

# The Prussian Encounter with Japan in the Personal Letters of Friedrich zu Eulenburg, Leader of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia, 1860-1862

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## Introduction

In 1900, in the wake of the recent acquisition of colonial concessions in Tsingtao in China and as a result of the positive efforts of Kaiser Wilhelm II to promote German colonization and commerce in East Asia there was great public interest in German colonial activity in the Far East. It was in this context that Graf Philip zu Eulenburg published the personal letters addressed to him and his family by his brother Graf Fritz zu Eulenburg (1815-1881), leader of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia from 1860-1862.<sup>1</sup> Eulenburg had been entrusted with the mission of obtaining official commercial treaties with Japan, China and Siam, which he was able to accomplish after painstaking negotiations in the case of Japan and China. Eulenburg, who never married, addressed his letters to his only brother and his family, with whom he maintained a very close relationship. While the letters were never intended for publication and indeed contain many references to family members and their activities, as the editor remarks, the history of the opening of official relations between Prussia and Japan described in the letters takes on new meaning for the expansion of German activity in East Asia at the time. Furthermore, the letters also give a good description of the circumstances involved in diplomacy in parts of the world that were still more or less closed to contact with European countries at the time.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will examine Eulenburg's letters in order to show how the leader of the Prussian Expedition personally understood the nature and significance of the first official encounter between a German state and Japan.

The letters deal with the entire expedition to East Asia, that is China, Japan and Siam, but this paper will limit itself to a discussion of Eulenburg's activities in Japan. After a brief sketch of the background of relations between East Asia and the Western powers and the commissioning of the Prussian Expedition, the paper will describe Eulenburg's observations on Japan, depicting not only his encounters with Japanese officials in the process of the negotiations, but also his observations of Japan and the Japanese people. In contrast to the official narratives of the Prussian Expedition<sup>3</sup>, which aim to provide a factual and general description of conditions in East Asia, the personal letters of Eulenburg present a close-up, first-hand account of the often difficult relations between European nations and Japan in the first years after the opening of the country to diplomatic and commercial relations after two centuries of self-imposed isolation.

## I. The Prussian Expedition to East Asia, 1860-1862.

### East Asia and the Western Powers

Contacts between Europe and East Asia in modern times began with European overseas exploration in the sixteenth century. However, these contacts were relatively limited due to the great geographical distances and traditional attitudes towards foreign nations which made China and Japan reluctant to deal with the encroaching Europeans. With the industrialization of Europe, the populous East Asia countries attracted renewed interest as potential customers for European goods, but due to deep reluctance to engage the Western powers, formal relations were established with China only after direct military action and in the case of Japan, only under the threat of military action.

A series of treaties formalized the relations between China and the major powers, The Treaty of Nanking (1842), which settled the “Opium War” between China and Great Britain, the treaty of Wanghsia (1844) with the United States, the Treaty of Tientsin (1858), signed by China with Great Britain, France, Russia and the United States in the aftermath of further Anglo-Chinese hostilities, together created an unequal treaty system, which guaranteed the rights of Westerners at the expense of the Chinese, lasting

into the twentieth century. This treaty system stipulated the opening of certain Chinese ports to trade under consular supervision, the principle of extraterritoriality, whereby foreign citizens would be placed under the legal jurisdiction of consular and mixed courts, a tariff rate highly favorable to the Western powers, the establishment of foreign legations in Peking, and the admission of Christian missionaries to the interior of China. This treaty system also became the model for European relations with Japan.

European relations with Japan began with the arrival of Portuguese missionaries and merchants at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. For a time, English and Dutch merchants also traded in Japan until fears of the potentially subversive influence of Christian missionaries led the Tokugawa regime to close the country to all Europeans, except for the Dutch, who were permitted after 1641 to trade under close supervision at a small settlement on a man-made island called Dejima in the confines of Nagasaki harbor.

At the same time as interest in trade with China grew, Japan also attracted the attention of the European nations. Several attempts in the first half of the nineteenth century by Great Britain, Russia, France, and the United States failed to establish relations. In 1854, United States was able to pressure Japan with a thinly veiled threat of force into accepting a treaty of "friendship" allowing, among other things, for American ships to call in the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate and to purchase supplies. Other Western powers soon made similar treaties. In the face of China's defeat by Western powers and its forced acceptance of the opening of the country, the Japanese reluctantly accepted a treaty with the United States in 1858 that stipulated a treaty port system similar to that of China: the opening of certain Japanese ports and permanent residence of merchants, consuls and diplomats, conventional tariff rate, the right of legal extraterritoriality. The Netherlands, Russia, Great Britain and France soon negotiated similar treaties with Japan.

### The Prussian Expedition to East Asia, 1860-1861

The opening of China and Japan for trade and commerce created interest among shipping and commercial circles in the northern states of Germany,

especially in Prussia, and the Hanseatic cities of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck, and in countries of the Zollverein. Since the 1840s German ships and merchants had been trading in Asian waters, there was a Prussian proposal in 1843 to make an approach to China to demand the same rights for its citizens as had been already conceded to Great Britain. According to the proposal, a *Handelssozietät* was to be established in Singapore, which would then be able to expand its activity to China.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the small number of German ships involved in the Asian trade, most merchants were willing to allow the other powers with formal treaties to represent their interests when necessary. However, as rivalries and nationalistic feeling among the powers grew with the expansion of trade, it was becoming less and less desirable for German interests to be represented by other powers, since German merchants were afraid of being disadvantaged without the legal protection offered them through consular officials of their own nation.<sup>5</sup>

