

Session 1 Comments and Questions

Akio Tanabe:

Let me first comment on Professor Nakata's excellent paper. I can only reiterate the point made by Professor Nakata. Firstly, it is very interesting that he pointed out that the positionality of indigenous tradition has changed in history. It was considered as primitive during colonial times and then there was a time of cultural relativism to state that different knowledges are just different and relative.

But then now, I think we have entered into a new age when we have themes of universal values in indigenous knowledge, but in two different ways. One is that, as you have pointed out, these indigenous knowledges are fragmented and used by the state and the corporate as useful knowledge for profit making. But on the other hand, we are also looking at the universal aspect of the indigenous knowledge as contributing to the new ideas or the new thinking of the world for sustainable and inclusive development and I think we have to see how this change in the position of indigenous knowledge have taken place. We have to be very sensitive to the political, economic and social implications of this change in the positionality of indigenous knowledge and I think you have done an excellent job of explaining the complexities on this issue.

The second thing we should note is that there has been decontextualization of indigenous knowledge as Professor Nakata said, but also that there is now a process of recontextualization of indigenous knowledge taking place. As you have rightly pointed out, we cannot just say that, okay, indigenous people should stay as they were and where they were so that indigenous knowledge can stay with these people. I mean, that is not possible or favorable for indigenous knowledge and indigenous people. So the question is how we can recontextualize both indigenous knowledge and indigenous people in the present age.

Okay, so now, what is the way to do this? I think this is very much related to Professor Matsushima's paper. I think Professor Matsushima is asserting independence of Lew Chew (Ryukyu) in critique of the existing power relationships between Tokyo and Okinawa and I do have a lot of sympathy with that critique of power relations. But I also feel, we have to think more carefully about the multiplicity that Professor Nakata has pointed out. There is not only multiplicity of different indigenous people, but multiplicity within indigenous populations – gender, class, ethnicity and all other kinds of differences like politico-economic positionalities. So we cannot just separate the dominant population from the indigenous population and then say that we will respect whatever indigenous people or indigenous society have to say. We have

to see the multiplicities within both the so-called dominant population and indigenous population and recognize unequal power relationship across all these boundaries. I think it necessary to be sensitive to both multiplicity and unequal power relationships when we discuss about indigeneity and the indigenous people.

Now, the message of indigenous knowledge is that we must rethink human-to-human relationships and human-nature relationships beyond modern progressive humanism and towards valuing singularities and differences that are yet connected together. That is, to see multiplicities in connection. That, for me, is the most important aspect of universalism contained in indigenous knowledge. We ought to take that very seriously and apply that indigenous knowledge to the position of the indigenous people today. That means we have to be sensitive to the multiplicities within the indigenous people and within the so-called dominant population as well, while recognizing connectedness. This attention on multiplicity in connection is what can bring about democratic values into our human-to-human and human-nature relationships.

The question now is: what are the ways or fruitful connections and combinations between multiplicities? We have to think this very carefully. The answer to this question not only changes the position of so-called indigenous people or indigenous knowledge within our present system. It also means we will have to change the present system as well. If we keep the present state system or the present corporate system, it would be all about conflicts and the running for the profit. If we keep the present corporate system, for example, the question will only be about who will get a profit from this indigenous knowledge. By taking the present system for granted, we have to support people fight for profit. That perhaps is necessary. But I think we have to also think beyond that. We have to imagine what really this business is about. Is it making people happier? What are the other ways for making people happier? So, to me, to think about indigeneity is to rethink the whole system and how to connect all these multiplicities in more fruitful ways so that there can be more inclusiveness and sustainability in our living environment. These are my thoughts inspired by your very interesting paper. I really appreciate your excellent job.

Now let me go on to discuss on Professor Matsushima's paper. I have been with Professor Matsushima in several seminars and I have always been impressed by his passion for insisting on the uniqueness of Lew Chew history and culture and the need of its independence. But I also have discussed with Professor Matsushima several times already about to what extent this kind of oppositional, conflictual politics is really relevant in today's world.

