

Report of the Russia Group
Chiang Mai meeting, June 28, 2001

Marietta Stepanients
Juliet Johnson
Benjamin Forest

1. We presented material during two sessions during the Chiang Mai meeting, reporting on the activities of the Russia team.
 - a. In the first session, we presented the general themes of the Russia group, the research plans of the three subgroups, and the technical aspects of network communication (listserv and webpage).
 - b. In a second session, Johnson and Forest presented their research on Russian monuments.

2. The Southeast Asia and Western China teams presented reports on their activities and plans. Here are short summaries of their activities; we expect that more detailed reports and lists of members will be posted on the website soon. The Southeast Asia and Western China teams expressed great interest in the work of the Russia group, especially since we are looking at such similar issues, and we hope to establish regular contacts among the groups.
 - a. The Southeast Asia team is divided into two major sub-groups, one working in Thailand itself and the second working in Yunnan, China. The Thai group has further divided itself into three thematic groups (similar to the divisions of the Russia group): Ethnic Identifications, Religious Movements, and Discourses of Development. Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, coordinator of the Southeast Asia team, will synthesize the research of these thematic groups for upcoming conferences. The Yunnan group engaged in extensive discussion, but has not yet created formal thematic subgroups.
 - b. The Western China team, led by Dr. Yang Shemin of the Central University for Nationalities and Dr. Dru Gladney of the University of Hawaii, will engage in a focused research project comparing three ethnic minorities in China: the Tadjik, Kyrgyz and Kazak peoples. There have been extensive attempts to transform each of these three groups from nomadic to sedentary ways of life, and these efforts have had significant impacts on their traditional cultures and identifications. The research project will compare a fully nomadic, semi-nomadic and fully settled group of each of these peoples to assess the different effects of sedentarization programs. The team will employ both a large-scale survey and interviews with local and regional officials. More generally, this project examines the tension between development programs and their reliance on official identifications, and the preservation of traditional cultures. More information on this project (and on ethnic groups in Western China) is available on Dru Gladney's website, at <http://www.hawaii.edu/dru/>

3. The representatives of the Russia team actively participated in discussions of the presentations of the Southeast Asia and Western China teams. These discussions generated a number of suggestions and observations for the Russia group.
 - a. It has become clear that the entire project will be a decentralized network using a variety of methodologies and approaches. The unity of the project will be provided by the common theme of official and vernacular identifications. Consequently, it is very important for all participants in the Russia CRN to read Peter Sahlins' paper "Identifications" to ensure that our research reflects this theme. This paper will be posted on the CRN web page as soon as possible.
 - b. Second, the Southeast Asia and Western China teams are very empirically oriented, particularly regarding the gathering of original survey-sociological data. Members of the Russia team should maintain an empirical orientation as well (i.e., through archival research, interviews, surveys, etc.) rather than writing solely theoretical papers.
 - c. Our discussions revealed that the other groups wish to maintain contact with members of the Russian group to enhance the comparative perspective of the projects. Religion, for example, is clearly an important link among all three groups. This is an excellent chance for us to make theoretical, empirical, and personal connections across groups, and we should take advantage of the opportunity. Many members of the Southeast Asia and Western China group are already members of our Russia listserver, so this will be one way to keep in touch. In addition, we tentatively plan to post proposals and papers from the Southeast Asia group on the website, and to distribute a list of the group members and their research interests to Russia CRN members.