

Decolonizations, Loyalties, and Nations

The colloquium on “Decolonizations, Loyalties, and Nations” addressed the issues of loyalty and dissidence during the wars of decolonization in Vietnam and Indonesia during the late 1940s and 1950s. Using a comparative approach it attempted to recover some of the diversity of options that were open to individuals who became entangled in the conflict and analysed the post-colonial crystallization of national images in Vietnam, Indonesia, France, and the Netherlands. As the value of national ideologies and historical interpretations superimposed by the central states diminished the deconstruction of national, monolithic images gained a new relevance.

Report >
Southeast Asia

28 November –
1 December 2001
Amsterdam,
the Netherlands

By John Kleinen & Remco Raben

The first day of the colloquium was devoted to the subject of conflicting loyalties during the decolonization wars. A survivor of the war, General Do Trinh, opened the meetings with an official view on the options the Vietnamese had around 1945 when the French returned to retake their former colony. French scholar Christopher Goscha presented a paper on foreigner volunteers in the Viet Minh and the moral taxonomies of desertion and treason in the context of decolonization. His choice for the term “crossing-over” enabled him to highlight the complexity of loyalties in the situation where many ideologies, ranging from anti-colonialism to anti-fascism and anti-communism, fought for prominence.

Richard Chauvel of Victoria University in Melbourne focused on Papuan and non-Papuan participation in the struggle for independence. What was seen as a sideshow at the time, turned out to be an important moment for Dutch and non-Dutch contemporaries to take sides in a belated struggle for decolonization. This easternmost area of the

Indonesian archipelago and of the Netherlands East Indies provided an interesting site for discussions on the issue of the Indonesian mental and geographical territory. Hans Meijer (Leiden University/Veteranen Instituut) treated the issue of “mixed blood”, arguing that most Eurasians were torn between their loyalty to the Netherlands, their attachment to their country of birth, and Indonesians’ growing anti-colonialism. Their problem was not one of political choice, but of decreasing opportunities.

Nguyen The Anh (École Pratique des Hautes Études, in Paris) nicely illustrated the issue of diminishing choices, giving an excellent overview of the options for Vietnamese politicians experiencing the effects of the power vacuum following the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945. Nelyca Delanoë (American Studies at the University of Paris X) presented insightful views on the fate of Moroccan veterans fighting in the French colonial army. After the war, they returned to their home country to face their own struggle for independence. Frances Gouda (University of Amsterdam) provided an analysis of America’s Cold War interests and its view of national identities in Southeast Asia. Influenced by an increasing anti-communist atmosphere, but also by other global concerns Washington’s decision-making was fairly inconsistent. While supporting the decolonization of Indonesia, the US stood squarely behind the French efforts in Indochina.

Veterans & Deserters

On the second day, post-war interpretations and the highly controversial issues of veterans and deserters were reviewed. Benjamin Stora (Inalco, Paris) discussed French

films on Indochina produced during the 1950s and highlighted the atmosphere of isolation and abandonment that surrounded the participants in the conflict. Compared to the war in Algeria, French film-makers encountered little opposition from government censors.

The Indonesian anthropologist Budi Susanto (Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta) gave an analysis of the Indonesian armed forces’ perspectives on the history of the revolution and the unity of the nation, drawing on the “Spirit of ‘45”. He illustrated his lecture with well-selected cuttings from newspapers and advertisements, which demonstrated how these views are increasingly being contested. Dutch historian Stef Scagliola (Erasmus University, Rotterdam) presented a sharp analysis of Dutch public reactions to the first revelations of war crimes that were disclosed on television in 1968.

The symposium concluded with a series of personal reminiscences by Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Dutch veterans, and a debate on “traitors and traumas”. Eyewitness accounts were given by General Do Trinh (Vietnam), Francisca Fanggiday (Indonesia), and Joop Morriën (the Netherlands). Historian Pierre Brocheux pointed out how the Boudarel case in France was not a matter of false memory, but an attempt by the political right to silence the difficult choices of the past. Henk Wesseling (Leiden University/NIAS, Wassenaar) led the subsequent debate on “traitors and traumas”. They dealt both with theoretical issues of “collective memory” and the production of “nationalized” images in the four countries. <

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Colloquium >

The colloquium was hosted by Maison Descartes, NIOD, the ASIA-group, and the IIAS. In addition, photographs taken by the Dutch reporter, Alfred van Sprang, who visited northern Vietnam between 1950 and 1955, were simultaneously exhibited at the Maison Descartes. The workshop concluded on Saturday evening with the screening of two films on the war of independence in Indochina: the original version of Dien Bien Phu made by Nguyen Thien Loi and a later version by the French film-maker Pierre Schoendoerffer.

