

Beijing Forum 2019

Language, Culture and Identity in Inter-Civilization Interaction (IV)

On the afternoon of November 3rd, the last session of the sub-forum “Language, Culture and Identity in Inter-Civilization Interaction” was held in Room No. 501 of the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University. Max Deeg, professor of Cardiff University, served as the panel moderator for this division. Zheng Xuan from Peking University, Praves Intongpan from Kasetsart University, Lian Chaoqun from Peking University, and Wilaiporn Sucharitthammakul from Kasetsart University were the contributors who delivered speeches during the session.

Professor Zheng Xuan gave the first speech, titled “Developing Affective Intercultural Competence (AIC) in Language Classrooms”. Professor Zheng recognized that recently there have been fruitful discussions on the development of intercultural competence (IC) through foreign language education. However, there is relatively not enough concern about the emotional dimension in current IC models, she said. Emotions, as she argued, play a very important role in mediating people’s cognition and behaviors. Negative emotions often reinforce stereotypes and prevent people from in-depth communication or real change. On the other hand, emotions serve as important catalyst in promoting intercultural competence development, if they are felt, understood, accepted, and expressed. It is therefore extremely important to understand the role emotions play in intercultural communication through different languages.

Praves Intongpan then shared his research in a presentation titled “The Cetiya (Pagoda) as a Communication of Buddhist Culture and Philosophy in ASEAN Countries”, in which he suggested that cetiya (or stupa) could be considered a repository for the Buddha’s relics and is considered a sacred place. After the time of the Great Death of the Lord Buddha, Buddhist monks and laymen managed to handle the Buddha’s remains in the traditional manner. During the reign of Emperor Ashoka the Great, the emperor ordered that the “Sanchi Great Stupa” be built, which was later the model for the construction of other great cetiya and stupa in different parts of the world and also influenced doctrine, belief, culture, Buddhist philosophy and morals. The construction of a cetiya needs unity and sacrifice, while most Buddhists consider a cetiya to be a sanctuary where they can pay homage and feel blessed. Therefore, cetiya are a source of culture, tradition, arts, history,

literature, rites, festivals, local, state and international tourism, as well as being a mechanism for the establishment of relationships among different ethnic groups, either in the past or in the future.

Professor Lian Chaoqun then led a discussion on the topic “Language Symbolism and Language Conflict: The Arabic-speaking World as an Example”, proposing language symbolism as a mechanism of language conflict and explaining how language is endowed with socio-political meanings to serve as proxy for socio-political conflicts. Based on experiences of language conflict in the Arabic-speaking world, Prof. Lian’s paper argued that maintaining language conflict at the symbolic level works to stabilize the socio-political structure in situations of conflict, while de-symbolizing language conflict may intensify extant socio-political conflicts, leading to disastrous consequences.

Wilaiporn Sucharitthammakul’s speech on “Śiṅgālovāda Sutra: The Recognition of Spiritual Civilizations in Ancient Indian and Chinese” conceives how the ancient spiritual civilizations of China and India are crucial as two civilizations who have interchanged between each other. Analyzing the five Chinese translated versions of The Śiṅgālovāda Sutra, Professor Sucharitthammakul argued that since history began until the present time, indigenous civilizations around the world, both material and spiritual ones, have moved and passed on to many places. While antique items of material civilization cannot be substituted in modern items, professor Sucharitthammakul said, spiritual civilization is never out of date. It is only the ancient languages themselves that may cause difficulty in understanding for newer generations of people. Nevertheless, the meaning and value of it still exists. It could still be further developed from its basis through the explanation of present-day language to suit the modern society.