

IIAS Reports *continued*

Chinese descendants in East Asia under Japanese colonialism

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THE WORKSHOP ON BORDER SOCIETIES AT ICAS 8, MACAO, 25 JUNE 2013
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OUR WORKSHOP ENGAGED with the history of Chinese migrations around the countries of East Asia. There is a big challenge involved in this, especially when discussing the period of Japanese colonialism (1895-1945). For decades, the assertion of national interests has been preponderant in the public debate about that period: think of the official endorsement of schoolbook texts on World War II in Japan, or the island disputes between China and Japan, and between Japan and South Korea. In the same vein, the Chinese migrant populations in Japan, Korea and Taiwan are usually studied from a national perspective, which emphasizes the migrants' foreignness to their local environments. There is a call for the construction of a regional history, which accepts the importance of national contestations over important issues, but that, at the same time, looks at what has been commonly shared during the region's development over time, and has contributed to its rise in the modern world. Chinese migrations in the region provide a natural and productive vantage point for the writing of such a history.

The workshop

General comments on the papers during the workshop were provided by Pui-tak Lee, Jens Damm and Peter Post. In accordance with the ambitions of the workshop, the papers' authors came from all the countries in East Asia, except, unintentionally, from North Korea. The papers were presented not by their authors, but each by one of the other participants.

The workshop focused on Taiwan and Korea, which had become colonies of Japan in 1895 and 1910 respectively. The papers by Jin-A Kang and Byung-il Ahn examined the developments which led up to the Wanbaoshan Incident in 1931. Wanbaoshan is a village near Changchun in Manchuria, where Korean migrant workers lived, who were (incorrectly) reported in the press to have been attacked, wounded and one even killed by their Chinese employers, usually big landowners. In retaliation, 142 Chinese were killed in Korean cities, mainly Pyongyang, and many more wounded. Among the workshop's participants Kang contests most explicitly the conventional historiography, which typically argues that the killings had been allowed to happen by the Japanese Governor General in Korea and that they served Japanese interests to invade and put order to Manchuria. That argument is credible because indeed the Japanese army did occupy Manchuria in the year following the Wanbaoshan Incident, and in doing so not only deepened Japan's rift with China, but also alienated it from the international community and caused a long-lasting enmity between China and Korea. Kang joins in with a new wave of historians, however, who emphasize that a variety of domestic tensions had been building up since World War I. These came to a head when the World Economic Crisis broke out in 1929: tension existed between Chinese migrant workers in Korea and local laborers, between Chinese businesspeople in Incheon (where the main Korean Chinatown was located) and local society, between Korean migrant workers in Manchuria and their Chinese employers, and between Korean migrant workers in Japan and the surrounding population. These tensions, which were new at the time, were obviously very difficult to manage in good harmony, and also led the Governor General in Korea and the Japanese government to adopt different approaches towards the migrant populations, in the period before 1931. Ahn's paper adjoins Kang's argument, but goes more deeply into the advantages that Chinese laborers had when operating in Korea, among which he counts the well-organized labor gangs, which had greater leverage over employers than Korean workers could muster.

Both authors emphasize the importance of class contradictions underlying and partly undercutting ethnic ones, and remind us, that what happened in Korea was part of worldwide anti-Chinese agitation. Jong-hee Yi belongs to the same group of new historians, who contest the conventional nation-oriented historiography. He argues in his paper that, in the 1920s, Japanese power to undermine the access to Korean markets of British and Chinese textiles did not result from state support to Japanese trading firms, as has been generally assumed thus far, but on the flexibility of Chinese business firms, who changed from British and Chinese to Japanese corporate partners in order to sell textiles in Korea, especially cotton and silk, and not only profited from changed market circumstances,

but also from import duties imposed by the Japanese on the import of Chinese silk to Korea. Likewise, Ryota Ishikawa argues that the difficulties in compensating for the persistent trade deficit, which Korea had with China after the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-95), did not push the Chinese traders from the Korean market, as has been assumed previously. Instead he argues, that Chinese business networks in East Asia were diverse and widespread, and thereby flexible enough to find other means of payment to counteract adverse state action.

