The Fourth Asia Future Conference
Southeast Asia Inter-Religious Dialogue
"Tolerance and Reconciliation: Religious Responses to Conflict Resolution"

In the Southeast Asia Inter-Religious Dialogue roundtable session that was held during the third Asia Future Conference (autumn 2016), religious responses to globalization in Southeast Asia was the main topic of discussion.

The second Southeast Asia Inter-religious Dialogue roundtable session was held during the fourth Asia Future Conference (August 24 to 28, 2018) in Seoul. The theme was "Tolerance and Reconciliation: Religious Responses to Conflict Resolution & Peace Building."

Despite the fact that confrontation and dispute arise out of political and economic factors, such disputes are often misunderstood as religious confrontation. This is because religion is crucial to the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the community and the people are in conflict with each other. In Southeast Asian countries which are said to be a mosaic of race and religion, such tendencies are even more pronounced, and confrontation sometimes turns into communal conflicts.

On the other hand, there are many cases where religious communities and their leaders have succeeded in peacefully solving such confrontations and disputes. We assume such religious leaders and civil leaders have accumulated vast experiences in reconciliation and peace-building processes. This roundtable session brought together religious scholars based in Southeast Asia and Japan who brought with them their knowledge and experience of conflict resolution and peace building from Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Based on these examples the role of religion in reconciliation and peace building was discussed.

Case Presentations:
Presentation 1. Thailand
  Vichak Panich, Vajrasiddha Institute of Contemplative Learning
  "Buddhism of the oppressed: Restoring Humanity in Thai Buddhist Society"
Presentation 2. Myanmar
  Carine Jaquet, The Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia
  "Brief report on the situation of Rohingya people, Myanmar"
Presentation 3. Indonesia
  Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University
  "The Dynamics of Muslim Society in Aceh after Tsunami."
Presentation 4. Vietnam
  Emmi Okada, The University of Sydney
  "Reaching Beyond the Religious Divide for Peace: The Experience of South Vietnam in the 1960s"
Presentation 5. Philippines
  Jose Jowel Canuday, Ateneo de Manila University
  "Muslim and Christian Dialogues in the Southern Philippines: Enduring Grassroots Inter-religious Actions in a Troubled Region"

The Fourth Asia Future Conference
"Southeast Asia Inter-Religious Dialogue" Roundtable
(Ogawa Tadashi, Atomi University)

The theme of this session was to have an "inter-religious" dialogue, but it was an "intra-religious" dialogue that was really necessary. This is what I strongly felt after participating in the roundtable.

As the chair of the roundtable Professor Shimazono Susumu said at the start of the session, a phenomenon that should be recognized as the resurgence of religion around the world is now apparent. Southeast Asia, where a variety of syncretism and religions co-exist, is no exception. Media reports in Southeast Asia which discuss "radical Islam terror," "the Rohingya problem," "the Mindanao conflict" and so on promote what political scientist Samuel Huntington at the end of the Cold War referred to as the clash of civilizations, a conflict based on religion and leading to bloodshed. The image of Islam in particular as promoting fanaticism, conflict and violence has spread around the world.

The participants in this session who hailed from Islamic, Buddhist, Christian as well as other religious backgrounds pointed out that the cause of what is recognized as "religious conflict" is not fundamentally religion itself, but rather is often a remnant from colonial rule, the failure of nation-state building, or the political mobilization of religious leaders. Hardline exclusionary nationalism merged with religion which spouts hostility against other religions has grown stronger and spread, and this is not limited to Islam but also prevalent in Buddhism, known to be a peaceful religion.

While movements within Islam and Buddhism which reject the separation of the state and religion and aim to merge nationalism and religion are growing stronger, the existence of a liberal camp which seeks human rights based on the separation of religion and state and to foster democracy has also become more visible and concrete. The fracturing between these two groups is the current reality. It is because of this that dialogue within the same religion has become crucial.

One participant stated that the key to dialogue lies in the potentiality of interpretation of religious doctrines. Contradicting doctrines exist within the same religion. While we need to understand the multifaceted nature of religion, religions need to have the ability to use creativity in interpretation in a manner that is suitable for today's world.

The impact of globalization on religion was also discussed. Globalization is often imagined as the unification of information, culture and values which originate in the West, but reality is not so simple. There are many streams of globalization. Wahhabism which originated in the Middle East, the increased rigidity of Salafism and fundamental Islamic thought are all gaining increased traction in the

Aceh province of Indonesia as well as other parts of Southeast Asia.

Social media, which originated in this age of globalization, crosses borders and brings an insurmountable amount of information into the regions of Southeast Asia. While this increases the number of opportunities for international mutual understanding, it is also largely connected to the spread and influence of propaganda by radical groups which promote terrorism. It is also impossible to overlook the effects of exclusion that have arisen in response to globalization. Social media is a double-edged sword to peace.

Upon hearing each presentation, the particularities, variety, and complexity of religion and society in each Southeast Asian country became apparent, as did the risk of generalizing the situation in these countries. I also felt that the path from conflict to reconciliation would not be a simple one. However, as was brought up in the presentation about the situation in Mindanao, as a result of peace efforts the repeated attempts to quell conflict led to the accumulation of experience and eventually to resolution. Doing what we can step by step is the only way to proceed.

Against this multi-religious backdrop, opportunities for open-minded discussion between Southeast Asian and Japanese intellectuals are in reality scarce. I would like to offer my thanks to the organizers – the Atsumi International Foundation and Sekiguchi Global Research Association – for providing us with this important opportunity.

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He had worked with the Japan Foundation for 35 years from 1982 to 2017, in management positions that included Director of New Delhi Office, and Regional Director of Southeast Asia, Jakarta.
His major publications include "Emergence of Hindu Nationalism" (2000), "Fundamentalism: from USA, Middle-East to Japan" (2003), "Fundamentalism: Twisted Terror and Salvation" (2007), and "Indonesia: Transformation of Islamic Giant" (2016).

（Translated and edited by Sonja Dale）