Reviving traditions and creating futures

Katé is one of the largest festivals and religious gatherings of the Cham people of Southeast Asia.[1] It is the largest Cham festival in Vietnam, where the Chams have their ancestral homeland.[2] It is perhaps due to its popularity that there are two dominant misconceptions regarding *Katé*. The first is that *Katé* is the 'Cham New Year'. The second is that the festival is limited to the Cham 'Brahmanist' population, known as the *Cam Ahier* (or simply *Cam*).[3]

William Noseworthy

Above: Ritualistic bathing of Po Klaong Can and his wife, Palei Craok. (Bau Truc, Ninh Thuan, Vietnam)

IN REALITY, the *Katé* festival occurs during the seventh month of the *Cam Ahier* calendar, usually in October, and the participants in the *Katé* festival are not limited to the *Cam Ahier*, but also include *Cam Awal*. The Cham Awal are a complex community that may consist of both *Cam Islam* (Sunni) and 'polythetic' Bani elements, or may consist of Bani elements only, depending on the source.[4] Finally, the Cham community has recently adapted *Katé* to include other ceremonies and festivals, such as *Katé-Ramâwan* and *Katé Cần Giờ*, each of which represents a shift toward a transnational frame to redefine communal and cultural identity.

Misconceptions about *Katé* are rooted in the history of the Southeast Asian Cham. Once a classical civilization that stretched along nearly half of the contemporary Vietnamese coastline and deep into the hinterlands of the Annamite Chain, the 'archipelagic' territories of the Cham people were slowly annexed by various Vietnamese lords through a process of demographic and administrative expansion that lasted from the eleventh to the nineteenth century.[5] During this time Cham society changed greatly as the religious makeup of the population shifted from a Hindu-Buddhist society, to a society that was predominantly Muslim and living mostly outside of the Cham homelands.[6] This brings us to the question of the Cham community today and the festival of *Katé*.

Today the largest *Katé* ceremonies and festival is held in Phan Rang (Ninh Thuận province, Vietnam), at the site of the Po Klaong Garai tower (VN: *tháp;* C: *bimong/kalan*). Scholars and travelers alike may encounter many names for *Katé* including: *Mbeng Katé*, *Lễ Hội Katê*, *Katé-Ramâwan*, and *Katé Cần Giờ*, and the aforementioned, incorrect, 'Cham New Year' or even *Tết Katê*. It is safe to assume that any references to 'New Year' are not related to the actual practices of *Katé*, but rather to the cultural experience of the Cham in the Vietnamese national context. A lack of widely accessible research on Cham history and culture reproduces this significant misrepresentation. *Tết Katê* conflates the notions of the Vietnamese lunar New Year, more appropriately called *Tết Nguyên Đán*, with *Katé*. Transliterating *Katé* into the Vietnamese pronunciation Katê may seem very slight to non-tuned ears, but can be replicated to show differences amongst native speakers of Cham and Vietnamese.

Cham communal leaders generally reject the term *Tết Katê*. Meanwhile *Lễ Hội Katê* demonstrates an additional form of Vietnamization as, not only is *Katé* transliterated, but the additional Vietnamese terms, *Lễ Hội*, apply an understanding of Vietnamese social patterns to the Cham festival of *Katé*. While *Lễ* has a religious connotation meaning 'ceremony', *hội* is more social and means 'gathering'. While Vietnamese social patterns are sometimes applied (inaccurately) to better understand *Katé*, *Katé* itself has also changed over time. Today the Cham community frequently use *Mbeng Katé*, whereby the term *Mbeng* means 'to devour', 'to gnaw', or 'to destroy', but can also mean 'to make an offering to the gods', or even 'festival', according to the classic dictionary of Aymonier & Cabaton.[7]

Today *Katé* is a four day festival, with the last two days referred to as *Mbeng Muk Kei* (the festival of the ancestors), and which are centered on ancestral worship and the veneration of the oldest matriarch in each family. To the outside observer these two days may not appear so different from the first two days, but they most certainly are.