The papers on Southern China partly cover the same ground. Xuexin Wang provides a good example in his paper. Migrant workers from Mainland China in Taiwan supplemented the scarcity in the local labor market resulting from the Japanese colonial modernization project, just as in Korea. The existing historiography on the first decades of cross-Strait migrations after 1895, which Wang's paper covers, describes how policies were determined by the need to consolidate the colonial state and restrain the migration in order to control it. Wang, to the contrary, offers an analysis of the actors in the transport market, which regulated the migration flow from below. He relates how the British Douglas shipping company had to wage a tough struggle with its rival, the state-supported Osaka Shosen company and was gradually pushed out of this market, and how at the same time both companies had to deal with the small-scale organizations of prospective migrant workers, based in the local transit hotels in Xiamen. They remind one of the above-mentioned labor gangs in Korea, mustering sufficient strength to compete successfully with the labor recruiters of the big shipping companies. The paper by Junling Huang (Xiamen University, Xiamen, China) uses business letters in order to detail how, during the same period, the Taiwan-based Shi family perpetuated its cross-Strait trading business despite the restraints posed on it by the new and still violently contested colonial state. Peichen Li offers more of a classic account of how the Taiwanese Chen family business, in handling its exports to Japan, adapted its organizational structure to the demands of modern business management, despite the absence of a functioning modern business law on the island.

The remaining papers worked along similar lines, but paid more attention to identity-formation. Huei-ying Kuo focusses on the anti-British and anti-Japanese movements in British Hong Kong, during the period 1919-1941. Her paper portrays the nationalism of the Hong Kong business elite as different from the nationalism of the various governments during the period – the former was more committed to Chinese ethnic claims; also the business elite was barely anti-foreign in its actual behavior, as is exemplified by its refusal to join economic boycotts against the colonial powers. Looking at how the above-mentioned papers contrast national state policies with the interests of the international trading community, there is little to wonder about this difference by itself: the Hong Kong businesses could shift their trade, as their interests dictated, from one big political player to the other, be it China, Japan or England. Timothy Tsu's paper tallies in perfectly with Kuo's, and those by others in our workshop, in relating how the imagery of Chinese capitalists in Southeast Asia, projected by expansionist politicians in Japan, portrays them as adversaries, not collaborators.

Returning to connections across the Taiwan Strait, Chu Hong-yuan, in his paper, follows the career of Li Youbang throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Li was a Left-leaning activist, who during World War II led a few thousand Taiwan-ese in Mainland China in their struggle against the Japanese occupation. Chu focuses much on the contrast that he sees between Li's Chinese identity and his formal Japanese citizenship, which alienated him partly from his co-combatants in the anti-Japanese struggle. Taiwanese identity really was a problem in China. This applied also the other way around, as Caroline Ts'ai attests to in her paper: the young police officers from Fujian province, who were trained at the end of the war to assist the expected Guomindang power takeover in Taiwan, knew near to nothing about the island at the time of their recruitment, and were quickly sidelined and severely frustrated after Taiwan's recovery in the late 1940s. Contrary to Chu's argument, however, Leo Douw envisages to debunk the importance of ethnic divisions in creating social difference, by contrasting the populations of the Taiwanese, who resided in the treaty ports in Fujian province, with the migrants who moved from

Fujian to Taiwan. These all shared a South-Fujian ethnic identity, but, because of the very different incidence of Japanese state policies in both places, they diverged greatly in their social composition and in their relationships with the surrounding populations. Ann Heylen, in her paper about the Taiwanese language reformer Cai Peihuo, confirms one other major point made in Douw's paper, namely the strong insistence of the colonial administration on forcing the Japanese language wholesale on the Taiwanese, whatever their social background, with very different consequences for people with a similar ethnic identity.

These conclusions will hopefully contribute to the writing of an East Asian regional history, in conformity with the ambitions of the informal research program, called '*Border Societies: Chinese descendants in East Asia under Japanese colonialism 1895-1945*', of which the workshop was a part. This was established in 2011.

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The celebration in 1972 by the Taiwanese community in Daegu, South Korea, of the 61st anniversary of the Republic of China. The picture highlights the theme of Chinese mobility in East Asia, which is treated in this report, even though it derives from a later period.

**The Participants**

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