

Torii Ryūzō and Early Anthropology in Japan: Visions of an Emerging Field

鳥居龍蔵と日本における初期人類学 ——新興分野の展望——

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Abstract

In this paper, I review some of salient biographical details of early Japanese anthropologist Torii Ryūzō, discuss his fieldwork methods in relation to the newly acquired territories of the Japanese empire, and then focus on his use of photography. This historical reconstruction allows us to consider relevant questions for anthropology in the contemporary period as decolonial approaches to knowledge are currently under discussion.

Key words : Early anthropology of Japan, fieldwork, photography, decoloniality

概 要

本稿では、初期の人類学者である鳥居龍蔵の主な経歴を概観し、日本帝国が新たに獲得した領土における彼のフィールドワーク手法について論じた後、写真の利用に焦点を当てる。この歴史的再構築により、脱植民地的な知識アプローチが議論されている現代において、人類学に関連する decoloniality を検討することが可能となる。

キーワード：日本の初期人類学、フィールドワーク、写真、デコロニアリティ

Introduction

This paper focuses on the work of Torii Ryūzō (1870-1953) as one of the first anthropologists in Japan. Torii was a prodigious academic and especially an original and lifelong fieldworker and ethnographer. He first did anthropological fieldwork at the age of 25 in the Liaodong Peninsula of Manchuria and was able to go to Taiwan in 1896 soon after the Japanese imperial government took control of the island. He also conducted fieldwork in the Kuril Islands, Southwest China, Korea, Sakhalin, Northeast China and Mongolia as well as in Japanese territories of Okinawa and Hokkaido (formerly Ryukyu and Ezo, integrated into Japanese colonial administration in the early Meiji period). He became the second Chair of the Anthropology Department at Tokyo University in 1922 some years after the death of his teacher and mentor Tsuboi

Shōgorō in 1913. His achievements are numerous, including helping establish Sophia University in 1928 and producing a large body of ethnographic photographs (numbering in the tens of thousands, many of which are available in online archives), stored in collections in the Museum of Tokyo University, the Seoul National Museum, and the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryūzō Memorial Museum (see Pai, 2009 for details).

It would be impossible to do justice to the even a small slice of early Japanese anthropology in a paper of this length, but I choose to focus on Torii for several reasons; as an exemplar of how anthropology developed at the end of the 19th century in Japan and into the 1930s when the field can claim to have been institutionalized with the founding of the Nihon Minzoku Gakkai (1934), with its first president Shibusawa Keizō (1896-1963), later changing its name in 1943 to Minzoku Kenkyūjo under Oka Masao (1898-1982). It is also useful to re-examine Torii because he became known at the time as one of, if not the most, famous field researchers starting from a humble beginning a more or less uneducated son of a merchant in Tokushima and moving to Tokyo as a teenager.

During this period there were other field researchers in Japanese imperial territories of note, in Taiwan, Inō Kanori for example (see below) and in Korea, Izumi Seiichi (1950-1970), and in Micronesia especially after 1933 (when Japan seceded from the League of Nations and again reclaimed Micronesia as its territories). There were as well a number of others in the Japanese mainland (*naichi*), for example the pioneering folklorist Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), who also visited Okinawa, Taiwan, Korea, and Micronesia, in addition to more well-known research in Tohoku. Yanagita, as the founder of the field, native ethnology (*minzokugaku*), carried out similar types of research within Japan as the above mentioned anthropologists and the boundaries between the fields of folklore and anthropology “remained fluid, due to ... belief in common racial heritage of the Japanese and their research subjects in Japan... Japanese human science ‘did not emerge by encountering the ‘other’ but by expanding the collective ‘self’” (Kingsberg, 2020, p. 25, citing Miyazaki, 1999). In other words, as Kingsberg and others have shown, the focus on early anthropology in Japan was largely concomitant with the expansion of the Japanese empire and a desire to understand the contributions of other ethnicities on the borders, both historically and into the present, for the greater Japanese ethno-national state of the Meiji era.