Conference on Hideyoshi’s Invasion of Korea

Report >
East Asia

20-25 August 2001
Oxford,
United Kingdom

By James Lewis

As East Asia (China, Korea, Japan) regains its historical position as a world centre, information about the history of regional relations becomes ever more critical. Because European language studies on regional relations are rare, dated, too broad, or provided for a political or economic agenda, we invited various scholars to prepare papers on Hideyoshi’s invasion of Korea (1592-1598). The seven-year long war (called the Imjin Waeran in Korea) involved China, Korea, Japan, the Ryūkyūs, Southeast Asia, and Europeans, giving it the dubious distinction of being an “East Asian World War”. It was part of the reunification of Japan, a serious concern for the Ming empire, and severely damaged, but did not shatter, Korean society, politics, and its economy. Interpretations of the war upheld by Japanese and Korean scholars were surprisingly similar, although differences did emerge.

The conference “The ‘Imjin Waeran’ - Hideyoshi’s Invasion of Korea: Problems and Perspectives” focused on five themes. The first theme addressed the international and domestic situations of Japan and Korea over the sixteenth century. Dr Han Moon-jong, (North Chōlla University, Korea) offered “The Korean Domestic Situation and Relations with Japan on the Eve of the Invasion” that outlined Korean relations with Japan, the Korean political and social economy, and explained the lack of Korean military preparedness. Professor Saeki Kōji (Kyūshū University, Japan) presented “The Relationship between China, Korea, and Japan in the 16th Century” that described Japanese relations with China and Korea as marred by violent incidents and the slow reappearance of Japanese piracy.

The second theme turned to the war itself and the peace negotiations. Professor Kitajima Manji (Kyōritsu Women’s University, Japan) gave us “The Imjin Waeran: Contrasting the First

and the Second Invasions of Korea” that described a Hideyoshi who set out to conquer China, met with frustration in Korea, and reduced his goals to the permanent seizure of Korean land. Professor Min Deakkee (Ch’ōngju University, Korea) presented “Chosōn’s Position and Response to Peace Negotiations during the Imjin Waeran”, which discussed the pragmatic military and diplomatic concerns of the Korean court and explained how these concerns conditioned Korea’s eventual acceptance of making peace with Japan. In “The Japan-Ming Negotiations”, Professor Sajima Akiko (Fukuoka Jogakuin University, Japan) examined Japanese-Chinese negotiations and sought to explain Japanese atrocities by depicting a pre-war Hideyoshi who already viewed Korea as Japanese territory in revolt.

Results of the invasion were treated in the third theme. We lacked presentations connecting the structures of political economy with events, but we did have a paper on cultural and biological exchanges. Professor Ha

Woo-Bong (North Chōlla National University, Korea) presented “Post-war Cultural Exchanges” in which exchanges going in both directions were discussed. To various Japanese locales went Korean Confucianists and information technology (metal type and book collections that became the core of major Japanese libraries). Military technology, chilli peppers, and tobacco went to Korea.

The fourth theme focused on the memory of the invasion preserved in different literary forms. “Post-war Han Source Material on Hideyoshi’s Invasion of Korea”, presented by Professor Murai Shōsuke (Tokyo University, Japan), introduced and offered vignettes of leisure, administration, and army-civilian relations from the memoirs of ordinary Japanese soldiers. Professor Choi Gwan (Korea University, Korea) presented “Literature on the Imjin Waeran”, outlining the relevant fictional and non-fictional genres in Korea and Japan and suggesting that these accounts created long-lived chauvinist attitudes in both cultures.

The fifth and final theme considered the Chinese connection. Dr Han Myung-gi (Kyujanggak, Seoul National University, Korea) offered “Chaejo chiūn and Chosōn-Ming, Chosōn-Later Jin Relations in the seventeenth Century”, which examined the ideological and propaganda role of Korean ‘gratitude and dependence’ towards the Ming. “Korea and China after the Imjin Waeran”, presented by Professor Kuwano Eiji (Kurume University, Japan) examined the imposition on Korea of particular state rituals celebrating a Chinese god of war, living Chinese generals, and departed Ming soldiers, thereby offering an operational measure of official Korean commitment to the Ming and the Qing. Professor Harriet Zurndorfer (Universiteit Leiden, the Netherlands), in her paper “Wanli China versus the Dragon’s Head and the Snake’s Tail”, dispelled the images of a weak Wanli Emperor and put into perspective the impact of the war on imperial finances. Professor Namlin Hur (University of British Columbia, Canada) delivered “The Celestial Warriors: A

Drama of Military Aid and Corruption in the Korean War, 1592-98” that examined Korea within Chinese geopolitical concerns and offered a Korean view on the burdens of hosting Chinese forces.

Commentary was provided by invited discussants from Japan, the Netherlands, and the USA. Support was provided by The Korea Foundation, The Oriental Institute of the University of Oxford, The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, The Japan Foundation, The Northeast Area Council of the Association for Asian Studies (USA), The British Academy, The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, The International Institute for Asian Studies (the Netherlands), Wolfson College (Oxford), and The British Association for Korean Studies, which organized the conference. <

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