

The Image of Japan and Europe in the Official Narrative of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia, 1860–1862

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I. Introduction

Although contact between Europe and East Asia in modern times dates from the period of European overseas exploration in the sixteenth century, it was limited by the vast geographical distances as well as cultural and political factors that made the people in countries such as China and Japan reluctant to deal with the encroaching Europeans. However, around the middle of the nineteenth century the rapid pace of industrialization of Europe and the improvement in technology and communications brought about an increased interest in East Asia, whose populous countries offered great potential as customers for European goods. The European and American eagerness to expand trade and commercial activities to East Asia, primarily China and Japan, was met by a deep reluctance to engage the Westerners. It was only through the signing of treaties in the aftermath of hostilities between China and the Western powers, that formal relations were established.

The Treaty of Nanking (1842), which settled the “Opium War” between China and Great Britain, provided for the cession of Hong Kong to Britain, the opening of five ports to trade under consular supervision, and established a uniform tariff rate of five percent *ad valorem*. After this breakthrough by Great Britain, the United States negotiated with China the Treaty of Wanghsia (1844), which established the principle of extraterritoriality, whereby foreign citizens would be placed under the legal jurisdiction of consular and mixed courts, a right later extended to all other treaty signatories. Other subsequent treaties and agreements between China and the great Western powers completed the opening of China. The Treaty of Tientsin (1858), signed by China with Great Britain, France, Russia and the United States, signed in the aftermath of further Anglo-

Chinese hostilities, stipulated the opening of eleven additional ports, permitted foreign legations in Peking, and allowed Christian missions in the interior of Chinese territory. This unequal treaty system, which guaranteed extraterritorial jurisdiction and a highly favorable tariff rate to the Western powers, laid the basis for their relations with China well into the twentieth century and also served as a model for their relations with Japan.

With the opening of China, the interest of the Western world naturally turned to China's close, yet still secluded, neighbor Japan. At the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, Japan had a lively trade with the Portuguese and also allowed the English and Dutch to trade in Japan. However, fears of the undue influence of Christianity, which entered the country with missionaries accompanying the Portuguese merchants, moved 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 created for them in the confines of Nagasaki harbor.

As trade with China began to grow in the 1840's and 1850's, the expansion of United States territory across the North American continent to the west coast, and the growth in whaling and trapping activities in the North Pacific focused more and more attention on Japan as a potential source of supplies and as a trade partner. After several approaches from Great Britain, Russia, France, and the United States were rebuffed in the first half of the nineteenth century, the United States in 1854 succeeded in pressuring 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. The other Western powers soon made similar treaties with Japan. The American treaty also made provision for the appointment of consular officials, and the American Consul Townsend Harris, after several months of difficult negotiations, succeeded in persuading the Japanese to sign a commercial treaty in 1858. Alarmed at the recent defeat of China by British and French forces and fearing similar action against Japan, the reluctant Japanese accepted a treaty that stipulated the opening of five Japanese ports to unsupervised trade and permanent residence, residence at Osaka and Edo, a conventional tariff rate, the right of legal extraterritoriality, and the residence of an envoy at Edo. The Netherlands, Russia, Great Britain and France soon negotiated similar treaties with Japan.

With the opening of China for trade and commerce, shipping and commercial circles in the northern states of Germany, especially in countries of the Zollverein, Prussia, and the Hanseatic cities of Hamburg, Bremen, und Lübeck, began to turn their interests to Asia. At first, the number of ships involved was rather small, and German merchants were content to allow the powers that had formal ties with China to represent their interests when necessary. However, an increase in the volume of trade between Asia and Europe brought in its wake a swelling tide of nationalism and competition among the powers. It was becoming less and less desirable for German interests to be represented by non-Germans. In August 1859, Prussia, as head of the Zollverein, decided to take the lead in providing a legal basis for the growing German trading activities in Asia by commissioning an official Expedition with the task of signing treaties of trade and commerce with the governments of China, Japan, and Siam on behalf not only of Prussia, but also the Zollverein States, the Hanseatic cities, and the archduchies of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz. This expedition, which sailed to East Asia in 1860 and 1862, succeeded in negotiating commercial treaties with Japan, China and Siam on terms similar to those of other Western Powers.

