

Wartime Japanese Anthropology in Asia and the Pacific

Shimizu, Akitoshi / Jan van Bremen (Eds.). Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology. Senri Ethnological Studies no. 65, 2003, 300 pp. [The publications of Senri Ethnological studies are not for sale. They are being distributed to a limited number of libraries worldwide.] ISBN 0387-6004

The conflicts in ex Yugoslavia, the Near and Middle East and Africa with large numbers of refugees, the integration of them and of emigrants in culturally very different countries is an increasingly scorching theme, calling for the expertise of anthropologists. Such expertise also played an important role before and during World War II.

The editors explain how anthropology was influenced by colonialism and imperialism since the 18th century. Colonial powers like the Netherlands, England, the USA etc. were interested in the characteristics of peoples in newly acquired territories. The boon time for anthropology came with World War II, when all powers were in urgent need of understanding their enemies for propaganda purposes and to prepare themselves for the occupation and administration of enemy territory.

In „Wartime Anthropology: A Global Perspective“, Van Bremen compares war anthropology in Japan and the United States, and, to a minor degree, in Great Britain and the Netherlands. Both USA and Japan realized how important a wide and deep understanding of the enemy was. Conclusions by scientists like Ruth Benedict had a major impact on how the US dealt with Japan towards the end and after the war.

Akitoshi Shimizu deals with „Anthropology and the Wartime Situation of the 1930s and 1940s: Masao Oka, Yoshitarō Hirano, Eiichirō Ishida and Their Negotiations with the Situation“. By taking full control of Manchuria in 1931 and subsequently invading China, Japan was socially – ideologically - economically and politically directed towards total war efforts, to which anthropology had to contribute its share.

In “Seiichi Nakano and Colonial Ethnic Studies” Kevin M. Doak traces the relationship between ethnicity and national identity, focusing on the role of Seiichi Nakano (1905-1993), who had developed ideas how to tackle the problem of nationality (minzoku) in wartime Japan. Nakano re-interpreted ethnic nationality as an one element within a broader concept of nationality, belittling ethnic differences within Asia.

Teruo Sekimoto writes about “Selves and Others in Japanese Anthropology”. The first generation of modern Japanese anthropologists was benefited by war and militarism

from 1935 to 1944, when their focus was on peoples in the colonized and occupied territories.

The origin of the Japanese race had been a major theme since the setting up of the Japanese anthropology in 1884. In “Physical Anthropology in Wartime Japan” Atsushi Nobayashi comments the research which consisted of comparing the relation between the Japanese and the neighbouring peoples, in order to gain insights into the origins of the Japanese race.

“Anthropological Studies of the Indigenous Peoples in Sakhalin in Pre-Wartime and Wartime Japan” is Shirō Suzuki’s topic from the point of view of the historical study of indigenous peoples. He focuses on field research of the Uilta people conducted in the 1930s and 1940s by Eiichirō Ishida, a leader of post-wartime anthropology.

Ch’oe Kilsūng presents „War and Ethnology/Folklore in Colonial Korea: The Case of Akiba Takashi“. Takashi was a renowned ethnologist in colonial Korea. Kilsūng examines how he had positioned himself between colonialism and academism and his attitude to colonialism and ethnology during World War II. Takashi advocated a union between Japanese and Koreans by way of „The Japanese Spirit“, defining „Minzoku“ as „a group of people who share the same culture and aspire after the same ideal“.

In his paper “For Science, Co-Prosperity, and Love: The Re-imagination of Taiwanese Folklore and Japan’s Greater East Asian War” Tsu Yun Hui examines how a group of amateur folklorists in Japanese-ruled Taiwan practised folkloric research during the war 1941-1945. In support of their research they argued that the pursuit of folkloric knowledge would contribute to research on mainland China and South East Asia, both of vital interest to Japan.

„Studies of Chinese Peasant Society in Japan: Before and During World War II“ by Nie Lili provide an overview of the situation in China. The aim is to understand the purposes and research methods, how the Japanese scholars viewed Chinese society and how the nexus between war and colonisation influenced their activity.

Kōji Miyazaki’s “Colonial Anthropology in the Netherlands and Wartime Anthropology in Japan” is devoted to the term “other”. Miyazaki interprets Japanese anthropology of those years not as one which encounters the “other”, but as one that expands the collective “self”.

In “Mabuchi Tōichi in Makassar“ Nakao Katsumi describes wartime anthropology in Burma, Mabuchi’s years at the Taihoku University, his work with the South Manchurian Railway Co and at the Makassar Institute 1944-1945.

B. A. Hussainmiya's "Resuscitating Nationalism: Brunei under the Japanese Military Administration (1941-1945)" analyzes a new national and social awareness created by the Japanese among indigenous communities. They gave Brunei authorities ample room for decision making. This experience transformed subservient people to people demanding rights and freedom, when the former rulers returned after the war.

The publication provides a welcome insight into the different phases of anthropology in Japan, not only in wartime. The reference to foreign scientists, whose research had a bearing on Japanese anthropology, is particularly helpful in appraising the situation, even more enlightening are the contributions about leading Japanese anthropologists. Each article is accompanied by a rich bibliography. Where appropriate, names are shown also in Chinese/Japanese characters.

Richard Dähler

Review in: Internationales Asienforum, International Quarterly for Asian Studies,
36. Jg., Mai 2005, 1-2/05



Reviewer:

© Dr. Richard Dähler, CH 8047 Zurich

<http://www.eu-ro-ni.ch/publications/Shimizu.pdf>
www.eu-ro-ni.ch