The Coined Concept of “Minzoku (Minzu/Minjok)” in the first half of the 20th Century: From the perspective of Sociologist Kentaro Komatsu (1894-1959)

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The word “Minzoku” in Japanese, as well as “Minzu” in Chinese or “Minjok” in Korean (which use the same Chinese characters, “民族”), have been treated naturally as quite “traditional” by people in East Asia and as a core concept with which to build up the identity of human being and human society. However, at least under its modern use, this word was coined at the end of the 19th Century in Japan as a ‘Chimera’ compounded and fabricated by the different eastern concepts, including people, folk, ethnicity, and nation, leading people to accept it without further question. By looking back at the almost forgotten discourse of Japanese sociologist Kentaro Komatsu (1894-1959) who played a significant role in the coinage of the modern concept of “Minzoku”, in this paper the author examines the process through which this word developed its bloated image.