Haciendo visibles las historias ocultas: discursos innovadores y compromiso político de antiguas voces silenciadas en Birmania, Tailandia, Camboya, India y Perú

Making Hidden Histories More Obvious: Innovative Discourses and Political Engagements of the Former Silent Voices in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, India, and Peru

CHAIR
Arlene Crampsie (Ireland)

Laurent Pordie (France): "Histories of a Medicine: Identities Constructions and Consolidations in the Tibetan World"

Celine Valadeau (France): "Human/Non-human Relationship as a Symbol of Identity: Discussion Attempts between Yaneshá (Peruvian buffer zone) and Bunong (Cambodian highland)."

Mony Pen (Switzerland): "The Thorny Emergence of the Civil Society in Cambodia"

Frederic Bourdier (France): "The Forgotten People: Recent Oral Explorations of the Past in Northeast Cambodia"

Jacques Ivanoff (France): "National Ideology and Contrasted Discourse in Thailand: Political Effects of New Voices"
Histories of a Medicine: Identities Constructions and Consolidations in the Tibetan World.

Laurent Pordie  
(France):

Abstract: Tibetan medicine (sowa rigpa) is found among various populations of Tibetan culture across the Himalayan range. This diversity has not only led to a plurality of practice, but also to multiple histories, each of them depicting a singular trajectory for this medicine. This paper will show how each history both reflects, and is articulated to the identities of the practitioners (amchi). To this end, I will take the urban, institutionalized amchi in Ladakh, a remote region of northwestern India, and that of their homologues in the Tibetan exiles community of Dharamsala in the same country. These people share common cultural traits, especially relating to Mahāyāna Buddhism, but their political trajectories, as well as their social and ethnic identity differ greatly. These differences are also to be heard in the way these two groups of amchi narrate the history of their medicine, shaped as it is by their socio-political environment. Of course, the history of Tibetan medicine differs depending on its geographical location. It would be difficult, even without considering the contemporary use of historical revisionism, to speak of history in the singular when we speak of Ladakhis or Tibetans. But the plurality I refer to does not ultimately reflect the historical developments of Tibetan medicine, but the way in which these developments are reinterpreted and reinvented. History as a science is a discipline which is instrumentalized in the social field. It is made of revised stories, the allure and the coherence of which mimic that of History and not what they are in reality, that is, political discourses motivated by vested interests.
Human/Non-human Relationship as a Symbol of Identity: Discussion Attempts between Yanesha (Peruvian buffer zone) and Bunong (Cambodian highland).

Celine Valadeau (France):

Abstract: Shamanism is no longer considered as an autonomous practice but more as an exchange, predation and power open space where relationship between human and human and human and non-human are played. By using of those socio-cosmological statements, shamanism is although an agentive authority. Its adjustments in front of external pressures – colonialism, etc. – are shown how the traditional founding principles has been evolved to ensure identity in order to be able to defend itself in front of the government rhetoric and other external pressures. In Amazonia, the restructuration process of the shamanism by integration in is own power and domination relational process that have been suffered from government and inter-ethnic interactions, is well studied.

Following this theoretical direction, the first part of this paper will develop how the relationship between human and non-human has been modified in order to create a new identity in a complex area where narcotrafic, wood extraction and subsoil gas wealth are developing activities. To face up to, ritual roots of Yanesha person production and by extension identity conceptions, have shown large transformations. Here, the Yanesha healing system will be considerate with using historical data coming from colonialism period, mythological histories and ethnographic material. In a second part this paper will have the aim to expose how could be thought similar resistance mechanisms by transforming traditional healing structures and personhood conceptions in the Bunong society leaving in South-eastern Asia. To the end, this paper will expect to demonstrate how are processed those resistance dynamics and what are the political repercussions.
The Thorny Emergence of the Civil Society in Cambodia.

Mony Pen (Switzerland):

Abstract: The civil war in Cambodia in the 70s has devastated the country’s infrastructures and killed three-million human beings, ranging from ordinary citizens to scholars. The war ended in the 90s, but it left afterwards starvation, trauma, fear and poor health conditions over the war survivors. The first legitimate government was established in 1993 through national election under the technical coordination and observations of the United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC). The civil society organizations (CSOs) dealing with human rights started their first activities two years prior to the election in order to enhance an understanding and participation of the Khmer people for that first ever important democratic event. Some of these organizations, later on, switched their focus to development-based activities especially in agriculture, health and education with the support of external funding.

The CSOs are presently divided into three categories with different roles and responsibilities: international NGOs, local NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs). The later have certain interests in farming, fisheries, and sanitation and women self-help groups. Local NGOs are more active across the spectrum from advocacy and human rights by providing and supporting social and humanitarian services. Besides, the activities of the international NGOs focus more on socioeconomic development in association with some local NGOs, CBOs, researchers and infrastructure expansions. According to the Asian Development Bank in 2008, it was estimated that 45% of the 1,500 local NGOs and 93% of the 316 internal NGOs registered with the government were active.

Overall, the CSOs’ missions contribute to the government’s development agendas that aimed to eradicating poverty, promoting human rights, gender justice, social welfare, and educations throughout the country. Consequently, the CSOs play a major role as human rights advocates, monitors and observers regarding the performances and political acts of the government. In this aspect, both relationship and partnership between the CSOs and government is vital because it is the core fundamental tool for a better progress in socioeconomic development. Nevertheless, the contemporary relationship between the government and NGOs is frequently challenged for those involved in human rights advocacy because they are perceived of being overly critical of the government. Conversely, it happens that some local NGOs survive mainly because of the favors and influences provided by international donors. Consequently, those local NGOs are established to pull funding for serving the interests of their allies, not for the community’s demand.