The importance of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia has been noted in studies dealing with the rise of Germany and its expansion in the age of imperialism in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Apart from raising the prestige and influence of Prussia as the leading economic power of Germany, the treaties proved an immediately practical and legal basis for German trading activities in Asia. With political unification achieved through the establishment of the German Empire in 1871, Germany was a late-comer to the overseas imperial expansion that characterized international politics in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. However, the treaties forged by the Prussian Expedition to East Asia, as components of the unequal treaty system that regulated relations between Western countries and China and Japan, established the basis for Germany's advancement as one of the major powers on the stage of international relations in East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century.¹

This paper will not treat the diplomatic or foreign relations aspects of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia, but rather will concern itself with a description of some of the cultural assumptions that lay behind the motivation, planning and execution of the Expedition. More specifically, the paper will focus on the images

of Europe and Japan in the pages of the official narrative of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia. The official narrative consists of a three-part series containing a total of eight volumes. The first part, which shall concern us here, consists of four volumes, and was authored by A. Berg, an artist member of the Expedition.² It offers a narrative of the journey of the Expedition from Europe to Asia and an account of the treaty negotiations, but also gives a description of the conditions in the countries visited by the Expedition. The second part³ 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). The third part is comprised of the eighth volume, a collection of drawings by Berg, depicting various scenes of Japan, China, and Siam.⁴ We will begin with a brief overview of the Expedition, its origin, composition and itinerary before proceeding to a description and analysis of the images of Japan and Europe in the official narrative.

II. The Background of the Expedition

German ships and merchants had been present in Asian waters since the 1840's, and a proposal was made as early as 1843 to show the Prussian flag in China to demand the same rights as had been conceded to Great Britain. The proposal included a plan for establishing a *Handelssocietät* in Singapore, which could eventually expand its activity to China.⁵ However, shipping and trading were still limited and the time for such a proposal was not yet ripe. The number of ships and the volume of trade in Chinese waters began to grow steadily in the 1850's and the opening of Japan in 1858 attracted further attention among German commercial and industrial eager to find new markets for their wares. Shipping and trading in Asian waters were also becoming more competitive among the Western powers. German merchants, who had until then allowed their interests to be represented by officials of the other powers, began to feel at a disadvantage, fearing that they could not prosper or expand their activities without the legal protection offered them through consular officials of their own.⁶

On 15 August 1859, a Prussian cabinet order approved a plan for an official Expedition with the task of signing treaties of trade and commerce with the governments of China, Japan, and Siam. Graf Friedrich zu Eulenburg was named "Außerordentlicher Gesandter" (envoy extraordinaire) and "Bevollmächtigter

Minister" (plenipotentiary) to the courts of China, Japan, and Siam, and was authorized to negotiate 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. The Prussian Landtag approved the expenditures for the Expedition in March of 1860.⁷

Apart from the major objective of signing official treaties of trade and commerce with the governments of Japan, China and Siam, there were several other purposes for the Expedition. The Expedition was also intended to provide an opportunity for Prussia to show its flag abroad, afford the fledgling Prussian Navy an opportunity to gain its proverbial sea legs, contribute to the advancement of the scientific study of the natural environment of the area visited, and investigate the possibilities for German industry and commerce.⁸

The inclusion of scientists and merchants among the members of the Expedition with the aim of collecting scientific and commercially useful information served to broaden the appeal of the Expedition beyond the narrow political boundaries of Prussia and helped to inspire a Germany-wide sense of nationalism. The plan and preparations for the Expedition were also widely publicized in the pages of the *Kölnische Zeitung*, a then leading newspaper known for its liberalism and patriotic-national spirit. The newspaper emphasized the fact that while the Expedition was organized by Prussia, it was authorized to negotiate for the German Zollverein, the Hanseatic cities, and the two Mecklenburgs, and made a point of referring to it as the "*deutsche Expedition*."⁹

The Expedition was composed of four vessels, 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*, whose cargo included supplies, gifts, and samples of German products. The *Thetis* and *Frauenlob* departed Danzig in October 1859, while the *Arkona* left in December. After making port calls in England, the Canary islands and Rio de Janeiro together on 24 May 1860 and the ships rendezvoused in Singapore at the beginning of August. The *Elbe* left Hamburg on 7 March 1860 and arrived in Singapore on 7 August. Graf Friedrich zu Eulenburg and the members of his entourage traveled via commercial passenger ships via Suez and Ceylon, arriving in Singapore on 2 August.¹⁰ The *Thetis* and *Frauenlob* left Singapore on 11 August and the *Arkona* left on the 13th. On the way to Japan, the *Frauenlob*, with all hands aboard, was lost at sea in a typhoon off the coast of Japan. The *Arkona* arrived in Edo on 4 September, the *Thetis* ten

days later, on 14 September. After three months of difficult and tedious negotiations due to internal Japanese political problems, Eulenburg succeeded in reaching agreement on a treaty between Japan and Prussia alone, without the states of the German Zollverein, the Hanseatic cities, and the two Mecklenburgs. This caused considerable consternation and disappointment in Germany.¹¹ In actuality, the problem could be solved by the other German states flying the Prussian flag. This minor setback was also mitigated by the fact that the treaty with China, signed on 2 September 1861 after months of negotiations complicated by internal Chinese political difficulties, and the treaty with Siam, signed 6 February 1862, included all the German states that Eulenburg was authorized to represent.