Katé, day by day

Each Cham family is associated with a hometown (C: *bhum Palei*; VN: *quê hương*), and each hometown is associated with one of the classical Cham creation deities such as the various incarnations of Po Inâ Nâgar or *devarajas* such as Po Romé and Po Klaong Garai; and other ancestral gods such as Po Sah Inâ and Po Klaong Can. On the first day of *Katé* each of these deities is worshiped at individual sites in the hometowns. For example, in *Palei* Hamutanran (VN: *Hữu Đức*) there is a parade that brings ceremonial gifts and clothing to a small figure of Po Inâ Nâgar. Cham *Ahier* priests offer gifts to this goddess of the soil, who according to Cham manuscripts written in the modern Cham script of *Akhar Thrah* was responsible for teaching the Cham community the art of weaving and the technology of lowland rice agriculture.[8]

The second day of *Katé* is the day of ascension to the 'towers' (VN: *ngày đi lên tháp;* C: *Katé di bimong/kalan*). The Cham towers are famous cultural symbols; particularly since the largest tower group at *Mỹ Sơn* was declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1999. During the ceremonies and festivals of the Cham calendar *(sakawi Cam)*[9] the Cham towers become sites of active communal worship, gathering, and celebration. Thus, on the second day of *Katé*, members of the Cham community go up to the towers and perform a ceremony to ask permission to open the doors, which is followed by offerings to the ancestral gods.

The third day of *Katé* is usually referred to as *Mbeng Katé Palei* and is the beginning of the '*Mbeng*' gatherings, ceremonies, and celebrations. On this day, Cham families return to their hometown temples for ceremonies and offerings to their local deities. For example, on this day Cham families in *Palei* Craok (Ninh Thuận province), gather at the local temple *(danaok)* of the deity Po Klaong Can, who is said to have taught the Cham people pottery, and the one responsible for granting Po Klaong Garai his royal 'prowess' *(ganreh)*. The ceremony starts by asking permission to open the doors of the *danaok*. Next, worshippers (mostly women) gather along the inside of the hall, while the priests (mostly men) sit off to the right hand side. As the ceremony reaches its peak, the *On Kadhar* (a specialized priest who is a master in the history of the Cham people, has a deep knowledge of Akhar Thrah, and plays the *kanyi*[10]) sings the *Damnuy* or 'history' of Po Klaong Can. Meanwhile, priestesses assist in the ritual washing of the figures of Po Klaong Can and his wife. To those familiar with Indic tradition these figures may appear as 'lingas' that have had faces painted on them. Finally there is a priestess, known as a *Muk Pajau*, who is responsible for channeling the *Po Yang*, or divine essence of the ancestral deities, in a ritualistic act of spirit possession. As the *Muk Pajau* is possessed by the Po Yang, she smokes two cigarettes, performs traditional Cham dances, thrusts her arms

Reexamining human rights discourse after the Jewish and the Chinese Holocausts

After World War II, considerable efforts were made in the discipline of philosophy to question the validity of Western metaphysics. Surprisingly, human rights discourse has not been the subject of similarly rigorous interrogation.

Sinkwan Cheng

ON THE PRESSING ISSUE of crimes against humanity, no serious efforts have been made in the liberal West to seek alternative preventions or cures outside human rights discourse, which had long existed before Auschwitz, but nonetheless failed to avert it; nor have thinkers and policy makers seriously examined whether the abstract subject-centered reason grounding human rights discourse has not unwittingly contributed to the problem it seeks to address. As Levinas turns to the Jewish tradition in the aftermath of the Holocaust in order to reprioritize the suffering face of the Other before the philosophizing subject, I turn to the Confucian tradition for an alternative ethics and politics that would foreground the destitution of the Other before abstract legal, political, and philosophical discourse about 'rights'.

