

The Long 1960s in Asia (Editorial)

Derichs, Claudia; Ali, Kamran Asdar

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Derichs, C., & Ali, K. A. (2021). The Long 1960s in Asia (Editorial). *International Quarterly for Asian Studies (IQAS)*, 52(3-4), 173-179. <https://doi.org/10.11588/iqas.2021.3-4.16098>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

The Long 1960s in Asia

Editorial

Claudia Derichs, Kamran Asdar Ali

A number of studies, publications, conferences and anniversary events took place in 2018 to commemorate the 50th birthday of the legendary year 1968. These were accompanied by a raft of scholarly and popular assessments of the “long 1960s”, the “global sixties” and/or the “radical sixties”. The predominant empirical sites for analysis and retrospective were Western Europe and the United States of America. Other world regions were discussed to a clearly lesser extent. Apart from the crucial event of the Vietnam War, the (long) 1960s in Asia did not figure very prominently in the various publications on the topic.

This issue of IQAS seeks to focus on the 1960s in Asia, covering East, South-east and South Asia and discussing the decade from perspectives that have often escaped notice. It sheds a critical light on the notion of the “global sixties” and focuses on the local in order to grasp the spirit of the 1960s in selected Asian countries. It looks at individual nation-states but also transcends their borders, tracing transnational and transregional connectivities, mobilities and relations. It reminds us of radical junctures in countries’ histories that did *not* pave the way for freedom, peace and democracy – as conventional connotations of “1968” and “the sixties” predominantly suggest. The contributions to this issue thus cover the dark as well as the light side of the 1960s and share the conviction that research on this revolutionary decade’s ramifications in Asia is still a field with many blank spots.

Perhaps the most well-remembered hotspot of the 1960s in Asia is Vietnam. The Vietnam War mobilised protest movements all around the world, with European countries, the United States of America and Japan figuring prominently in the media coverage of demonstrations and activities against governments’ support of anti-communist forces in Vietnam. In Japan, the movement known as *Beheiren* (*Betonamu ni heiwa o shimin undô* or the “Citizens’ Movement

Claudia Derichs, Transregional Southeast Asian Studies, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany; claudia.derichs@hu-berlin.de. Kamran Asdar Ali, Department of Anthropology, University of Texas, Austin, USA; asdar@austin.utexas.edu

for Peace in Vietnam”) mobilised tens of thousands of people, who took to the streets in the second half of the 1960s. Internationally, *Beheiren* activists made headlines through their spectacular methods of helping quite a number of deserting GIs to escape to Europe via Japan and Russia. In Japan, GIs who had served in Vietnam often spent time to recover. Remarkably, it was not illegal under Japanese law to help deserters out of the country: American soldiers residing in Japan were not subject to the jurisdiction of the Japanese government; they were, like diplomats, exempted from Japanese immigration law. Hence Japanese citizens who supported US soldiers’ migration out of the country were not violating any Japanese law (Takata 2017¹). Apart from the movements and transnational networks of anti-Vietnam War activists operating within and from Japan, other Asian countries’ civil society protests hardly made headlines in the Western media of the time. Especially puzzling in this context is why the anti-communist massacres of 1965 in Indonesia have received so little attention in both the West and Asia to this day. Baskara Wardaya, in his article in this volume, offers an attempt at explaining the paucity of effective and visible international solidarity. Yet a number of open questions still remain – leaving today’s reader shocked and disgusted at the slaughter that took place in a country neighbouring Vietnam.

The articles in this special issue on the long 1960s in Asia intentionally address events, developments, problems and contextualisations that have thus far not been tackled, or at least not exhaustively, in the literature. They direct the spotlight at countries and trajectories that motivate the reader to put narratives into context – and to adopt a fresh perspective on events that hitherto seemed to be sufficiently interpreted for the history textbooks. Also, stories and historical phenomena that have all too easily been glossed over in the “grand narratives” of the 1960s – in international relations literature, in Cold War coverage, in retrospectives of post-World War II history – are excavated and discussed. Benjamin Kindler’s contribution is just one such example. Kindler proposes to return to the 1960s and direct one’s gaze at relationships of cultural solidarity within Third World socialism. He focuses on the Letters from South Vietnam that arrived in China around 1965, which are analysed as rare yet telling examples of a medium of communication which hints at the “possibilities of pan-Asian liberation struggles from a Vietnamese subject-position” in the 1960s (Kindler in this volume). The Sino-Vietnamese solidarity reflected in these letters was (only) cut off by China’s Cultural Revolution, which commenced in 1966.