The Expedition's personnel numbered in total some 800 men, including the crew of the four vessels. Accompanying Eulenburg were 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. As previously mentioned the Expedition also included several scientists and experts: the botanist Wichura, the zoologist Dr. von Martens, the geologist and geographer 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. Several of these men wrote descriptions of their travels in books or memoirs,¹² which also give many insights related to our topic. However, due to space considerations, this paper will focus on the description of Japan as it appears in the official narrative of the Prussian Expedition to East Asia.

III. The image of Europe and Japan in the Official Narrative

As we have seen, following the opening of China and Japan, there was increased interest in Europe concerning Asia. In Germany, the opening of Japan had been followed closely in the pages of the *Kölnische Zeitung*.¹³ Interest in Japan was further stimulated by the writings of two Germans, Wilhelm Heine¹⁴ an illustrator on Perry's expedition to Japan in 1853-54, and Friedrich Lühdorf,¹⁵ captain of the *Greta*, a German ship hired to carry coal for Perry's expedition.¹⁶ There was therefore already some familiarity with Japan and Asia in Germany

before the Prussian Expedition sailed. As we have seen, one of the express purposes of the Expedition was to gain scientific knowledge as well as useful commercial information about Asia. It is thus no surprise that the official narrative devotes a large part of its pages to a description of the history, culture, and conditions of the lands it visited. The first two of the four volumes deal with Japan. Half of the contents of the first volume is dedicated to an introductory exposition on Japan's geography, history, and its recent international relations. The second half of the first volume describes the voyage from Singapore to Edo, and the sojourn of the Expedition in Japan from September to October 1860. The second volume continues the description of the sojourn in Japan October 1860 to March 1861. Two appendixes contain the text of the treaty signed with Japan and an update on the recent events in Japan since 1861.

In general the narrative takes a rather enlightened approach to the task of describing the countries and peoples encountered during the Expedition. The first volume opens with the assumption that it is impossible to understand a nation without knowledge of its religion, history, language, and main ideas. It also points out that the basis of the cultures of East Asia and especially Japan are so different from the European, that they appear at first to be very strange and difficult to understand. Even those who have spent many years in Japan encounter "riddle after riddle," and "unexplainable contradictions." In this regard the narrative seems to affirm the stereotype of Japanese inscrutability. However, this is not a superficial or rash judgment, but rather a conclusion based on the lack of knowledge of Japanese language, Japanese sources, and the fundamentals of Japanese culture, as well as the reserve of the Japanese, which had become almost second-nature during the "closed" centuries.¹⁷

As for the character of the Japanese people as a whole, the narrative gives a rather positive image, almost defensive of their conservative, reserved character. Due to a good climate and geographical location, the Japanese were able to learn much from Chinese culture, not merely adopting it whole, but developing it in their own fashion to a "significant stage of civilization." While Chinese civilization reached a plateau and even began to decline, the Japanese were able to maintain their political independence as well as a lively cultural life. This they owed to an abiding stability and steady development lasting for several thousands of years, something experienced by few other peoples of the world. For this reason, it was only natural that the Japanese, by nature conservative and patri-

otic, clinged to their old ways and were reluctant to engage in intercourse with Westerners.¹⁸ Many ancient customs were still observed at the imperial court in Kyoto, which might appear strange to any other person, but were still of value and meaning to the Japanese, who had great respect for and attachment to customs of the past.¹⁹

According the narrative, the basis of the Japanese character lay in the sense of reverence towards superiors. Here one finds similarities to stereotypical descriptions of the Japanese as emotionally immature and childlike. This reverence for superiors was the source of all good feelings and the basis of the sense of well-being for the Japanese. Japanese human relationships were patriarchal, and the Japanese related to rulers and superiors like a child to his parents, looking to them to care for his every need²⁰ Other aspects of Japanese culture that the narrative evaluated highly were the pleasant family life, the ability of even the common people to read and to write, the Japanese sense of neatness and cleanliness, intelligence, diligence and perseverance.²¹

In general, while noting the vicissitudes of Japan's political life, the narrative emphasizes that Japan had achieved a high level of culture, one highpoint being the ninth and tenth centuries, when Japan achieved an age of chivalric romanticism, in which tournaments, music, and poetry flourished among the warrior class.²² With the reunion of the two imperial courts at the end of the fourteenth century, Japan entered another great period of cultural achievement, when the courts of the emperor and shogun competed for elegance and splendor, and art and poetry flourished again.²³

