How to Narrate Oppressed Grief: from Yasukuni to Calcutta

Kana TOMIZAWA
University of Shizuoka

ABSTRACT

A difficult and important subject is the mourning of the dead, especially of those who met an untimely death in a tragic situation. In the case of war memorials, for example, we now see some changes in many countries, from national memorial facilities into more universal ones. It seems a natural change that new broad narratives for the dead beyond borders are demanded and have been emerging after the era of national narratives. However, there are also some cases where conflicts, splits, and oppression of narratives are still so serious that such a transition cannot easily occur. For example, Japan has no national war museum as yet, and also has a long debate concerning the position of Yasukuni Shrine and its affiliated Yushukan museum. In this paper, I would like to examine such problematic, ambiguous and floating narratives of the dead along some “borders,” focusing on two memorial sites of the British dead in Calcutta (Kolkata now). One is the monument to the victims of the “Blackhole Incident” in St. John’s church, and the other is the South Park Street Cemetery (SPSC).

The Blackhole Incident is the famous but historically quite dubious story of the massacre of 123 British captives by the Nawab of Bengal in 1756. SPSC is the largest colonial cemetery left in Asia, established in 1767. Both the monument and the cemetery are memorials to the rulers of colonial India, and are often analyzed as the symbols of imperialism meant to work as devices to display and maintain British dominance. This paper, however, will try to suggest a different perspective about those memorials.

In the study of modern India, investigations of death tend to fall into two contrasting analytical categories. While representations of the death of the ruled are the object of efforts to salvage them from elite history, those of the rulers are analyzed as imperial functions. Such post-colonial perspectives critical of Orientalism are important, but I also feel we need to rethink the meaning of setting such a border to divide the dead into two different categories.

With this intention, this paper also tries to examine the implications of “Death and Life Studies (DALS)”, a new discipline which has developed in Japan especially over the past two decades. It was first modeled on thanatology in the West, but has been undergoing a unique development. Besides the main focus on the collaboration between clinical studies and the humanities and social sciences, it also has looked into a comparative study of how cultures deal with death. I would like to consider what kinds of contribution DALS can make to colonial history.
Belonging and Religion in a Multi-Ethnic Society: Cross-Border Migration by Khmer Theravada Buddhist Monks in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta

Hisashi Shimojo
University of Shizuoka

ABSTRACT

A historical narrative on borders is often treated differently between nation-states, as we know from the historical disputes between Japan and other Asian countries. But there can also be major differences even between people born in a multi-ethnic society and the nation-state to which the society belongs.

This study examines belonging and religion in the multi-ethnic society of Vietnam’s Mekong Delta by focusing on cross-border migration by Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks. When French colonial rule came to an end in the middle of the 20th Century, the Khmer monks of the Mekong Delta had no choice but to negotiate relations with two countries, Vietnam and Cambodia. Until the 18th Century, the Mekong Delta was a far-away periphery from the kingdoms in both Cambodia and Vietnam. By the late 19th Century, however, the two regions were integrated into a unified colonial space, French Indochina. During the French period, the Khmer speakers in the delta used the Khmer language and Theravada Buddhist education system which was reformed and institutionalized by a few prominent monks such as Chuon Nath, a compiler of the first Khmer dictionary in Cambodia. However, this education system was gradually forced to change under Vietnam, a new nation-state which gained control of the Mekong Delta after decolonization in the middle of the 20th Century. The Vietnamese authorities abolished Khmer language education in public schools, restructured existing Khmer and Buddhist organizations, and sought to sever ties between the Khmer monks of the Mekong Delta and Cambodia. Nevertheless, the Khmer monks in the delta attempted to evade various political restrictions, and often crossed the Vietnam-Cambodia border in an undocumented way to get higher Buddhist and Khmer language education in Cambodia.

What has connected Cambodian society with Khmer monks in the multi-ethnic delta after colonization and decolonization? Why has the Vietnamese nation-state attempted to take a strong line on cross-border migration by the Khmer monks? To examine this question, this research uses historical narratives and ethnographic data collected through my fieldwork in Vietnam and Cambodia. In this discussion, this paper will reveal that religious migrants and nation-states continue to negotiate over cross-border migration at cross purposes, because of their different understandings of the past since colonization.
Kana Tomizawa is Associate Professor of the Department of International Relations at the University of Shizuoka, specializing in religious studies. Previously, she was Project Associate Professor at U-PARL (The Uehiro Project for the Asian Research Library), the University of Tokyo Library System, The University of Tokyo.

Her main interests are:

- Orientalism in the Indian context with a focus on the late 18th century.
- British cemeteries in India and their socio-cultural significance, especially in the late 18th century.
- The history of the modern concept of religion in India.


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Hisashi Shimojo is Assistant Professor of the Department of International Relations. He specializes the history and anthropology of Vietnam and Cambodia. His publications include War and Refugee: Oral Histories in A Multi-Ethnic Society of the Mekong Delta (Fukyosya, in Japanese, 2016). He has worked on issues of survival strategies under war and socialism, cross-border migration, and hybrid ethnicity.

He has explored the struggle and negotiation over governance and subsistence that arose between nation states and the local people living in a multi-ethnic society composed of ethnic Khmer, Chinese, and Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam under the war and socialism since the late 20th century. After the French colonial rule came to an end in the middle of the 20th Century, Vietnamese nation states tried to mobilize resources and manpower in the Mekong Delta, which has many non-Vietnamese people and which is one of the world’s leading rice-producing area. He explored how the local people coped with the national policies by focusing on their survival strategies such as draft evasion, black-market trading, and undocumented cross-border migration.