Torii is furthermore of particular interest because of his intense commitment to fieldwork and his photographic documentation, issues that have continued to be central in much anthropological discussion up to and including into the 21st century. I discuss the first topic, fieldwork, directly in relation to the constraints and historical backdrop of coloniality in the next section specifically, as Torii’s photography, in the following section, also needs to be placed in the context of the power relations between colonizer and colonized.

In this paper, I first outline a brief discussion of colonial anthropology, especially in relation to Taiwan, to further contextualize Torii’s research in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As I proceed, utilizing several photographs from Torii’s monumental output, I discuss the place of photography in anthropology more generally in order to cast further light on the nature of anthropology’s legacy of fieldwork combined with documentation, highlighting questions that continue to be relevant for fieldwork and ethnography into the present era. The main purpose of this paper is to provide a discussion of the historical precedents of ethnographic representation as first documented by Torii, and to also further discuss the evolving co-construction of anthropology with photography, though such a discussion is of course limited by the length of this paper. Finally, it is appropriate to link these discussions with the wider ongoing discussion of decoloniality in the field of anthropology.



Figure 1

1st photo (on top): Torii (on left) in Manchuria (Caption reads “Excavation on Ryōyō Army Logistics Hospital, sketching a brick tomb.” 2nd photo (on bottom) Torii (on right) in the same location, no additional information (both likely to have been in 1909). Photo Plates #3069 and #3021, available at <http://www.muse.or.jp/torii/>

Colonial Anthropology

In Japan, as in other countries (Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany and others), anthropology developed in the context of colonial power and extension of interests beyond national borders (Shimizu, 1999). In addition to the pathbreaking article of Shimizu (for which I rely on much of the discussion below) in the case of Japanese anthropology, other works that have explored anthropology’s links with empire are numerous, following the pioneering works in the 1970s and 1980s as the first wave of decolonializing of anthropological knowledge occurred (as a very short list, Asad, 1973, Fabian, 1983, and many of the works of George Stocking and others)¹⁾ and addressed issues of colonial encounters and overlaps of anthropology with colonial administration. This is not simply a result of decolonial movements post-1945 and the demise of easy “access,” to colonial “native peoples,” under the guise of scholarship, but also an “epistemological break,” even a “crisis,” as many of those writing already 30 or 40 years ago noted. Stocking (1987, p. 290) for example, pointed out that the Victorian ancestors of anthropological research, the same generation as Torii, would no longer have the monopoly on methodological “cynosure” of the discipline dependent as they were, pre-WW II and decolonization, on an impoverished and non-self-reflexive view of “tribal cultures,” based on “ahistorical ethnographic observation.”

The initial choice of sending Torii on his first fieldwork to Liaodong in Manchuria was made by then Chair of the Tokyo Anthropological Society and Tokyo University Professor of Anthropology Tsuboi Shōgorō in consultation with the Meiji government as well as military commanders in Manchuria, confirmed by letter on June 30, 1895.²⁾ Tsuboi had taken on Torii as an uneducated young man (but someone that Tsuboi recognized as having a remarkable learning capacity) from Shikoku as a teenager as a research assistant soon after his arrival in Tokyo. This letter instructed Torii to research “customs of the natives, collect ancient objects (*kobutsu*), search for prehistoric remains (*iseki*) and make a report” (Pai, 2009, p. 271). It was not

until the following year (1896) that he received a camera from Tokyo University for his research expedition to Taiwan. Returning to the theme of his cooperation with imperial agents, Pai writes that soldiers of the Imperial Army were hired as his guards for protection of Torii and his equipment but also the sites that he opened for archaeological excavation (Pai, 2009, p. 275). Figure 1, although from a later period of research in the first decade of the 1900s, shows Torii with a soldier (2 soldiers in Photograph 2) at his side, as many of the photos that include Torii do (there are some of Torii with indigenous peoples but fewer).

Torii could not have carried out his work without assistance of imperial military escorts and permission in Taiwan, Manchuria and other places, signifying the nature of colonial anthropology in Japan. After Japan had acquired Taiwan in 1895, a long discussion took place over the cost of administering the newly-acquired colony within the Meiji government, with some parties advocating re-sale to other imperial powers such as the British or French. Eventually the Japanese imperial government settled on a solution to develop extractive resources, especially camphor, which was largely to be found in the foothills of the mountains, home to most of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and by 1900 Taiwan produced 60% of the global production of this important commodity which in turn was used for production of gunpowder, fireworks, mothballs, insect repellants and many other items (Roy, 2020, pp. 1-2).