As the East Asian neighbour to China and Japan, Korea’s (meaning South Korea’s) sixties are somehow less well known, except for those who are familiar with the postwar history of the country in general and the post-Korean War

1 Kei Takata (2017): Escaping through the Networks of Trust: the US Deserter Support Network in the Japanese Global Sixties. *The Sixties* 10/2, pp. 165–181.

history in particular. Korea, as Eun-Jeung Lee describes, in fact saw a revolution in 1960. In the spring of that year, a strong student movement erupted and eventually brought down the authoritarian regime of Rhee Syngman. But what is known in Korea's history as the April 19 Revolution (and discussed intensively in our interview with Kim Kab-Nyun) turned out to have a very short lifetime. Rather than giving rise to democracy, it became the impetus for a military coup in May 1961. This coup, Lee argues, caused Korea's 1960s to bear the burden of the developmental military dictatorship that captured power. While it is debatable whether "stability" based on the rule of a dictatorial regime is advantageous for fostering economic progress, the author proposes taking relationality and conditionality into account. The article thus focuses "on the ideological structure of the transitional era in which the revolution for democracy led to the establishment of an anti-communist developmental dictatorship as a result of the combined effect of various conditions of Korean politics and the international Cold War in the 1960s" (Lee in this volume).

Similarly revealing, since not widely discussed in the literature, is Eiji Oguma's take on the long 1960s in Japan. While we have mentioned the Japanese anti-Vietnam protests and the deserter support network, these merely reflect the perspective of civil society and/or the opposition movement towards the politics and society of the time. Political regulation and economic policy in the country's post-1968 history were formative for what eventually brought a renewed turn to conservatism. Contrary to what might be assumed in light of a strong and radical student movement and a fierce rejection of the (extension of the) bilateral Japanese American Security Treaty in the wider public – which had caused then-Prime Minister Kishi to resign (1960) – Oguma shows that the Japanese ruling conservative party managed to revive and then sustain its support base. Despite the presence of comparatively strong social movements, he argues, effective social change subsided and a conservative political order re-stabilised in the 1970s. This was first and foremost possible because of a "combination of industry dispersion and reorganisation of citizenry" – resulting in a powerful conservative resurgence and one-party dominance that characterised "the long 1960s" as well as the subsequent decades in Japan (Oguma in this volume).

It might be argued that Indonesia's "long 1960s" have lasted until today. The repercussions of the massacres of the mid-1960s are by no means addressed openly and without prejudice, even though decades have passed and the post-1965 dictatorship of President Suharto was toppled in 1998, making way for a transition to democracy. Baskara Wardaya re-tells the history of 1965, which became so utterly distorted by the hegemonic – and highly fabricated – official narrative of the anti-communist purge. Certainly, Indonesia's 1960s massacres are not only "one of the gravest examples of peace-time mass violence of the post-World War II period" in Asia, but hold that dubious distinction well beyond Asia if not the world. Wardaya blames, among other factors, the lack

of pressure from the international community, which enabled the Indonesian government to refuse investigation into the events. The reason for this lack of pressure, he states, lies in the fact that at “the height of the Cold War, many foreign governments benefitted from the mass killings” (Wardaya in this volume). The trajectory of Indonesia reveals another side of Asia’s “long 1960s” – a dark side, which left not much of a future to dream of.

The late 1960s are especially remembered for the numerous student and workers’ movements in many Western parts of the world. Yet, some of the most important student and peasant-led radical struggles in South Asia in the 1960s were linked to the Naxalite movement in India. In the early 1970s, Kolkata (Calcutta, then) was a city under siege. This was due to the radical movement that is remembered in relation to Naxalbari, a small village in West Bengal that was the site of the 1967 peasant uprising supported by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Soon the uprising spread across the state, with major participation by indigenous groups such as the Santhals and other scheduled castes. Driven by Maoist ideological fervour and Charu Majumdar’s (1918–1972) writings, the revolutionary movement was joined by a number of urban intellectuals and became popular even among students in elite Kolkata colleges. The CPI(M) itself split in 1969, forming the CPI-ML (Marxist-Leninist), which followed a more radical and insurrectionary political line. The entire province of West Bengal was engulfed in a series of violent acts and the Indian state’s response was immediate and brutal. In early 1970 Presidential rule was imposed on West Bengal to combat the internal threat of a communist uprising and subsequently, through militarised state action, thousands of activists and innocents were tortured, incarcerated or killed in police encounters. Following Charu Majumdar’s arrest in 1972 and his death in custody soon afterwards, the movement dissipated (to be resurrected later in various forms across India). By this time, it had already lost its force due to state suppression and also because of internal divisions within the CPI-ML leadership. To date the deaths of these young people are mourned and remembered in the city (not to mention the hundreds of peasants and “tribals” who were killed in the countryside). Contemporary Bengali literature and cinema has created avenues for rethinking and recalling the era. Within this context, Sengupta and Maitra in their paper trace the radical turn in Bengali political culture in the 1960s, ushered in by the Naxalbari Movement. The movement’s vision led to iconoclastic acts of toppling statues of deified cultural figures, publicly burning canonical books and assaulting higher academic institutions as sites of the propagation of an outmoded bourgeois culture. In addition, the article provides a critique of the authoritarian leadership of the CPI-ML, the posture of non-dissent within its cadre and its anti-intellectualism, with its reading of history that was deterministic and narrowly teleological. Yet the paper simultaneously gives us a more sympathetic reading of a movement that re-

mained resplendent with multifarious possibilities and narratives, despite its many problems. In developing their argument, the authors use understudied novels, political writings, memoirs, poetry, theatre and cinema from the period as their prime archival sources. In tracing the cultural and artistic effervescence that was the product of this radical moment in the region's history, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Indian Bengal.