You have already said in your first introduction that you had a collaboration with other

indigenous people in Taiwan in other seminars. But when we think about it, the positionality of the people of Lew Chew and the indigenous people in Taiwan are very, very different. I mean, indigenous people in Taiwan are not be able to assert their national independence. They have to seek for better position within Taiwan. On the other hand, you are clearly asserting for independence of Lew Chew.

So the question is here about the rights. Who has the right to call for national independence? I think Professor Matsushima's thoughts goes around the idea of national sovereignty. One question is: Is national independence the only way to solve the problem of unequal relationships? Of course, like we have to ask for the share of profits as long as there is the corporate system and capitalist system, if nation-state systems continue to exist, yes, perhaps a people seeking freedom might as well assert for national independence.

But if we are to seek beyond that, the story will be different, and I think it is very important that we imagine a world beyond this nation-state system and beyond the idea of national sovereignty. I think the history of Lew Chew itself actually demands us to reconsider the nation-state system. As Professor Matsushita knows much better than me, Lew Chew used to have very diverse connections with China, Japan and Southeast Asian countries. Lew Chew maintained excellent diplomatic relationships with both China and Japan and acted as a hub in the extensive trade network.

So the cordial relationship that Lew Chew had with others had not much to do with the question of who is independent or who has sovereignty, but of how to connect multiplicities together. And Lew Chew has a beautiful history of showing this capacity to live with multiplicities around her. In my view, Lew Chew is in a good position to show to the world that we can imagine better connections of multiplicities beyond the idea of national sovereignty with one people, one territory, and one culture. The Lew Chewan culture shows us a beautiful example of how different cultures can be connected, how different cultures can be accommodated together in the network. So I want to request Professor Matsushima to say a few words on this possibility.

On the issue of Lew Chewan bones, I think you have suggested that now the Lew Chewan people are combining or blending traditional knowledge with modern knowledge in its assertion of self-determination. That is why, you suggest, Okinawan, or Lew Chewan people have the right to repatriate the bones. Okay, that is fine. But when we think about the multiplicity within Okinawa or Lew Chew, is it really the people of Lew Chew that have the right to the bones as one people? Or should we also take into account the multiplicity of different histories as there are many islands like Ishigaki with different histories and cultures within Okinawa? Can you

really say that there is one Lew Chew people with one culture and one history? Or do different island people have different cultures and different histories and therefore have different relationships with those particular bones and ancestral remains? I think this involves very, very complex questions. You know much better than me about all this complexity.

I understand your critique of the present unequal relationship between the so-called main island and Lew Chew and I sympathize with your positionality. But as an academic I also would like to think beyond the present knowledge system. That is why I am asking how we can take into account all these multiplicities present within Lew Chew as well as within so-called mainland Japan and how it is possible to build better relationships connecting all these multiplicities beyond borders. In any case, I really appreciate both of your papers very much for reminding me again how important it is to think of indigeneity. It is really a door to think of the new world beyond the existing system of power and knowledge. Thank you so much.

Yugo Tomonaga:

Thank you. So Professor Nakata or Professor Matsushima, could you please answer Professor Tanabe's comments?

Yasukatsu Matsushima:

Thank you very much for comment, Prof. Tanabe. Going beyond the nation-state system is very important globally as you said. In the history of the Lew Chew kingdom, there were multiple relationships with surrounding Asian countries. But from 1879, after the annexation of Lew Chew by Japan, we became a part of the Japanese Empire. Since then, our islands became one of the prefectures of the Japan. In 1972 Okinawa was released from the occupation by the USA, but the Japanese government insisted that the islands must be a part of Japan and re-annexed. So I think we should not go beyond the borders of nation states at this moment, without recognizing the independence of Lew Chewans from the authority of Japan. Lew Chew now is a part of Japan. Even though Japanese is a powerful nation-state in the international society, we must break from this nation-state of Japan.

Let me introduce here an example of the Republic of Palau. The population of Palau is about 20,000 and the population of my home town Ishigaki island is 50,000, two times larger than Palau. While Lew Chew is still a colony of Japan, Palau became an independent nation-state in 1994. They have the right of self-determination over their politics, economy and society today. What it tells us is that an island with smaller scale of population and economy than Ishigaki still had a potential to run an independent country. Although I say Lew Chew must become independent, I believe it should be achieved peacefully but not through terrorism. We must use the UN system or international law. Lew Chew is not alone, but I know Chamoro people in

Guam, the United States of America, are also acting for the self-governance in Guam and independence from the USA. I'm sure that these indigenous people can make a movement in cooperation.