For its information on Japan, the narrative depended heavily on two classical treatises on Japan written by Germans who had spent time in Japan as physicians for the Dutch East Indies Trading Company at Nagasaki. These works are the *History of Japan* by Engelbert Kaempfer, who was in Japan from 1660-62, and *Nippon*, by Philipp Franz von Siebold, who was in Japan from 1823 to 1829 and was banished for attempting to smuggle maps and contraband from Japan, but later pardoned and returned to Japan in the 1860s.²⁴ Among the features of Japanese history which the narrative describes are the unique creation mythologies of Japan,²⁵ and the lack of the practice of primogeniture, which has resulted in a many struggles for power that have greatly determined the course of Japanese history.²⁶

Concerning the modern period of Japanese history, when contact with the

Europeans began, the narrative points out how open and positive the Japanese were, at least at first, towards the Portuguese, who were able to travel about the country, virtually at will, the missionaries preaching the Christian faith, and the merchants making a handsome profit from trading. The openness of the Japanese also made it one of the most promising countries for the propagation of Christianity, which accompanied the overseas exploration activity of the Europeans. The missionaries themselves were astonished at the lack of religious fanaticism, and the tolerance that the Japanese showed towards family members who had converted to Christianity.²⁷ This must have been in stark contrast to their experience in Europe, which at that time was in the throes of bitter religious conflict.

The narrative gives a rather balance treatment of Japanese religion, and makes no claim for the inherent superiority of Christianity. While recognizing the high level of development achieved by Japanese Buddhism, the narrative also points out how many Buddhist monks had fallen into a state of frivolous superstition, ignorance, and sensuality, which much jealousy and competition among the various sects. Buddhist perfection was reserved to an exclusive few, and tended to be esoteric. For example, according to the European way of thinking, the *koan*, or questions proposed for meditation in Zen Buddhism, were filled with false paradoxes or absurdities. Since many of the monks catered to the rich, the common people felt excluded from the Buddhism as practiced by the monks. In such circumstances, Christianity with its promise of salvation and reward in heaven, would have been very appealing.²⁸ The narrative also points to the hospitals, orphanages and schools built by the missionaries as well as the exotic atmosphere of the Christian liturgy, with its incense, candles, bells, music, symbolic rituals, as being another element of the appeal of Christianity to the Japanese.²⁹

In its explanation of the reasons for the expulsion of missionaries and the suppression of Christianity from the end of the sixteenth century, the narrative makes some interesting observations on the impact of Christianity on the Japanese people. For example, the common people had been accustomed to degrading themselves before their superiors. The estrangement from their social betters was further exacerbated by the strict punishments meted out to them. The nobility were unapproachable and ruled through a system of absolute obedience and fear instilled among the common people. Furthermore, the authority of the

imperial house was derived from its divine origins. The Christian missionaries on the other hand, taught the Japanese a sense of individual worth through the teaching that rich and poor, the high and low, were all the same before God and all were worthy of salvation in God's eyes. This sense of equality was inimical to the authoritarian Japanese political system, and the growing number of Christian converts was perceived as a very real threat to the status quo.³⁰

In the end, the narrative maintains, Christianity was incompatible with the authoritarian Japanese political system, which was based on a hierarchical and thus inherently unequal class structure. At this point, the narrative describes the different impact of Christianity on highly developed and less developed cultures. Where the level of cultural development of a people is still low, the principles and values of Christianity are easily adopted and become the basis for further progress and cultural development of that people. However, in the case of more highly developed civilizations, the values of Christianity conflict with the traditional values. That is why ancient Western civilization had to decline before Christianity could take root in Europe. On the other hand, there has always been a violent confrontation between Christianity and the Islamic world. There has never been a gradual conversion of an Islamic state to Christianity. It either throws off the advances of Christianity or collapses under its pressure. The situation in Japan was similar. Japan had been exposed to Confucian and Buddhist teachings, but these did not significantly challenge the authoritarian basis of Japan's political basis. These teachings were eventually adapted and assimilated into Japanese civilization without upsetting the traditional political life.³¹

There were, of course, other reasons for the prohibition of Christianity. One was the rivalry among the Jesuits and other orders.³² Similarly, the intrigues and subterfuges of the missionaries who remained in Japan even after the edicts of banishment only increased the suspicions of the Japanese towards the missionaries.³³

In describing the ruthless persecutions of Christianity, which it deemed to be unparalleled in world history, the narrative makes the interesting observation that one cannot judge the cruelty of the persecutors or the stoic steadfastness with which it was endured by the Japanese converts by European standards. For one thing, all Asian peoples, due to the influence of Buddhism, hold death and physical suffering as lesser evils. Second, the nervous systems of the Asians, including

