

CALL FOR PAPERS DEADLINE | 5 AUGUST 2018

“Masters of Their Own Destiny”: Asians in the First World War and its Aftermath

An International Conference and a Photography Exhibition organized by the History Department, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University and the Institute of Research on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC – CNRS)

Dates: 9-11 November 2018

Venue: Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

Despite being qualified as a “World War”, the First World War has long been studied primarily in a Eurocentric perspective, notwithstanding the massive participation of non-Western populations in the war (more than two million soldiers or workers, colonial and non-colonial, from Africa and Asia) and the importance of their expectations along with their disillusionment with the Paris peace treaties. In the last fifteen years, there has been greater interest in the participation of the colonized populations in the war effort, in terms of military and economic, as well as social and cultural aspects of the war within the colonial society. But the Asian States and societies have still been considered marginal. Many important reference works on international relations of Asia consider that it is only after the Second World War and the decolonization movements, that the Asian States became true actors, “masters of their own destiny”. They seem to have overlooked an important fact that three sovereign Asian countries (Japan, China, and Thailand) entered into the First World War on the Allied side. Nevertheless, in recent years, several works have been published on the First World War from the Asian perspective.

The perspective of this conference is to consider the First World War as a key moment which permitted, for the first time in history, important migrations of people and the circulation of ideas, objects, and techniques between Asia and Europe *in both ways*. By overcoming the oversimplified Eurocentric vision that the masses in colonized countries came to support the European war effort, the aim of this conference is to highlight the Asian individual and collective trajectories, marked by their desire to become the “masters of their own destiny” in the colonial and total war contexts. We hope to join together the perspectives of global history, micro history, and history from below. A biographical approach with the illustration of the individuals’ “non-standard” experiences could allow us to measure the impact of a particular experience of war and of Europe on their lives and their family circle, as well as on their societies.

It is the question of analyzing the experience of war, the conditions in Europe, and the return to their homeland from diverse sources: military archives (including the army’s postal censorship commission), colonial archives, diplomatic archives, intimate letters, press, photographs, memories and literary works, etc. How did Asian workers or soldiers seize that exceptional opportunity to “take charge of their own destiny” at both the individual and national level? How did the Asians apply that “exceptional” experience of the First World War and expatriation to their personal and social life? What was the impact of these individuals on

the political, economic, social, and cultural destiny of the Asian peoples under Western domination? The transition from individual aspirations by using experiences from Europe, to political aspirations in coming back to their homeland, in other words their capacity to become “masters of their own destiny” will be particularly explored.

Possible avenues of research include (among others):

- Experience of Asian soldiers on the European front
- Experience of Asian workers in Europe
- Testimonies of Asian diplomats and officials in Europe
- Asian political activists and the making of new political networks in Asia
- Asian students in Europe and the making of new elite in Asia
- Asian mediators of new technics: the making of new professions in Asia

Other events:

- A photography exhibition entitled “Asians and the Great War”
- A special session on the filmed archives on the Great War with screening and debates of film archives
- Excursion for participants to WWI-related sites and museums and attendance at the 11 November commemoration ceremony in Bangkok

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSAL

Paper proposals should include a title, an abstract (250 words maximum) and a brief personal biography of 150 words for submission by **5 August 2018**.

Please submit your proposal using the provided paper proposal to claire.tran@irasec.com, bhawan.r@chula.ac.th, and v.vacharakirin@gmail.com. Successful applicants will be notified by **20 August 2018** .

ORGANISERS

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