

Out of sight, not always out of might. Bilateral relations between distant small countries; methodological observations

Vesa VARES*

Keywords: bilateral relations, distant countries, diplomatic relations, international politics, Finnish foreign policy

Abstract

Studying bilateral relations of “distant” countries is a complex issue, especially in cases where there are no evident mutual interests or mutual threats or when there are no special conflicting interests either. However, this kind of research does not necessarily differ qualitatively or methodically from the study of countries and cultures which are much closer to each other. However, the undramatic day-to-day affairs, which have not moved the destinies of the two nations, can often reveal interesting examples of political identities and mentalities and surprising links, especially if the bilateral relations have been used in order to gain a foothold of the wider reference group of the other party. Most often it is hoped that one would find markets for its products or diplomatic support and to make oneself more known also among other countries in the area. However, it is more common to find negative than positive stereotypes, when one deals with bilateral “distant” relations. It is what is peculiar, odd, exotic, even frightening and shocking, that gets the attention and is exaggerated. All this creates a contrast and a possibility to strengthen one’s own identity. I shall here refer to some examples especially in the Finnish case. All in all, studying the bilateral relations of two distant countries in the very least gives a possibility to find something new; how have those narratives, which we already know, been seen on a smaller scale and in unusual arenas – and how have these smaller nations themselves influenced the larger narrative?

* Dr. of Soc. Sc. (Political History), Associate Professor of Political History, University of Turku, Finland, vesa.vares@utu.fi.

References:

A. Books and articles:

- Fält, Olavi K. *Eksotismista realismiin. Perinteinen Japanin-kuva Suomessa 1930-luvun murroksessa*. Studia Historica Septentrionalia 5. Pohjois-Suomen Historiallinen Yhdistys, Societas Historica Finlandiae Septentrionalis. Rovaniemi, 1982.
- Hall, Stuart. *Identiteetti*, Suom. ja toim. Mikko Lehtonen ja Juha Herkman. Tampere: Vastapaino, 2002.
- Jakobson, Max. *Diplomaattien talvisota. Suomi maailmanpolitiikassa 1938–40*. 5. Painos. Juva: WSOY, 1979.
- Paasivirta, Juhani. *Suomi ja Eurooppa. Autonomiakausi ja kansainväliset kriisit 1808 – 1914*. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1978.
- Uola, Mikko. *Suomi ja keskuksen valtakunta. Suomen subteet Kiinan tasavaltaan 1919 – 1949*. Kangasalan Kirjapaino 1995.
- Vares, Vesa. “Isten vidám, nagy gyermekei, akik nagyon jó véleménnyel vannak magukról – s gyakran joggal”. Magyarország képe Finnországban az 1920-as és 1930-as években. In *Kutatási Füzetek 16. Magyarágkép 19-20. századi útleírásokban*. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 2010).
- Vares, Vesa. ”Pikkumainen Marianne. Suomalaisen oikeiston näkemyksiä Ranskasta vuosina 1918–1923.” In *Suomalaisten Ranska. Kaunis tuntematon*. Eds. Louis Clerc and Kristiina Ranki. Ajatus-Kirjat (Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy, 2008).
- Vares, Vesa. *Creating a State and National Identity: Finland and Europe 1918 – 1922*. *Valahia Journal of Historical Studies* 14 (2010): 79-104.

B. Internet posting:

- The History Guide. Lectures on Twentieth Century Europe*. Neville Chamberlain on *Appeasement* (1939). <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/munich.html>. (Read on October 11th, 2011).