



**Panel's title : Conceptual Issues in Asian Context**

**Titre du panel : Les enjeux conceptuels dans un contexte asiatique**

**Coordinator (Affiliation, University...)** : Fleur Chabaille-Wang (INALCO, IAO) et Nguyen Thuy Phuong (CESSMA, ERHISE)

**Language** : English

**Topics** : Political Science, History (Interdisciplinary panel)

**Panel presentation :**

This panel is part of a set of four panels dealing with methodological issues. These panels aim to engage further reflection on new conceptual and methodological approaches dedicated to the study of Asian countries. This panel will deal with some major conceptual issues related to political theories (self-determination, liberalism etc.), culture, ethnicity, and nation symbols such as territory, ceremonies or rituals in several Asian countries (Vietnam, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, India). It will focus on the formulation and the reception of these concepts in colonial or nation building contexts. Drawing on different sources and approaches (linguistic, comparative political theory, anthropology, textual and visual exegesis), the four papers of this panel aim to shed new insight on Western and local influences in the process of formulation, appropriation and adaptation of these concepts in a particular national context. They will discuss conceptual dichotomies such as premodernity/modernity, domination/resistance, cultural transfer/indigenization. Among the cross-cutting issues of this panel, special attention will be devoted to the difficulty for the researcher to grasp the real scope of local and Western contributions to many cultural, social, and political concepts commonly used in Asian countries. Due to socio-historical and ideological factors, it is indeed a challenging task to clarify the intertwined influences upon which concepts or theories were forged and evolved. Through the reassessment of their historical roots, each paper of this panel will reflect on broader aspects, such as links between conceptualization and colonisation, as well as between conceptualization and nation-building process.

*Key words* : Asia ; concept ; political theory ; ethnicity ; nation symbols ; cultural transfer ; indigenization ; colonisation ; nation-building process.

**Participants :**

1) **Name(s) (Affiliation, University...)** : Kevin Pham (Ph.D Candidate in Political Theory, University of California)

**Communication's title** : Vietnamese Political Theory

**Language** : English

**Presentation :**

Is there a 'Vietnamese political theory'? In this paper, I use methods from the field of comparative political theory to advance the argument that there is no 'indigenous' Vietnamese political theory. In other words, there is no 'canon' of Vietnamese political thinkers. However, 'Vietnamese political theory' exists as a mélange of Chinese and Western political theories that Vietnamese intellectuals have adapted in order to formulate new conceptions of the self as well as an identity of resistance against foreign rule.

Colonized by China for about a millennium, Vietnam – its political thought and its social structure –



was primarily Confucian in the public sphere, while individuals in the private sphere could practice Buddhism and Daoism. Yet, logical tensions within the supposed harmony of Confucianism such as between 'yang' (strict adherence to social hierarchy) and 'yin' (fluid and expressive individualism) were debated between northern and southern Vietnamese. These debates would pave the way for the Vietnamese to diminish their reliance on Confucianism during the early decades of French colonization.

Beginning with French colonialism in the 1860s until the 1920s, intense debates among Vietnamese intellectuals revolved around several areas of contention. First, they debated whether or not to hang onto various forms of Confucianism, as some argued that such values would hinder modernization necessary for anti-colonial aspirations. Another major area of contention was whether or not to support reformers or activists, or collaborators or revolutionaries. Lastly, and most significantly, they debated whether or not, and to what extent, to accept various liberal ideas from the West, such as Social Darwinism, French republicanism, anarchism, and Nietzschean philosophy. This period of flowering liberal ideas was attractive to young Vietnamese who believed that a new values were necessary for self-critique and self-strengthening. Of course, the period of flowering liberal ideas during French colonialism was eventually displaced by Vietnamese adoption of Marxism and communism. A common conceptual thread that links all of these periods and their areas of contention is a central debate on how the 'self' ought to be conceptualized in relation to society. For example, for anti-colonial intellectuals, such as Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh, self-determination necessitated self-critique and self-strengthening. This discourse of the self could be argued in complex ways within the context of Confucianism, as, on the one hand, improvement of the self was necessary to ensure the harmony of clear Confucian social relations and filial piety. On the other hand, Western liberal discourses of the self stressed individual autonomy, which spurred feminist movements and thus threatened traditional Confucianism.

