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Shooting and friendship over Japanese prisoners of war

Differences between Featherston, New Zealand and Cowra, Australia
in Japanese connections

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Social Anthropology

at Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand

Yasuhiro Ota
2013

Abstract

Japanese prisoners of war were interned in Featherston, New Zealand and in Cowra, Australia during the Asia-Pacific War. Because of cultural misunderstanding of military traditions, there were violent incidents between prisoners and guards. These were the Featherston Incident and the Cowra Breakout and each of these caused heavy casualties. Since the war, these tragedies have encouraged mutual understanding and then friendly relationships between Japan and Featherston, and Cowra. However, there is something different between Featherston and Cowra in terms of Japanese connections: While, it is said that Cowra is a symbol of peace between Japan and Australia, it is rarely heard that Featherston is that between Japan and New Zealand.

The researcher has had three questions since he visited Featherston in 2004 for the first time: What is the difference between Featherston and Cowra? What is the cause of the difference between them? How should friendship between Japan and Featherston develop in the future? These three questions were answered when similarities and differences between the two incidents were explored by literature analysis and ethnographic analysis. The most important difference is that while Japanese victims of the Featherston Incident were cremated, but their ashes are still missing, those of the Cowra Breakout were buried and their graves have been maintained with great respect.

The answer to the first question: Judging from the theory of the state of international exchange, the Japan-Featherston relationship is unique in that Featherston people have had a friendship with Japanese people through a Japanese choir, Chor-Farmer, whereas the Japan-Cowra relationship is a fraternal relationship that Japanese people and Cowra people have created. The answer to the second question: Japan-Cowra relationship was born from the fact that there were some who had something philanthropic in war memories, whereas Japan-Featherston relationship was influenced by that there were some who had ill-feeling toward the Japanese in war memories. The answer to the third question: Present unique friendships between Featherston people and Chor-Farmer representing the Japanese should be maintained in the future because that seems to be all Featherston people's wishes.

Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful to the two anthropologists of Massey University. When I lost my motivation to study anthropology at the Postgraduate Diploma course and left university for one year, I found Dr Graeme MacRae as an anthropologist suitable for my Asian studies at Massey University Albany through an anthropologist of Waikato University. Since then, he has supported my anthropology studies, in particular “Shooting and friendship over Japanese POWs in Oceanian countries” as MA thesis. I encountered the “Featherston Incident” for the first time when I was studying political anthropology in the Graduate Diploma in Social Anthropology course. Since then, Dr Jeff Sluka has encouraged me to do anthropology studies both directly and indirectly until now.

In Featherston, my thanks are due to Joe Dittmer. He showed me the precious material relevant to the Featherston Incident at Heritage Museum and helped me conduct fieldwork there. My thanks are also due to the South Wairarapa district council, the Featherston RSA, JNL and the Japanese Embassy who helped me participate in events and gather relevant information. In Cowra, I wish to thank Sallie Thompson and Graham Apthorpe who became my host family and helped me gather the material related to the Cowra Breakout. I am grateful to those who helped me take part in events: members of the Cowra tourism, the Cowra Breakout association, the Cowra district council. I also appreciated Maurie Miles’ kindness: he told me about the day of the Breakout. I must thank Bill Cusack for his help, too: he sent precious material to New Zealand for me.

In Japan, I am very grateful to those former POWs and their relatives: *Fukie Adachi*, *Jinsaku Sakurai* and his family, *Michiharu* and *Junko Shinya*, and *Masayoshi Yamada*. They let me hear about the Incident or the Breakout as they were. I also appreciate Chor-Farmer’s kindness: they told me about their valuable experiences in Cowra and Featherston. I also thank *Shoichi* and *Yoko Ishizuka* for learning “unique ties between *Joetsushi* and Cowra” from them.

In Auckland, my thanks go to Warren and Doreen Payne. They agreed to my interview and told me about her father who was a padre and an interpreter at the Featherston POW camp just after the Incident. I wish to thank also Stacey Watson and Gareth Giles who have read this thesis in whole and given suggestions and help.