Japanese are different from those of Europeans, and they are able to endure physical injuries that would cause a European to faint.³⁴ In another context, where it describes the cruel punishment given to Japanese prisoners and convicts, the narrative makes a similar reference to the physiological differences between Japanese and Europeans. The severity and cruelty of Japanese punishment is to be explained from the fact that the nervous system of the body of East Asian is less developed, and thus not as sensitive to pain as that of the Europeans, and should therefore not be judged by the same standard.³⁵ On the other hand, the narrative asserts, taking joy in inflicting cruelty on humans and animals, is an “innate characteristic” of the lower classes of the Japanese and Chinese peoples.³⁶

In the wake of the suppression of Christianity and the banishment of the missionaries, the Japanese became suspicious of all Europeans, and beginning with the Spanish and Portuguese, eventually all Europeans were forbidden to enter Japan except the Dutch, who were permitted to trade on a limited basis at Dejima, a small island built in Nagasaki harbor for that purpose. According to the narrative, the Europeans were partly responsible for their own expulsion from Japan due to their excesses, greed, and lack of scruples in dealing with the Japanese. The conceit and arrogance of the merchants, combined with their ignorance of and lack of respect for Japanese customs, especially the observation of etiquette in greetings and deference towards the nobility, caused much resentment and bitterness among the Japanese.³⁷

The Dutch were often depicted by their contemporaries as being too obsequious and accommodating to the eccentric demands of the Japanese out of their desire for profit.³⁸ The narrative considers the fact that the Dutch submitted to the Japanese demands as a sign of weakness, which served to lower the Dutch in the eyes of the Japanese, to whom decisiveness and determination were highly esteemed values.³⁹ However, the narrative also maintains that one cannot judge an entire nation by the conduct of only one group, its merchants. Furthermore, merchants of any other nation would most likely have acted in the same way, especially in the heydays of overseas European expansion, when merchants were not known for dealing with non-European peoples with any sense of justice, honor, or morality.⁴⁰

Japanese history during the period of isolation from after the expulsion of all but the Dutch until the opening of the country in the wake of Perry's expedition in 1854-1853, is described by the narrative as more or less a “blank page.” During

this period the traditional Japanese political system reached its highest point and developed no further. Since it was a period of internal peace, the population grew as agricultural and commercial production increased. Apart from certain defects which could also be found in European civilizations, Japan had developed to a higher stage than any other non-Christian civilization, in spite of its despotic political system.⁴¹ This despotic, authoritarian rule was predicated on the Asian concept that the ruler is responsible for everything that happens, whether good or bad, under his reign. The Asian understanding of personal responsibility was also the reason for the severe punishments often meted out to vassals and officials not only for their personal failings and negligence, but also for failures in the administration of offices which they were the overseers.⁴²

As the narrative describes it, the essence of Japanese national character had changed little during the two centuries of isolation, although it did become gentler and more humane. Interestingly the narrative attributes a significant, albeit subtle, influence to Christianity on the Japanese people, which evolved slowly and unnoticed throughout two centuries of continuous suppression. As evidence, the narrative points to references in the writings of the Dutch and others to examples of Japanese acts of self-sacrificing friendship, altruism, self-denial and acting out a sense of honor and duty. These virtues, observed anywhere else would be considered to be the consequences of a “Christian” morality.⁴³ However, whether Japan will advance to a new and higher stage of civilization and make a lasting mark for itself in history, only the future would tell.⁴⁴

The last section on Japanese history contains a description of the relations between Japan and the outside world during the two centuries of isolation and the background of the recent events behind the opening of the country. What is of interest here is the sensitivity shown toward the Japanese position vis-à-vis the Westerners. The narrative lists many examples of the arrogant and high-handed behavior of the Westerners, such as the corruption of the Dutch merchants, whose illegal trading activities resulted in the loss of life of many of their Japanese counterparts.⁴⁵ The arrogance and condescending behavior of the Europeans and Americans who made approaches to the Japanese before Perry’s successful expedition is also criticized. For example, the Russian envoy, Nikolai Rezanov, who arrived in Nagasaki in October 1804, commissioned to request the Japanese to open formal negotiations, is criticized for his arrogant attitude and ignorance of Japanese customs. Rezanov arrived in Japan with a letter of introduction to

the authorities in Nagasaki that had been given to an earlier Russian delegation led by Alexander Laxmann, who returned Japanese castaways to Hokkaido in 1792. Rezanov's stubborn refusal to dismantle his ship's armaments and to follow other demands of Japanese etiquette and protocol did nothing to dispose the Japanese to acknowledge his request to open negotiations. Rezanov was kept waiting in Nagasaki for several months while his request was deliberated in Edo before it was ultimately rejected.⁴⁶

A few years later, in 1808, the British frigate *Phaeton* entered Nagasaki harbor while flying the Dutch flag. The unsuspecting Japanese who went out to meet the ship were taken hostage, and the ship's commander demanded food and water. The next day the ship showed the British flag, and the captain sent a letter threatening to burn the Chinese and Japanese boats in the harbor if the demands were not met. After food and water were brought out to the *Phaeton*, it set sail. However several Japanese officials committed suicide in order to take responsibility for their failure to prevent the incident.⁴⁷