The opening of China and Japan to foreign trade created great interest in Asia not only among the German commercial and shipping circles. Two Germans, who had participated in the expedition of Perry to Japan in 1853-54, Wilhelm Heine<sup>6</sup> an illustrator on Perry's expedition to Japan, and Friedrich Lühdorf<sup>7</sup>, captain of the *Greta*, a German ship hired to carry coal for Perry's expedition, wrote accounts of their travels in Asia which also served to heighten interest in China and Japan.<sup>8</sup> In Germany, newspapers like the *Kölnische Zeitung* had also been closely following events in Japan.<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of growing interest in East Asian trade, on 15 August 1859, a Prussian cabinet order approved a plan for an official expedition to the area for the purpose of signing treaties of trade and commerce with the governments of China, Japan, and Siam. Appointed to lead the expedition was Graf Friedrich zu Eulenburg, who was named "Außerordentlicher Gesandter" (envoy extraordinaire) and "Bevollmächtigter Minister" (plenipotentiary) to the courts of China, Japan, and Siam, and was authorized to negotiate treaties not only on behalf of Prussia, but also for the Zollverein States, for the Hanseatic cities of Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck, and for the archduchies of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Preparations for the Expedition were begun after the Prussian Landtag gave its approval for the expenditures of the mission in March 1860.<sup>10</sup>

Graf Fredrich zu Eulenburg was born in Königsberg in 1815 into a well respected aristocratic family and had a long career in the Prussian civil service. After studying in Königsberg and Berlin, in 1835 he began several years of work at various administrative positions, and served in various diplomatic posts beginning with an appointment as Generalkonsul in Antwerp in 1852 and Generalkonsul in Warsaw in 1858. After the successful completion of his mission to the Far East, he was awarded a high Prussian order, the Order of the Red Eagle (Rother Adlerorden II. Classe). He became Minister of the Interior under Bismarck and was well-known for his efforts to introduce various administrative reforms. Retiring from public service in 1878, he died in 1881 in Schöneberg near Berlin.<sup>11</sup>

As noted in the Official Narrative, the Expedition had several other objectives in addition to the signing of official treaties of trade and commerce with the governments of Japan, China and Siam. For example, the Expedition was also intended to provide an opportunity for Prussia to show its flag abroad and to provide its fledgling Navy to prove its worth, thus allowing it to raise its prestige at home and abroad. Another stated purpose of the Expedition was to make a contribution to the growing body of scientific knowledge of the geography, flora and fauna, and the natural environment of the East Asian countries visited. It was also expected to investigate the possibilities for the development of markets in the area for the expansion of German industry and commerce.<sup>12</sup>

The political importance of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia has been noted in several studies that treat the role of Prussia in the rise of Germany and its expansion in the age of imperialism in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. The successful completion of the treaties not only gave a solid legal and practical basis for German trading activities in Asia, it also raised the prestige and influence of Prussia as the leading economic and political power of Germany and helped consolidate its role in the eventual unification of Germany in the establishment of the German Empire in 1871. Although Germany was a late-comer to overseas colonial and trade expansion in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the success of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia helped established the basis for Germany's advancement as one of the major players on the stage of international politics in East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the political significance of the expedition, however, the inclusion of scientists and merchants among the members of the Expedition to collect scientific and commercially useful information served to broaden the appeal of the Expedition beyond the boundaries of Prussia and contributed to the formation of a sense of nationalism throughout the various German states. The *Kölnische Zeitung*, a newspaper known for its liberalism and patriotic-national spirit, devoted much coverage to the plan and preparations for the Expedition. As the newspaper pointed out, although the Expedition was being organized by the Prussia government, it had also been given authorization to negotiate treaties on behalf of the German Zollverein, the Hanseatic cities, and the two Mecklenburgs. The paper thus referred to it as the “*deutsche*” Expedition.<sup>14</sup>

Altogether, some 800 men comprised the personnel of the Expedition, including the crew of the four ships assigned to transport the group. Eulenburg's immediate staff included four diplomats: Legations-Secretär Pieschel and three attachés, von Brandt, von Bunsen, and Graf August zu Eulenburg, the nephew of the leader of the Expedition. There were also several scientists and experts: the botanist Wichura, the zoologist Dr. von Martens, the geologist Dr. Freiherr von Richthofen, the agricultural expert Dr. Maron, the artist A. Berg, the illustrator Wilhelm Heine, the photographer Bismark, the gardener Schottmüller, the Prussian merchants Grube, and Jakob, the Prussian Councilor of Commerce Wolff, and the merchant Spiess, who was a representative of the Chamber of Commerce of Saxony.<sup>15</sup> Several members of the expedition, including the above mentioned Spiess,<sup>16</sup> Maron,<sup>17</sup> and Heine,<sup>18</sup> as well as the Arcona's naval chaplain J. Kreyher<sup>19</sup> and Capt. Reinhold Werner,<sup>20</sup> commander of the *Elbe*, later published accounts of their travels in East Asia with the Expedition.<sup>21</sup>

After completion of the mission, an official narrative of the Expedition was published in a three-part series containing a total of eight volumes. The first part consists of four volumes and describes the journey of the Expedition from Europe to Asia and the conditions in those countries, together with an account of the treaty negotiations.<sup>22</sup> The second part consists of a scholarly description of the flora and fauna encountered during the Expedition by the botanist von Martens (vol. 5 and 6) and the biologist Wichura (vol. 7).<sup>23</sup> The third part, which comprises the eighth volume, is a collection of drawings by

Berg, depicting various scenes of Japan, China, and Siam.<sup>24</sup>

## II. The Prussian Encounter with Japan during the Expedition

The letters of Eulenburg give a close-up, personal description of the activities of the Expedition in the Japan from the viewpoint of its leader. Several things stand out as he describes his dealings with the Japanese during his five month stay in Japan. First, there are the difficulties involved in the negotiation of the treaties. Eulenburg complains time and time again about the obstinacy of the Japanese officials, and their refusal to take the Europeans and Americans as serious partners in the international political and economic setting. On the other hand, he paints a rather positive picture of his experiences with the still relatively unknown Japanese people, their culture, and their way of life.