Then, who is indigenous people in Lew Chew, in Okinawa Prefecture? There are some definitions for indigenous people to refer like the ILO Convention 169 which defines indigenous people as people inhabited at the time of colonization or the establishment of the present state and who understand themselves indigenous people. I think this definition in ILO Convention 169 is good enough for a common definition. In 2013, I founded an association for the independence of Lew Chew with my friends, and now the association has 350 members. They all identify themselves as indigenous people and understand that they need a sovereignty and the right to be independent from Japan.

Martin Nakata:

The question about indigenous traditional knowledge is important to consider, as you rightly pointed to the kind of agendas behind and there are many agendas. There are people who want to just be going back to traditions and developing their own communities within those traditions and right through to innovating knowledge and developing it for benefits. There is really no right answer for that except to say that when people are recruiting indigenous knowledge for enterprise then surely some of the gains made by that enterprise should benefit the indigenous people. Too often the benefits do not flow to Indigenous people.

But if I can just pull it back a little bit further for the Australian context and the question about negotiating sovereignty. We have 60,000 years of continuous indigenous presence in Australia. Why should we negotiate with governments? But, we do have to negotiate and in a language environment and a system of thinking environment that is Western. So sovereignty is negotiated within the government and western system of law and we compromise our beginnings as indigenous people in the process. So, for instance, in Australia, Indigenous people have argued are arguing to get title to our land back because there is still denial in Australia about the taking of the land. Government has done the liberal thing, I would say. Government says if you can prove continuous occupation of your land, we will negotiate this remaining title and you can have a formal title that recognizes your ownership. For some groups that has been forthcoming and that was a great thing for them. But, at the time, some of us said no. You are actually negotiating a formal of title within the Western system of land title. That will always be compromised and now today 20 years later, they have a Native Title but it's so impoverished they can't do as much as they might like with the land. So it is recognized title to the land, but we can't necessarily use the title to develop the land. So it is compromised, not serving our needs and interests and yet we spent 30 years trying to enact some liberal engagement with

government in the best of good faith. So in the larger sense, it is not just in land title, it is in our education, it is in our health, it is in our futures and forever we are in a compromised environment in trying to assume some sort of sovereign position by which we can then say there is a higher plane you need to go to, but there isn't.

Indigenous people are coming back are coming back to traditional knowledge and knowledge. It is one thing to say there are multiplicities of positions relating to indigenous knowledge. But the more significant issue is that the whole notion of indigenous knowledge is already captured within the Western order of things. So the very thing that we talk about is already re-inscribed in somebody else's channel. So even as we try to address indigenous problems, it is often within the ties to Western discourse limits.

So if we want to go back to the pristine traditional knowledge, that is really difficult to do because all the knowledge we have about traditional indigenous knowledge is in Western discourse. So how do you untangle western positions from the indigenous position? Where do indigenous traditions and knowledge begin and end today? Where does non-indigenous traditions and knowledge begin and end today?

We are caught up in this and it is not working in our favor. So I too like my colleagues have been down the beaten path through the various UN conventions that recognize our rights and are made of that effort in Geneva. We now have a declaration on indigenous people's rights. Well, no shit. It has made no difference to us. Is it just for the nations-states who signed up to the declaration that recognize our rights? Now what? What can actually come from it.

So again, another example where indigenous people have made real efforts to try and compromise to be reasonable, to engage in the system within the nation-states we find ourselves today. So it is difficult to ask for fuller participation from that position. But, in Australia, we have a fairly-defined position for indigenous people. As you alluded to - Indigenous self-determination – self-determination within the nation states. Yes, but whatever deal you cut, it should work for the interests of people on the ground. At the moment, that is just difficult.

So I quite like the idea of refusal. Like it is easier to say “Go home, bugger off. Get out of my country,” because it is so much more satisfying to hear a position that says we are still in charge. Just get out of our face.

Tanabe:

I fully agree with what you said. Actually, I also work with the so-called tribal movement in India and I understand that there is a very, very harsh reality of unequal power relationships in

their living environment including the hegemonic legal and discursive framework in which people are forced to speak about themselves.

