Japan, China, and the construction of history

Leo Douw

AFTER THE APPE MEETING IN Beijing in November 2014 a series of papers, and discussions in the last issue, 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 at stake 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 ongoing Chinese expansionism, menacing a real war, and drag the world community of nations along? Can we speak of an ongoing Chinese expansionism, menacing a real war, and drag the world community of nations along? Can we speak of an ongoing Chinese expansionism, menacing a real war, and drag the world community of nations along?

Leo Douw

Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam

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 societies was evinced by papers as an issue to be developed in future history writing. One means to overcoming the resulting tensions was discussed by Kuo Hsuan-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 Aung San Hlaing’s Hakka network, and the Hokkien network of Awe’s competitor in Singapore, Tan Ka Ke. Similarly, the papers by Leo Douw (University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam) and Yoshinori Aruga (Aoyama Sinca, Tokyo) 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 Taiwanese” who were 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 “meanwhile line 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. Forging and remaking major myths in the controversies of historiography were already noted in the forgetfulness by Chinese nationalists in Dihli’s; these were also present in the August meeting in Amsterdam (Van den Gl Laden (University), the memorial monuments in Jakarta and Amsterdam for J.B. van Heutz, the general whose massacres against the native popula- tion 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 which was key should be remembered at present. It seems clear that the revisionism that informed the history-oriented papers of the workshop could contribute significantly to its own discussions, and the ability to balance the single-minded nationalisms that prevail in Japan and China. The workshop focused on the twentieth century, but also on longer-term trends in the construction 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 turn may be a starting point for historical analysis rather than the “balance of power” approach, which has recently emerged as a public debate, and threats to sharpen the apparent Sino-Japanese antagonism rather than soften it. Several of the papers in the workshop will be published in the Identity-related academic journal Translocal Chinese East Asia Perspectives (TCEA), no. 10.1 (2016). Spring 2016, published by Brill Academic Publishers. The journal is meant to provide a platform for academic debate and discussion of those treated in the workshop are important. 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).

References

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

2 For a publication of Dihli’s paper, see http://tinsy.net/ (boundaryDihl)

3 The workshop was of course 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 session chairpersons. For shortness sake only their names follow here, in alphabetical order: Ida Kader (University of Amsterdam), Otto Holman (University of Amsterdam), Gerd Janne (University of Amsterdam), Susan Legnini (VU University Amsterdam), Chris Lorenzo (VU University Amsterdam), Pá Mèngyè (University of Amsterdam), Peter Poth (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation), Willem van Schendel (University of Amsterdam), Sikkio Visscher (University of Amsterdam).