Thus, Vietnamese 'indigenous' thought is absent in the sense that there are no original or orthodox moral doctrines. Rather, if a Vietnamese political thought can be spoken of, it is a *mélange* of various foreign political theories: Confucianism, Western liberalism and communism, all linked by evolving conceptions of the self's relation to society, and with an identity of self-determination and resistance from foreign control.

2) Name(s) (Affiliation, University...) : Joseph Ciaudo (PhD in Intellectual History of Modern China, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales)

**Communication's title : Écrire une histoire du concept de « culture » (*wenhua*, *bunka*, *munwa*) en contexte sinogrammique : concept lexicalisé et concept syntagmatique**

**Language** : English

**Presentation** :

L'histoire conceptuelle, entendue autant dans son approche germanique autour du projet de la *Begriffsgeschichte* de Koselleck que dans la logique prônée par l'école de Cambridge, trouve peu à peu sa place en terrain asiatique. Les histoires des concepts modernes en chinois, japonais et coréens n'ont cessé de se multiplier au cours de la dernière décennie. Néanmoins, un problème méthodologique de première importance n'a jamais été véritablement adressé par la recherche : à savoir la question de l'unité lexicale des termes sur lesquels furent battis les concepts de la modernité. À la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du XX<sup>e</sup>, de nombreux néologismes furent confectionnés au Japon, en Chine, et également en Corée, afin de « traduire » les sciences et humanités occidentales. Comme l'écrivait Michael Lackner (1993), le problème avec ces néologismes est que « leur indivisibilité n'est qu'apparente, car la profondeur sémantique des éléments composant chaque néologisme agit de telle sorte que le lecteur est tenté de les analyser séparément et les dissocier de nouveau ». En Extrême Orient, les concepts sont le résultat d'une stratification de multiples significations acquis au cours de l'histoire, mais en plus, à ceux-ci s'ajoute un processus similaire pour les caractères isolés qui servent de composants. Aussi, par exemple, l'élément lexical *wenhua/bunka/munwa* (souvent traduit par « culture ») ne fait pas sens uniquement pour lui-même ; il est composé de deux sous-unités de sens, deux morphèmes dont il



faudrait également connaître la trajectoire conceptuelle. Du fait de la souplesse des langues sinogrammiques, le lecteur peut être tenté de lire *wenhua/bunka/munwa* sur la base des différents morphèmes qui le composent. Ainsi, l'histoire des concepts en Chine doit rejoindre une histoire de la lecture.

Cette communication propose de repenser certaines perspectives méthodologiques de l'histoire conceptuelle pour les langues sinogrammiques en distinguant deux types de lecture conceptuelle : lexèmes et syntagmes. À travers l'étude du concept de *wenhua/bunka/munwa*, ce papier montrera que les sens accordés aux termes peuvent être différents en fonction de la lecture choisie. *Wenhua* n'est pas uniquement une traduction de la *Kultur*, mais peut être aussi « la transformation (*hua* 化) par les lettres (*wen* 文) ». En analysant plusieurs documents d'époque, cette recherche démontrera qu'en Extrême-Orient, les concepts modernes de « culture » et de « civilisation » ne furent pas uniquement le produit d'une importation conceptuelle européenne, mais le résultat d'une production locale, puisant ses sources dans des textes et des pratiques de l'époque impériale. Aussi l'auteur proposera une réflexion sur les moyens à employer pour rédiger des histoires conceptuelles en terrains extrême-orientaux.

