

Social Science Workshop I Summary of Discussion

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In Social Science Workshop I, Prof. Iwasaki Yoshitaka read his paper, "Freedmen in the Indian Territory after the Civil War: The Dual Approaches of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations," followed by a summary and comments by Professor Sato Madoka of Otsuma Women's University. Then the floor was opened for questions and discussion.

Prof. Iwasaki's paper presented a very interesting case from a postcolonial perspective in which a deprived group (Indians) confronted another deprived group (freedmen) in U. S. society. The paper deconstructed the Indian as the oppressed, and highlighted the Indian as the oppressor. As often is the case in recent studies of colonial/postcolonial power struggles, several questions vex the borderline between racial categories: How was mixed blood defined and where is the individual placed in the two Indian nations? Prof. Iwasaki's answers to these questions clarified the situation where mixed blood was not clearly demarcated from full blood unlike white society in which the one drop theory was maintained when it came to white-black relations. The mixed blood individual usually considered himself/herself as Indian and was probably so categorized by U. S. agents. Prof. Kawashima of Nanzan Univ. pointed out that in Mississippi under the Jim Crow system, Indians were generally categorized as whites regardless of the percentage of Indian or white blood. The reason for this, according to Prof. Iwasaki, was that the Choctaw who had once lived in the area were removed in the 1830s and the few who remained in Mississippi did not have any choice but to live as U. S. citizens. It was interesting that there was an assumption that being an Indian was a privilege beyond U. S. citizenship.

Related to the above question was the issue of identity. Through discussion, it became clear that freedmen generally had strong attachment to their native land in spite of their deprived condition in the Indian territories. Freedmen considered themselves as assimilable to Indian nations while the Choctaw and the Chickasaw thought them unassimilable. Therefore, it seems that freedmen were categorized as Indians in their self-consciousness and from the viewpoint of the U. S. government, but not necessarily so in the consciousness of full blood Choctaw or Chickasaw.

Two questions from the floor were concerned with the power structure in the Indian nations. The Chickasaw maintained an oligarchy in which the governor

enjoyed a strong influence over the people. Freedmen under the regime did form political associations in order to make appeals to the U. S. government or its agents. The Choctaw and the Chickasaw were antagonistic toward these associations and the U. S. government did not respond to their appeals. In the future, there would be more active and effective political associations among freedmen, according to Prof. Iwasaki.

Prof. Lee questioned whether the term “discrimination” was an appropriate label for the kind of relationship between the Choctaw/Chickasaw and freedmen. Although a definite answer was not given in the discussion, the question was well worth pondering to open up a pathway to a more nuanced understanding of the complicated relationship that the paper dealt with.

To the question whether his Japanese perspective was advantageous to the kind of study that Prof. Iwasaki had pursued, he answered in the affirmative. The relationship between freedmen and Indians is sensitive, even today. Prof. Iwasaki as a Japanese had access to stories from both groups. In fact, some of the stories could be discussed only in Japan, according to Prof. Iwasaki. In other words, the topic might be potentially productive for American Studies scholars outside of the U. S.

As Prof. Iwasaki insisted when answering one of the questions by Prof. Sato, the kind of research he had conducted was meaningful in reconstructing the major narrative of U. S. history by uncovering untold histories and presenting a more complex racial geography.