I would like to reiterate that I understand and deeply sympathize with your frustrations. I would like to say that also in the case of the tribals in India, our strategy has to be multi-sided. You know, on the legal and political front, we have to take this oppositional and confrontational approach to fight within the present political and legal framework. But on the other hand, in our more self-transformational side of the project, we are trying to take up and learn from the universal aspect of indigenous knowledge involving multiple parties and keeping our consciousness on the multiplicity so that it will not only be about one indigenous people and their rights but about the collaboration of different groups of people including other so-called subalterns outside of indigenous population but connected with them. I want to bring some kind of global connection to multiplicities to think together how we can really change the present setting as a whole beyond the existing borders. That is thinking beyond the present system but, you know, I really agree and sympathize with you that there are fronts that we have to fight within the present system.

From the floor:

Thank you very much for your presentations. I am from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. I have a question for Professor Nakata. When I visited Northern Queensland together with a researcher from a language center in the past, we met an elder who categorized himself as fluent in three languages, three traditional languages. But I was wondering, and this is also my question to you, how individuals categorize themselves as being fluent in their traditional languages. Thank you.

Nakata:

I am not quite sure about the question, but how do indigenous people categorize themselves if they speak three different languages? One, I think the broader position is that indigenous people define themselves as the first people of the land. They might be fluent in different languages, they may belong to a different language and marry into a different language group. But the significance of indigenous is really on place, as First people in this place. I am not sure how to simply interpret the meaning of indigenous but, in Australia, it means people of a place. A person can be male, female, doctor, patient, but you still remain indigenous of the place or country no matter what language you now speak.

It is a real dilemma around the issue of language and identity and it is quite difficult because when you talk about identity it is attached to place and language. There is a realm of conversations and a lot of populations where you can look at the questions about who owns the

land and there is a whole process of identity changes over time. So one significance of identity politics bends towards traditions and the languages of a particular place of origin, but your identity is not fixed. It always moves so I am young man, then I am an adult, then I am father, then I am grandfather.

But too often political debates in places in Australia some people are saying if you do not look Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, if you are not speaking the language and you are not living on your country, then you're not indigenous. I think that that is a very shallow way of talking about identity, indigenous identity. Those accusers lack the knowledge of colonial history that led to most of the Indigenous population being removed from their traditional lands or removed from their families and institutionalized. They lack knowledge of traditional knowledge and the Indigenous sense of belonging to land.

The traditional knowledge system is a way to understand what that is. If you go back to some of the very beginnings of the logic and reason within knowledge system, you will understand that how we actually name ourselves is in relation to land. So even my Japanese name, Nakata, traditionally Naka is in the middle, Ta is field, so people of the field. In my traditional Torres Islands indigenous family, I belong to a group called Kulkailag. Kulka is red, lag means place or belonging to. We were people to the east where the sun comes up. We name ourselves from that point. How we relate to each other, to others, to the world, comes from that same point.

So who we are as indigenous people is fundamentally linked to the land and the sea and the sky that we live in. We project who we are from that point. It is not political thing about whether you are Indigenous or not. It is not because which person you marry or which place you know live or what language you now speak, but as indigenous people we find ourselves connected to the land and sea and sky that our ancestors occupied and from which they forged their understanding and knowledge of the world.

Mushakoji:

May I ask a question? So Dr. Nakata, it is a question about a comparative case. The Japanese government is very eager to contribute to and give grants to indigenous communities who are developing their traditional knowledge. This is very good, but the Japanese government wants to have an indicator about how good the value of the traditional knowledge for the biodiversity and nobody, no indigenous communities, have presented a universally adaptable indicator about the value of one's traditional knowledge. I think it is necessary to ask how to have a single measure to compare traditional knowledge, and I would like to have your reaction to this one.

To Dr. Matsushima, I fully agree that the human rights aspect and the international law aspects

are very important. But, beyond that, I think there is also a matter of reconciliation, between your part Lew Chew and the Japanese part. It is not just about giving back bones of ancestors. You may also ask the government or those universities to apologize. What we can refer, and I admire, is the Canadian situation where the government from different levels are asking for reconciliation with the first nations. I told my students and to several groups about the need to have reconciliation with the Lew Chew people and with the Ainu people in Japan. But, unfortunately, I wasn't able to find anybody who supported my idea about reconciliation and I would like to find out why we Japanese don't like reconciliation and why do Canadians like reconciliation. Thank you.

