

Inez de Beauclair: 1897–1981

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INEZ DE BEAUCLAIR (née Countess von Korff), born in 1897 in Darmstadt, Germany, died in Taipei, Taiwan on Good Friday, April 17, 1981. In accordance with her wishes she was laid to rest in a crypt built by her father, amidst the forests and meadows of her childhood.

De Beauclair studied anatomy and anthropology under E. Fischer at Freiburg, where she also married Dr. Carl de Beauclair. Postwar conditions in Germany persuaded Dr. de Beauclair to accept a professional opening in Indonesia, a welcome opportunity for the young anthropologist who immediately began to study museum collections and the available literature to familiarize herself with her new environment in advance. By all accounts she enjoyed Java, Sumatra, Banka, and Billiton and would have preferred to stay on one of the tropical islands, but her husband had already accepted an assignment in Shanghai.

Thus in 1924 she set foot on the soil of the country which was to determine the course of her life. In Shanghai she assisted the anatomist Dr. Wagenseil in taking anthropological measurements and concurrently studied various aspects of Chinese culture in loose affiliation with the Royal Asiatic Society, China Branch.

In 1936 she was invited to teach German at the National Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. After two years she returned to Germany to attend Thurnwald's lectures at Berlin University and resume work under E. Fischer at his institute. By then her interests had shifted to *Rassenpsychologie*, 'comparative psychology of races', in which she took an intensive training course.

At the end of 1938 she again set out for China to teach German and French at the



Inez de Beauclair in the field.

National Zhejiang University which, due to the Sino-Japanese war, had moved to Guangxi Province in Southwest China. One year later she moved to Anxun, Guizhou Province, at the invitation of the Army Medical College where she taught German and Latin to students of anatomy and pharmacology. She remained at Anxun, heart of a territory inhabited by ethnic minorities, until the autumn of 1941 and began to study the Miao, helped with medical treatment in their villages, and took anthropological measurements. Late in 1941 she moved to Dali, Yunnan Province, where she was put in charge of an ethnographic collection which was to be the core of a museum and did research among the Min Chia near Lake Dali. When the institute closed down, she stayed on to help during a severe cholera epidemic, but later moved to National Chungqi University at Lichuan in Sichuan province. The Philological Institute of the Academia Sinica happened to have been relocated to the same place and de Beauclair had an opportunity to use its famous library and study literature on the ethnic minorities of the Southwest. Drs. Ling Xunxeng and Li Fanggui also encouraged her to continue her research on ethnic minorities, especially the Keh-lao about whom very little was known. She gladly accepted an invitation to teach German, French, and Latin at National Guizhou University, because it gave her a chance to return to Guizhou and continue her research. Her studies later resulted in *Tribal Cultures in Southwest China* (1970). She was also in charge of the Research Institute for the Cultures of the Southwest, with the task of reclassifying the ethnic minorities and collecting data on their histories and cultures. She stayed there until 1951. During all these years she contributed scholarly articles to various learned societies, but the bulk of her valuable manuscripts and collections was lost in the confusion of war and revolution.

De Beauclair left China in 1952 for Europe and America, but was soon invited back

to China, this time to work at the National Palace Museum, then near Taichung, Taiwan. She later joined the newly established Institute of Ethnology of the Academia Sinica in Nankang where she remained until her retirement 18 years later. She did research among the ethnic minorities of Taiwan, collected ethnographic specimens for the museum of the Institute, and undertook fieldwork on Lan Yü (Botel Tobago), the Batan Islands, and Micronesia, where her studies were concentrated on Yap.

At the present moment, when we try to assess 90 years of anthropological research on Lan Yü (the result will appear as a special issue of *Ethnos in Asia*), her work on Lan Yü and the Batanes assumes unequaled significance as the only extensive and reliable body of information on nonmaterial or sociological aspects of Yami culture. Moreover, she collected it under severe conditions and just in time, before missionary work and other forms of acculturation changed life on Lan Yü so much that she lately declined to revisit the island.

In her last years she worked on the Dutch period of Formosa (1624-1661) and on a monograph on the Siraya, the ethnic group the Dutch had closest contacts with and who are now completely sinicized. She also did a study on multicolored glass beads and glass bangles as heirlooms in the possession of some ethnic minorities. Unfortunately these studies were incomplete at the time of her death. Plans for the re-publication of her varied studies are underway.

I first met Inez de Beauclair at an international congress when I was a student at Vienna University working on my thesis about the ethnic minorities of Taiwan. In the 1950s, when field trips to the Far East were unheard of for graduate students, I was thrilled to meet this lady scholar who had actually worked among the groups about which I had so laboriously acquired a little knowledge through Japanese source material.

At first, her forthright German manner impressed me as being rather formidable, although she answered my random questions with great patience. On parting, she kindly encouraged me to write to her and this correspondence, which continued to her death, remains a source of stimulation and encouragement to me. Whenever one of us later visited Taiwan, she went out of her way to be helpful and gave unstintingly of her vast store of professional and life experience.

For her, devotion to her scholarly work was an absolute to which she subordinated all other concerns. Her critical mind and her outspokenness sometimes got her into "hot water," all the more since she upheld the European priority of scholarship over sensibilities in a social context where circumspection is valued. Yet, I never found her inflexible where her scholarship was concerned.

She conducted her fieldwork in the more regal style of her generation, but wherever I traced her steps among the ethnic minorities of Taiwan, she was held in high regard. The old people found it easy to talk to her and were touched that, at her age, she did not shun the exertion of visiting them and learning from them. On the quiet, she seems to have done many a good deed for them and for some Chinese students. She was happiest in the company of congenial fellow scholars whom she would engage in spirited and stimulating discussions. The breadth of her interests, also reflected in her bibliography, is truly amazing, and her correspondence spanned the globe.

During the last few years she fought heroically against failing eyesight, declining health, and loneliness. When I last saw her, ten days before her death, she was broken in body, but not in spirit. Although at first she expressed resentment about her depen-

dence on others, and frustration about her inability to continue work, she changed into her usual self with a stupendous memory for detail once the conversation turned to my research projects. After a couple of hours, she, who had reiterated her wish to die, toyed with the possibility of accompanying me down to the excavation site in East Taiwan.

That was the last time I saw Inez de Beauclair, and I keenly miss her spirited example, her stimulating letters, and conversations.

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*This bibliography is adapted from a list of publications compiled by the Chinese Materials Center, Taipei, for a forthcoming volume of the collected works of Inez de Beauclair. Used with permission.

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