**society/****社会(Shè Huì)**

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| Final Remarks | LAU Kinchi, HUANG Ping, Matthias Middell | 06 Jun.2022 |

LAU & HUANG: Professor Middell pointed out that the concept “Society” is central as well as ambiguous in the European context, and gave an excellent review of the evolution of the concept over four centuries. Similarly, in the Chinese context, the term needs to be situated in the specific historical and political junctures. Its denotations and connotations can only be fully grasped by contextualization in the people-to-people relations and people-to-nature relations over the centuries.

The richness of the concept in China is in excess of the term “She Hui” as an equivalent to the European term “Society”, or as juxtaposed in contradistinction to the economic or political dimensions in modern times. By referring to the encompassing features of the term in pre-Modern China, we hope to highlight the ethical customs and mores in social and cultural relationships. Revisiting the inclusiveness and sense of identification as part of a territorially and culturally defined “society” (She Hui, grouping all members as one larger community) would help show its distinction from modern individualism and atomization under the logic of modern capitalism and globalization, and would help salvage its philosophical tenets in guiding social division of labour and living together in harmony.

In response to the presentation by Professor Middell, we would like to highlight two points: First, society is not just a question of social relationships or of governance, but also a relationship between humans and Nature, and the increasing exploitation of Nature in modernity deserves our attention, as Professor Middell quoted from Marx, warning us of anthropocentrism. This is an aspect of Marx that is not often drawn attention to, but deserves our scrutiny given the current climate collapse, global warming and nuclear power plant catastrophes like Fukushima that we witnessed. Second，while society may be used to stress unity and inclusion, it can be a form of assimilation and homogenization in colonialist projects, and it may also be counterposed to differentiation and division which Prof Middell also highlighted. Hence, society, which is apparently a term to denote sameness, of being “us” in the same community or nation-state, may as well be used for othering, to marginalize, subordinate or discriminate against particular groups.

Middell: Again, we agreed (as already for the term nation) on many aspects of the analysis of a term broad as society. This reflects on the one hand that we ground our observations in the knowledge of theoretical traditions that are not only European or Chinese but very much transnationally interrelated and interwoven. On the other hand, we became aware that we discuss in our “societies” similar challenges to which we are confronted simultaneously, be it the human-nature relation accentuated by the many effects of climate change or be it the question of openness or closure of societies towards foreigners/ strangers/ migrants coming from other places but contributing productively to the very concrete performance of our societies. The aim of the conference was perhaps the discovery of differences, but the conclusion can also be that our concepts of the world and the positioning of our societies in this world are mutually co-constitutive since we learn from each other and are present in the concepts used at the other end of the Eurasian landmass.