

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



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German Prisoners of War in Japan 1914-1920: towards a new narrative

In 2014 the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War was globally remembered in academic and public functions, in lectures, exhibitions, and publications. The centenary in itself demonstrated a rejection of the prevailing narratives of the First World War and smoothed the way for alternative points of view. In the memory culture of the First World War also Japan takes its part since it entered the war in 1914 against the German Reich and was represented in Versailles in 1919 as one of the victorious powers. As far as the German-Japanese relations are concerned, however, a major point of interest are the German prisoners of war who were taken captives by the Japanese in November 1914 after having defended Tsingtao for three months. In the context of German-Japanese relations they are taken up time and again. In the wake of the centennial of the First World War historical science is at present revising earlier conceptions of the historiography of the First World War. With the exception to the last major study on the subject by Ulrike Klein (Freiburg, 1993), however, research on the German POWs interned in Japan during World War I has never moved beyond a biased and euphemistic conception of German captivity in Japan. On the contrary, the “friendship in war” has again been perpetuated since 2014. Thus, in my talk I would like to present an alternative point of view on the German POWs in Japan. When compared with the situation of POWs from other nations during World War I it becomes apparent that German prisoners in Japan were not the only ones to be treated humanely.

Frank Käser obtained his MA degree in Japanese Studies and History from Freie Universität Berlin and in Ancient History from Technical University Berlin. Previously a lecturer in the Institute for East Asian Studies at Freie Universität and a research fellow at Tsukuba University, he is currently a JSPS fellow at the University of Tokyo. His fields of research are Japanese modern history, the history of the Red Cross movement, the Japanese Red Cross in the Meiji Period, and German-Japanese Relations.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum open to scholars working on Japan in any field of the humanities. It is organized by Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration via our new online registration or email (weber@dijtokyo.org) is greatly appreciated.

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