As in the case in Bengal, in Sri Lanka in 1970–71 there was also a major radical insurrection that had Maoist tendencies. The Sri Lankan (then Ceylon) government crushed the revolt spearheaded by the People's Liberation Front. The eruption of revolutionary violence was only a part of the longer story of the Left in Sri Lankan post-colonial history. From the time of the country's independence from Britain in 1948, the Trotskyite Left faction had become the dominant communist party in national politics and had a number of elected representatives in the parliament. The Government of S. Bandaranaike, which came to power in 1960, started to work with all left-wing groups, and in 1964 parts of the Trotskyite Left joined the government. Hence precisely at the moment when anti-communist violence intensified in places like Indonesia, interestingly in Sri Lanka there was a gesture of co-habitation with the formal Left in parliamentary politics. Yet, as mentioned above, in 1970–71 there was the near collapse of the Bandaranaike government due to the insurrectionist attack by radicals and Maoists; the Soviet Union and its allies, along with India, assisted in crushing the movement. Gunawardena and Kadirgamar, in their contribution to this volume, trace this history of the Left, but simultaneously emphasize how the Left ceded the agrarian question and the related importance of self-sufficiency in food production to the political right in Sri Lanka. The economic crisis of the mid-1970s led to the ascendancy of private capital as well as to a shift toward Sinhala nationalism that intensified existing ethnic tensions and fed the violence that engulfed Sri Lanka for almost three decades. By revisiting the history of the Left in the 1960s, the article helps us understand some additional factors in the violence that erupted in the 1980s. This perspective departs from explanations for the civil war as primarily the result of primordial identity differences (Sinhala and Tamil ethnicities) and illuminates how Leftist politics in terms of the peasant question, industrialisation, ethnic difference, distribution of resources and social welfare may have also played a part in the violence faced by the country in subsequent years.

Unlike other parts of South Asia, the Pakistani state had started to clamp down on communist activities soon after the country gained independence in 1947. In the 1950s the Pakistani state enmeshed itself in the US-led Cold War politics of the time. This close relationship culminated in the severe repression of progressive political groups and the eventual banning of the Communist

Party of Pakistan in 1954. Soon after the 1958 imposition of martial law, the military regime clamped down on all political activities, leading to the arrest and harassment of Leftist political workers and leaders. The 1960s was thus one of the most difficult times for the Leftist movement in Pakistan. By the early 1960s the various groups of the Leftist clinging to existence underground had also started to feel the impact of the Sino-Soviet split within international communism. In Pakistan, some of these international differences were played out in terms of factional rivalries, while others took the form of tangential arguments on the nature of the martial law regime. Despite the friction within and between the Leftist groups in Pakistan, it was clear that in the prevailing international atmosphere and the political realities within Pakistan, the Maoist groups with more radical anti-imperialist slogans (anti-Americanism and support for the people of Vietnam), an anti-India stance and a call for active (and armed) struggle became more popular among the youth and the students. The heavy reliance on foreign capital by the military government faced a major setback after the 1965 war with India, when World Bank funds were cut off and then resumed at much lower levels. As the country's entire financial structure had been built on a large inflow of foreign capital, economic growth began to sputter. Bad harvests in 1965 and 1966, and the demand of the East Pakistani middle classes for a more equitable share of the spoils of development, created major political turmoil in the country. The dictator Ayub Khan's much heralded "decade of development" thus came to an abrupt end when in 1968–69 students, intellectuals, the urban poor and the working classes participated in a massive civil disobedience movement. Within this larger context, Anushay Malik's article focuses on how the labour and student activists in Pakistan were part of the global moment of the 1960s with its sense of expanded possibilities. In a methodologically innovative move, Malik focuses on local stories from around Lahore to explore how this political imagination was expressed in Pakistan. Using the 1960s as one particular window to look at the aspirations of ordinary people, the essay distances itself from the narratives of political parties and transformative events. Rather it seeks to highlight voices that inform us about the future aspirations of the people themselves for meaningful change in their lives and what mattered to them. The stories Malik shares are of activist cadres who were mobilising people during the 1960s, a process that culminated in the anti-military movement of the late 1960s that toppled the dictator. This is an attempt at history from below that delves into the interstices and erasures in order to provide a more nuanced history of the Left in 1960s Pakistan.

In our attempt to provide a corrective to the silence on the history of the Left during the "long 1960s" in Asia, we have assembled a group of articles that also provide us with a history of conflict, state sponsored oppression and ideological doubt during the post-war period and in a number of newly independent

states. The articles read together are part of a mosaic that helps us see the evolving political patterns and connections through a history of social movements, peasant mobilisation, labour struggle, radical insurrection as well as state rigorism in the 1960s and early 1970s from a particularly Asian perspective. This history is surely messy, unruly and contradictory, yet it may foreground what has remained inaudible or been suppressed in history writing on the topic. Within this context, our humble attempt is to bring forward an unremembered past to add to the few academic social and cultural histories of progressive politics from 1960s Asia.