

# **Introduction: The Comparative Study of Mediterranean and Non-Mediterranean Slavery and Bondage from Historical Perspectives**

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Slavery was an important part of the world's social systems until it was abolished during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as shown by the historical fact that from antiquity slaves were engaged not only as manual labor in the home, agriculture and mining, but also as professional soldiers, language interpreters, traders, craftworkers and musicians. There are also cases in Southeast Asia of decrepit and otherwise incapacitated slaves being selected as objects of human sacrifice.<sup>1)</sup> Slaves were usually obtained from such sources as prisoners of war, debtors, convicted criminals and slave families. Slavery was one of the major forces giving rise to the modern economy, enabling a transition to free wage labor by an increase in human resources, while it was retreating as a social institution at the same time.

The major aim of the present collection of research is to clarify the historical development of slavery and compare its peculiarities in the Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean worlds, by examining institutions of bondage in local contexts and their transformation in response to global contexts.<sup>2)</sup> Slavery in the narrow sense originated in the ancient Mediterranean world, and later developed in the Islamic world, further spreading to the early modern Atlantic and other maritime regions as Europeans and Muslims expanded their activities there, as SHIMIZU Kazuhiro argues in the present collection. Servitude in Burma and Japan, discussed by SAITÔ Teruko and MATSUI Yôko, was essentially different from Mediterranean slavery.

When Muslims and Europeans came into contact with the non-Mediterranean world, such bonded people began to be considered as "slaves." For example, Matsui shows that in the case of early modern Japan 1) the Toyotomi and Tokugawa regimes prohibited human trafficking of the Japanese after the arrival of the Portuguese and 2) the Tokugawa regime saw the transition from long-term to short-term indenture. Furthermore, as the regions of the globe came to achieve tighter and tighter cohesion into the modern world economy, local institutions of slavery and bondage were forced to adapt

to changing circumstances, as shown by SUZUKI Hideaki in his treatment of Swahili society on the east coast of Africa during the nineteenth century, a division of labor was adopted employing *mjinga* (“barbarian”) in the newly developing industry of clove plantation, while employing *mzalia* (“a locally born slave”) in the home. Turning to the latter part of the nineteenth century in Upper Burma under the Konbaung Dynasty, the development of a monetary economy, which was, among other factors, stimulated by British colonial policy for exploiting rice cultivation in Lower Burma, brought about a decline both in the importance and the number of debt-slaves owing to easier access to wage labor (see Saitō).

Despite the marked decline in the importance of slavery as the major force of production, the issues of slavery and bondage are by no means confined to the past. Although slavery per se was legally abolished on a worldwide scale during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owing to the diffusion of Enlightenment thought and liberalism, it has been often argued that conditions of indentured laborers in plantation and mining companies are not significantly different from those of slaves of the past; that is, “modern slavery” still exists.<sup>3)</sup> One can also argue that the circumstances facing refugees today are often more dire than their counterparts in the days when slavery provided them with a secure means of subsistence.

Furthermore, there is also the argument that the abolishment of slavery intensified “racism.” Although Enlightenment thought claims, in principle, that all mankind share the same origins and are therefore all fundamentally equal, there remain Europeans who claim superiority over other racial groups due to genetic factors and/or innate abilities, for the purpose of disenfranchising ex-slaves of their otherwise legitimate social and political rights. Ironically, despite the previous lack of racial distinction within slave populations, the distinction between whites and people of color has often been emphasized more strongly since the abolishment of slavery.<sup>4)</sup> And the nation-state, which ideally purports the existence of a national homogeneous identity, has often intensified distinctions, among not only nations, but also racial, ethnic and religious groups within their borders, when the powers that be are incapable of effectively achieving national integration and a mutual profit-sharing system among all citizens.

In the midst of the intensification of discrimination among racial, national and ethnic groups, scholars have recently begun to look at slaves who were not allowed to claim their own identity and who mediated within different groups: for example, slaves who served foreign visitors, migrating into their masters’ households and commercial enterprises. Moreover, slavery

is not always static, due to the chance of emancipation by virtue of a master's wishes or by marriage or concubinage with a free partner. Offspring born to female slaves and foreigners often played key roles as intermediaries between foreign and local communities,<sup>5)</sup> while slaves captured in foreign wars were in a position to offer valuable information about their native societies, some becoming mediators between culturally diverse communities and thus serving as invaluable human resources for conquerors and traders. Despite being obliged to subjugate themselves to different groups, such slaves were placed in positions to rearrange the relationships between them.

It is in such a way that the comparative study of slavery can be helpful for reconsidering the roles of slaves in achieving social integration. Historical studies of slavery offer important information for examining socio-cultural intercourse among diverse ethnic, religious and cultural groups and promise to shed further light on the historical background to the rise of the modern world and the formation of nation-states, as well as comparing social integration in premodern and modern societies before and after the abolishment of slavery.

### Notes

- 1) A. Reid, ed., *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, London and New York, 1983, pp. 24–25.
- 2) This collection of articles is comprised of papers presented at the Shigakukai Public Symposium on “Slavery and Bondage in the World History” (Dorei to Reizoku no Sekaishi) at the Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Japan, held at University of Tokyo, 24 November 2018. I am very grateful to other participants, namely, Prof. Y. Kido and Prof. S. Suzuki, for their presentation and comments, and to Prof. H. Takayama and Dr. R. Shimada for their cordial support of the Symposium.
- 3) H. Suzuki, ed., *Abolitions as a Global Experience*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2016, p. 9, and Shimizu's contribution here.
- 4) Y. Kidō, *The Age of the Civil War in US*, Iwanami-shoten, Tokyo, 2018.
- 5) See, for example, U. Bosma and R. Raben, *Being “Dutch” in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920*, tr. by W. Shatter, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2008, pp. 26–103, and Shimizu's contribution here.

