

# みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館 学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

## Collective Works of HIJIKATA HISAKATSU : Foreword

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| メタデータ | 言語: English<br>出版者:<br>公開日: 2015-11-18<br>キーワード:<br>作成者: 須藤, 健一<br>メールアドレス:<br>所属: |
| URL   | <a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10502/5163">http://hdl.handle.net/10502/5163</a>    |

## Foreword

The islands of Micronesia are located in the Western Pacific, a vast expanse of sea stretching 5000 kilometers from east to west. Hijikata Hisakatsu, a sculptor, poet, and ethnographer, spent 13 years in these islands beginning in 1929. The islands of Palau and Satawal provided the setting for his research and artistic pursuits. Palau is now the Republic of Palau (Belau), while Satawal is part of the Federated States of Micronesia, which joined the United Nations in 1991. Both states have taken their place as modern nations in the international society.

Micronesia entered the pages of world history in 1521, when Magellan stopped in the Mariana Islands. Since the 17th century, the Marianas, the Caroline Islands, and the Marshall Islands have been governed in succession by Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. After World War I, Japan named them the "South Sea Islands." The headquarters of Japan's South Sea government was located on the island of Koror in the Palau archipelago, the first islands to be visited by Hijikata. In 1947, following World War II, the South Sea Islands were renamed the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and were placed under the administration of the United States by the United Nations.

Hijikata graduated from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1924. While making sculpture in plaster and wood and writing poetry, he dreamt of traveling to the South Seas. His image of the South Seas came largely from Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, which described life in Tahiti. Hijikata's interest in the South Seas, however, had little to do with the picture Gauguin had painted of Polynesian life. His main interest was rather in the ancient roots of Japanese culture. In his diary, he wrote of his motive for going to the South Pacific: "While studying prehistory and cultural history, I came across writings on the natives of the South Pacific." It was in 1927 that he became interested in the South Pacific, especially the islands of Micronesia. He began reading extensively about the societies and cultures of the island peoples occupying the Pacific with Japan. In addition to books written by Japanese scholars, he also read J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* and W. J. Perry's *The Children of the Sun*. Of all this literature, he was most influenced by Matsuoka Shizuo's *Ethnography of Micronesia*.

Matsuoka's book was based on information he had collected on the various islands that he visited during his navy career, as well as on the official documents of Japan's South Sea government and on studies by European ethnographers. Matsuoka wrote, "The Japanese have been the Japanese since ancient times as have the South Sea people been the South Sea people since ancient time." His point was that it is a mistake to make superficial connections between the ancient customs of Japan and those of the South Sea islanders based on mere resemblances between them. Hijikata was inspired by Matsuoka's assertion that it is essential to gain an accurate, in-depth understanding of both cultures when making anthropological comparisons. Though he empathized with Matsuoka as an amateur ethnologist and archaeologist, Hijikata believed that there was a need to record the actual conditions of the life and culture of the South Sea islanders through more intensive field work than Matsuoka had been able to perform.

Through his research in the South Seas, Hijikata demonstrated that his interest in prehistoric culture was genuine and not just academic. In February 1929, under the heading "Why I want to go to the South Seas," he wrote in his diary: "The native customs and legends of the South Seas will undoubtedly be a source of endless interest to me." This passage reflects the image that Hijikata had formed in his mind of the South Seas through his reading, and it tells of the expectation mixed with a sense of uncertainty felt by the first Japanese to do a serious anthropological study of Micronesia.

One reason Hijikata chose Micronesia as the area for his research was his aversion to cold weather. In February 1928, he wrote a poem entitled "Island Floating in the Blue Sea." After a verse bidding farewell to Tokyo, he said:

My spirit longs for the perpetual summer of the South. A small island floating in the middle of the vast southern sea will give me a good life for while and then provide a quiet repose for my soul.

The latter wish was not to come true. Hijikata died in Tokyo in January 1977.

About to embark on his quest, Hijikata thus declared his intent to live happily with the people of the South Sea Islands in the shade of palm trees and tropical foliage. Hijikata embraced a dream of a primitive and nonliterate society, and in March 1929 he set out in search of it in the Micronesian islands of Palau.