In the background of his research on the indigenous peoples of Taiwan was a controversy over the origin of Japanese peoples that had taken place between Tsuboi (Torii's mentor) and Koganei Yoshikiyo (1858-1944), considered the founder of physical anthropology in Japan. Tsuboi maintained that a mythical stone age people, Koro-pok-guru were the ancestors of mainland Japanese while Koganei maintained that Ainu were. The term Koro-pok-guru was evidently a term derived from Ainu people and believed by Tsuboi to be a mixture of people, but not including Ainu. Numerous articles were published in the years from 1887 shortly after Tsuboi had founded the Anthropological Society of Tokyo (later renamed the Anthropological Society of Japan). In order to contest the claims, Koganei amassed a large number of skeletal remains of Ainu (166 skulls and 92 skeletons).

Tsuboi, Koganei, and others were instrumental in promoting the image of Ainu as "a primitive race," and Tsuboi, in particular, was also centrally responsible for the human exhibitions of Ainu people at the Fifth National Industrial Exhibition in Osaka (1903), the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (also known as the St. Louis World's Fair, 1904), and the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition in London in 1910 (Low, 2012). This debate continued until the death of Tsuboi in 1913 and little evidence of the Koro-pok-guru was unearthed while Koganei, and following him Torii, posited a composite and hybrid melting pot as the origin of Japanese, consisting of peoples from northeast Asia, Indochina and Indonesia. For this reason, Torii became interested in the indigenous peoples of Taiwan as the possible primitive "ancestors" of Japanese (Askew, 2004) following similar evolutionary anthropological theories common in the late 1800s and early 1900s regarding "primitive peoples" as "survivals."

Thus anthropology, at least as exemplified in Torii's work, was not simply research on the "Other," as in other European colonial contexts, but also of the "Self and Near-self" in the phrase of Askew (2004, p. 140). In this respect, Torii's research also subscribed to the notions of race that were prevalent at the time, as well as anthropological methods to try to determine the differences ascribed to race, namely anthropometric measurements of head sizes, and in the case of numerous photographs, poses of torsos and heads of the people he researched. Pai (2009, p. 281) notes that Torii was the first to utilize anthropometry and physiology for racial classification studies in Northeast Asia.

In a similar manner, the photography of skulls, arranged on racks in some of the photos (a few of the Taiwanese tribes of this period still engaged in head-hunting, later outlawed by the Japanese colonial



Figure 2

The areas of Taiwan (and the tribal names) where Torii researched from 1896 to 1900; Mountainous areas are visible running north to south (photo by author at Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryūzō Memorial Museum).

administration) and also the collection of skulls for further analysis was something that Torii engaged in. For example, Torii is quoted as saying that because of the violent murders of Japanese camphor workers at the time, he was unable to enter Mushe (in north-central Taiwan). “Luckily I have been able to obtain skeletal material – one skull and one complete body ... something many times more valuable than access to the village” (Torii, quoted from Nakazono, 1993, in Barclay, 2001). According to Ishii (2024), Torii’s classification of the nine mountain indigenous ethnic groups of Taiwan - Atayal, Bunun, Tsou, Amis, Paiwan, Puyama, Rukai, Saisiyat and Thao (also known as Yami), was based on both his observation of customs as well as discernable racial characteristic differences. This list has since been expanded to 16 groups, all of them since 2001. The debate about head-hunting that was carried on at the time of Torii’s research (and about which some of his photos gave evidence) has been ongoing and re-examined more recently by Roy (2020), among others, including Japanese scholars, who argues that ritual head-taking was part of the larger system for protecting fields, hunting grounds, and regulating disputes, as opposed to the savagery in how it was portrayed at home in colonial-era Tokyo and elsewhere as a partial rationale for colonization of the “savages” (Roy, 2020, p. 32). Whereas Roy subtitles his dissertation, “the camphor question is in reality the savage question” after the former U.S. Consul in Formosa (Taiwan) from 1897 to 1903, James Davidson, who wrote a survey of the island and its resources (published in 1903), one could easily say in respect to anthropology in the context of Taiwan and its indigenous peoples, the savage

