

2019

H-Diplo

Conference Report (CR-2019-1)

24 July 2019

Workshop Report: Reconceptualizing the Cold War: On-the-ground Experiences in Asia 21-22 May and 22-23 June 2019

<https://hdiplo.org/to/CR2019-1>

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The *Reconceptualizing the Cold War: On-the-ground Experiences in Asia* project held two two-day workshops in May and June 2019 at the National University of Singapore. The project has two aims: to establish an oral history archives concerning the Cold War and decolonization in Asia; and to publish a series of anthologies that reconceptualize the conventional understandings of the Cold War through the collective study of on-the-ground experiences across Asia. Hajimu Masuda is the Principal investigator, and his description of the project is available at <http://masudahajimu.com/cfp-reconceptualizing-the-cold-war-on-the-ground-experiences-in-asia-national-university-of-singapore/>

Characteristics of the Workshops

For each of our workshops, we invited a dozen specialists who study various parts of Asia, including India, Pakistan, China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, as well as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, and East Timor. These researchers come from various institutions, disciplines, and occupations, and approach Asian history/studies and the Cold War from diverse angles. Discussions were centred on conceptual frameworks and methods concerning how to approach the diverse “Cold War” experiences of various groups of peoples in more meaningful ways.

One heated thread of discussion involved the interpretation of ordinary peoples’ participation in and understandings of the Cold War. In his opening remarks for the workshops, Hajimu Masuda emphasized the need to reconceptualize the Cold War as a whole, suggesting the importance of paying attention to various kinds of “social wars” concerning ethnic, religious, gender, social, cultural, and local tensions that have often been obscured under the standard narratives of the Cold War. Other presenters also suggested alternative approaches to reconceptualizing the Cold War by reconsidering the term “Cold War” itself, since it inherently implies an American-centric perspective on the post-WWII world, often overlooking diverse historical contexts in Asia and other parts of the world.

The First Workshop, 21-22 May 2019

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The first workshop (21-22 May) invited specialists from various occupations (academics, artists, journalists, activists, etc.) who utilize oral history approaches. Half of the presentations dealt with ordinary peoples' participation and social mobilization: Sim Chi Yin (King's College, UK) and Teng Phee Tan (Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce) explored the Malayan Emergency; Mythri P.U. (University of Calicut) and Muhammed Kunhi M.U (Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi) examined the Naxalite Movement in India; and Luong Thi Hong (Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi) discussed young women's experiences in the Vietnam War.

The second group of invited specialists focused on the "Cold War front lines" between mainland China and Taiwan. The three papers by Kao Tan-hua (Wuchiou, Taiwan), Yongming Chen (Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong) and Zhiyu Zhang (Xiamen Univ.), and Xiyan Wang (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, Paris) investigated front-line communities by means of cultural anthropological, architectural, and family historical approaches to the Wuchiou, Xiamen, and Kinmen islands that lie between China and Taiwan.

Finally, Heo Ho Joon's (*The Hankyoreh News Paper*, Jeju) and Chong Ujong's (Otani University) papers analysed local and individual experiences of supposedly "anti-Communist" suppression in Jeju and Osaka, and how local people (Jeju islanders and Zainichi Koreans) experienced and remembered these events.

The roundtable discussion centred on how to approach the concept of the Cold War from an Asia perspective. Participants pointed out that Asian experiences do not fit with the major components of the conventional notion of the Cold War, e.g. a "long peace" and "nuclear deterrence." Along this line, S.R. Joey Long (NUS) raised questions as to how scholars should reconceptualize the Cold War to reflect situations on the ground in Asia and how they should rewrite the history of post-WWII Asia when it is informed by the people on the ground. He suggested the possibility of using "Competing Modernities," "Civil Wars," and "Political Violence" as alternative frameworks to that of "The Global Cold War" in writing twentieth century global history.

The Second Workshop, 22-23 June 2019

While the participants in the first workshop came from more diverse occupations, the presenters of the second workshop (22-23 June) were mostly scholars. The first group of presentations focused on mainland Southeast Asia and discussed the local politics and social conflicts that lay underneath the Cold War ideological binary: Prasit Leepreecha (Chiang Mai Univ.) examined the Hmong people's experiences in Cold War Thailand; Vattana Pholsena (French National Centre for Scientific Research) investigated minority groups of peoples in the borderland communities between Thailand and Laos, and between Laos and Vietnam; and Simon Richard Creak (NIE/NTU, Singapore) analyzed Laotian Anti-Vietnamese sentiment as a vernacular "anti-Communist" ideology.

