Japan, China, and the construction of history

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could a historiography be constructed that counteracts the promotion of trade and investment, or the construction of alternatives to this confrontation, in particular by the balanced by a military build-up under US leadership? If so, are we speak of a new, regional Cold War, which might erupt into a real war, and drag the world community of nations along? If so, is this a breakthrough in ending a two-year term between Asia’s biggest economies: row history and territory.

**References**

1. The workshop was held at the occasion of the author’s retirement and was kindly sponsored by the Program Group Moving Matters at the IAS Institute for Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam, the International Institute of Asian Studies in Leiden, and the Faculty of Arts at the VU University Amsterdam.

2. For a publication of Dirlik’s paper, see http://tinyurl.com/bv6y6.

3. Several of the papers in the workshop will be published in the University-released academic journal Translocal Chinese: East Asian Perspectives (TCEA), nr. 10.1 (Spring 2016), published by Brill Academic Publishers. The journal is meant to provide a platform for academic debate on issues and concerns of which those treated in the workshop are an important part. For further information on the journal’s institutional and editorial policy, please see: www.brill.com/tce (also see the announcement on page 53).

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**Leo Douw**

AFTER THE APEL MEETING IN Beijing in November 2014 a series of panel discussions and roundtables, which showed Japan’s Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and China’s President Xi Jinping reluctantly shaking hands. Small wonder, Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations have been in a state of stasis for several years and apparently won’t improve much for some time to come. On 25-26 June 2015 a workshop was convened at the University of Amsterdam, with the intention to discuss this impasse: can we speak of a new, regional Cold War, which might erupt into a real war, and drag the world community of nations along? Can we speak of an upcoming Chinese expansionism, menacing to Japan and its other neighbors, which should be countered by a military build-up under US leadership? If so, are we speak of a new, regional Cold War, which might erupt into a real war, and drag the world community of nations along?

What about the possibility of building a regional East Asian identity, or one that is even more cosmopolitan? Several papers implied that China should not be reified as a nation endowed with a unique and unchangeable culture, or identity, but should be studied as a participant in global developments that shape and reshape it over time. Jeroen de Keutel (University of Amsterdam) showed how Xi Jinping’s “Chinese Dream” discourse and his “Seven Don’t Speaks” pattern in its turn may be a better starting point for historical understanding of the rift between “mainlanders” and “native Taiwanese” in Taiwanese society.

Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner (University of Sussex), in her presentation on “Asian barriers,” acknowledged that this term has served to articulate national social and political agendas, rather than to bring these together. But at the same time she showed how it has provided an umbrella for common discussion, and an opportunity to overcome Orientalist notions of Asia and replace these by a more self-aware and positive discourse on Asian values. The paper by Arif Dirlik (University of Oregon) argued that the notion of “China” or “Zhongguo” was subject to change over the long period of its use, and had begun to propagate a Chinese cultural exceptionalism by the late nineteenth century, after a centuries-long interaction with Western ideas about the nation state. In doing so, the term as used by Chinese nationalists makes us forget about the diversity of Chinese society and the acquisition of foregin territory by the Chinese state.

This brings us finally to the question of how a historiography of East Asia may be created that underlines such a regional East Asian identity. One recurring motif during the workshop was the need to overcome the repressed identities of those mobile populations, especially traders, who before WWII had initiated the modernization of regional business enterprise, but who after the war had become victims of modern state building and the consequent repressive nationalisms. Young Ahn (Saginaw Valley State University, Michigan) presented his research on the contemporary position of Korean migrants of Chinese descent in the US, and traced much of their predicament back to exactly this history of repression after the war. Just as in most South East Asian countries, big Chinese business families had increasingly dominated domestic and international commerce in the Koreas before the war. Junghoe Yi (Bekman National University) reinforced this argument by presenting materials from the recently opened archives of the Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce, during 1910-1945. In Inchon, the port city where the biggest Chinatown of Korea was located at the time, Jin-A Kang (Hanyang University, Seoul) went even further back in history, and discussed the complicated patterns of interaction with the Korean society among members of one big Chinese family business, the Tonghuihai firm, during the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95.

The issue of emergent nation-oriented loyalty and the related discrepancy between the interests of the firms, which engaged in cross-border trading, and those perceived by the local society was evidenced by the papers as an issue to be developed in future history writing. One means of overcoming the resulting tensions was discussed by Kuo Hua Ying (Johns Hopkins University), namely the building of cross-border business networks through the cultivation of hokkia networks, the Hokkia network of Aw’s competitor in Singapore, Tan Kah Kee.

Similarly, the papers by Leo Douw (University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam) and Danh Huong Linh (Aquincum Sinica, Taipei) discussed the social position of the Taiwanese who migrated to China and Southeast Asia during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). The predicament of these “Registered Chinese” was only caused by the claims laid on them both by the Chinese and the Japanese governments during that period: being Taiwanese, but registered as Japanese nationals, they were subject to Japanese rules and restrictions, but they also profited from that status, especially when they worked and resided in China and South East Asia. The resulting jealousies and accusations of non-patriotic and even criminal behavior, which were largely justified, were forgotten during the Cold War period, but were again remembered during the late 1980s, when in Taiwan the indigeneration movement emerged and the issue of multiple nationalities and identities was posed once more. Lin maintained that this meant understanding this rift “mainlandese” and “native Taiwanese” in Taiwanese society is possible without remembering that many Taiwanese during the colonial period cooperated with the Japanese against China’s interests. Foreign aid and remittances as major motives in the recollections of historiography were already noted in the forgetfulness by Chinese nationalism in Dinh’s paper, these were also present in the argument made by Ma Ying (University of Amsterdam) on the memorial monuments in Jakarta and Amsterdam for J.B. van Heutz, the general whose massacres against the native population of the Netherlands East Indies have been largely forgotten by mainstream Dutch historiography, but actually were already a topic of contestation in Dutch politics during the Interbellum, and a topic that should be remembered even today.

It seems clear that the revisionism that informed the history-oriented papers of the workshop can contribute significantly to ideological renaissance. These papers have highlighted the balanced-mind nationalism that prevails in Japan and China. The workshop focused on the twentieth century, but analysis of the longer-term future for Sino-Japanese interactions: trading has been indirect and strictly controlled since the sixteenth century at the latest. Therefore we may say, that the present-day reluctant cooperation between both countries is part of a long lasting pattern. This pattern in its turn may be a better starting point for historical analysis than the “balance of power” approach, which has recently emerged into public debate, and threatens to sharpen the apparent Sino-Japanese antagonism rather than soften it.

Several of the papers in the workshop will be published in the Identity-relevant academic journal Translocal Chinese: East Asia Perspectives (TCEA), nr. 10.1 (Spring 2016), published by Brill Academic Publishers. The journal is meant to provide a platform for academic debate on issues and concerns of which those treated in the workshop are an important part. For further information on the journal’s institutional and editorial policy, please see: www.brill.com/tce (also see the announcement on page 53).

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