question is in many ways the camphor question.³⁾

There can probably be no final and authoritative assessment of Torii's contribution to the anthropology of his time, since our understanding of the colonial nature of the conditions under which he labored continues to evolve. It is undoubtedly true that understanding of the continuities of ethnography would require many of the theoretical bases of anthropology as a global system of knowledge production and exchange to acknowledge the timing and originality of Torii's work (Kuwayama, 2004). Should we concur with Pai's (2009) assessment that "colonial racism," was the driving force as Japanese government and academics were eager to disassociate the origin of Japanese wholly from Ainu populations considered and portrayed in expositions (Osaka, 1903, for example) as "backward and disheveled colonized subjects needing Japanese guidance, reform and education" (Pai, 2009, p. 287, citing Howell, 2004 and Hudson, 1999)?

That Torii and others of his time were "driven by a mixture of nationalism, idealism, romanticism, and the desire to preserve and collect the remnants of the nation's imagined ancestral origins and imperial archaeological heritage" (Pai, 2009, p. 288) can be widely agreed. Or more sanguinely, as Askew concludes, that regardless of intentions, "his theory of ancient Japan and origin of the Japanese nation matched the needs of empire" (Askew, 2004, p. 147).

Furthermore, questions about the colonial context of anthropology (or ethnology as it was more commonly called prior to WW II) continue to be only partially examined and therefore subject to new understandings. For example, Nakao (2005) has written about the imperial past of Japanese anthropology and assesses that the transition from *minzokugaku* (ethnology) to *bunka jinruigaku* (cultural anthropology) or *shakai jinruigaku* (social anthropology) following Japan's defeat in WW II obscures much of what made Japanese ethnography (and anthropology) distinct, albeit in the service of empire. "To explore the history of prewar ethnographic research is tantamount to remembering and confronting modern Japan's imperialistic past. The apparent 'historical amnesia' among anthropologists in Japan parallels the low level of historical consciousness of Japanese people in general about Japanese imperialism" (Nakao, 2005, p. 32).

In regard to Taiwan, in particular, the ferocity of the campaigns to subdue indigenous people from 1895 to 1915 involved numerous campaigns waged by police, military, and paramilitary forces leading to the deaths of thousands, including civilians (citing numerous sources an estimate of over 10,000, Roy, 2020) as well as attempts at imperial assimilation and Japanese language education. While not attempting to prioritize Taiwanese colonial violence (over the histories of other parts of the Japanese empire, Korea and China, for example), in the context of Torii's first photographs it is highly instructive that the mission involved recording information about the indigenous peoples, leading to the colonial (and anthropological) assessment of indigenous peoples as savages.

From a different focus, the assessment of the contributions of early anthropologists (and social science researchers more generally) can change according to the national and geopolitical situations of a given era. The comparison of Torii with Inō Kanori is instructive as Torii focused almost entirely on the indigenous tribes in inland mountainous Taiwan, because of an interest in finding peoples who had not been sinicized, that is, mixed with Chinese coming from the mainland in previous centuries. Inō, who carried out research in Taiwan at a similar time, was much more interested in the coastal inhabitants, partly also since his knowledge of Chinese was a factor in his ability to use written materials. Barclay (2001) describes what he refers to as an Inō Kanori "revival" that has taken place in recent decades due to the internal politics of Taiwan and the demise of the Kuomintang's (KMT) dominance on national identity narratives, which previously had negated consideration of the type of mixing between Chinese and indigenous populations in Taiwan symbolized by some of the coastal tribes that Inō studied.

However, in order to explore the dynamics of Torii's original contributions I will next discuss some of the issues related to the immense amount of photos that he took, in Taiwan, and elsewhere.