Four days after arriving in Palau, Hijikata was able to make his own sketches

of the *a bai* pictures that had so impressed him in Matsuoka's book. The people of Palau had no written language, and these colorful pictures carved into the gables, beams, and rafters of the great meeting houses told the story of their history. These pictures had a tremendous appeal to Hijikata, who was intensely interested in pre-historic culture and primitive art. Thenceforth, he went out almost everyday to observe wooden images, traditional money, stone pillars, ruins and artifacts, and funeral sites in caves. He recorded the legends and myths narrated to him by Palauan elders. Hijikata learned about the quickly disappearing "old" Palau from a report by Augustin Krämer, a German ethnographer who had been in Palau in 1908, and something about archaeological methodology from Yawata Ichiro, a Japanese archaeologist who came to Palau to do research while he was residing there.

During the course of his investigations, Hijikata was dismayed to find that the people of Palau showed little if any interest in their history or traditional culture. He expressed a sense of crisis in his dairy, noting "A piece of the old Palau dies every time a Palauan elder passes away; within 10 years it will be almost impossible to know the old Palau." He began teaching the art of woodworking to boys in public schools at the request of the South Sea government. He instructed them in the use of *kaibakl*, or hand axes, in carving *a bai* pictures on thick wooden boards. These "story boards" made by his former students are now sold to tourists for hundreds of dollars each. He made the rounds of all the schools in Palau, spending a few months teaching at each one. During these sojourns, he lived with the villagers, experiencing firsthand their lifestyles and customs. These stays provided him with a perfect opportunity to ask the elders questions about the oral traditions surrounding their villages' stone images and other ancient remains and to learn from them the local myths, folk tales, and religious beliefs. He took careful notes, and in 1931 published his studies in an article entitled "The Palauan Viewed from Legends and Artifacts."

After living in Palau for two years and learning all he could about Palau's historic culture, Hijikata became interested in investigating another South Sea island where there remained a more primitive way of life than could be found in Palau. With the spreading influence of the Japanese colonial administration, some 5,000 Japanese had now settled in Palau. The Palauan people, forced to live under

colonial rule, had become what Hijikata viewed as "semi-civilized." This environment was quite different from the South Sea culture that he had envisioned.

In September 1931, Hijikata left Palau aboard a small schooner to search the outer islands of Yap for a "place unaltered by civilization where the islanders still live in the old way." On all the islands he visited, Hijikata was disappointed to find that Japanese merchants had made barter arrangements with the islanders to produce and supply copra. After sailing for 18 days, he arrived at Satawal, the final port on the supply route. After two months of living on the island, Hijikata wrote a letter to Japan, saying, "I and a student (a carpenter apprentice) who came with me are the only Japanese on the island. Not knowing the language yet, I cannot say that things are truly interesting. I am, however, enjoying being the most respected person on the island. I am satisfied with life here; eating food the womenfolk spend all day in making, plain though it is, under the blue sky with a breeze blowing through the palms, laughing at trivial things."

In another three months, Hijikata had gained sufficient proficiency in Satawalese to converse rather freely. He developed a phonetic alphabet for transcribing the nine vowels and 15 consonants of the Satawalese language, and used it to record folk tales in the people's native language. He spent seven years on this island of only six kilometers in circumference and 280 in population. He observed and took notes on the daily life of the islanders, their economic activities, important events, and religious ceremonies. He also acquired knowledge about diverse aspects of their culture, including the oral tradition of their matrilineal clan migrations, sibling relationships, extended family structure, kin organizations, social and political systems, land tenure and inheritance customs, food resource management, marriage, extramarital relations, divorce, taboos, and magico-religious practices and beliefs. Having completed most of his ethnographic studies, he spent much of his time during his last three years on the island in painting, making sculpture, and writing poetry.

Hijikata's research methods were essentially different from those of the many ethnographers who at the time collected and recorded information using only pre-conceived guidelines to fit certain conceptual schemes. He sought to understand other cultures by learning about their general frameworks through participant observation of the inhabitants' ordinary life and of frequently repeated events. He

then supplemented this knowledge by inquiring about the background and implications of the phenomena he had observed.

In 1943, Hijikata wrote a book entitled *Driftwood*, through which he gave a comprehensive description of Satawalese society and culture. Having grasped the islanders' heart and ethos, Hijikata explained in the book the way in which these people shared food resources and the influence that a "fear of the gods" and a "sense of shame" had on their behavior. The quality of this work compares very favorably with the research of professional anthropologists and ethnologists. In fact, he makes the facts speak vividly in a way that many ethnological surveys fail to accomplish. In my own experience of conducting research in Satawal some 50 years after Hijikata, I found his writing to be consistent with my observations and free of error. The precision and detail of his records bear eloquent testimony to his mastery of the Satawalese language. Not only did Hijikata make Satawalese his second language, but he succeeded in personally becoming a "Satawalese" himself.