The second group utilized biographical approaches to study Cold War Asia. Hajirah Junaid (from Islamabad) and May Ngo (Czech Academy of Sciences) used this approach for their investigation of a Pakistani literary figure in the Indo-Pakistani War and a Chinese-Cambodian in the Vietnam War. Paula Hendrikx (Univ. of Melbourne) approached women's left-wing activism, also through a biographical approach, with a focus on one peasant woman activist's life story in Cold War Indonesia. All three papers demonstrated that biographical approaches to the Cold War could provide unexpected insights into how people understood and experienced it.

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The third line of discussions involved Vanessa Hearman's (Charles Darwin Univ.) and Kisho Tsuchiya's (NUS) papers, both of which analysed transformations of local "cold wars" into hot wars. Hearman argued that the Indonesian massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party members (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) in 1965 was justified by the idea that the situation was one of "kill or to be killed," and explained how people remember the unfolding of the events by use of visual and auditory memories. Tsuchiya attempted to provide an alternative framework for interpreting East Timor's decolonization, the Cold War and the Indonesian invasion (1974-75) using postmodernist theories of "simulacra and simulation."

The fourth thread of the second workshop involved various types of Cold War social mobilization and education. Yang Bin (Univ. Macao) and Covell Meyskens (US Naval Grad School) discussed individual experiences of Chinese on-the-ground mobilization: The Red Guards sent to Burma and various groups of people sent to a Third-Front town in Central China. Finally, Kinuko Maehara Yamazato (Rukyu Univ.) and Sherzod Muminov (Univ. of East Anglia) described contrasting experiences of Okinawans who had opportunities to receive educations in the United States and Japanese imperial soldiers who were sent to internment camps and re-educated in Siberia. These cases showed the complexity of migrants' (or travellers') experiences in terms of Cold War dispensations. They also revealed different levels of openness and silence on part of their interviewees depending on class, individual experiences, and dominant discourses of each society.

Overall Remarks

Overall, the workshops presented a new kind of dialogue concerning how to approach the Cold War from Asia, as participants suggested various alternatives ranging from area studies, the social sciences and humanities, and biographical perspectives to seeing the Cold War as a social war, a social mechanism, and a people's war, under the conceptual rubrics of fear, metaphor, and simulacra, to name a few. We will continue to organize similar workshops in the coming years, and we hope that more and more fruitful discussions of "Cold War Asia" will originate in our discussions, opening a path to a comparative analysis and reconceptualization of the Cold War world in general.

For more details, please contact the conference manager, Tsuchiya Kisho <hiskt@nus.edu.sg> or the project's Principal Investigator, Hajimu Masuda <hishm@nus.edu.sg>.

Workshop Programs

Reconceptualizing the Cold War: On-the-ground Experiences in Asia (21-22 May 2019)

Opening Remark: Masuda Hajimu (Associate Professor, NUS)

Panel 1: Grassroots Experiences of the Malayan War

Sim Chi Yin (artist/photographer and PhD candidate, King's College London), "Tracing 'bandits': The Many Lives of the Leftist Foot Soldiers of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960"

Teng Phee Tan (Chief Researcher, Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce), "The 'Worst Town' in the Malayan Emergency: Grassroots Experiences and People's Memories of Gunung Hijau New Village, Pusing, Perak"

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Discussant: Simon Richard Creak (Assistant Professor, NIE/NTU) and Fang-Tze Hsu (PhD Candidate, NUS)

Panel 2: Grassroots Experiences of the Naxalite Movement

Mythri P. U. (Assistant Professor, Univ. of Calicut, Kerala, India), “Reminiscence of Resistance: Social Experiences of Naxalite Movement in Kerala, India”

Muhammed Kunhi M.U (Research Associate, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi), “Memories of the First Maoist/Naxalite Violence in Kerala, India: Assessing Local Experience of the Ideological Politics of the Cold War”

Discussant: Iqbal Singh Sevea (Associate Professor, the Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

Panel 3: Ordinary Families’ and Women’s War Experiences

Kao Dan-hua (Independent Researcher, Wuchiou, Taiwan), “Wuchiou Lighthouse: The Beacon of the Cold War and the Light-keeper Family”