Anthropology and Photography

As already noted, Torii was one of the first ethnographers to use photography, and probably the first Japanese. Malinowski, who carried out research about 20 years after Torii's first use of a camera, is often acknowledged as a pioneer in this respect. Extended commentaries on Malinowski's achievements, but which also present him critically in light of the later publication of his diaries (roughly 25 years after his death in 1967) have referred to the style of anthropological research of this generation as "I-witnessing" (Geertz, 1988, pp. 73-101).

This leads to the some important reflections. First is the notable concomitant development of anthropology and photography at the end of the 19th century. Pinney refers to this as "parallel histories," in, for example, the establishment of the Ethnological Society of London (1843) and the first prototype of a photograph, a daguerreotype in 1837, followed by a "public announcement of Fox Talbot's 'photogenic drawing' in 1839 (Pinney, 1992, p. 74). In writing about Malinowski, who is well-known to have established legislative-like rules and theoretical concerns in relation to fieldwork, the accompaniment of the photography, signaled the "I was there' pronouncement of the fieldworker-theorist" and "the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal (Goin, 1997, p. 67, second quote cited from Sontag, 1973).

One could add then that the particularist ethnography of the fieldworker and fine-grained vision of the photograph allow transcendence to a kind of universal statement, or theory, based on irrefutable evidence. In other words, here it is, here they are. In many cases, especially at an early point in the history of photography and what was known as "salvage anthropology," there is urgency of showing the world a people "before they pass away" (reference to photo explorer, Jimmy Nelson, whose coffee table books are filled with photos of peoples who might/will/have disappear-ed -a claim that is broadly critiqued by indigenous peoples; see Survival International for examples). Well-known 19th century Native American photographer Edward Curtis also habitually used the term "vanishing race," even though he was aware that it was inaccurate (Brumbaugh, 1996, p. 34). The similarity in Curtis' and Torii's work has also been noted by Pai (2009).

A more general discussion of the role of images and evolving understanding of them in the early 20th century is also important. Torii's photos, many taken as they were at the very beginning of the circulation and reception of images in wider arenas (expositions, journals, and so on), are subject to the distinction posed by Benjamin (1955, but first writing in the 1930s) between the difference of an image having "cult value," or having "exhibition value." Although Benjamin was referring more generally to art in his famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, his distinction is also applicable to photography. Such documentation also begins with "ceremonial objects," where "what mattered was their existence, not their being on view" (1955, pp. 224-225). Later, he argues that in photography, "exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance," resulting in what Benjamin describes as their "melancholy, incomparable beauty" (1955, pp. 225-226).

The slow reduction and usurpation of the ritualistic function of art (through photography and film) has significance in the evolution in anthropology from a mission of salvaging culture to bringing it closer to



Figure 3

A camera similar to the one used by Torii. The camera weighed between 3 and 4 kilograms and glass dry plates were attached to the front, each plate weighing 100 grams (Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum, 2016). Caption reads that Torii became the first person to use a camera in 1896. Photo taken by author at Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryūzō Memorial Museum.

larger numbers of people in the metropole for their edification and shared understanding. Wolin (1988, p. 189), cites a different work by Benjamin (“What is Epic Theatre?”, also written in the 1930s), “Every day the urge gets stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness... extract[ing] it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.” It is in a similar way that anthropology has progressed from a more basic ritual-like documentation symbolized by portraits and body measurements of the early ethnographers to more nuanced and representational (but whose representation?) styles of research and writing and hence, following Benjamin, has moved to a more political type of engagement with the meaning of research of the “other” and the context in which it occurs, especially in the years following WW II.

Regardless of this wider discussion of the changing nature of photography from its inception to the present, as well as its intertwined history with anthropology, it is certainly clear that Torii, a pioneer in fieldwork and photography, has been underappreciated even as some of the 1,829 dry-plate photographs (45% of which were taken in Taiwan, during a total of 504 days of research in the years 1896, 1897, 1898, and 1900) have been recovered and reproduced by the Torii Ryūzō Photographic Record Society of Tokyo University (Wong, 2004). Wong subscribes to a dual analysis of photography as outlined by Thomas (2009), “recognition,” and “excavation,” (note Thomas’ dichotomy postdates the analysis of Wong). In other words, it is deemed crucial to analyze the social background (excavation) of the photographer and those photographed in a given context. Pertinent to that analysis is not only a statistical measure of different contexts of the body of work, but also the types of poses, facial expressions and so on.

