Japan, China, and the construction of history

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Published in:
IIAS Newsletter

Citation for published version (APA):
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Discrepancy between the interests of the firms, which engaged in cross-border trading, and those perceived by the local society was evidenced in papers as an issue to be developed in future history writing. One means to 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 hometown ties; such was the case with Myanmar business tycoon Aye Boon Hwa’s Hakka network, or the Hokkien network of Aow’s competitor in Singapore, Tan Ka Kee.

Similarly, the papers by Leo Douw (University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam) and Tuan Hong Lin (Asia Sinica, Taipei) discusses the social position of the Taiwanese who migrated to China and Southeast Asia during the Chinese colonial period (1895–1945). The predicament of these “Registered” migrants was 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 indigenization movement emerged and the issue of multiple nationalities and identities was posed once more. Lin maintained that no understanding of this rift “mainlander” 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. Forming and redeeming major narratives in the archives of historiography were already noted in the forgetfulness by Chinese nationalism in Dillih’s paper; these were also present in the argument made by Maarten van Heuszt, the general whose massacres among the native population of the Netherlands East Indies have been largely forgotten by mainstream Dutch historiography, but actually were already a topic of contention in Dutch politics during the Interbellum, and in Mark’s view should be better remembered at present. It seems clear that the revisionism that informed the history-oriented papers of the workshop can contribute significantly to discussions on how to balance the single-minded nationalisms that prevail in Japan and China. The workshop focused on the twentieth century, but also the longer history of 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 starting point for historical analysis than the “balance of power” approach, which has recently emerged in public debate, and threats to threaten the apparent Sino-Japanese antagonism rather than soften it.3 Several of the papers in the workshop will be published in the recently relaunched academic journal Translocal Chinese East Asian Perspectives (TCEA), n. 10.1 (Spring 2016), published by Brill Academic Publishers. The journal is meant to provide a platform for academic debate and discussions on the above-mentioned papers, of which those treated in the workshop are an important part. For further information on the journal’s institutional embedding and editorial policy, please see: www.brill.com/tcea (see also the announcement on page 53).

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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 History Matters of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science 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 Dillih’s paper, see http://tinyurl.com/ boundaryDillih
3 The workshop of course was much richer in content than could ever be done justice in a summary article, and all misrepresentations are the author’s responsibility. Valuable contributions, aside from those by the paper presenters, were provided by the discussants and the papers’ co-authors. After the papers the discussants and session chairpersons. For shortness sake only their names follow here, in alphabetical order: Jukka Ruuder (University of Amsterdam), Otto Holman (University of Amsterdam), Gerd-Janne (University of Amsterdam), Susan Leimgruber (VU University Amsterdam), Chris Lorenz (VU University Amsterdam), Pat Nye (VU University Amsterdam), Peter Poot (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation), Willem van Schendel (University of Amsterdam), Sikko Visscher (University of Amsterdam), and Harriet Zandbergen (Leiden University).