### The Difficulty of Dealing with Reluctant Japanese officials

Graf Friedrich zu Eulenburg and the main members of his immediate entourage sailed from Ancona on May 23, 1860, travelling on commercial ships via Suez and Ceylon, arriving in Singapore on 2 August, where they met up with the four vessels assigned to the Expedition: the 2320-ton steam-powered corvette *Arkona*, which served as the flag ship, the 1533-ton sail frigate *Thetis*, the 95-ton schooner *Frauenlob*, and the clipper *Elbe*, which had been purchased for the purpose of carrying the supplies for the Expedition's needs as well as gifts, and samples of German products to be distributed in the countries to be visited by the Expedition.<sup>25</sup>

The *Thetis* and *Frauenlob* left Singapore on 11 August, while the *Arcona* left two days later, on 13 August. On the way to Japan, the ships encountered a typhoon, delaying their arrival, with the *Arcona* arriving in Edo on 4 September, the *Thetis* ten days later, on 14 September.<sup>26</sup> The *Frauenlob*, with all hands aboard, was lost at sea. Deeply touched by the loss of the schooner, Eulenburg regretted the loss of the excellent officer who commanded the schooner and thought that it was a mistake to send such a small ship on the mission.<sup>27</sup> The *Elbe*, which had sailed by a different route and had orders to stop in Hong Kong if necessary, arrived in Edo on 6

December, to Eulenburg's relief.<sup>28</sup>

Upon arrival in Japan, Eulenburg immediately wrote an official request to the Japanese government asking for suitable lodging for himself and his staff. The government sent several officials on 5 September to inform Eulenburg of the preparations and a note was sent on 6 September explaining that living quarters had been arranged in Akabane.<sup>29</sup> Eulenburg's first encounters with Japanese officials took place after moving into his quarters. On 8 September Eulenburg received three "governors" (*bugyō*)—Sakai Oki no kami, Hori Oribe no kami, and one whom Eulenburg described as the official "spy," whose name he did not know—accompanied by a large retinue. After introductions, they smoked and drank tea.<sup>30</sup> A few days later, they had another visit from the same *bugyō* and a translator. In his description of the encounter, Eulenburg writes of the lively atmosphere of the meeting that was enhanced by the Japanese officials' fondness for champagne.<sup>31</sup>

Eulenburg's first direct contact with the Japanese government took place on 14 September, when Eulenburg visited one of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Wishing to follow what he understood to be the Japanese custom, he rode in a *norimono*, escorted by his sailors and a marine honor guard with the Prussian Flag in the vanguard, and accompanied by several other minor attendants carrying umbrellas and other objects. After introductions and exchanging pleasantries, the discussion became more serious and lasted a total of three hours. The minister told Eulenburg that it was impossible for the Japanese government to make a treaty with Prussia, because of strong public opinion against it. When Eulenburg replied that he would not leave Japan until he had a treaty, the minister promised to bring the matter up to the *Taikun* (*Shōgun*) again and would send a reply. Summing up the day's events, Eulenburg complained that he was in a "bad mood" and that "nothing had gone as planned."<sup>32</sup>

Eulenburg had been worried about the success of his mission from the start, and with negotiations beginning on such a poor footing, he began to grow impatient. About a week later on 18 September Eulenburg again received the three *bugyō*, who merely repeated the Minister's position that it was impossible to make a treaty because of the strong domestic opposition to the opening of the country. In his letter to his brother, Eulenburg wrote that he had told the *bugyō* that if he did not receive a more favorable answer

within the week, he would take a more strident tone. He also related that he served the officials champagne and sardines, but wouldn't offer them anything again unless they brought better news next time.<sup>33</sup> A few days later, the same three *bugyō* appeared unexpectedly and repeated the same message. Losing his patience, Eulenburg wrote, that he could not conduct business with them anymore unless they had authorization from their government to negotiate a treaty. He also requested them to ask the minister for another meeting.<sup>34</sup>

On 24 September, the *bugyō* came to announce to Eulenburg that the Minister of Foreign Affairs would see Eulenburg on 4 October. The official business ended, they then proceeded to have a private conversation while enjoying champagne, cigars and pipes. The promised meeting took place on 2 October. However, although the meeting took a long time, nothing much was accomplished. Eulenburg described the Japanese as stubborn, yet admitted that they had made at least one step forward, in that although they insisted that they were not able to conclude a treaty now, they did promise that they would negotiate one in the future. Eulenburg rejected this offer outright and when he declared that he would write a diplomatic note to explain his position and asked for another meeting to discuss it, they agreed. Eulenburg was clearly frustrated: "In the meantime, I will explode my last mine through the mediation of the other foreign envoys. If that doesn't help, then I am at my wit's end."<sup>35</sup>

Due to the importance of the treaty for Prussia and with a long mission to obtain treaties from China and Siam ahead of him, Eulenburg's growing impatience with the lack of progress in negotiations is understandable. However, from the Japanese viewpoint, the longer the negotiation process could be drawn out, the more time it had to deal with the domestic opposition to the opening of the country. As Michael Auslin points out, the Japanese considered negotiation as a way to defend itself against the encroaching Western powers: "Negotiation was more than mere dialogue with the treaty powers, however; it encompassed the response to the West. In the Japanese case, negotiation is better understood as a form of resistance... Japanese officials selectively employed tactics designed to frustrate Western plans while maintaining the fiction of adhering to the treaties."<sup>36</sup> As we shall see, although it took another two months, a breakthrough was achieved through the good offices of Townsend Harris, the American envoy.