Yasuhiro Ota

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Table of contents	iv
List of figures	vi
Introduction	1
Background.....	2
Research questions.....	2
Theory of comparative study: Rectangular coordinate system.....	3
Methodology.....	5
Literature analysis.....	6
Fieldwork.....	7
Order of discussion.....	9
1. Historical background	11
1.1. Asia-Pacific War and Japan and New Zealand, and Australia.....	11
1.2. Geneva POW Convention of 1929.....	14
1.2.1. Geneva POW Convention.....	14
1.2.2. New Zealand, Australia and Japan's response to the Convention.....	16
2. The Featherston Incident	18
2.1. Featherston prisoner-of-war camp.....	18
2.2. Situation of the POW camp before the Incident.....	20
2.2.1. General treatment of POWs in the camp.....	20
2.2.2. An unexpectedly comfortable POW camp life.....	22
2.2.3. Tense atmosphere overspreading the camp.....	24
2.3. The day of the Incident.....	27
2.4. Aftermath of the Incident.....	30
2.4.1. Commemoration of victims of the Incident.....	30
2.4.2. Surviving prisoners' camp life.....	31
2.4.3. New Zealand authorities in the aftermath of the Incident.....	34
2.5. Cause of the Incident.....	41
2.6. Recent relationship between two peoples involved.....	44
2.6.1. Before the 1990s.....	44
2.6.2. After the 1990s.....	50
2.6.3. Researcher's recent visit to Featherston.....	57
2.7. An unfortunate connection of Featherston with Tarawa.....	

3. Cowra Breakout.....	64
3.1. Cowra prisoner-of-war camp.....	64
3.2. Situation of the POW camp before the Incident.....	68
3.2.1. General treatment of POWs in the camp.....	68
3.2.2. An expectedly comfortable POW camp life.....	69
3.2.3. Complete change in the atmosphere of the camp life.....	70
3.2.4. Separation of NCOs and soldiers as the camp security policy.....	71
3.2.5. Voting for death or life.....	72
3.3. The day of the Breakout.....	75
3.4. Aftermath of the Breakout.....	78
3.4.1. Commemoration of the Japanese deceased.....	78
3.4.2. Surviving prisoners' camp life.....	79
3.4.3. Australian authorities in the aftermath of the Breakout.....	80
3.5. Cause of the Breakout.....	86
3.6. Recent relationship between two peoples over the incident.....	88
3.6.1. Before the 1990s.....	88
3.6.2. After the 1990s.....	103
3.6.3. Researcher's recent visit to Cowra.....	104
3.7. Special relationship between Cowra and Joetsushi.....	109
4. Comparison of the two incidents.....	111
4.1. Similarities.....	111
4.2. Differences.....	113
5. State of international exchange with Japan.....	120
5.1. Japan-Cowra relationship at the present time.....	120
5.2. Japan-Featherston relationship at the present time.....	122
5.3. Cause of the difference between (J-C) and (J-F).....	124
5.4. State of friendship between Featherston and Japan in the future.....	126
Conclusion.....	127
Appendices.....	136
Appendix A: Geneva POW Convention.....	136
Appendix B: Evidence of eyewitnesses.....	138
Appendix C: Adachi's memoir.....	143
Appendix D1: Bossard' and Schmid's reports.....	144
Appendix D2: D2: Black's report.....	146
References.....	148

List of Figures

- Figure 1. Rectangular coordinate system of international exchange p. 5
- Figure 2. Layout of compounds at the Featherston POW camp p. 19
- Figure 3. The monument to Japanese victims and the monument with *haiku* p. 47
- Figure 4. The Japanese garden p. 60
- Figure 5. New Japanese POWs arrived at the Featherston Station in January 1943 p. 60
- Figure 6. Guideboard indicating the layout of No. 12 POW camp in Cowra p, 66
- Figure 7. Japanese War Cemetery with the black granite shrine in Cowra p. 92
- Figure 8. Tadao Minami's grave at the Japanese War Cemetery p. 92
- Figure 9. Cowra Japanese garden p. 101
- Figure 10. The inside of the St Raphael's Catholic Church in Cowra p. 106
- Figure 11. Commonwealth War Graves in *Yokohama*, Japan p. 110
- Figure 12 . Rectangular coordinate system of international exchange (located) p.121