70% of the photos of the indigenous peoples in Taiwan are anthropometric images, including facial features, hairstyles, physiques, body markings and tattoos (here Wong questionably includes costumes; note that I have deliberately chosen not to include photos of indigenous peoples in this article – a choice I made since I question their use as potentially exploitative, given the colonial context).⁴⁾

Another 15.2% are photos of social contexts, such as next to houses, weaving, pounding rice, etc. Wong argues that the “aboriginal people became ‘dehumanized’ as ‘passive objects of study’” (Wong, 2004).



Figure 4

Caption reads, "Jewelry, Dolls and Toys."
Photo Plate #7329, From Yami tribe, taken
between 1896 and 1900, available at <http://www.muse.or.jp/torii/>



Figure 5

Caption reads, "A megalithic site in
Puyama," taken between 1896 and 1900,
Photo Plate #7788, available at <http://www.muse.or.jp/torii/>

It can be argued to some extent that the technology did not allow much more than a lengthy posed picture, notwithstanding the critique regarding anthropometric measures, given that it required time to mount the plate, take the picture and not have anyone move, otherwise it would cause a blurred image as in some of the photos (see Figure 5).

Torii also did take pictures of artifacts (see Figure 4) and large scale archaeological monuments (see Figure 5). Here we can note the power of photography for anthropological representation is its "potent mixture of veracity and yet inherent mutability of meaning" (Morton, 2018, p. 1). Jewelry, yes (in Figure 4), but given by whom to whom? Dolls and toys, yes, but for play or deeper significance?

It must be added that there were examples of photography used by early anthropologists before Torii (even as he preceded the more famous usage of photos by Malinowski from 1914-1918 in the Trobriand Islands). Early anthropology already grappled with the dilemma of photographic documentation between what could be described as "facts about which there can be no question," attributed to C. H. Read (1899), and the problem of ethnography (and photography), in being unable to research humans "secluded from disturbing influences, and watched, like the materials of a chemical experiment in a laboratory," attributed to the founder of the British Folklore Society, Andrew Lang (1910), and quoted as well by Albert Cort Haddon, one of the first British anthropological photographers (example and citations in Pinney, 2011, p. 25). Haddon's photos from the first and second Torres Straits Expeditions in 1888 and into the early 1890s were also published in book form in 1899 (revised in 1912) which was helpful to Malinowski when he did his fieldwork (Pinney, 2011, p. 50).

Without trying to explore the entire range of photography in anthropological fieldwork across a span of at least 130 years,⁵⁾ it is at least instructive to jump to a brief but poignant assessment in a work considered to be one the most classic anthropological achievements of the 20th century, namely in Claude Levi-Strauss' *Triste Tropiques* (1955). In his summary, Pinney (2011) argues that for Levi-Strauss a "mournful self-loathing" is evident in which ethnography (with its written product) is allied with photography in destruction of the

primitive. Exploration of presumptively new worlds is now “a trade” in which the goal is to accumulate images “an inadequate mechanized shadow of a former completeness” with its corresponding mass market ready to consume them (Pinney, 2011, p. 99-101).

The role of photography in its relation to anthropology then may be considered of some marginal utility as much as it is documentary evidence, but also is and will remain “ambivalent, with most social anthropologists producing large numbers of field photographs but uncertain as to their status or meaning as cultural or historical documents” (Morton, 2018, p. 2). This is also true in trying to frame the photographs of Torii within the context of the Japanese imperial era in which he lived, even as they recorded peoples and landscapes that are no longer extant. “Photography is now being rephotographed. [Not] the conservation process by which the decaying archival image is reproduced for another generation but ... the images of an imagined past brought from darkness to light by projects which stress the recuperative and forensic possibilities ... of this excavated material culture of colonial and imperial heritage of anthropology” (Pinney, 1992, p. 90).