Several Americans had also made approaches to Japan before Perry's arrival. With the growth in American fur trapping and whaling activities in the North Pacific Ocean, many shipwrecked American sailors became stranded in Japan. The Japanese standard policy was to escort the men to Nagasaki, where they would leave on Dutch ships. Although kept under confinement in Buddhist temples to avoid contact with Japanese, these sailors were given clothing, food and other necessities. Some of the men responded with abuse and violence towards the Japanese, who had no other recourse but to put them under stricter confinement in prisons.⁴⁸

Stories of the mistreatment of shipwrecked American sailors were often exaggerated, but publicized in a sensational fashion in the West, making the issue of the treatment of shipwrecked sailors a leading argument for the necessity of opening the Japan. In 1849, the American warship *Preble* entered Nagasaki harbor and demanded the release of several shipwrecked American sailors. Although the situation was resolved when the sailors were released to the Americans through Dutch mediation, the Americans claimed it was their resolve and threats that broke the deadlock.⁴⁹

Japanese sailors were also sometimes stranded at sea and picked up by Western vessels. Although such Japanese castaways were allowed to be returned to Japan only on Dutch vessels at Nagasaki, other European and American ships

often tried to bring these castaways back to Japan, often against their will, as a pretext to provide an opportunity to open negotiations with the Japanese government. Such was the case in 1837 when the Morrison, an American merchant vessel tried to return some Japanese. The ship was turned back.⁵⁰

The arrogant and high-handed behavior of the foreigners is contrasted with that of the Japanese who supplied Rezanov with food and water without charge during his stay, and also gave him provisions before his departure.⁵¹ As for the shipwrecked sailors, the narrative defends the Japanese as a civilized people who resorted to imprisoning the sailors as the only way to keep them under confinement until they could be returned. It also pointed to the fact that the expenses of their food, clothing and shelter were also covered by the Japanese government as an example of Japanese hospitality towards the foreigners.⁵²

The narrative shows further understanding for the Japanese position by its recognition of the fact that the opening of Japan through Commodore Perry and the subsequent negotiations for the commercial treaties between Japan and the Western powers were achieved through the threat of the use of force if the Japanese did not comply.⁵³ Perry had used a thinly veiled threat of force to pressure the Japanese to accept his demand for a treaty.⁵⁴ In negotiating the commercial treaty in 1858, the Japanese were motivated by the fear of British and French attack in the aftermath of the victory of the two powers over the Chinese at Tienstin.⁵⁵

Although it refers several times to the difficulty of understanding the true situation of Japanese internal politics,⁵⁶ the narrative shows a certain sympathy for problems which the government faced as a result of opening the country to intercourse with the foreigners. One of the problems was the general inflationary pressure on prices as a result of the increased demand by foreigners for Japanese products. This caused much frustration and resentment among the people and was often used as an excuse by the Japanese to reverse the treaties that had opened the country to trade.⁵⁷ Another economic difficulty was the strain on the Japanese currency caused by a treaty stipulation that allowed Westerners to exchange foreign silver coins with Japanese by weight. Since the Japanese coins were of greater purity, that is, because they had a higher silver content, this resulted in an unfavorable exchange of silver and a flow of the precious metal out of Japan. The situation was eventually alleviated by a change in Japanese coinage policy, but in the meantime, it allowed many foreigners to make great

profits. As the narrative notes, it was not surprising that the Japanese should consider these foreigners to be “thieves”.⁵⁸

Similarly, according to the narrative, it was quite understandable that the rudeness of many Westerners and their ignorance of Japanese customs would upset the Japanese. Drunken sailors were the cause of much annoyance to the normally peaceful and decorous Japanese. The narrative also admits that the merchants of Europe, although themselves neither well educated nor well mannered, often considered themselves superior to the Japanese and acted with arrogance and conceit, demanding deference and respect from everyone, including the Japanese officials, who were members of the aristocratic samurai class. It was no wonder that the Japanese saw such Europeans, despite their advanced machines, ships and weapons, as “barbarians.” The excited, nervous activity of the Western merchants as well as the crudity and rudeness of the sailors could not but make a poor impression on the Japanese for whom quiet, reserve, and polite formality were the marks of civilized behavior.⁵⁹