A similar sign of progress was also made, as Eulenburg wrote on 15 October, when the Japanese agreed to various requests concerning the exchange of money, the furnishing of the quarters and the supplying of the vessels of the Expedition.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Eulenburg's patience was growing thin. Members of the Expedition, especially the captains of the naval vessels were complaining of boredom. As he wrote, not only was he himself frustrated at the lack of progress, he now had to listen to the complaints of his own staff, which demanded even more patience.<sup>38</sup>

Eulenburg had to wait more than four weeks for a reply to his letter to the Minister. In the meantime, He unpacked some of the gifts for the *Shōgun*, a pair of globes, which he planned to send in hopes of accelerating progress in the negotiations. "He won't get the other gifts until I have my treaty, and if I don't get a treaty, he won't get anything either."<sup>39</sup> On October 26, 1860 Eulenburg presented the globes to the *bugyō* and also gave them pieces of amber jewelry for their wives.<sup>40</sup>

Eulenburg also tried to make use of what he had learned about the Japanese art of diplomacy from dealing with the Japanese so far. On October 26, 1860, when he called the *bugyō* to visit him and asked them the status of his latest note to the Minister and they refused to talk business, he feigned disinterest: "Since, as I have learned from experience, here in Japan it is better to assume the appearance of complete indifference, I didn't ask them if the Minister intended to see me again soon. I am convinced that they will report this indifference to him and that he will let me hear something from him."<sup>41</sup>

Eulenburg's frustration and doubts about the prospects of success were also clearly expressed in a letter dated 29 October. While holding out hope that the mediation of the American envoy Townsend Harris would bring progress to the negotiations, he also expressed anxiety, complaining that "it takes divine patience to proceed with the slow pace of negotiations without getting nervous, especially when one can be sure that the whole world believes that the blame rests simply in my ineptitude. But what means should I use to make the Japanese more amenable?" He goes on to explain that he can only use the power of persuasion, and cannot resort to bombarding the city of Yedo (Edo) with the small fleet at his disposal. Furthermore, the other objectives of the Expedition were also in jeopardy, since the scientists, and

specialists were unable to gather much information.<sup>42</sup> The reference to naval bombardment was an allusion to the pressure of military power that nations such as Britain and France were able to bring to bear in their relations with the Japan and China. In fact, Eulenburg was hoping that the news of the recent capture of the forts at the mouth of the Peiho River by the French and British in their war with China would make an impression on the Japanese: “Perhaps that will give the Japanese a little scare and make them more pliant towards us.”<sup>43</sup>

On 1 November 1860 Eulenburg received discouraging news from Townsend Harris, who reported that the Japanese government maintained that it was still not in a position to make a treaty with Prussia. Eulenburg did not hide his disappointment, but wrote that he had had many bitter experiences in life and that this setback put him in a bad mood for a few hours, and then he was over it: “I have nothing to blame myself for, and *ultra posse nemo obligatur.*”<sup>44</sup>

The reply from the Minister to Eulenburg's diplomatic note that finally came on 12 November 1860 was negative, however: the Minister had written that Prussia would surely be “reasonable enough not try to force a treaty on Japan when it had no desire to do so.” For Eulenburg, it was enough to “make me lose courage and patience.”<sup>45</sup>

However, a breakthrough in the stalemate was reached on 6 December, four months after Eulenburg's arrival in Japan, when Townsend Harris visited Eulenburg to report the “good news” that the Japanese government was prepared to name a plenipotentiary to negotiate a treaty with Prussia.<sup>46</sup> In one of his letters, Eulenburg wrote that the British envoy Rutherford Alcock mistakenly thought that it was British intervention that brought about the breakthrough. Eulenburg himself considered the American envoy Harris the most helpful and skillful of the foreign representatives in Japan and attributed the recent success to his good offices. However, Eulenburg did say that he was also grateful for Alcock's assistance in general, although he dismissed the French envoy as being too preoccupied with himself to be of much help to the Prussians.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, Harris' intervention was instrumental in breaking the Japanese resistance to the Prussians. In his meetings with the Japanese government to recommend the Prussian treaty, Harris proposed that the opening of Japanese

ports to the Prussians could be arranged to be carried out not immediately, but delayed by a year or two. This delay was very attractive to the Japanese government, which saw in it a way to assuage the growing movement in the circles that opposed the opening of the country.<sup>48</sup>

The official exchange of credentials took place a week later, on 13 December. Eulenburg describes the customary reluctance of the Japanese to engage the matter directly, so he decided to move things along by presenting his own credentials, which was then reciprocated by the Japanese. The formalities were followed by the usual champagne, sardines, cold meat and conversation.<sup>49</sup>

Although the substantive negotiations had begun, things did not go smoothly, and Eulenburg was still very anxious about the outcome. On 22 December, after receiving the *bugyō* and a new interpreter, Eulenburg wrote:

“I am still anxious and imagine that there will still be something that comes up to disturb the progress of negotiations.”<sup>50</sup> He also described a meeting with the minister on 24 December as “unpleasant,” and wrote that he was on the point of becoming rude at the minister’s obstinacy and pettiness.<sup>51</sup>

Further substantive negotiations took place on 28 December 1860, when basic agreement was reached on the seven articles of the treaty. However, Eulenburg was afraid that at the next meeting the finicky Japanese would demand to go over it all again. “At the negotiations, the people are terribly ponderous. It takes great effort to express a sentence or even a word differently than the wording of the earlier treaties. For an hour today they questioned what kind of relationship there was between the Prince Regent and the King, and why the latter doesn’t abdicate, if he is so sick, or whether the Prince Regent exercises all royal powers, or shares them with the King.”<sup>52</sup>

To Eulenburg’s chagrin, the negotiations dragged on for a month since the Japanese “raise objections over every detail.” Eulenburg shrewdly conceded several non-essential points and was able to get some concessions in return.<sup>53</sup> He described the similar circumstances of a meeting on 3 January:

The people have no idea of the real sense and import of the terms of the treaty. They fight only over words, but so obstinately that today it took two and a half hours to dissuade them from a completely senseless wording of an article which they had proposed. The interpreter Moriyama is the only one who

understands something, but he is a damned fellow, who continually makes things difficult for me. Despite all this, we have finished the entire deliberations today. However it is to be taken for granted that the Japanese will raise a host of objections again later.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, the interpreter Moriyama did raise further questions over detail several times, but Eulenburg refused to deal with him and demanded to deal directly with the *bugyō*, who 8 January 1861 finally declared that they were satisfied with the wording of the treaties and considered the negotiations to be completed.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, a week later, on 15 January 1861, when Eulenburg tried to hand over the official gifts for the *Shōgun*, the *bugyō* requested additional changes, and Eulenburg refused. Eulenburg's resoluteness had an effect and they did not insist on the changes. The gifts were then handed over.<sup>56</sup>

That same day, another serious complication hampered the negotiations. This was the murder of Henry Heusken, the interpreter of the American legation, whom Townsend Harris had put at the disposal of Eulenburg to help in the negotiations. Heusken was used to spending almost every day with the Prussians, and would return to his lodgings at the American legation after supper. Although accompanied by Japanese officials assigned to guard him, he was waylaid by seven men on the way home and was fatally wounded in the stomach. Eulenburg sent Dr. Lucius, his physician, to aid him, but Heusken died within a few hours, ostensibly from loss of blood. Eulenburg was deeply moved by the death of Heusken, who had been a constant companion during the Expedition's time in Japan.<sup>57</sup>

In the wake of Heusken's death, Eulenburg feared that the incident might be used by the Japanese as an excuse to refuse to sign the treaty. His repeated inquiries about the status of the treaties were answered by the simple statement that the Japanese government was not yet ready: In the aftermath of the murder of Heusken, there had not been enough time to prepare the necessary copies of the treaty. Eulenburg wondered "whether there would be a signing of the treaty, or whether the Japanese government is so perfidious as to place more difficulties in the way."<sup>58</sup> On 22 January, he received word from Harris that the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs had told him that the treaty with Prussia would be ready within a week.<sup>59</sup>

The next day, the *bugyō* called on Eulenburg to tell him that they would come the next day at 1:00 pm for the official signing of the treaty. There was, however, one last delay. In his last meeting with the Minister, Eulenburg had asked for and was promised a guarantee in writing that Prussians already in Japan would be allowed stay even before the treaty was to go into effect on 1 January 1863. Eulenburg had yet to receive this written guarantee and it was clear from the explanation of the *bugyō* that the Japanese intended to renege on the promise. At this point, Eulenburg lost his patience and declared that “such behavior appears to be faithless to me, and I would under no condition sign the treaty until I had the written promise of the Minister in my hands.”<sup>60</sup> The document was delivered several hours later, which led Eulenburg to believe that the document had already been prepared, but the *bugyō* had been instructed to dissuade him not to insist on it. He reacted to this tactic of the Japanese by describing them as “Perfidie Volk!”<sup>61</sup>

Finally, on 24 January, five months after the arrival of the Expedition in Japan, the signing ceremony took place. As it turned out, Eulenburg had succeeded in concluding a treaty between Japan and Prussia alone, without the states of the German Zollverein, the Hanseatic cities, and the two Mecklenburgs. Eulenburg, was of course disappointed, yet he realized the value of the treaty to German interests in general, especially in allowing Prussia to enhance its status among the German States. Overwhelmed with joy, Eulenburg wrote in a letter on the day of the signing ceremony, he took the treaty to his room and pressed it to his heart “like a child that came into the world with a difficult birth.” He further observed that “it no longer mattered what becomes of the rest of the Expedition. Whether anything more is achieved or not, whether we drown or otherwise perish, the main objective has been fulfilled and there can be no more talk of disgrace. I thank God on my knees for helping so much.”<sup>62</sup> Actually, already on 24 December, Eulenburg wrote that he had resigned himself to the fact that it would apply only to Prussia, and not the other German states.<sup>63</sup>

In a letter dated 11 January 1861, Eulenburg wrote that the treaty would definitely not include the other German states. While he admitted that this did not reflect well on his diplomatic skill, he maintained that it was still a good outcome for Prussia, and for Germany as a whole. In fact, he wrote,

just as he arrived in Japan, Prussian merchants had been ordered to leave the country, but now they had been guaranteed the right to stay and to engage in business. The treaty would also allow Prussia to take the initiative among the other German states:

Prussian will be able to take part in the lively trade between China and Japan, but only Prussian ships and not ships of Hannover, Oldenburg and Hamburg. Germans wishing to do business in Japan must become Prussian or pretend to be Prussian. Whoever wishes to export German goods to Japan must used Prussian ships. For the next ten or twenty years, Germany will be represented here only by the black and white flag of Prussia, and I think “c'est précisément ce qu'il faut.”<sup>64</sup>

Since Eulenburg had been authorized to negotiate also for other north German states, the failure to include them in the treaty caused considerable disappointment in Germany.<sup>65</sup> In actuality, as indicated by Eulenburg's remarks above, the problem could be solved by the other German states flying the Prussian flag. This setback was also mitigated by the fact that the treaty with China, signed on 2 September 1861, and the treaty with Siam, signed 6 February 1862, included all the German states that Eulenburg had been authorized to represent.

Furthermore, the treaty with Japan had greater significance for Prussia and Germany than the treaty with China. In a letter dated 20 December 1860 Eulenburg commented on a news he had received from Lord Elgin, British High Commissioner to China, who at the time was overseeing British military operations in the recently ended Second Opium War with China. Eulenburg had been expecting some diplomatic help from Elgin in obtaining a treaty with China. However, Lord Elgin informed him that the Chinese might not be willing to deal with Prussia until they see how the present treaties with the other powers would work out. This was a disappointment to Eulenburg, but he felt that with what he had learned in Japan, he would not need to depend as much on diplomatic help as before. Furthermore, he considered the treaty with China less important than the one with Japan:

If I only get a treaty here, then the essential thing has been achieved. I will act

on my own in China, and if I don't succeed, that won't hurt, for Prussian ships and Prussian subjects are already now being treated like Englishmen and Frenchmen, and have little to lose if a treaty with China is not made. The situation here is different. The subject of a state that has no treaty with Japan is not even allowed on land, and if I leave without a treaty, Japan will be closed to Prussia for a long time.<sup>66</sup>

Having accomplished his mission in Japan with the signing of the treaty, Eulenburg made preparations to pack up his things and personnel to move on to China for the next leg of the Expedition's journey. After making the appropriate courtesy calls to the foreign legations, including a sad farewell to the still deeply grieving Townshend Harris, and receiving Japanese officials for the last time, Eulenburg left his lodgings on 28 January with his staff and military escort for the landing place in Edo Bay to board the *Arcona*. The ship sailed to Yokohama and departed from there with the rest of the fleet on 31 January, bound for Shanghai, via Nagasaki.<sup>67</sup>

### Observations on the Japanese people in general

As we have seen, Eulenburg's account of the tedious treaty negotiations is filled with frustration at the intransigence and obstinacy of the Japanese officials with whom he was dealing. On the other hand, in other parts of his letters, Eulenburg writes with a curious admiration for the Japanese people, their culture, and their way of life. Eulenburg and his staff made frequent, almost daily rides on horseback to see various parts of Edo as well as the country side. They were always accompanied by Japanese officials carrying the two swords of the samurai warrior class, who were stationed at the quarters of the Prussian legation to provide security for the Prussians.<sup>68</sup> Eulenburg resented the limitations that this put on his movements, and often complained of being under guard and feeling imprisoned.<sup>69</sup> Eulenburg put little stock in the reliability of the Japanese police and the officials assigned to protect him, and carried a revolver when he went out on his rides.<sup>70</sup> His resentment did not diminish, even when the Japanese government increased the guards at the foreign legations and requested that going out be avoided out of fear of attacks on Westerners by a plot of 500 *rōnin*, or masterless

samurai, who opposed the opening of the country. Eulenburg considered the threat to be exaggerated by the Japanese government in order to gain some diplomatic advantages from the foreigners,<sup>71</sup> and preferred to manage his own security by strengthening the guard with his own sailors and marines.<sup>72</sup> Even after the murder of Heusken, when the Japanese government recommended that the foreign legations withdraw to Yokohama, Eulenburg considered the danger exaggerated. At a conference of the British, American, French and Prussian representatives to deal with aftermath of Heusken's murder, Eulenburg tried to play the mediator, toning down the harsh tone of the diplomatic note to the Japanese Government that had been drafted, which to Eulenburg sounded like a "declaration of war."<sup>73</sup> The British, French and Dutch envoys thought that all the legations should withdraw to Yokohama, while the American Townsend Harris had decided to stay in Edo. For his part, Eulenburg intended to remain in Edo, but he nevertheless agreed to write his own note declaring that the withdrawal of the legations was justified.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the danger and the Japanese close supervision of his movements and as a diversion from the tedium of the protracted negotiations, Eulenburg made many excursions which allowed him to observe some of the life of the people in Edo and its surroundings. He found the city itself full of hustle and bustle, the noise of which sometimes disturbed his work in his lodgings, and considered the busiest quarter of Berlin to have a monastic quiet in comparison.<sup>75</sup> Eulenburg was not very impressed by the view he saw from a hill overlooking the city, pointing out the lack of tall buildings or towers, with houses of the same height spreading out as far as the eye could see.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, Eulenburg thoroughly enjoyed the natural beauty of the Japanese landscape on his rides through the countryside, remarking on one occasion that he had never seen such beautiful fall foliage.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, enjoying the view from a mountaintop cemetery overlooking Nagasaki harbor, he observed that there was nothing more peaceful than a Japanese cemetery.<sup>78</sup>

