Chinese descendants in East Asia under Japanese colonialism
Leo Douw

THE WORKSHOP ON BORDER SOCIETIES AT ICAS 8, MACAO, 25 JUNE 2013
ORGANIZERS: LEO DOUW, UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM, VU UNIVERSITY AMSTERDAM AND TIMOTHY TSU, KWANSEI GAKUIN UNIVERSITY, NISHINOMIYA

OUR WORKSHOP ENGAGED with the history of Chinese migrations around the countries of East Asia. There is a big challenge in discussions about the period of Japanese colonialism (1895-1945). For decades, the assertion of national interests has been preponderant in debates about that period, often presenting the personal 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 in their host societies. These are the underlying challenges 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 papers by Jin-A Kang and Byung-il Ahn examined the developments which led up to the Wanbaoshan Incident in 1931, and in doing so not only killed by their Chinese employers, usually big landowners. 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 papers on Southern China partly cover the same ground. Xuanyuan Wu, in a good example in which Chinese 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, on 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, muttering 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 Taiwanese-based Sh family perpetuated its cross-strait trading business despite the restrictions posed on it by the new and still volatile contested colonial state. Peiwen 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. Huayung Kuo focuses 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 Tiu’s paper tackles in particularly with Kao’s, and those by others of Taiwanese language and its relationship to the Taiwanese language reformer Cai peihuo, confirms one of which the workshop was a part. This was established in 2011.

I have participated in a number of similar workshops, so have the other participants. In my presentation, I focus on the migration of Taiwanese and Okinawans to Japan before and during the pacification, and compare it with other migration processes in East Asia. In 1946, Okinawans who had participated in the war could get 80% of the出去 of men and 60% of the women. The salary was high, and the life was more comfortable in the camps than in Okinawa. In Japan, they worked in 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 differential treatment under the wartime textile trade deficit, which Korea had with China after the First Sino-Japanese war (1894-95), did not push the Chinese traders from the Japanese market. He says: “Korean business networks were determined by the need to consolidate the colonial state and restrain the migration in order to control [it]. Wang, on the contrary, offers an analysis of the actors in the transport market, which regulated the migration flow from below. He relates how the Japanese business firms, as has been generally assumed thus far, but on the flexibility of Chinese business firms, who changed their business strategies, in order to benefit from the changing market circumstances.

For information, please address Leo Douw (L.M.Douw@uva.nl)

The Participants
Byung-il Ahn, Dept. of History, Sogang University, Korea.
Chu Hong-yuan, Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History; Dept. of Political Science, National Taiwan University, Taiwan.
Jin-A Kang, dept of Business Administration and Commerce, Seoul University, Korea.
Kang-Jin, Dept. of History, Hankyung University, Republic of Korea.
Leo Douw, Dept. of Society and Anthropology, University of Amsterdam; Hist. Univ. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Ann Heylen, Dept. of Taiwan Culture, Languages and Literature, National Taiwan Normal University, National Taiwan Studio Center (OTC), Taiwan.
Huan-kung Kao, National Taiwan University, Taiwan.
Ishikawa Ryota, Institute for Research in Humanities, Ritsumeikan University,Kyoto, Japan.
Jeremy John, Dept. of History, University of Oregon, USA.

I want to thank you for your help in creating this document. If you have any further questions or need assistance, please let me know.