Luong Thi Hong (Deputy Head, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam), “No Child, No Family: The Fate of Young Vietnamese Women Volunteers during the Vietnam War”

Discussant: SR Joey Long (Associate Professor, NUS) and Taomo Zhou (Assistant Professor, NTU)

Panel 4: Local Translation of Global Ideological Politics

Yongming Chen (PhD candidate, Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong) & Zhiyu Zhang (PhD candidate, Xiamen Univ.), “Practicing the Cold War and the Frontline Urban-Rural Dual System: The Cross-Border Fishermen, Detectives, Party Members, and Defectors in Xiamen”

Xiyan Wang (PhD candidate, School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, Paris), “From the Cold War Threat to Ecological Threat: The Change of Ghost Stories in Kinmen”

Discussant: Zhou Taomo (Assistant Professor, NTU) and Wei Yi Leow (PhD Candidate, NUS)

Panel 5: Local and Individual Experiences of Cold War Suppressions

Chong Ujong (Lecturer, Otani Univ., Kyoto, Japan), “‘Does anybody know Paek Chang-Un?’: ‘A certain Korean boy’ Judged in the U.S. Military Court in Osaka”

Heo Ho Joon (Senior Reporter, *The Hankyoreh Newspaper*, Jeju, South Korea), “Jeju 4.3 Uprising as Cold War and their Sufferings: Based on the islander’s oral testimonies”

Discussant: Seung-Joon Lee (Associate Professor, NUS)

Panel 6: Roundtable

Reconceptualizing the Cold War: On-the-ground Experiences in Asia (22-23 June 2019)

Opening Remark: Masuda Hajimu (Associate Professor, NUS)

Panel 1: Local Politics Underneath the Global Cold War

Prasit Leepreecha (Senior Lecturer, Chiang Mai Univ., Thailand), “Cold War and Ethnicity in Northern Thailand

Vatthana Pholsena (Research Fellow, French National Centre for Scientific Research, France), “Reconstituting a history of the Cold War in two Southeast Asian borderlands”

Simon Richard Creak (Assistant Professor, NIE/NTU, Singapore), “Anti-Vietnamese Racism as Anticommunism: Vernacular Expression of Ideology and Defining the Cold War in Laos”

Discussant: Samson Lim (Associate Professor, SUTD, Singapore)

Panel 2: Personal Life Stories Underneath Cold War Conflicts

S. Hajirah Junaid, (Independent Researcher, Islamabad, Pakistan), “From East Pakistan to Bangladesh: Challenges of the political, economic and social environment of 1970 and 1971 from a people’s perspective”

May Ngo (Research Fellow, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech), “Chinese-Cambodians in the Vietnam War: an oral history of the ‘other’ soldiers in the Vietcong”

Discussant: Chien-Wen Kung (Postdoc Fellow, NUS)

Panel 3: Left-wing activism and Anti-communist Repression in Indonesia

Paula Hendriks (PhD candidate, Univ. of Melbourne, Australia), “Women, Land and Peasant Activism on the Left in Early 1960s Cold War Indonesia: A Case Study from the Minangkabau Highlands”

Vannessa Hearman (Senior Lecturer, Charles Darwin Univ., Australia), “To kill or be killed’: Fear and responses to the Indonesian anti-communist Repression”

Kisho Tsuchiya (Postdoc Fellow, NUS), “Making of a Cold War Simulacrum: FRETILIN and the Cold War in Timor, 1974-1975”

Discussant: Seng Guo Quan (Assistant Professor, NUS)

Panel 4: What emotions conveyed in the form of ideology?

Bin Yang (Associate Professor, Univ. of Macau, Macau), “Red Guards in Burma, 1960s–1980s: An Oral History”

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Covell Meyskens (Assistant Professor, US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey), “Maoist Man and its Discontents in a Third Front Town”

Discussant: Zhou Taomo (Assistant Professor, NTU)

Panel 5: What emotions conveyed in the form of ideology?

Kinuko Maehara Yamazato (Associate Professor, Univ. of the Ryukyu, Okinawa), “Through the Eyes of Okinawan Students: Experiences in the US Military Scholarship Program during the Cold War”

Sherzod Muminov (Lecturer, Univ. of East Anglia, UK), “Inadvertent Cold Warriors: Japanese Returnees from Soviet Captivity and the Early Cold War in East Asia, 1949-1956”

Discussant: Sayaka Chatani (Assistant Professor, NUS)

Panel 6: Roundtable