Of course, apart from the resentment against foreigners on account of the economic disruption caused by the opening of the country, there was also much opposition to the foreigners from traditionalists, nationalists or anti-government factions trying to weakening the position of the government and its policy of accommodation to the foreigners.⁶⁰ There were at this time many incidents of murder and violence against foreigners. Henry Heusken, the translator of the American resident minister Townsend Harris, was a victim of such murderous attacks during the Expedition’s sojourn in Japan. In general, however, the narrative describes encounters with Japanese as very friendly, and praises the hospitality and childlike fascination of the Japanese when encountering the Westerners for the first time.⁶¹ In their travels in the countryside, the Westerners were treated with friendliness as well as curiosity, but never with suspicion, by the people.⁶² Similarly, the Japanese whom the Prussians engaged as servants proved to be very faithful and loyal, and won the praise of their masters.⁶³

This attitude of the ordinary Japanese also contrasts with that of the officials, who, while polite, were very strict and tried to limit the contact of the Westerners with the people as much as possible, constantly supervising them, and even going so far as to prevent their exercise of the right of free trade.⁶⁴ The officials seemed to be doing everything they could to prevent the implementation of the treaties.⁶⁵

The descriptions of the sojourn of the Prussian Expedition in Japan from its

arrival in September 1860 to its departure in January 1861 also furnish many insights into the image of Japan and Europe. These sections of the narratives are filled with simple observations of the scenery of Japan, the layout of cities such as Edo,⁶⁶ Yokohama,⁶⁷ and Nagasaki,⁶⁸ and the construction, style, and materials of the buildings. Not surprisingly, the furnishings of a Japanese room, which were minimal, contrasted with the table and chairs in use by Europeans.⁶⁹ The lack of painting and coloring in Japanese rooms and buildings was another obvious contrast to European styles of construction.⁷⁰

The narrative also contains descriptions of the customs and living habits of the Japanese people. Here too, one finds many comparisons between Japan and Europe. For example, the narrative gives an account of a meal prepared by the Japanese officials for their Prussian guests. The utensils used were very elegant and decorative, but the food was not exactly to European taste. The meal, which included fish and other dishes, was not bad, but a little bland, leading to the conclusion that perhaps the Japanese tongue was accustomed to more delicate tastes than the European tongue was able to appreciate. On the other hand, as the narrative recognizes, it was also true that European tastes were also acquired. At any rate, some Japanese food, such as raw salmon was very delicious, and was to be recommended to every gourmand.⁷¹

Japanese religious festivals and popular customs are also mentioned in the narrative. Perhaps to make them more understandable, they are compared to similar European customs and observances. For example, the frivolity, eating and drinking of the Chrysanthemum Festival is compared to the Bacchanalia of ancient Rome and the Karneval celebration of modern Germany.⁷² Similarly, the monthly festivals that took place on the first, fifteenth and twenty-eight day of the month were observed in much the same way as Sunday in Europe.

IV. Conclusion

By the time the Prussian Expedition had arrived in Japan in 1860, the major powers of Europe and the United States had already been in contact with the Japanese for several years. Even Prussian and German ships, albeit in smaller numbers than those of other countries, had been calling in Japan since the opening of the country. Nevertheless, due to the two-century hiatus in Japan's contacts with Europe since the initial contacts with the Portuguese in the sixteenth

century, Japan was still relatively unknown.

For this reason, the Prussian Expedition to East Asia, whose prime mission was to negotiate commercial treaties with Japan, China, and Siam, had as an additional objective the gathering of information. The four-volume official narrative of the Expedition, provides not only details of the negotiations of the treaties, but also gives much background information on the history, culture, and peoples of China, Japan and Siam. This paper has focused only on that section of the official narrative that concerns Japan, highlighting the image of Japan and Europe as it appears in the descriptions of the Expedition's sojourn in Japan and its encounter with the Japanese people.

The paper has discussed the narrative's description of Japanese history, showing its positive evaluation of the high level of Japanese civilization and the innate qualities of the Japanese people. It also described the positive and negative effects of the encounter between Japan with Europe, especially the impact of Christianity, whose teaching of individual worth and equality of persons conflicted with the authoritarian political system based on awe and fearful respect toward one's superiors.

We have also seen how the narrative, in its description of the history of relations between the Western world and Japan, shows a sympathetic understanding for the way arrogant and conceited Westerners ignorant of Japanese culture and customs forced the reluctant country to open its doors to the world. At a time when Westerner's knowledge of Japanese internal politics was limited, the narrative shows a remarkable awareness of the some of the problems caused by cultural differences, and a surprisingly critical view of Westerners in Japan who often dealt in an arrogant and conceited fashion with a people whose basic characteristics of diligence, perseverance, and loyalty, were as praiseworthy as the high level of its cultural achievements.

NOTES

- 1 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.