Nakata:

A single measure for traditional knowledge, it is a typical position that people from outside indigenous communities retain. What does it mean for us? If we the government provide some grants, what is the accountability of the Indigenous community in Australia? That is often the situation. It is never what communities value or need that is prioritized but how taxpayers monies are accounted for and we understand that is important.

The global thing is really to sacrifice the places where they provide some empirical measure that we can't build back. So an indigenous community in Australia will make a lot of improvement with a little bit of money that we have got. But we have learned as well we have to change the mindsets of the grant providers so that those metrics are formed differently and deliver much more benefits to the people, not just the government.

We have come a long way. We could share a lot of that kind of stuff about funding provisions. Often, the other characteristic is that funds to communities or community priorities are often very small and they don't go very far. The third is like it's something that we have learned from developing countries, those grants drive a project-driven reform agenda. Project-driven reform agendas as we know from experience do not change anything over the long-term, and the communities need longer-term investment to have a systemic change. So we have learned that lesson too. Short-term grants provided by the short-term government in power really doesn't change much at all.

So we have been trying to advocate for funding regimes that the longer-term government budgetary policy can sustain so that we can embed generational change, but you can't do that with one-off funding, and then, as soon as that funding runs out, you have to chase more funding. They need to chase more funds and by the time you get it, you are doing somebody else's delivery of services rather than serving the priorities of the community. So we have learned quite a lot of stuff in the ways that the government provides funding.

So, on the reconciliation agenda in Australia, we too follow the Canadian model. The government apologized publicly, quite a long time after the end of the decade of reconciliation activities. The apology meant a lot to Indigenous people but not much has changed as a result. Still the reconciliation agenda we have had for about 20 years now. In my university there is a poster that says reconciliation and most of the universities have their own statements of reconciliation, but really nothing changed for us. In Australia, we indigenous people would say those posters on the wall just tell you that we still need an agenda to achieve reconciliation.

Reconciliation for us as Indigenous people, we don't want to participate in reconciliation because we did nothing wrong and it is really for the white Australian to be going to their own community and thinking about and reconciling with themselves, their actions, that completely decimated Indigenous populations across Australia. Some do that but many Australians give reconciliation very little thought.

They think reconciliation is the celebration and visibility of our culture - that we come and sing and dance and feel good about ourselves together. That is not reconciliation. You know, that is – if they want to do that kind of thing, go do it, but try and take some time to think about it, how you screwed over millions and millions of indigenous people in the past. So we have a very active political agenda and my colleague here, we are very passionate about these things. We go about our engagements in very different ways, but we are very committed to indigenous justice and that is what makes us passionate.

Matsushima:

Thank you very much. I understand that there were strong movement by many people in Canada to fight against the government so many years until the government recognized the right to land of indigenous people in Canada. However, while the Japanese government in 2008 officially recognized the existence of indigenous people in their territory, it has not yet recognized their right to ancestral land even today. So reconciliation will not be happening because I think the Japanese government will never apologize to Lew Chewans and Ainu people and recognize the right of indigenous people. In the understanding of the Japanese government, Lew Chew islands were no man's land and, therefore, it's not a problem for Japan to claim these islands were their own land.

In 2015, the governor of Okinawa prefecture, Takeshi Onaga, went to participate to the UN Human Rights Committee meeting to make an appeal on the violation of human rights against the people observing the relocation of the US military base. But the appeal was denied by the Japanese government saying that in Lew Chew, or what they call Okinawa, there were no such

a problem of human right violation. For the government, the problems happening in Okinawa are not a human rights problem but only a security problem where some activists are threatening the US-Japan security arrangements. Here I see a big gap in recognitions between Lew Chew and the Japanese government ignoring the fact that we have a different history - Lew Chewans had their own country before 1879. There is a widespread feeling among Lew Chew people that they will not be understood by the Japanese government forever. That's why Lew Chewan people today insist on independence from Japan.