

A Journey through the Ethics of Repatriation of Remains

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Historian Yoshihiko Amino (1928-2004) has written a small book titled "*A Journey of Returning Old Documents*" (1999). In the chaotic postwar period, the Fisheries Agency of Japanese government planned a project to compile maritime history, and the Tsukishima Branch of the Fisheries Research Institute visited old houses all over Japan and wrote simple loan forms to borrow documents in order to build a social history archive and store them there. The book never uses the word "repatriation". Although the word "return" is used in the book, it is in effect the same meaning as "repatriation" in the proper sense of the word, which means "to return valuable materials to their origins." This is well express to the readers the complexity of the difficulties involved in the seemingly obvious act of returning materials, as well as the emotional weight of the researcher who uses the materials to conduct their research, while also feeling sorry for the loss of the materials. In fact, it is reported that Tsuneichi Miyamoto, one of the famous folklorists at that time, who borrowed the materials in Tsushima in 1950, felt that he could "*get out of hell now*" when he heard the news of their return. Even though some reviews of the book have praised Miyamoto as a brilliant researcher, I as a retiree who still teaches research ethics classes for graduate students, feel a shamed that the sense of moral responsibility in Japan's social sciences has not changed much in the twenty years since the book was published.

The opinions in this special issue were written by the Commission for the Ethical Treatment of Human Remains (TCETHR), an organization of the American Anthropological Association, based in Hokkaido, Tokyo, and Okinawa, Japan. After interviewing the parties and persons concerned in Hokkaido, Tokyo, and Okinawa, the members of the TCETHR reported on the content of the symposium held in Okinawa in July, 2023 with the parties of researchers, descendants whose families and compatriots that were subjects of academic research, and activists. Therefor, TCETHR's research journey across Japan could be described as a "journey through the ethics of the return of human remains. The members of the "Construction of a

Theory Linking Anthropology and Critical Social Movements for the Formation of Indigenous Studies" (PI: Yoshinobu Ota), funded by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (JSPS), have supported Taser's research activities in Japan and we have worked together, holding joint seminars and exchanging information and opinions at each occasion. We have held joint study groups and exchanged information and opinions each time. Insofar we have not only engaged in what anthropologists call "participatory observation," but we have experienced the passing back and forth of perceptions between ourselves and others while being involved in the process. Thus, our trip could be described as a journey to gain insights from the activities of those working on the ethics of human remains restitution. The symposium enclosed the research journey.

I wrote "gleaning suggestions," but in fact we are still in the midst of the above-mentioned Grant-in-Aid research, collecting data of our experience on efforts to return human remains, and trying to understand the reasons for the delay in returning. We are ready to prepare the process of giving back the remains to the descendants. There are multiple factors involved, such as the history and trends of the returned human remains and burial accessories, as well as the historical circumstances of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in various regions. I suppose that it is not enough to consider the ethical issues of those who are alive today. However, concrete efforts should be made to overcome the (though it almost sounds self-centered) excuse on the research side that researchers still hear today that there was no such thing as research ethics in the past. From now on, it is necessary to take practical measures to seriously confront immorality and to convey to our future fellow citizens the voice of consideration and remorse for our lives. I have to emphasize that I am aware that this is not a problem that can be resolved with a ready-made apology.

Now, Dr. Amino's small book actually provides an important lesson on the issue of repatriation and restitution. Through his journey to return the ancient and old documents, Dr. Amino learned about borrowing process and history of the documents, and with his own expertise, he scrutinized the documents and overturned the conventional wisdom of Japanese history.

For example, Dr. Amino has discovered that the HYAKUSHŌ (pronounced correctly "Hyakusei") had not used as peasants and farmers, but fishermen, blacksmiths, hunters and gatherers, and other non-farming subsistence workers who supported the economy of early modern Japan through production and distribution. Before his discovery, we used to think the HYAKUSHŌ as 100% of the peasants and farmers and these mentioned in Japanese national history according with our stereotype. In other words, the occasion of restitution is not only an ethical act of returning what has been taken from us, but also an opportunity to rethink the nature of scientific act by clarifying the circumstances of collection. In Miyamoto's words, we "have not yet reached the deepest part of hell." On the contrary, we may be headed not to hell, but to another society before we were deprived of it. Traveling is about rewinding time. We as researchers need to embark on a journey through the ethics of returning human remains, starting from the unique circumstances of each individual and exploring the possibility of our various routes.

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