The above is what I undertake in one of my two IIAS book projects, entitled *Reexamining Human Rights Discourse after the Jewish and the Chinese Holocausts.* In keeping with the Institute's spirit of bringing Europe to Asia, and Asia to Europe, both books in progress are devoted to translation, comparative philosophy, and comparative politics. That Levinas and Confucius are brought together in my first project is no coincidence: the Jews and the Chinese sustained the greatest crimes against humanity in World War II.[1] Both cultures provide alternative insights that might help explain how the splendid civilization created by the Enlightenment could dialectically turn into a monstrosity unleashing violence of an unspeakable kind. The significance of Levinas and Confucius in my project is further illuminated as I bring in critiques of rights discourse by Gandhi, and feminists including Scott, Glendon, and Gilligan.

'Humanization of man'

My project originated as a response to an important proposal made by the Chinese representative P.C. Chang (張彭春) at the drafting stage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Chang recommended that the foremost mission of the Declaration should be the "humanization of man".[2] For good reason: for the Chinese who had suffered an estimated loss of 10-20 million lives in World War II, crimes against humanity were committed not because of the absence of the concept of 'rights' in the world, but because people had lost their humanity and humaneness, as well as their ability to recognize the victims of such crimes as human beings. Chang's pleading fell on deaf ears.

World history since the adoption of the UDHR by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948 renders it time to reconsider Chang's proposal. Rights discourse has become ever more elaborate and sophisticated over the past 65 years. Yet the long list of human rights violations, simultaneous with the burgeoning of rights discourse, should command us to reexamine whether 'rights' were not yet another abstract notion hypostatized into a monotheistic God, and whether it would not be more to the point to refocus on the 'human' in 'human rights', and to reprioritize the flesh-and-blood human being before the intangible idea called 'rights'.

into the air, shouts, sings, and carries with her a hardboiled egg, all the while followed by an additional assistant who makes sure that her body remains safe during the spirit possession. Finally, she hands out the cigarettes and the egg as symbols of good luck for the upcoming calendar year. Following this, several fan dances occur and, as the words of the *On Kadhar* draw to a close, attention turns to the feast, before returning home.[11]

The last day of *Katé (Katé dalam sang)* is more intimate than the preceding three ceremonies. On this day each family gathers around the oldest matriarch of their house. The ceremony is still religious in form and involves rituals that are recited by a priest (ideally each house has a priest associated with that family), or a familial equivalent of the *Muk Pajau*. The last day of *Katé* focuses on the building of familial and neighborly relations through partaking in *Mbeng*, and gathering together to enjoy each other's company over food and drink.[12]

Katé reimagined

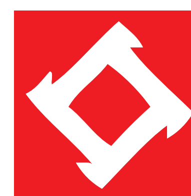
While many *Katé* rites in the Cham community, particularly those associated with the *Mbeng Muk Kei*, can be traced back to pre-Colonial and perhaps even pre-historic rituals, the nature of the Cham community today is changing. *Katé-Ramâwan* and *Katé Cần Giờ* are perfect examples of these changes. *Katé-Ramâwan* is a student-led production that ran for its eighth year in 2012. The production is generally held one or two weeks after *Katé*, in Hồ Chí Minh City; it is a musical production that blends dance, song, and traditional music with explanations of *Katé* ceremonies and Cham understanding of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. *Katé Cần Giờ* is another relatively new gathering (now in its third year) that emphasizes cultural dialogue amongst Cham populations from both Cambodia and Vietnam. While *Cham Ahier Katé* rites are still performed at *Katé Cần Giờ* there is also a greater emphasis at this gathering on bringing together both Islamic and non-Islamic elements of the Cham community in Southeast Asia, to promote inter-faith dialogue amongst the Cham population. It is clear that in the current reinterpretations of the Cham ceremonies of *Katé* there is both an emphasis on staying true to the traditions and history of the Cham people, while at the same time developing a transnational approach that creates a better understanding of the Cham as a Southeast Asia people.

