

“Realists”

versus

“Idealists”

Ideological Struggles in Japan's Intellectual Field of the 1960s in the Light of the Debate on Sartre's "A Plea for Intellectuals"

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In 1966, Jean-Paul Sartre held a lecture series in Japan, in which he undertook to rehabilitate intellectuals and call for engagement from actors in the Japanese intelligentsia. With his lectures Sartre clearly captured the Japanese Zeitgeist: Violent political developments and ideological struggles were at work at the time, including the Vietnam War, anti-American resentments, animosities between the Communist Party of Japan and the New Left as well as between progressives and conservatives. Sartre's lectures thus caused a strong echo in Japan's intellectual field, culminating in a vigorous debate in which leading members of the Japanese intelligentsia participated. The participants generally split into three camps: Rightist conservatives, the so-called “realists” (genjitsu shugisha), left-liberal “progressives” (shinpoteki chishikijin), who constituted the camp of the so-called “idealists” (risō shugisha), and lastly the Communists. The debate reflects the play of power in the intellectual field in the late 1960s, characterized by a marginalisation of the Communist Party by the New Left, by the social engagement of a progressive stratum of intellectuals and by the emergence of an increasingly conservative academic elite. In my paper I will analyze the debate by examining the historical and ideological background and the concept of the intellectual from the perspective of discourse analysis and historical semantics, thus showing how the Japanese intelligentsia discussed their social responsibility and drawing a picture of the ideological battles in the intellectual field of the 1960s.

PD Dr. Simone Müller has studied Japanology, Sinology and Philosophy at the University of Zurich, at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and at Doshisha University. She is currently working at the Asia-Orient-Institute of the University of Zurich, teaching and conducting research in Japanese literature and intellectual history. Her post-doctoral thesis (Habilitation) *Torn Consciousness - Repetition and Difference in the Intellectual Discourse of Inter- and Postwar Japan [Das zerrissene Bewusstsein: Wiederholung und Differenz im japanischen Intellektuellendiskurs (chishikijin ron) der Zwischen- und Nachkriegszeit]* consists of an analysis of the self-referential discourse of literates on the role and responsibility of intellectuals in 20th century Japan, in light of European, namely French, concepts of intellectualism.

Lecture in English, No registration required

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