Among the things that caught Eulenburg's attention on his rides were markets, tea houses, temples and bath houses. As for the latter, Eulenburg was especially struck by the nonchalance and lack of shame of the Japanese bathers who did not try to hide their nakedness.<sup>79</sup> Wherever Eulenburg and

his company went, they attracted much attention among the people. Eulenburg writes of being crowded so closely that they could not pass through. Sometimes police and officials cordoned off sections of the places that the Prussians visited, to keep the crowds away.<sup>80</sup> At times Eulenburg found the laughing and shouting crowds annoying, especially when they called the Westerners “Tojdjen backa” [*tōjin baka*], or “crazy Chinese or foreigner,” an epithet that Eulenburg sarcastically described as “very flattering.”<sup>81</sup> At the same time, however, he seemed to enjoy amusing the curious and onlookers by passing out buttons to the women and children.<sup>82</sup>

Interestingly, Eulenburg showed some understanding for the curiosity of the Japanese and their excited reaction to the Westerns whom they were seeing up close for the first time. “We must appear strange to them as Japanese would appear to us in Berlin.”<sup>83</sup> Nor did he seem to mind the crowds when they happened to come upon a puppet show and he and his party seemed to attract more attention than the performance itself. He even found the puppets depicting Westerners to be humorous and laughed at them along with the crowd.<sup>84</sup> Eulenburg showed a similar openness to Japanese culture in describing a several course dinner that had sent over from the Japanese government shortly after arrival of the Expedition in Japan. He admired the small, delicate dishes in which the food was served, and although he found the taste of *sake* “horrible” and the food “unpalatable” to European tastes, this did not prevent him from tasting everything, and he found the entire thing “very amusing.”<sup>85</sup>

There were also several aspects of the Japanese people that he admired and described in positive terms. For example, some small figurines he had brought from Europe as gifts had broken on the voyage to Japan. He had thought they were impossible to repair, since they were made of cast-iron, but a Japanese handworker surprised him by being able to fix them: “One of the figurines came back today, excellently repaired. The people are very skillful.”<sup>86</sup> He was also amused by the dexterity of Japanese performers who made small butterflies out of paper and could make them fly around the room by waving a fan at them. He described the performance as one “surpassing in grace anything I have ever seen” in this type of performance.<sup>87</sup>

Other characteristics of the Japanese that Eulenburg admired were their frugality, interest in learning, and child-rearing practices. As an example of

Japanese frugality, he related the story of a resourceful *rōnin*. While many *rōnin*, he explained, resorted to robbery and crime to support themselves, the son of a *rōnin* employed by his interpreter Heusken was able to support his family on the modest salary he was given for his services. “Could someone live in an aristocratic residence among us at home on a monthly income of 1 Thaler and 15 halbgroschen?”<sup>88</sup>

He was also surprised to hear a Japanese asking in passable German about the needle guns that the Prussians carried. Eulenburg dismissed the assumption of his staff that the man had been assigned to spy on them, pointing out how easily some of the Japanese servants engaged for the household needs of the expedition had been able to count in German and understand simple commands. He also found it amusing that one of the *betto*, a minor official, enjoyed addressing his comrades with the word “Schafskopf.”<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, Eulenburg also admired the way Japanese raised and cared for their children. He was quite impressed by the ten- to twelve-year old boys who accompanied the Japanese merchants. Eulenburg described them as well-bred and with the best of manners and appearances. He also admired the childrearing practices of the Japanese, who, as he related, never struck their children, and for that reason one never heard a Japan child crying, unless it had fallen and hurt itself, or was frightened by the sudden appearance of the Westerners galloping by.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, Eulenburg found other aspects of Japanese culture less praiseworthy or even peculiar. For example, commenting on a recent large fire that destroyed the three biggest theaters in Edo, he added that he had never been to the Japanese theater and would never go, since “they are not at all set up for a good and proper clientele. The good and proper Japanese never go to the theater.”<sup>91</sup> He also referred to the Japanese custom of displaying the severed heads of executed criminals on trees. The head is displayed for one, two, or three days, depending on the nature of the crime and if no one came to claim it, it is thrown to the dogs. The death penalty is levied for many crimes, and a servant who steals from his master is killed “mercilessly.”<sup>92</sup>

Another thing that Eulenburg found peculiar was the Japanese custom of ritual suicide, *hara-kiri*. Around the middle of October, Eulenburg had been

informed that the Lord of Mito, who had been involved in the murder of the “regent”<sup>93</sup> a few months earlier, had died and that there would be an eight-day mourning period for him. When he later learned that the Lord of Mito had actually committed ritual suicide, Eulenburg remarked how strange it was “that the government had ordered the lord to kill himself and then announced a mourning period for him.”<sup>94</sup>

We have already seen that Eulenburg was greatly frustrated by the tedious treaty negotiations with the Japanese government officials. Although he realized that this obstinacy was a result of the reluctance to make concessions to the encroaching Westerners in face of domestic opposition to the opening of the country, he also considered the protracted art of negotiating a part of Japanese culture. For example, on one of his excursions, he wished to visit a Buddhist temple, but the priests did not want to let him and his party in. Eventually the Japanese officials accompanying him persuaded the monks to allow the visit. “Every discussion among the Japanese takes a long time. The present one took an hour or so.”<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

When the Prussian Expedition to East Asia was commissioned, Japan and China were still relatively unknown, mysterious and exotic lands to most Europeans. As the examples from his personal letters show, Eulenburg's account of the Expedition's activities with his personal first hand observations embellishes the description of the official narrative of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia. The official narrative also describes Japanese officials as polite, yet strict and keen on limiting the contact of the Westerners with the local populace as much as possible, constantly supervising them, and even going so far as to prevent their exercise of the right of free trade.<sup>96</sup> Essentially, the officials seemed to be doing all they could to delay the implementation of the treaties.<sup>97</sup> Eulenburg's accounts of his dealings with the Japanese officials fleshes out the story and supplies concrete details of the intricacies of the negotiating among people of different cultures, with limited experience of contact with each other.

