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 big economic one-offs between Japan and its other neighbors, which should be counteracted by their Japanese counterparts.

On 25-26 June 2015 a workshop was convened at the University of Amsterdam with the intention to dissect 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 ongoing Chinese expansionism, menacing to Japan and its other neighbors, which should be counterbalanced by a military buildup up under US leadership? If so, are there alternatives to this confrontational trend, in particular by the promotion of trade and investment, or the construction of an East Asian regional identity? And with regard to the latter, could a historiography be constructed that counteracts the Japanese and Chinese nationalisms, and which tampers the concomitant historical claims?1

First, does China pose a military threat to international peace and if so, should that threat be balanced by a counterthreat? The recent surge of bilateral tensions in the international press resonates with the presentation by Henk Schulte Nordholt (Hofung Technology). He interpreted Xi Jinping’s “Chinese Dream” discourse and his “Seven Don’t Speaks” as a breakthrough in ending a two-year row between China and Japan’s biggest economies row history and territory. OBEREUTER, Kim Kyung-Hoon.

AFTER THE APEC MEETING in Beijing in November 2014 a series of pictures were released in the world press, which showed Japan, warn China against using force in supporting its claims to its territory. ©REUTERS/ JAPAN, CHINA, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY

China’s President Xi Jinping (Right) shakes hands with Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during their meeting at the APEC meetings in Beijing, 10 Nov 2014. The formal talks signaled a breakthrough in ending a two-year row between Asia’s biggest economies row history and territory.

Peter Peverelli (VU University Amsterdam) opened a paper on “Asia’s 21st Century: A New Way of Thinking.” He interpreted Xi Jinping’s “Seven Don’t Speaks” and his “Three Major Historical Events” (the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1978, and the recent kick-off of the “Chinese Dream” discourse and his “Seven Don’t Speaks”). Peter Peverelli (VU University Amsterdam) and Man-houng Lin (Academia 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 Resident” Chinese was largely caused by the claims laid on them both by the Chinese and the Japanese governments during that period. Being Chinese, but registered as Japanese nationals, they were subject to the same Chinese 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 indigenization movement emerged and the issue of multiple nationalities and identities was posed once more. Lin maintained that no understanding of the rift between “mainlanders” 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. Foreigning and renaming as major motives in the revisions of historiography were already noted in the forgetfulness of Chinese nationalism in Dirlik’s paper: these were also present in the argument made by Ethan Mark (Leiden University) on the Tumen River Area Development Project, which was the need to overcome the repressed identities of those history-oriented papers of the workshop can contribute to the question of how a historiography in Asia may be created that underbuilds such a regional East Asian identity. 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 be studied as a participant in global developments that shape and reshape it over time. Jeroen de Kloet (University of Amsterdam) presented his study of the Tumen River Area Development Project in the context of global developments that shape and reshape it over time. Jeroen de Kloet (University of Amsterdam) on the Tumen River Area Development Project.

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References

1  The workshop was held at the occasion of the author’s retirement and was kindly sponsored by the Program Group Migration Matters of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Research, University of Amsterdam, the International Institute for 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/Proj3  The workshop of course was much richer in content than issue to be developed in future history writing. One means of approaching the resulting tensions was discussed by Kuo Huo-Ying (Johns Hopkins University), namely the building of cross-border business networks through the cultivation of hokkia networks, and other hokkia networks of war.”

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