Japan, China, and the construction of history

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AFTER THE APEC MEETING in Beijing in November 2014 a series of papers and papers were released in the world press, which showed Japan’s Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and China’s President Xi Jinping reluctantly shaking hands. Small wonder, Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations in the Netherlands have been in stalemate 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, and drag the world community of nations along? 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 counter-balanced by a military buildup under US leadership? If so, are there alternatives to this confrontation 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 counter-threat? The recent surge of militant tendencies in the international press resonate with the presentation by Henk Schulte Nordholt (University of Technology) he interpreted Xi Jinping’s “Chinese Dream” discourse and his “Seven Don’t Speaks” as a deepening of Chinese nationalism in the domestic and international arena, and an accommodation to its Chinese counterparts on island groups in the East and South China Seas. Counter-claims by the US, which backup China’s territorial claims on island groups in the East and South China Seas. Counter-claims by the US, which backup China’s territorial claims on island groups in the East and South China Seas. The resulting jealousies and accusations of non-patrician 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 there is no understanding of this 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 construction of historiography were already noted in the forgetfulness by Chinese nationalists in Dirlik’s paper; these were also present in the misrepresentation of the East Asian region as a whole, which was largely unnoticed in the discussion between both countries is part of a long lasting pattern. This pattern in its turn may be a starting point for historical analysis rather than the analysis of power” approach, which has recently emerged in the public debate, and threatens to show the apparent Sino-Japanese antagonism rather than soften it. Several of the papers in the workshop will be published in the recently relaunched academic journal East Asian Perspectives (TECA), 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 embedding and editorial policy, please see: www.brill.com/tceca (see also the announcement on page 5).

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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 Moving Matters at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 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/btrtu (boundary2)

3 The workshop of course was much richer in content than could ever be done justice in a survey article, and all misrepresentations are the author’s responsibility. Valuable contributions, aside from those by the paper presenters, were provided by the other participants, in particular the paper discussants and session chairpersons. For shortness sake only their names follow here, in alphabetical order: Jula Tamer (University of Amsterdam), Otto Holman (University of Amsterdam), Geraldine O’Regan (University of Amsterdam), Susan van Schendel (University of Amsterdam), Sikko Visscher (University of Amsterdam), Peter Pott (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation), Willem van Schendel (University of Amsterdam), Sikko Visscher (University of Amsterdam), Piet Nye (University of Amsterdam), Peter Pott (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation), Willem van Schendel (University of Amsterdam), Sikko Visscher (University of Amsterdam), and Harriet Zurndorfer (Leiden University).