3) Name(s) (Affiliation) : Goh Yi Yee (Ph.D Candidate, National Chiao Tung University)

**Communication's title** : Problematizing Study Asian in Social Sciences: A case study of Malaysia ethnic relations

**Language** : English

**Presentation** :

Examining and reviewing the past efforts on study Asia is not only necessary and possible to provide a solid base for fostering and further conducting a substantial research but also should be posited at the very beginning of conducting such research. The mean is to admit the wrongdoings, righting the wrongs (Spivak), thereby, identifying the drive launching area studies in the past, although by doing so might revoke the (mis)recognition of Western domination's attempt, yet that possibly could clear the cloud of colonial gaze. These conceptual dichotomies for domination: modern/premodern; civilized/uncivilized; inferiority/superiority (literature on modernity/coloniality), could merely consolidate biases, misunderstanding and evoke dissent from the side of being studied. Hence it is crucial for scholars to clarify and re-examine terms or concepts that Western coined, invented or constructed, avoid all sorts "taking for granted" usages at the first hand. Taking the problematic studies on Malaysia ethnic relations for instance, the concept of ethnic itself is adapted or appropriated without the slightest hesitation and leaving out contextual position by scholars from political science, anthropology and sociology disciplines. Disentangling complex and diverse society or history of Asia as it is, studying Asia also requires the process of re-reading Asian history as a whole, for us not to be trapped and became one of the visual impaired figures in the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, holding an elephant tail and said "the elephant is like a tail".

4) Name(s) (Affiliation) : Isha Tirkey (PhD Candidate in Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University)

**Communication's title** : Symbolic representations of the Indian nation and its territory

**Language** : English

**Presentation** :

The new methodologies that are being used in the study of nations and nationalisms focus more on the nuanced socio-historical categories that have transpired in the national space. In conducting such an analytical research we find that symbols are inherent part of the complex nation building process where symbols and ceremonies are introduced, altered, abolished, and re-established during pivotal times in history. Thus they are no longer just seen as a decorative item in world



politics. All nations adhere to similar symbolic and ceremonial codes that raise boundaries against non-members and authenticate them to the degree that suggests that nations can be represented by one flag and its 'raison d'être' expressed through one national day.

The main research question is how the understanding of nation is created and recreated through symbolic forms in territory and why today they command such profound emotional legitimacy? Representations of the nation through geographical maps, institutions, poetry, songs, ceremonies, culture, art, etc. contribute to shaping the grammar of the nation while also mobilizing the elite and the masses alike to its service. What will be studied is the ways in which these cultural artefacts have originated, have aroused deep sentiments, and have been challenged and questioned. Territory forms my basic case study where I will be looking at the ways in which the nation has been glorified by reconstructing the past mostly by inventing traditions and ceremonies. Territorialization of memories and attachments have created a symbiosis of people and land, regarded by its people as an ancestral land or homeland, thus making the homeland not only 'ours' but also 'sacred'. Popularisation of the territory through the images of 'Bharat Mata' or Mother India which are closely associated with a particular religion and the two famous temples, has made the socio-political and cultural environment quite complex. Such religious interference makes these symbols exclusionary in nature to such an extent that people of other religions, communities often have to give loyalty test. References will be also made to the songs of the nation which help in its further sacrilization, they are the lyrical counterparts like flags and emblems, thus lifting the vast expanse of mundane, material land to a more powerful meaning. Here particular emphasis will be on the national anthem 'Jana Gana Mana' and the national song 'Vande Mataram', the historical role each song played and is still playing, the controversies surrounding them, and the Constituent Assembly debates on them. A study on national days and ceremonies show us that these days serve as an effective means of nationalization, the repetition of identical rituals of remembrance every year gives space where the individual can encounter and celebrate Indian-ness and belonging to a particular landscape.

Since a major portion of my work will be trying to understand how symbols were formed, archival work becomes necessary in order to unearth the reasons for creating such symbols and why was it thought necessary. To look into the recent debates on these symbols a systematic study of newspaper articles will provide insights on the developments. Since most of the symbols are cultural appropriations, a textual exegesis on many literary works for example 'Anandamath' by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'Home and the World' by Rabindranath Tagore will provide information on how the society perceived of these symbols; further paintings and other art works will generate an understanding of the changing nature of symbols. Since songs as symbols have been greatly appropriated by the hugely popular Bollywood industry, a study on music videos will give an idea as to how these symbols appeal to the masses, for instance the various renditions of the national song 'Vande Mataram'; thus forming an ingredient of our daily lives and becoming a part of banal nationalism.