The nature of the CSOs is quite different: some of these organizations adjust their organizational objectives time-to-time according to the political wills/stances of the government. Consequently, the voice of CSOs in Cambodia is far from being homogenous and their ‘gentle attitude’ (with regards to the dominant political party) contains the risk to lower their powers, spirits, and democratic dimensions, especially with regards to their attempts in policy engagement level. On the other hand, it also affects the sustainability of their community development approach, as it shows a poor model of political engagement to the community-based organizations.
The purpose of my presentation is to share my personal observations and experiences regarding the voices of civil society organizations in Cambodia, insofar as I had ten years of experiences working with CSOs for community empowerment and human rights all over the country.
The Forgotten People: Recent Oral Explorations of the Past in Northeast Cambodia.

Frederic Bourdier
(France):

Abstract: For long it has been said and re-said by government workers, development practitioners, international experts and some social scientists that indigenous populations residing in the remote hilly areas were, more than others, facing a growing exclusion. This was not only due to their faraway location close by to the Vietnamese and Laotian borders, but because of being socio-culturally marginalised by the dominant past adjacent kingdoms and, last but not least, for the reason that a ‘real history’, in comparison to the neighbouring empires, was de facto non existing. In addition, highlanders have been perceived as vulnerable ethnic groups with a weakened identity which prevented them to be prepared, alone, to face the brave new world, mostly when it comes to economic development and social integration. A spiritual and material wealth ‘from inside’, rooted in the dynamics of their culture, was missing.

This subjective perception which has been highlighted as well in many parts of South-Asia cannot be taken for granted, mostly when it comes to the fact that their history has been totally neglected by official written sources (archives, chronicles, inscriptions). Such an asymmetric attitude has nowadays been worsened by the typical government preoccupation with ethnic cataloguing, already entertained in Viêt Nam and Lao PDR, and nowadays en vogue in Cambodia. Such a static classification refuses to take into consideration people’s existing legacy of the past, as well as their aptitude for innovation and capacity to develop strategies to modify, for instance, their socioeconomic patterns, their cultural options and their ability to navigate in a huge social network going beyond ethnicity, specifically in a vast borderland area. Worse, an external imposed decision to fail to recognize their history has compelled the highlanders to be falsely labelled with passive static features, not as a changing population characterized by an always active set of practises and ideologies, shaped by movement, fluctuation and exchange.

In reaction, as it has been done with the subaltern studies in India, various groups of highlanders are nowadays taking the decision to reshape their own story by incorporating what has not be depicted by official manuscripts and academic texts.

The purpose of such an attempt is not only to provide either a better legitimacy or a visibility to the ethnic groups who traditionally do not have any written script but to enable them be part to the formation of the Cambodian democracy. The paper will select examples that can shed light in that direction. I will demonstrate how the cultural creativity among hill peoples in a context of intensified socio-cultural encounters is associated with a strong desire to re-appropriate a vernacular history, mainly through oral sources. I will argue that the increasing complexity of this new trend does not occur in a context of ‘authentic identities and cultures’ deprivation’ but, instead, contributes to the elaboration of historical flexible identities, which are part of a continuum always in construction. And such a continuum is a prerequisite for the recognition of their political voices in the Cambodian society.

Jacques Ivanoff
(France):

Abstract: In Thailand some historians put into question official historiography, which only hear the voice of national researchers, the "other" being judged unable to understand the country. This is a biased vision of the history of the building of an ethnonation and can be manipulated (Winichakul 2002; Pavin 2004). This is how the Thai consensus appeared, based on the concept of thainess of being Thai”. Without being exclusive, this ideology does not authorize the sound of voices in the Nation. The limits of such official references appeared during the social crisis in 2010, which opposed “Red”, in short traditionalist farmers, outside the core of the Nation against the “Yellow”, middle class urban who considered themselves as “real Thai”. This emerging class opposition, until now evacuated from the national historiography and official discourse made the Thai consensus, on which is based the democracy, ineffective. This late appropriation, of the concept of social classes in the political discourse by the Red coming from the base (the paradox being that the real leaders are the wealthy and corrupt traditional pol) suddenly see themselves outside the Thai Nation, which the Yellow had occupied. If the Yellow were the real Thai, so you were they? Voices raised, discussion, meetings, reveals the force of the countryside and a “Commune” occupied Bangkok in order to reintegrate the national body would not go away before its new force being recognize. By talking to each other, they finally see the real “geo-body” of the Nation (Winichakul 1994) and the place the State imposed them. They criticize a false democracy; new voices lead to new discoveries with the real nation. It was liberation, a revolt that almost ended in a civil war. Thailand enters in a new democratic process.

We thus now that the refusal to hear social differences inside a nation lead to violence. This could be applied to the minorities, which have no way to express themselves, being Thai or not. Their own identity would only be transfer to so-called “porte-parole” (missionaries, Ngo, agencies, researchers, who have different interests and manipulated the ethnic discourses) are the ethnic minorities to really be able to express themselves, even is some manage to their advantage the “national Thai consensus”. But there is a new tendency among researchers working on migrants and other “forgotten” people at the margins or even “welfare margins” who get interests in the trajectories of the people outside the official records and who allow to better take into account the way millions of people lived differently in the country. But State, and especially Thailand, know very well how to manipulate these new discourses and we will see how it take it back and adapt the new threats for its own survival.