However, even Hijikata was unable to gain access to the esoteric knowledge that was the wellspring of Satawalese spiritual culture. The story of the clan's genesis and its navigational techniques, as well as the knowledge to ensure crop fertility, quiet storms, and foretell the future, had all been bequeathed by the gods. There was an unwritten law forbidding divulgence of this knowledge to outsiders. The divine punishment for breaking this law was believed to be death.

The islanders communicated with the gods and petitioned divine protection when employing this knowledge. However, Hijikata's ethnography contains no detailed description of the incantations and rituals performed for this purpose. The lack of such information is generally considered to be a critical shortcoming in an ethnographic study. Still, one must be impressed with Hijikata's respect for customs and his unwillingness to intrude into the islanders' spiritual universe.

In the seven volumes of diaries that Hijikata kept while he was on Satawal, with one solitary exception (an unfortunate murder case), he never expressed the slightest dissatisfaction or criticism about the Satawalese people, society, or culture.

Clearly, Hijikata had found the "primitive South Sea" life he was looking for on this isolated island. For Hijikata, Satawal lived up to his original perception of

the South Pacific and offered an ideal matrix for his pursuits as both an artist and ethnographer.

In January 1939, Hijikata returned to Palau after a seven-year absence. By this time, 13,000 Japanese were inhabiting the islands. Japan had left the League of Nations in 1933, and had annexed the South Sea Islands. An infusion of settlers and the establishment of military bases followed. Hijikata was amazed at the changes that had taken place while he was away.

The South Sea government was planning a survey of native customs and local land-tenure systems in an effort to formulate a mechanism for deeding land to Japanese immigrants. Inevitably, they called upon Hijikata, the foremost authority on Micronesia at that time, to assist them in this project.

Hijikata quickly undertook the task of making a "questionnaire on the customs of the Micronesian islanders," a joint project which he conducted with Sugiura Kenichi, a social anthropologist from Tokyo Imperial University. The questionnaire consisted of 50 questions aimed at obtaining information on the clan, family, and social organizations and on the land-tenure systems throughout the South Sea Islands. Refusing to take a back seat to his eminent colleague, Hijikata personally used the questionnaire to conduct field work on village organization, while Sugiura investigated the land system.

When he conducted his region-wide survey in 1941, Hijikata realized his long-cherished desire to travel throughout the South Sea Islands. Back in Palau, he compiled his survey results and published a number of papers on social organizations, marriage customs, and religion practices in the islands. In all, he produced some 20 articles which appeared in such journals as *The Quarterly Journal of Anthropology* and *The Japanese Journal of Ethnology*. From the relentless manner in which Hijikata carried out his research and his diligence in publishing the results, we can discern the sincerity of his commitment "to serve the people of the islands." In the process, he also left a wealth of source material to the academic community by way of his observations of actual life in Micronesia. Finding himself stifled by government work, Hijikata returned to Japan in 1942.

Despite the stringent wartime circumstances, Hijikata received many requests to publish his work. He wrote one book about Palau and five more about Satawal, and composed at least 30 articles, all of which were acclaimed for their scholarly

value. Three of his books, *Myths and Legends of Palau* (1942), *Driftwood* (1943), and *Folk Tales of Satawal* (1953), have recently been reprinted, bearing witness to the high quality of the data he collected. His observations are highly regarded for their detail and accuracy by scholars in the fields of anthropology, ethnology, and mythology. In 1973, three of Hijikata's papers, "Palauan Kinship," "Some Ceramics of Palau," and "Stone Images of Palau," were translated into English and published by the Micronesian Area Research Center of the University of Guam. In Japan, *The Collected Works of Hijikata Hisakatsu* have been published in eight volumes. Some of these works are slated to be translated into English so as to satisfy the earnest desire of the Micronesian people and to make them accessible to non-Japanese researchers. This book, *Society and Life in Palau*, is the first of *The Collected Works* to be translated into English.

This publication of Hijikata's work, which is an important part of Japan's cultural and intellectual heritage, would not have been possible but for the generous support of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. We express our sincere gratitude to the Foundation for making Hijikata's work available in English to scholars the world over.

Kobe, 1993

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