- 2 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien. Nach amtlichen Quellen.* 4 Bände. Berlin, 1864-1873. The section of the narrative concerning Japan, i. e., the first two volumes, has been translated into Japanese: 中井晶夫訳『オイレンブルク日本遠征記上・下』(新異国叢書13 雄松堂書店 昭和44年).
- 3 E. Ohrt. "Die preussische Expedition nach Japan, 1860-1861." Vortrag gehalten von Dr. E. Ohrt in der Sitzung zu Yokohama am 7. Dezember 1910. in: *Mitteilung der deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, Bd. XIII, p. 200.
- 4 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-Asien: Ansichten aus Japan China und Siam 1860-1862.* Berlin, R. V. Decker, 1864.
- 5 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien. Nach amtlichen Quellen.* 4 Bände. Berlin, 1864-1873., Bd. I, p. vii.
- 6 Kerst, *Die deutsche Expedition nach Japan*, pp. 16-17.
- 7 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien.* Bd. I, p. xii.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. xi.
- 9 Kerst, *Die deutsche Expedition nach Japan*, p. 20.
- 10 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien.* Bd. I, p. xv.
- 11 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——」『史学会』第112編第1号 2003年, pp. 84-87.
- 12 Adolf Freitag, "Japan und die Japaner im Schrifttum der Preussischen Expedition von 1860-1862 nach Ostasien," *Mittheilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, Bd. 33, Teil D, 1942.
- 13 Georg Kerst, *Die Anfänge der Erschließung Japans im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Presse —Untersucht auf Grund der Veröffentlichungen der Kölnischen Zeitung*, Hamburg, 1953.
- 14 Wilhelm Heine, *Reise um die Erde nach Japan*, 2 Bde. New York und Leipzig, 1856. There are one-volume translations in both English and Japanese of the section concerning Japan: William Heine, *With Perry to Japan: A Memoir by William Heine*. Translated, with an Introduction and Annotations by Frederic Trautmann. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990; 中井晶夫訳『ハイネ世界周航日本への旅』(新異国叢書第II輯2 雄松堂書店 昭和58年).
- 15 Friedrich August Lühdorf, *Acht Monate in Japan nach Abschluß des Vertrages von Kanagawa*. Bremen, 1857. Japanese Translation: 中村赳訳 グレタ号日本通商記(新異国叢書第II輯3 雄松堂書店 昭和59年).
- 16 Kerst, *Die deutsche Expedition nach Japan*, p. 15.
- 17 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien*, Bd. I, pp. 3-4.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 130-133.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

- 24 There is an extensive literature on both Kaempfer and Siebold. On Kaempfer, see for example, *Engelbert Kaempfer zum 330. Geburtstag Gesamtelte Beiträge zur Kaempfer-Forschung und zur Frühzeit der Asien-Forschung in Europa*. Zusammengestellt und bearbeitet von Hans Huls und Hans Hoppe. Lippische Studien, Bd. 9 (Lemgo. 1982); Detlef Haberland, "Engelbert Kaempfer. Arzt, Reisender und 'Entdecker' Japans," in Japanisches Kulturinstitut Köln (Hrsg.) *Kulturvermittler zwischen Japan und Deutschland. Biographische Skizzen aus vier Jahrhunderten* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1990); ヨゼフ・クライナー編『ケンペルの見たトクガワジャポン』(六興出版 1992 年); B・M ボダルト＝ベイリー著『ケンペルと徳川綱吉ードイツ人医師と将軍の交流』中央公論社刊 1994 年; Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan Tokugawa Culture Observed*. Edited, Translated, and Annotated by Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. For Siebold, see for example. Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), *Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866) Gedenkschrift: ergänzt durch eine Darstellung der deutschen Japanologie: Deutsch und Japanisch*. Tokyo: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1966. Eberhard Frieze, "Philipp Franz von Seibold (1796-1866) und sein Japanwerk heute," Japanisches Kulturinstitut Köln (Hrsg.) *Kulturvermittler zwischen Japan und Deutschland. Biographische Skizzen aus vier Jahrhunderten* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1990), 31-49.
- 25 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien.*, Bd. I, pp. 13-15.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 35 *Ibid.*, Bd. II, p. 16.
- 36 *Ibid.*, Bd. I, p. 84.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 38 Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720-1830*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, Rev. ed., 1962, pp. 3-4.
- 39 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*. Bd I., p. 95.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 156-59.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 161-163.

- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- 57 *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 287.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- 59 *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.
- 60 *Ibid.*, pp. 283-286.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- 62 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*, Bd. II, pp. 3, 8.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 64 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*, Bd. I, pp. 267, 269; Bd. II., p. 5.
- 65 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*, Bd. I, p. 273.
- 66 *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 295-301, 319-327.
- 67 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*, Bd. II, pp. 2-10.
- 68 *Ibid.*, pp. 187-207.
- 69 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*, Bd. I, p. 270.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- 72 *Die preussische Expedition nach Ost-asien*, Bd. II, p. 18.