In an current age of proliferating images, “the democratization of image production” and “ubiquitous technology” of smartphones or any subsequent technology (400 billion photos taken each year, already 7 years ago) means that the photo will continue to live in our afterlives and even affect the way subdisciplines such as visual anthropology or online ethnography have relevance as distinct intellectual pursuits (Morton, 2018, p. 12- 13). One could be forgiven for drawing too much significance for the anthropological vision as marking an analogous journey from momentous illumination, to mid-20th century mainstream positioning as social science, to its continued reimagining of itself leading up to and into the 21st century. However the expansion of questions both about the democratization of images and possibilities of fieldwork of all kinds as well as renewed questions about anthropology’s (not only anthropology, but perhaps more acutely than other of the social sciences) uptake of decoloniality in its critique of knowledge making and methods will continue to influence theory and practice for some time to come.

Conclusion

“One will not castigate long-dead writers for using the words of their time or for not sharing ideological views that we now take for granted” (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 1995, *Silencing the Past*, p. 82)

Anthropology has been relentlessly auto-critiqued for its implicature in colonial knowledge making. In attempts to contribute to postcolonial social science, this critique has much to offer. As an example, the efforts to repatriate human remains, where possible, are ongoing, as are discussions about returning museum collections of artifacts (Matsushima, 2023; 2024; Tominaga 2024; 2025). This not only is an issue for individual researchers to become aware of, but for entire academic organizations to make clear investigations and statements of ethics, complicated as they may be (American Anthropological Association, 2024).

It is not always the case that agreement will be easily reached between different organizations, even within the broader field of anthropological societies, for reasons that are best left for each of them to explain, as is the case in Japan with three anthropological associations taking different stances regarding the repatriation of human remains in museums (CEMiPOS, 2024). Opening discussions of reparations for slavery, genocide or other past injustices can be met with befuddlement or doubt by a generation who were not alive at the time of those events, however it is, I argue, a responsibility of those who are engaged academically in the common pursuit of understanding difference (as a fundamental shared value of

anthropology) to unearth as much of the background of the early history of our field as possible and then to commit such history to reconstruction not as a final way of deciding the historic rights and wrongs but to develop a deeper ethical basis for future research and knowledge construction.

Decolonizing a field as wide as anthropology and with a background that was intimately linked with coloniality from its onset offers both unique challenges and opportunities. In a call to move forward based on a critical examination of the past (here there is special mention of American anthropology and in particular founding figures there, like Franz Boas) and not indulge in “imperialist nostalgia,” is “to understand the genealogies bequeathed to us by the remarkable people who founded the discipline as complicated and contradictory is not equivalent to rejecting the important body of work they assembled but is to appreciate what they achieved by subjecting it to relentless analytical scrutiny” (Gupta and Stoolman, 2022, p. 781). This could be said equally about Torii Ryūzō, who lived in China through WW II and until 1951, only returning to Japan before he died in 1953.

In this respect we can learn from how anthropological research endeavored and even struggled to create knowledge but also understand the ways in which the “words” (including methods and photographic records) that early anthropologists recorded were often built atop a model of colonial exploitation, whether or not they explicitly acknowledged or approved of it. Living in a world in which inequality continues to be a prominent feature of nearly all human institutions and social groups, we can also understand how simply recording documentation of difference is not enough or could serve as a viable stand-alone mission for an anthropology of the 21st century. Showing the many dimensions of how things were (the study of anthropology and ethnographic details but also linked with its/their social, historical, and political contexts) necessarily means taking some responsibility for helping make changes in the world, including in anthropology itself.

Notes

- 1) There are also works in Japanese such as Nakao, 2016 and Sakano, 2005; 2016.
- 2) Torii was not the first choice, but at the young age of 26 he was ready to go when asked by Tsuboi after an older researched declined to go.
- 3) The Japanese imperial government, in other words, found a reason to continue its colonial occupation in Taiwan, through the extraction of camphor, which entailed understanding and subsequently “civilizing” the indigenous peoples who happened to be adjacent to the camphor trees in the highlands of interior Taiwan.
- 4) Interested readers are referred to the website hosting a large number of them at <http://www.muse.or.jp/torii/>
- 5) See Pinney (2011) for further examples.

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