Similarly, the comments in Eulenburg's letters on the general character and disposition of the Japanese fills out in greater detail the official

narrative's account of encounters with ordinary Japanese, whom it described as basically friendly and hospitable, especially when encountering the Westerners for the first time.<sup>98</sup> As the official narrative relates, during their excursions in the countryside, the members of the Expedition were treated with friendliness as well as curiosity, but never with suspicion, by the people.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, the Japanese whom the Prussians engaged as servants proved to be very faithful and loyal, and won the praise of their masters.<sup>100</sup> Eulenburg's descriptions add color and detail to the account of the encounter of the Prussians with Japan from the personal viewpoint of the leader of the Expedition.

Where the official narrative of the Expedition aimed at providing a factual and general description of conditions in East Asia, the personal letters of Eulenburg gives an insight into the intricacies of cross-cultural encounters between Germans and Japanese who had until then very little contact with each other. As such they also paint a very colorful picture of the behind the scenes workings of diplomacy at a time when European nations and Japan were learning how to deal with each other in the aftermath of the abrupt opening of the country after two centuries of self-imposed isolation.

## NOTES

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  - 9 Georg Kerst, *Die Anfänge der Erschließung Japans im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Presse-Untersucht auf Grund der Veröffentlichungen der Kölnischen Zeitung*, Hamburg, 1953.
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  - 11 *Ibid.*, p. iii-iv; Lotz, A. “Eulenburg, Friedrich”, in Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie 55 (1910), pp. 743-747. URL: <http://www.deutschebiographie.de/pnd119178931.html>. Retrieved 1 February 2013.
  - 12 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien. Nach amtlichen Quellen*. Bd. I, p. xi.
  - 13 See for example Georg Kerst, *Die deutsche Expedition nach Japan und ihre Auswirkung*. Hamburg: Cram, de Gruyter 1962; Holmer Stahncke, *Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und Japan, 1854-1868* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987; 鈴木楠緒子「オイレンブルク使節団とプロイセン自由主義者——小ドイツ主義的統一国家建設との関連で——」『史学会』第112編第1号 2003年 75—98頁. [Suzuki Naoko “Oirenburuku shisetudan to puroisen jiyushugi-shōdoitsushugteki tōitsu kokkakensetsu to no kanrende” in Shigakukai Vol. 112, No. 1 2003, pp. 75-98]; 鈴木楠緒子『ドイツ帝国の成立と東アジア：遅れてきたプロイセンによる「開国」』ミネルヴァ書房 2012年, 73-110頁 [Suzuki Naoko, *Doitsuteikoku no seiritsu to higashi ajia: okuretekita puroisen ni yoru “kaikoku.”* Minerva Shobō, 2012, pp. 73-110.]
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- 25 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien. Nach amtlichen Quellen*. Bd. I, p. xv.
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- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 71-72.

- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.
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- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
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- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 143-144.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- 57 *Ibid.*, pp. 149-151.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- 65 Kerst, *Die deutsche Expedition nach Japan*, pp. 29-30; 鈴木楠緒子「オイレンブルク使節団とプロイセン自由主義者——小ドイツ主義的統一国家建設との関連で——」[Suzuki Naoko “Oirenburuku shisetudan to puroisen jiyushugi-shōdoitsushugteki tōitsu kokkakensetsu to no kanrende,” p. 84-87.]
- 66 *Ost-Asien 1860-1862 in Briefen des Grafen Fritz zu Eulenburg*, p. 130.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 159-162, 164.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 141-142.
- 73 In his memoirs, Rutherford Alcock, the British envoy, describes the conference and content of the note as follows: “We had determined at the second conference, with entire unanimity, to withdraw from Yedo; sending in at the same time a vigorous protest against the whole system of intimidation and murder, of which we were made the victims, *with the cognizance and seemingly tacit acquiescence* [emphasis in original] of the Government to which were accredited.” Rutherford Alcock, *The capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Year's Residence in Japan*. Vol. II. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969 reprint, p. 42.
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- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 110-111.
- 80 *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 105, 107, 146.
- 81 *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 84, 91.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 91, 146.
- 83 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 85 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 86 *Ibid.*, p. 133, 144.
- 87 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

- 88 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 89 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 90 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 92 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 93 Ii Naosuke, (井伊直弼) the chief minister of the *Shōgun*. As the central figure in the negotiation of treaties with Western powers, he was the target of the opposition to opening the country.
- 94 *Ost-Asien 1860-1862 in Briefen des Grafen Fritz zu Eulenburg*, p. 90-91.
- 95 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 96 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien. Nach amtlichen Quellen*. Bd. I, pp. 267, 269; Bd. II., p. 5.
- 97 *Ibid.*, Bd. I, p. 273.
- 98 *Ibid.*, Bd. I, p. 269.
- 99 *Ibid.*, Bd. II, pp. 3, 8.
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