

Japanese Wartime Zoo Policy : The Silent Victims of World War II

Review by Sally Walker

Mayumi Itoh, author of Japanese War-time Policy, was Professor of Political Science at University of Nevada, Las Vegas and taught at Princeton University and Queens College, City University of New York as well.

Dr. Itoh also wrote on Japanese foreign policy and in-country politics in various intellectual and popular magazines. The book *Globalization of Japan: Japanese Sakoku Mentality and U.S. Efforts to Open Japan (1998)* is also a product of Dr. Itoh. The Prolific author also wrote *The Hatoyama Dynasty: Japanese Political Leadership Through the Generations (2003)* and *Japanese War Orphans in Manchuria: Forgotten Victims of World War II (2010)*.

**Japanese Wartime Zoo Policy
The Silent Victims of World War II. Mayumi Itoh (Palgrave Macmillan, Hardcover, November 15, 2010. #9780230108943, 266pp.)**

On September 2, 1939, readers of the *Daily Telegraph* work up to the news that "the Snakes have been destroyed." London Zoo's venomous snakes, numbering 40, were removed from their cages and destroyed and the zoo coincidentally received a message that day that more cobras and dangerous Asiatic snakes had been dispatched from India. Even the harmless snakes were said to be destroyed when war broke out. More valuable animals were salvaged such as an ancient Chinese alligator, Komodo dragons and the largest pythons. Even toxic invertebrates were destroyed but a Giant panda, 4 chimps, 2 orangs and an okapi were taken to the country facility called Whipsnade. It was announced that other animals would be moved to safer quarters in areas not so likely to be bombed as a crowded city.

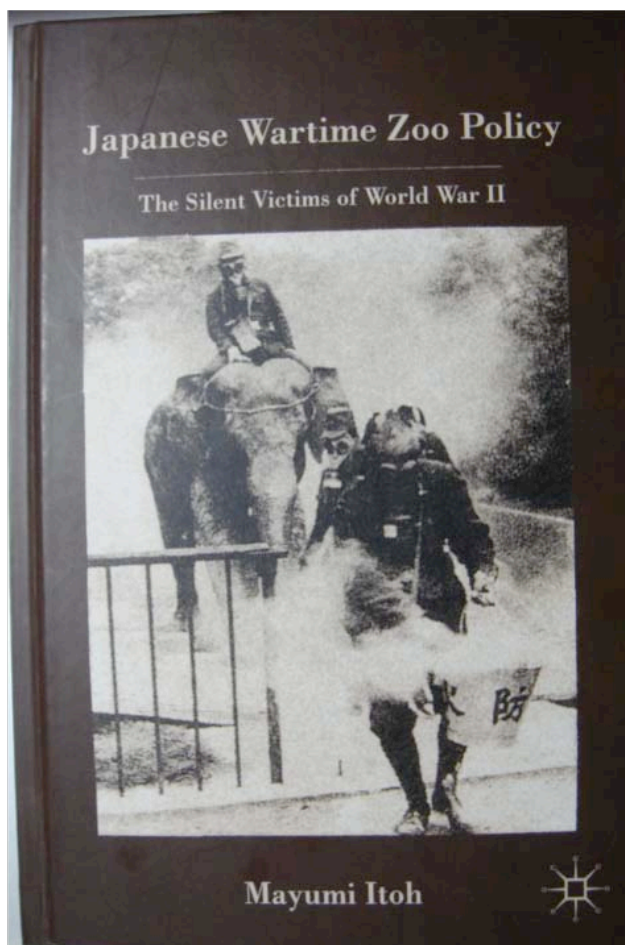
As bad as this sounds, and it happened all over Europe during WW II, it was not so bad as the almost total extermination of Japan's dangerous animals, as well as those of Korea, Taiwan and Manchukuo which were "colonies" of Japan. And the reason for this? The government of Japan used this as propaganda, as a means of inducting civilians into the war spirit. It was this, rather than public safety, which drove the programme which applied to both

zoos and circuses. The order was issued in late 1943, over a year before the air raids of American bombers began.

Ron Hrebenar and Vernon Kisling praised the book: "This is a very important policy area that has not been addressed in the English-speaking world. The material in the opening chapter on the plight of zoo animals in Haiti, Baghdad, and Kabul puts the experiences of WW II zoos in Asia and Europe in a new light and makes one wonder whether humans ever learn from past mistakes. The author has done a wonderful job of researching and documenting this subject. There is absolutely no doubt that this is a definitive study in this area. It is simply one of the best researched and documented books I have ever seen and is truly an original piece of policy research." Ronald Hrebenar, Professor of Political Science and Associate Director of Asian Studies, University of Utah.

"This is an excellent account of a little known and sad aspect of zoo history. With a review of zoo history in Japan and the fate of zoo animals throughout the world during WW II, it puts the fate of Japanese zoos in context with unsettling detail. As a result of difficult and important research, the author has uncovered and presented the effects of war on yet another cultural institution, along with the lack of respect shown for these zoo collections and what the collections represented. It is a significant contribution to the field of zoo and aquarium history."--Vernon Kisling, Chair, Marston Science Library, University of Florida.

The author, a Japanese herself, is very systematic, describing the zoos' situation in context with the different regions of Japan and Europe and USA as well. She relates the historical



background of the creation of modern zoos and militarism in Japan. She also gives a detailed assessment of the Japanese Wartime Zoo Policy. There are a good number of photographs graphically illustrating, in some instances, the pain and agony both animals and their caretakers suffered in carrying out government orders of the Japanese Home Ministry. This activity was carried out during a period of public hysteria. Under those conditions anything goes and the public were brainwashed into going along with everything. Japan is certainly not the only country in which such atrocities were perpetrated and worse things even have been done all over the world.

It is important to document the differences and in this book the primary theme is the calculated manner in which the government used the ostensibly necessary destruction of zoo animals to ignite the war passion and fear among its people and prepare them to do whatever the military deemed necessary. It is a good story for all of us to read so that we may recognise similar inclinations in our own governments and even in ourselves !