

Cultural Understanding and Heritage Protection in War and Occupation: A Study of the United States' Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) - with a Comparative Reflection on the Occupations of Afghanistan (2001-) and Iraq (2003-)

Nassrine AZIMI

Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences, Hiroshima University

Introduction

This thesis is a study of cultural understanding and cultural heritage protection in war and occupation, focussing primarily on the case of the post-WWII American Occupation of Japan (1945-1952). It analyzes the role of policy-makers, specialists and scholars during the planning phase throughout the war and, later, at the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) headquarters in Tokyo, specifically within the Arts and Monuments (A&M) Division of the Civil Information and Education (CIE) Section. While the Occupation of Japan is my main focus, a comparative context is briefly considered, regarding the occupations of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003, as it pertains to cultural understanding and heritage protection.

Historical Background

The thesis first sets the historical context of the development of cultural property and protection measures in Japan, starting with the Edo period (1600-1868), when the stability, relative prosperity and openness to education and learning for common people extended to cultural endeavors as well. Infrastructure for travel and leisure developed extensively, prompted by the *sankin-kōtai* system,

which in turn helped develop regional centers of commerce and learning, leisure and entertainment beyond major cities. During the Edo culture started becoming accessible to ordinary people.

In the Meiji period (1868-1912) the foundations of Western-style cultural institutions and protection laws were gradually set in place. Throughout this time, systemic and comprehensive exchanges with the West were established and institutions of the state, based on Western models, were studied by a number of Japanese study missions and delegations dispatched to the West.

The most important of these was the Iwakura Embassy, which for almost two years travelled across the United States and Europe to learn about the workings of a modern state. The observations of these delegations greatly impacted Japanese educational and cultural institutions, from schools and universities to museums and collections.

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, lasting connections between Japanese and American educational and cultural scholars, most significantly from within the greater Boston area, like Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Tenshin and their institutions, such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, were deepened. Bonds among these like-minded scholars later helped nurture and train

a cadre of younger American experts like Langdon Warner and some of his students, knowledgeable and passionate about Japan's cultural heritage and who came to Japan after the war under the SCAP banner.

War-time Preparatory and Scholarly Work

My thesis asserts that there was significant 'preparation' by the Americans throughout the war years to consider the cultural dimensions of post-war Japan. American planners not only called on political or military experts but also gathered the best minds and brightest scholars of Japan that the US then possessed. During the war years, the locus or institutional hub for their work on cultural property protection in war was the Roberts Commission, officially 'The American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas', approved by President Roosevelt on June 23, 1943.

The membership of the Roberts Commission was a real Who's Who of prominent individuals from America's museums and cultural institutions. It played a central role in elevating the need for cultural property protection during war, and in promoting the work of Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives (MFAA) teams within the US Army. Nothing like it had existed in a war machinery till then, and nothing like it has been done, since. It must be noted that the Commission's work was facilitated thanks to prior efforts by numerous American scholarly entities, the two most important of which were the American Defense-Harvard Group and the American Council of Learned Societies.

As to individual scholars within policy teams working on Japan from 1942 onward—key individuals across the White House, State Department, War Department and various ad-

hoc committees or commissions, including the interdepartmental State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC)—some 30 percent were academics or specialists of Japan. Even non-Americans, like British diplomat and eminent scholar of Japan George B. Sansom, or 'outsiders' like Ruth Benedict, whose *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, commissioned by the Office of War Information in 1944, would become mandatory reading for the US army after victory, were able to exert influence. Renowned Japan experts and other scholars were present across the US executive branch and the military machinery from the start, even if 'hardcore' American military decision-makers were not always eager or willing to incorporate input from scholars.

Furthermore, as argued by the historian Takemae Eiji, the notion that SCAP staff were uninformed or unqualified is false: to the contrary, Takemae has noted the high qualifications of many who arrived in Japan in 1945. Civilian specialists, and officers trained in US military's excellent Japanese language and culture schools, were thus interacting with Japanese people across the land and in many sectors. Succinctly described by Rudolf V.A. Janssens "the war forced the Americans to think more seriously about the Japanese."

Towards the Arts & Monuments (A&M) Division in Tokyo

My thesis contends that SCAP had a direct influence in preserving Japan's cultural heritage in the immediate post-war years. The very existence of a cluster within SCAP designated for the protection of arts and monuments was a rare feature, not seen in any direct American military occupation before Japan or since. The group's mandate also enjoyed the endorsement of Washington, the senior leadership at SCAP, and

the Japanese government and legislature. Just as importantly, the unit's advisors and staff were, for the most part, competent and qualified curators and scholars of art.

A clearly articulated official policy by the War Department, endorsed by General MacArthur from the early stages of the Occupation to protect Japan's cultural property and assets, created the right environment for the small A&M staff, which visibly also possessed enough diplomatic skills to work ably with the US military and with the Japanese government. They thus complemented the work of their Japanese counterparts, scholars who worked as field representatives, interpreters or advisors for A&M. These intertwined networks laid solid foundations in those crucial early months, so that Japan's pre-war system for cultural protection not only was not lost, but emerged even stronger by 1950, despite chaotic post-war conditions. Furthermore, a certain 'Democratization' of access to cultural goods took place, one example of which was the Imperial Household Agency's acquiescing to an annual two-week public opening of the famed Shōsō-in treasury in Nara, till then off-limits to all but a selected few.

As the thesis suggests, many of these developments may well have taken place gradually, after the Occupation. But timing was key. Had the Americans ignored or, worse, abused the defeated enemy's cultural property, one can speculate on further, irreversible damages that would have been inflicted on Japan's cultural heritage. Rather than any single person, policy or project on its own, it is the timeliness and accumulation of all of the above factors that helped create such an effective 'cultural policy' at GHQ/ SCAP.

Comparative Context and Conclusions

The American political and military attention

to cultural aspects of Japan—in the broadest sense—had started long before the Occupation, indeed only shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Efforts by the Americans gained further momentum, depth and scope as the war front expanded, so that by the time the Occupation began there was, as the legal scholar Geoffrey Scott has noted, a clear idea of what needed to be done in the realm of cultural heritage protection.

No such preparations took place for the more recent wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, and these occupational failures have had a profound impact on the US military, albeit belatedly. Cultural understanding and cultural property protection are now more serious considerations in the US Department of Defense planning. In a speech to West Point cadets on November 27, 2011, Robert Gates, former US Secretary of Defense, said that after Afghanistan and Iraq any future defense secretary who would encourage a land invasion of countries in Asia, the Middle East or Africa 'should have his head examined'. In the same speech Gates made an appeal to cadets, to absolutely prioritize becoming proficient in other cultures and languages.

But while the US military has made efforts at learning and adjusting, this work isn't the military's alone: policies and attitudes of politicians and senior decision-makers are key. Culture in its broadest sense must become part of the mainstream, and its role in improving a range of post-conflict challenges better studied and articulated. My thesis thus calls for renewed and in-depth studies about what happened seven decades ago in Japan in the realm of culture and heritage protection, recalling again the Memorandum of August 29, 1945 to Secretary of War Stimson by a future A&M staff, describing the policy of the world's most powerful army in these words:

'The occupying army is cognizant of the fact that the age-old cultural and artistic monuments in the lands to be occupied are a part of the cultural

heritage of all peoples, and it is a fundamental policy of this army to protect and preserve in every way possible these monuments.'