially taking into consideration the fact that it was lost or abandoned by the majority. The Russians living in Russia have other unifying grounds and values commonly shared.

Edited by Toko Fujimoto.