William Noseworthy, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Vietnam National University. (noseworthy@wisc.edu)

Notes

1 The research for this piece was conducted during the Fall of 2012 with the assistance of a field research grant from the University of Wisconsin Madison's Center for Southeast Asian Studies, which was also used to begin research on Cham manuscripts. Additional thanks go to Dr. Dharbhan Po Dam, Dr. Sakaya, Đăng Nam Hòa, Sikhara, the families of Palei Hamu Craok, and many other students and teachers in Baigur (Hồ Chí Minh City).
2 Văn Thu Bích. 2004. *Âm Nhạc Trong Nghi Lễ Của Người Chăm Bà La Môn.* Hà Nội: Văn Hóa Dân Tộc, p.35
3 "Cham 'Brahmanists'" is a term derived from French colonial Orientalist researchers. However, "Cham Shaivites" might be a more appropriate term as the Cham population has historically been more associated with the worship of Siva than that of Brahma.
4 Yoshimoto, Y. 2012. 'A Study of the Hồi giáo Religion in Vietnam: With a Reference to Islamic Religious Practices of Cham Bani', *Southeast Asian Studies* 1(3), Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University
5 Taylor, K. 1999. "The Early Kingdoms", in Nicholas Tarling (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* 1(1):153. Cambridge University Press.
6 Pérez-Pereiro, A. 2012. 'Historical Imagination, Diasporic Identity and Islamicity among the Chams of Cambodia', Dissertation in Anthropology submitted November 2012, Arizona State University.
7 Aymonier, E. & Cabaton, A. 1906. *Dictionaire Cam-Francais.* EFEO: Paris, p.356
8 *Dalakal Po Nâgar.* Cham Manuscript written in the modern script of *Akhar Thrah.* Date and Author unknown. From the collection of Dharbhan Po Dam.
9 *Sakawi Cam* is a luni-solar calendar that is thought to have been created during the time of Po Romé (r. 1627-1651) through merging the Indic influenced solar *śaka* calendar with the Islamic influenced *jawi* calendar. The individual calendars are known as *Sakawi Ahier* and *Sakawi Awal.*
10 A two stringed instrument, played with a bow
11 Sakaya. 2003. *Lễ hội của người Chăm,* Văn hóa Dân tộc: Hà Nội, pp.135-149
12 Sakaya. 2010. *Nghiên Cứu và Phê Bình,* Phụ Nữ: TP Hồ Chí Minh, pp.304-305

Asian Studies Association of Australia Book Series
New and Forthcoming books



Southeast Asia Series Published by National University Press/ The University of Hawaii Press and NIAS/KITLV
Series Editors: Edward Aspinall (edward.aspinall@anu.edu.au) and Andrew Walker (andrew.walker@anu.edu.au)

New Books
Kurt Stenross, *Madurese Seafarers: Prahus, Timber and Illegality on the Margins of Indonesia*
Katharine McKinnon, *Professionals in the Hills: The Politics of Aid in Northern Thailand*
Douglas Kammen and Katharine E. McGregor, eds, *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-1968*

Forthcoming
Robbie Peters, *City of Struggle: The Kampung in Surabaya, 1945-2010*
Nicholas Long, *Being Malay in Indonesia: Histories, Hopes and Citizenship in the Riau Archipelago*

East Asia Series Published by Routledge
Series Editors: Morris Low (m.low@uq.edu.au)

New Books
Romit Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities*
Jonathan Benney, *Defending Rights in Contemporary China*

Forthcoming
Guy Ramsay, *Mental Illness, Dementia and Family in China*
Ando Takemasa, *Japan's New Left Movements*

South Asia Series Published by Routledge
Series Editor: Peter Mayer (peter.mayer@adelaide.edu.au)

Women in Asia Series Published by Routledge
Series Editor: Lenore Lyons (lenore.lyons@uwa.edu.au)

New Book
Hyaeweol Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook*

Forthcoming
Kabita Chakraborty, *Young Muslim Women in India*
Emma Fulu, *Intimate Partner Violence in the Maldives*
Kyungja Jung, *Practising Feminism in South Korea*
Kay Schaffer and Xianlin Song, *Women's Writing in Post-Socialist China*
Bianca Smith and Mark Woddward (eds.), *Gender and Power in Indonesian Islam*

20% DISCOUNT OFF LISTED TITLES

Routledge would like to offer a 20% discount off any of the titles in the Routledge series listed in this newsletter.

To order your copies simply enter the code ASA13 at the checkout.

Offer expires 31th December 2013.

Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer. Discount available only from www.routledge.com

For more information about the ASAA please visit our website at: www.asaa.asn.au

It is not surprising that in calling for the humanization of humanity, P.C. Chang drew extensively from Confucian philosophy whose humanism had inspired some *philosophes* in their formulations of rights discourse and their critiques of tyranny (including tyranny of the church and tyranny of absolutism). Chang's `humanization of man' is an idea taken directly from Confucius' *ren ren* (仁人) – a core idea in Confucian ethics.

The Confucian virtue *ren* (仁) has been variably translated as 'kindness', 'benevolence', 'humanity', etc., none of which really capture the essence of *ren* as human beings in their existential, social, and emotional togetherness. It has been commonly observed that the character *ren* (仁) depicts two human beings, but no explanation has yet been offered as to why the co-existence of two human beings would necessarily entail compassion and kindness rather than hostility and aggressiveness, as Hobbesians and Freudians would argue. In my research I explore the many deep layers of the ethical, social, and political meanings of *ren* (仁), so far neglected in scholarship on Confucianism. The profound contributions that could have been made by *ren* to the UDHR (an opportunity that had regretfully been missed) is elaborated on by engaging Confucius's *ren* in dialogue with Hegelian and Arendtian ideas of love, my rewriting of Mauss' formulation of the gift, and Levinas' "persecuted one for whom I am responsible to the point of being a hostage for him" *(Otherwise than Being, 58-59).*

The distinctive contributions of Confucianism: *ren* versus tolerance

Ren does not merely require 'tolerating' the Other. The coexistence of two human beings in *ren* refers to their *existential and emotional connectedness,* rather than the mere physical cohabitation of the same space by two disconnected individuals. *Ren* (仁) grounds itself on the premise that both sides are *living human* beings with human feelings and vulnerabilities. Any side being reduced to a mere abstract concept, as in the case of the liberal politics of tolerance, would not qualify as *ren*. The ability to feel for each other as enjoined by *ren* finds one of its powerful expressions in compassion – one of the many meanings of *ren* – a meaning that is also borne out in the etymology of roughly equivalent Western terms such as 'compassion' or *Mitleid* – that is, 'suffering together' or suffering the Other's suffering.

Mencius once admonished rulers by reminding them of the practices of some of their virtuous predecessors: "For Yu, his people's drowning is his own drowning; for Zhi, his people's hunger is his own hunger. Hence their anguish and desperation." Zhi would rather starve than allow his people to starve, as parents would rather give up their own lives than allow their children to suffer any harm. The Jewish proverb articulates well this Confucian sentiment: "The other's material need is my spiritual need". The other's material need concerns my spirituality because, in between choosing my starvation or the Other's starvation, in between choosing my self-preservation and the preservation of the Other, my moral freedom and my being (as a human being) is at stake. The Other's material need is thus infinite – not because the Other's material need is endless, but because my concern for the Other's physical need is infinite, as infinite as my spirituality (or, in Confucian terms, the Other's physical need is as infinite as my humanity).[3]

By emphasizing feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, Confucian and Levinasian ethics can help us return from abstract notions of rights to the concrete human in human rights. This has tremendous significance for rethinking human rights. Crimes against humanity are invariably committed when the victims are not recognized as human beings – when they are objectified into numbers or other kinds of abstractions such as targets in a system to be ridden, and when the perpetrators also abstractize themselves into killing machines devoid of the human capacity to feel for the sufferings of the Other.

Sinkwan Cheng, IIAS Fellow. (sinkwancheng@gmail.com)

Notes

1 Note that the atrocities against the Chinese was committed by the Japanese after the latter's aggressive adoptions of ideas and institutions from the modern West. Those adoptions were by no means free from reinterpretations and misinterpretations.
2 The classical Chinese language is not gendered, and a literal translation of *ren ren* would be 'humanizing human being'. Chang used 'man' to avoid the awkward repetition in favor of the idiomatic English usage of the time.
3 My project includes a discussion of the ethical and political divergences between Judaism and Confucianism ensuing from the divergences between the religious dimensions of Jewish spirituality and the thoroughly humanistic character of Confucianism.